

MY OWN.

BROWN heads and gold around my knee
Dispute in eager play,
Sweet, childish voices in my ear
Are sounding all the day;
Yet, sometimes, in a sudden hush,
I seem to hear a tone
Such as my little boy's had been
If I had kept my own.

And when, oft-times, they come to me,
As evening hours grow long,
And beg me winningly to give
A story or a song,
I see a pair of star-bright eyes
Among the others shine,—
The eyes of him who ne'er has heard
Story or song of mine.

At night I go my rounds, and pause
Each white-draped cot beside,
And note how flushed is this one's cheek,
How that one's curls lie wide;
And to a corner tenantless
My swift thoughts fly apace,—
That would have been, if he had lived,
My other darling's place.

The years go fast; my children soon
Within the world of men
Will find their work, and venture forth,
Not to return again;
But there is one who cannot go,—
I shall not be alone:
The little boy who never lived
Will always be my own.

OPERA IN NEW YORK.

I.

FIFTEEN miles is the limit of vision on the surface of the sea; so the temporal vision of the average denizen of New York, as he looks backward, seems to be bounded in like manner by a horizon about fifteen years off. And like the folk of the dark ages, he looks upon the limit of his knowledge as the end of his world:—*that* is the jumping-off-place. Nor is this narrowness in scope of knowledge, even in things material, confined to the heterogeneous mass of men drawn together by trade and chance in the great commercial town. Not long ago, one of the leading journals of New York remarked seriously that a certain poet, having made his reputation before the war, must be regarded, "in so young a country, as belonging to ancient history." It happened that the bard in question had ceased publishing before the war, and was therefore little known to the ephemeral public for which that newspaper was that day published; for which reason there was, to a large proportion of its readers, a semblance of truth in its assertion, which, so far as it had any effect, went to nourish and confirm the notion that in some queer way connects our first civil war with the beginning of our social culture, if not of our civilization, and looks upon the time "before the war" as a period of national hobbledehoydom. Yet, not

to turn to our elder generation of living authors such as Bancroft, Longfellow, Holmes, and Whittier, of whom Prescott, and Motley, and Hawthorne were contemporaries, we have, in the generation which succeeded them, Lowell, Curtis, Whipple, Baker, Stedman, Parton, Bret Harte, Aldrich, Stoddard, Leland, and we may add Howells, who are now in what should be the richest productive period of their lives, and all of whom had not only published but had made their reputations before the war. It need hardly be said that, among the writers who have come before the American public since that great event, there are a few whose names are already distinguished; but most of these have commanded attention rather by the nature and the novelty of their subjects than by their native force or their literary skill. What has been done here in literature and in art will doubtless be not only equaled hereafter but surpassed, notwithstanding the unfavorable conditions, both material and moral, of our society in that regard. It is only that the men who are to accomplish this have not yet appeared.

None the less because of the date of our best literary work, is fifteen years the boundary not only of the average New-Yorker's, but we may even assert of the "average American's," knowledge of the society in which he finds himself, and of which we can hardly say that he forms a part—he being rather one of a chance assemblage of isolated items. This

is true of him, unless he happens to be a native Bostonian or Philadelphian, who is likely to have roots that bring him social nourishment and knowledge from a deeper soil. As for the average New-Yorker, his very title to that designation is in much the greater number of cases merely the barren fact that he lives in New York, has lived there a few years, and hopes to live there always. Hence that superficial apprehension of things, and that looking from to-day, not beyond yesterday nor further forward than to-morrow, which has become a peculiarly New York trait. For it is not with the young alone that this short-sightedness prevails; nor is it a sign of ignorance greater than might be reasonably looked for, considering the elements of the population of New York, in all conditions of its society—considering how many of the inhabitants of the great trade-mart have come into it within fifteen years, and know nothing and care to know nothing of it beyond that limit. More than one-half the people who dwell upon Manhattan Island were born in Europe; and of the remainder, quite one-half have drifted upon it from other countries within the Union, which, more or less remote, are all so far away and so strange that these, too, although not political aliens, are socially foreigners.

This ignorance as to the recent past, which is generally accompanied by a complacent assumption as to the present, is upon no subject more complete and self-satisfied than upon music. Even the writers upon music in New York newspapers of the better class assume that musical taste is a recent development among the people whom they instruct. They look back to the building of the Academy of Music (if they can see so far) as the beginning of Italian opera in the United States, and regard Steinway Hall as the cradle of our orchestral music of the higher order. But, on the contrary, the truth is that the strangely named Academy of Music is merely the result of a series of long unsuccessful attempts to get from large and popular audiences that support for Italian opera which it had received in no country in the world in which there was not a large wealthy, leisurely class, who were disposed to pay lavishly for its support—doing this less from the pleasure taken in it by most of them, than because it was an expensive, fashionable, and socially exclusive pastime. Steinway Hall and Chickering Hall, useful appendages to the business of the eminent musical manufacturers whose names they bear, are mere make-shifts for the present; and in regard to the past, they are poor substitutes, which have very imperfectly and unsatisfactorily supplied the place of a concert-room

which New York lost "before the war," and which in size, in beauty, in convenience, and in its acoustic qualities was unsurpassed, if it were equaled, by any other in the world. Its entrance was in Broadway, opposite Bond street. It was approached, not by climbing narrow and dangerous stairs, but by a broad corridor on a level with the street, and the sight of its lofty and beautiful proportions and rich but chaste decorations was a never-tiring pleasure. Jenny Lind was the name of her who first awoke its echoes, which hardly died away when they were again aroused by Marietta Alboni. And this was years "before the war." Metropolitan Hall was burned in 1854. Before the building of the Academy of Music New York had, in Astor Place, an opera-house so admirable in design, so well adapted to its musical purpose, so beautiful, and so skillfully contrived for the exhibition of its audience, as well as its artists, that not only traveled Americans, but foreigners of extended acquaintance with the capitals and the elegant gayeties of Europe, pronounced it the most beautiful theater of its kind in the world. In form and in color it pleased the eye, and it was in one point singularly admirable: large enough for imposing display, both on the stage and off, it was not too large. Singers were not obliged to strain their voices to make themselves heard in it; beaux and belles were not obliged to strain their eyes to see each other's attractions, even without opera-glasses; nor did the elder ladies have any difficulty in criticising one another's dresses to the minutest particulars. At this time, too, the opera audience of New York was not so large nor so promiscuous but that most of those who composed it had more or less knowledge of one another. Hence, not only the visiting from box to box and sofa to sofa between the acts, but the mere presence together of friends and acquaintances, and of those who, although not acquainted, were yet familiar with one another's faces, for the common enjoyment of a great and refined pleasure, made the opera at Astor Place a very delightful form of society. But one of this beauty's chief charms was the cause of its ruin. It was too small. It would hold comfortably all the frequenters of the opera; but on special occasions, first nights, and the performance of very popular operas, it would not accommodate the unusual throng; wherefore, the treasury suffered sorely; for it is upon such occasional floods that places of public entertainment depend for that supply of money which makes the difference between failure and success.

But New York's greatest enjoyments of Italian opera have not been in houses specially built for the lyric drama. Before the building

of any opera-house between its two rivers, New York had known and appreciated operatic performances by artists of a higher grade than any of those who have appeared only on the boards of its opera-houses proper; and it is worthy of remark that, since the time when Italian opera made its first splendid entrance into the New World through the portals of New York, the most renowned singers, the grandest music, and the most delightful, if not the most complete, operatic performances have been presented to its public within profane, unconsecrated walls. This period of musical experience and culture extends so far back that it reaches the time of our grandfathers.

The annals of opera in New York are records of more than half a century. Before 1825 our stage knew only such musical performances—English operettas, they were called—as correspond to the French *vaudeville*. In these Mrs. Oldmixon, Mrs. Hilson, and Mrs. Holman—singing actresses from the London theaters—pleased the ears and the eyes of gentlemen in enormous white cravats and high shirt-collars, who wore their hair in a Brutus crop, and among whom there might be seen, at rare intervals, some old-fashioned fellows with queues tightly tied in black silk ribbons. In 1823, however, “*Der Freischütz*” was performed in English at the Park Theater, and was very successful. Two years afterward, the history of opera proper in New York begins, not in feebleness or uncertain obscurity, but in pomp and triumph, and a blaze of splendor.

The first Italian opera heard in America was Rossini's masterpiece “*Il Barbiere di Siviglia*,” which was produced at the Park Theater in 1825 by the famous Garcia Company. Angrisani appeared as *Basilio*, Garcia as *Almariva*, and Signorina Garcia as *Rosina*. Angrisani was one of the best Italian-singing basses of his day. Garcia had then hardly a rival among tenors; and his daughter, Signorina Garcia, soon became, as Madame Malibran, to Italian opera what Rachel was afterward to French tragedy; and she began her wonderful career in New York, where her talent was first recognized and was first appreciated at its real value, and where she soon became the idol of the public, tasting here first that intoxicating adulation which she was afterward to drink without measure.

Manuel Garcia was a Spanish Hebrew who had risen to operatic distinction in Paris as a tenor, both *di forza* and *di grazia*, and who, in such parts as *Otello*, *Almariva*, and even *Don Giovanni*, was without an acknowledged equal. His daughter, Maria Felicita, after some years of pupilage under her father, and some

little operatic experience in Italy as his supplement and support, went with him to London when she was sixteen years old, and was engaged at the Italian opera there, in 1824, as a chorus singer! Only a year afterward, when the prima-donna—the great prima-donna of the day—fell suddenly ill, Garcia, who never lost anything for lack of confidence, boldly offered the services of his girlish daughter in place of those of—Pasta! They were accepted, and, on the 25th of June, 1825, she appeared before a London audience as *Rosina*, and so pleased her audience that she was engaged for the rest of the season, six weeks, at a salary of £500. She afterward sang at the Manchester, York, and Liverpool festivals; but, notwithstanding some splendid manifestations of her talent, by one of which she provoked the jealous wrath of Velluti, the eminent *musico*, or male soprano, of his day (the last of his sexless sort who attained distinction), she had not yet reached a recognized position, and, indeed, her fortunes were so low that she was on the point of accepting an offer of marriage from a humble orchestral musician.

Fortunately, just at this time her visionary and eccentric father projected a scheme of Italian opera in America, and put it at once into execution. The rapidity of his movements are not less remarkable than his daring. On the 29th of November of the very year in which, in June, she had made at London her first appearance in “*Il Barbiere*,” she appeared in the same opera at the Park Theater, in New York. When we remember that, after the close of the London operatic season, about the 1st of August, the Garcias had made a concert tour through England, and that at that time the ocean was crossed only in sailing-vessels by a few people who had prayers put up in churches for their safety, and when we consider, too, the painful and protracted negotiations which are now necessary to secure the presence of a company of second-rate artists, the sudden appearance of the Garcia company in New York approaches the marvelous.



The success of the strange art and of the stranger artists, especially that of Signorina Garcia, was, like the performances, something quite unknown before in America. Nor was it the ephemeral consequence of novelty and surprise. The performances went on twice a week until the end of August, 1826, nearly a year. To “*Il Barbiere*” were added “*La Cenerentola*,” “*Otello*,” “*Semiramide*,” and “*Don Giovanni*,”—each of them a new experience, an unimagined delight, to the audience—each of them a new occasion of triumph to the young prima-donna, “the



MADAME MALIBRAN GARCIA. (FROM THE DRAWING BY JOHN HAYTER. PUBLISHED BY J. DICKINSON, LONDON, 1829.)

Signorina" as she was fondly called by the musical people of the day.

Maria Garcia was the most accomplished vocalist, the most dramatic singer, in all respects the most gifted musical artist, of modern days; and she had such beauty of person and charm of manner that she became the most supreme of prima-donnas—a sort of women who from their first appearance have been accustomed to see the world at their feet. She was the idol of society in New York, and was hardly less admired and beloved by the general public. Such a creature had not been seen before for half a century, and was not to be seen again for quite as long. Her voice was a contralto, but it was a contralto which enabled her to sing with equal ease the music of "Semi-ramide" and of "Arsace." She had at ordinary command three full octaves, from this

note  to this ; and in pri-

ate she could surpass even this wonderful compass. As an actress she was made by

nature equally mistress of the grand, the pathetic, and the gay. Her face was, perhaps, not in all points regularly beautiful; but it was full of beauties each eminent in its kind, and had an ever-enduring, always-varying charm. Her dark, bright eyes fascinated all on whom their brilliant glances fell, and by her smile, which revealed brilliant and beautifully shaped teeth, not only all men, but even all women, seem to have been carried captive. Her figure was so exquisitely beautiful in all points that it was somewhat extravagantly said that she might be studied for an improvement upon the Venus de' Medici. The poise of her daintily shaped head upon her shoulders was an appeal to admiration, and her graceful carriage would have been dignified had she been a little taller. To the power of varied expression in her face there seems to have been no limit; but that most natural to it, and most commonly seen upon it, was a fascinating radiation of happiness from her own soul to all within her influence. Nor did her manner and her look belie her nature. According to all evidence, she was as good as she was beautiful and fas-



MARIA F. MALIBRAN. (FROM THE PORTRAIT BY CHALON, R. A.)

cinating—"as good as an angel." There is no record of any other such supremacy, personal, vocal, and dramatic, except in the great Gabrielle, who turned the head and won the heart of all Europe three-quarters of a century before her; and Gabrielle was far below her morally, and in all that makes woman most admirable and lovable.

It is greatly noteworthy that the career of such a woman as this should have been really begun and shaped in New York, the New York of 1825. But so it was. In New York she received the first recognition of her talents; in New York she first felt the glow of triumph, and was conscious of the possession of sustained power. In New York, too, she passed from maidenhood to wifedom, and acquired the name by which, notwith-

standing a second marriage, she was afterward always known and will be known while the world reads the history of music. She had not been long upon the stage of the Park Theater when M. François Eugène Malibran, a French merchant of New York, proposed marriage to her. He was fifty years of age, she seventeen; but she was willing; and after a brief opposition on the part of her father she became Madame Malibran in March, 1826—only four months after her appearance here, and in the midst of her operatic and social success. Garcia's opposition to this marriage was purely selfish, as its sad event proved. His concern was not for his daughter's happiness, but for her salary—the gain which he expected to reap as her father and business manager from her brilliant future, to which he was looking. As to her, she may have sought an escape from his selfishness, tyranny, and brutality—for he was selfish, tyrannical, and brutal beyond measure and past sufferance; but she also, as the experience of the world has shown, may have been fond of this man who was old enough to be her father. It is necessary to look for no other motive on his part than that of passionate love for a girl so beautiful, so gifted, so charming, and so good. But, sad to relate, it does seem as if he had a base and selfish motive in his proposal, and that, with a Frenchman's eye to the profit of marriage, he sought a wife whose income, so long as she had health, could not but be very large. For she had been a wife but a few months when her husband, who had overcome her father's opposition by promising him a present of a hundred thousand francs for the loss of his daughter's services, was bankrupt and (as the

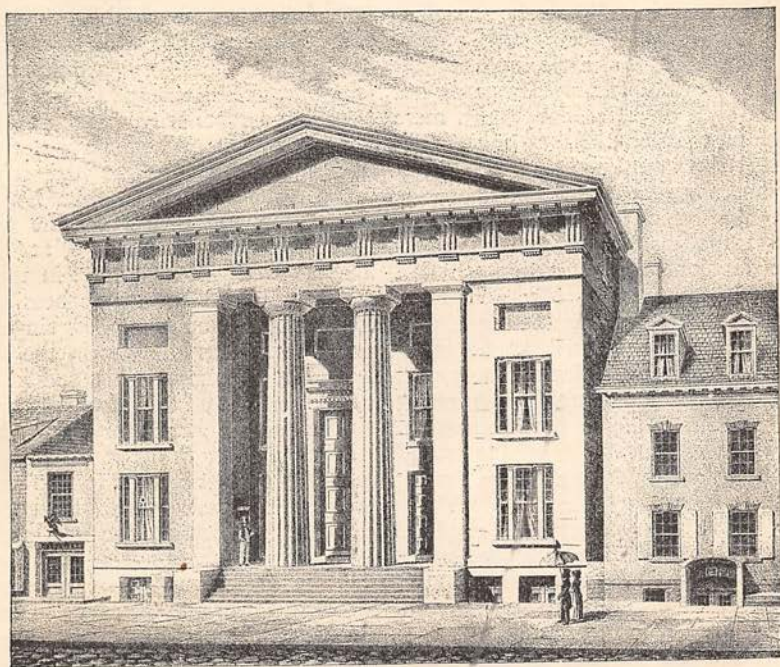


PARK THEATER AND PART OF PARK ROW, 1831. (FROM AN OLD PRINT.)

old laws on such matters were then in force in New York) a prisoner for debt. It is hardly probable that a merchant of his sort was ignorant of the calamity that was impending over him; and his subsequent conduct confirms this natural conclusion. The young wife gave up for the benefit of his creditors all claims which she had upon his property—an act which added greatly to her popularity. Her father abandoned her in his disappointment and rage, and, going to Mexico with his family, left her alone and penniless, with an imprisoned and disgraced husband, among strangers. She, not losing courage, renewed the study of English, and of English song, which she had begun in England (for, with the departure of her father, performance of Italian

first half of the nineteenth century, as singing the soprano parts of psalm tunes and chants in a little church in a small town then less known to the people of London and Paris and Vienna than Jeddo is now. Grace Church may well be pardoned for pride in a musical service upon the early years of which fell such a crown of glory, and which has since then been guided by taste not always unworthy of such a beginning.

Malibran, however, soon wearied of this life; and breaking loose from her selfishly dependent husband, she went to Paris, where she arrived in 1827. Thus in a short time she had crossed the Atlantic twice,—then no trifling matter, of course,—had achieved the success of a great prima-donna, had become



NEW YORK THEATER, AFTERWARD BOWERY, ERECTED 1826. (FROM THE COLLECTION OF THOMAS J. MCKEE, ESQ.)

opera was of course at an end); and before long she appeared at the Bowery Theater, then newly built and called "The New York." Her first appearance there was in "The Devil's Bridge"; her next in "Love in a Village." Success again crowned her efforts; her performances were very profitable to the manager; and from every night's receipts a certain sum was regularly sent to M. Malibran. She also sang in the choir of Grace Church, then at the corner of Broadway and Rector street. It is rather startling to think of the greatest prima-donna, not only of her day but of modern times—the most fascinating woman upon the stage in the

a wife, had seen her husband ruined and imprisoned, had been deserted by her father and her family, and, left alone in a strange country, had mastered a new domain of her art and a new language, had won a new popularity, and had filled the humble position of a choir-singer;—and she was a girl not yet eighteen years old. Thenceforward her life belongs to the history of music in Europe; but her career and her success as an artist, and her joys and sorrows as a woman, began in New York. She awoke an enthusiasm and an admiration, mingled with high regard, which surpassed all the attainments in this respect of her predecessors, so far as we can

learn, and of all her successors, as we know. Before her first were wreaths of flowers and coronals cast upon the stage. It was at Paris when she performed "Tancredi" at the *Théâtre Favart*, for the benefit of Sontag, her rival; but when this first homage from Flora to Euterpe fell before her feet, we may be sure that it brought up to her never-forgetting and tenderly grateful soul the memory of the New York experience that first gave her assurance that she was a great dramatic singer.

The incidents of Malibran's later life are so well known to all who take an interest in musical affairs, that any particular recounting of them would be superfluous here, even irrespective of the limits and the purpose of these articles. There is one story of her, however, which does not appear in her memoirs, and I believe has never been in print. When she was singing at Covent Garden Theater, in London, the tenor was Templeton, a Scotchman with a beautiful voice and fair vocalization, but dull, without style or expression, and a mere split-stick upon the stage. All at once, Malibran declared she would not sing with Templeton. The manager, supposing that she objected to him as an artist, and knowing her kindness and good-nature, asked her the reason of her decision. After a little hesitation she replied, "Last evening Mr. Templeton was going to kiss me." The manager, who knew Mr. Templeton as well as he knew Malibran, sent for the tenor immediately, and in the presence of the haughtily shrinking prima-donna, told him of her accusation. "Modum Molly Brawn," was the stolid Scotchman's reply,—"*Modum Molly Brawn, I wadna kuss ye on ony accoont.*" "Molly Brawn," who was then pestered by a gilded throng made up of half the male butterflies in London, appreciated the situation instantly, broke into a peal of laughter, and matters were restored to their former condition.

Malibran worked all her wonders and achieved all her triumphs in the little space of ten years. Within three years from the time when she soared into happiness upon the applauses of the Park Theater, she had conquered the whole musical world of Europe, where she reigned gently for a short, glorious reign of six years. Her only rival was Henrietta Sontag—Sontag, to whom we shall strangely have to give a place in these sketches at a very much later date. They had their partisans; they were both great singers; both were beautiful; they were jealous; they were publicly compared; their several successes were made thorns in each other's sides. Malibran fully acknowledged the talent of her rival. She would sometimes weep and say, "Why does she sing so divinely?" At last

the two were reconciled. It was at a concert at the house of the Countess Merlin. There was a little scheme among the musical amateurs to bring them together; and in the course of the evening it was proposed to them to sing the great duo from "Tancredi." There was in both a brief shrinking—natural and inevitable—from the struggle; but soon they consented, and approached the piano-forte, excited not only by their own emotions, but by the murmurs and applause of the whole company. The performance more than fulfilled all the high expectations it had awakened, and caused so profound a sensation of delight and admiration that, at the end of the duet, they looked a moment in each other's eyes, then silently clasped hands and kissed—a sight to see. Thereafter they were friendly rivals; but Malibran, because of her superior dramatic power and greater versatility (a trait of her genius which was most remarkable), attained an unquestioned superiority, which she maintained while she lived. When she was at the fullness of her power, and at the highest pinnacle of her art, she was thrown from her horse, and received injuries from which she never recovered, and she died in 1836, at the youthful age of twenty-nine—being, in the shortness of her life and the suddenness of her rise to undisputed eminence, as singular among prima-donnas as she was in the splendor of her vocal and mental gifts, and in the charm of her person and the beauty of her character.

The point in her history which is of peculiar interest to us at present is that she received the first recognition of her eminence in New York. As we have seen, when she came to this country she had no reputation in Europe, although she had been heard there in the principal parts of operas, and as a solo singer at the great festivals in England. But her audiences, bound up in their admiration of the great prima-donnas of the day, chiefly Pasta and Fodor, failed to appreciate her at her real value. They listened and looked, and were much pleased, and they mildly approved; but they did not perceive the exquisite quality of her art; they did not feel the magnetism of her gifts and graces. In New York, partly because of the novelty of this form of musical art, partly because of the absence of the overshadowing fame of prima-donnas of long-established eminence, but partly also, we must believe, because of a quick sensitiveness of apprehension which is one of the few distinctive traits of the English race in America, she was at once recognized as a great artist and a noteworthy personage. It need hardly be said that musical criticism in America was then less searching

because less informed and less experienced than it is at present. It was not until a score of years had passed that the combination of musical organization, technical knowledge, and literary skill required for that criticism appears in the journalism or in the periodical literature of America. But if Malibran was not criticised here with the musical expert's knowledge of vocalization and of the art (or, as it is sometimes vainly called, the science) of music, her art as a whole was fully appreciated, and her personal power as an actress was acknowledged with a submissive delight. Nor was her vocal eminence without such a degree of intelligent and competent recognition as might be looked for at that time. It is interesting to see the impression which this enchanting artist and woman made upon a public in which there were comparatively very few who had ever heard a complete opera (for in "Der Freischütz," the only opera which had then been performed here, the dialogue was spoken); I therefore quote here extracts from the first brief article written in America on Italian opera. It is from the "Evening Post" of the 30th November, 1825:

"An assemblage of ladies so fashionable, so numerous, and so elegantly dressed was probably never before witnessed in our theatre. † * * * In what language shall we speak of an entertainment so novel in this country, but which has so long ranked as the most elegant and refined among the amusements of the higher classes of the Old World! All have obtained a general idea of the opera from report. But report can give but a faint idea of it. Until it is seen, it will never be believed that a play can be conducted in recitative or singing, and yet be nearly as natural as the ordinary drama. We were last night surprised, delighted, enchanted; and such were the feelings of all who witnessed the performance * * *. The daughter, Signorina Garcia, seems to us a being of new creation, a cunning pattern of excellent nature, equally surprising us by the melody and tones of her voice, and by the propriety and grace of her acting."

But remark upon the new entertainment and upon the artists by whom it was presented was not confined to such brief phrases of glowing generality. The same journal copies from another publication an article on the third performance of "Il Barbiere" which fills one and a half of its ample columns, the purport and quality of which may be gathered from the following passages, which give the critic's impressions of the first Italian prima-donna heard in America:

"But how, or in what terms, shall we speak of Maria Garcia? How can our feeble pen portray the loveliness of this admirable creature's face and figure, and give to our distant readers any conception of the wildering wonders of her almost unequalled voice!

Compass, sweetness, taste, truth, tenderness, flexibility, rapidity, and force do not make up half the sum of her vocal powers; and her voice is only one of the rare qualities with which nature has endowed her. She possesses in as high a degree as any actress we remember to have seen that exquisite perception of propriety in action, that delicate appreciation and graceful execution of the duties of her part, which constitute requisites so indispensable in the practice of her difficult profession. * * * Her embellishments are sparingly introduced, and never when they are not wanted. On such occasions, however, as call for the exhibition of her skill, she pours forth a rich stream of overflowing and almost overpowering melody, the more surprising as it is evidently the mere effect of a relaxation of the restraint which her good taste has imposed upon her powers of execution. Her shake is good; her *appoggiaturas* beautiful; and her roulades, whenever introduced, are thrown off with rapidity and ease."

This criticism, indeed, is not very exact nor very searching. We may not unjustly suspect that the writer's notion of the *appoggiaturas* which he pronounced so beautiful was rather vague; and his remark upon the "delicate appreciation and graceful execution of the duties of her part which constitute requisites so indispensable in the practice of her difficult profession," is of that confused, unmeaning sort which comes from feeble and confused thinking, and the groping effort to say something fine and critical without anything in mind that needs to be said. But praises not only less indiscriminate but equally meaningless have been recently lavished in high journalistic quarters upon the inferior successors of Malibran. Nor was this sort of comment upon musical performances peculiar then to New York. An examination of the London newspapers of that day discovers that the criticism there was much on the same level—little if any higher. It is only within the last thirty-five years that true æsthetic criticism of art has been known in the journalism even of England. And, moreover, it should be remarked that the high quality of Signorina Garcia's style,—its largeness, purity, and simplicity,—was recognized by all the New York writers on music of that day, and by the public, and was contrasted, to her great advantage, with the more florid and less chastened style of her father. And yet again, the writer quoted (who manifestly had heard opera in Europe) distinctly recognizes in another passage the supremacy of Maria Garcia's genius, and in plain terms pronounces her "the future rival of Pasta and Fodor." This she proved to be, not after years of effort and improvement, but immediately on her return to Europe, and not only their rival but their superior. During the few years that she lived and sang after her twelve-month's sojourn in America, the eulogies of her European critics and the

† There was then but one theater in New York.



MRS. AUSTIN. FROM A LITHOGRAPH AFTER THE PAINTING BY H. P. BRIGGS, R. A.
(FROM THE COLLECTION OF THOMAS J. MCKEE, ESQ.)

ecstasies of her European audiences were only magnified echoes and prolonged repetitions of the praises she received and the delight she gave during her year in New York.

Nor did New-Yorkers at this time fail to offer encouragement to other musical artists, or to enjoy other operatic music and Italian singing. Signora Bartolini, an artist of fair European repute, was engaged at the Chatham Garden Theater,—a place in Chatham street, not far from the City Hall, and something like the Niblo's Garden of after years,—where she sang operatic airs between the two or three plays which at that time almost always made up an evening's theatrical entertainment.

Italian opera, however, was soon followed by English opera, and the beautiful Spanish-Hebrew prima-donna by an English vocalist very unlike her in person and in style, and vastly her inferior as an artist, yet charming and almost as beautiful. This was Mrs. Austin, who, two years after the departure of

Malibran, came before the New York public, and also at the Park Theater. Mrs. Austin had a mezzo-soprano voice of delicious quality, and she sang in the best style of the Anglo-Italian school of her day. She was very beautiful, in what is regarded as the typical Anglo-Saxon style of beauty—"divinely fair," with blue eyes softly bright, golden brown hair, and a well-rounded figure. She was very much admired as *Ariel*. The operas in which she appeared were chiefly Arne's "Artaxerxes," Weber's "Oberon," "The Marriage of Figaro," "Cinderella," "Tancredi," and "Dido," with Rossini's music adapted by Mr. Charles Horn, an English tenor and musician who was prominent in New York's music during the second quarter of the century. But it would be tedious and useless to undertake to recount all the operas in which Mrs. Austin appeared. She remained in New York several years, very much admired by all lovers of music and by all attendants at the theater, because of her beauty and her pleasing man-



MASTER BURKE IN CHARACTER. (FROM COLLECTION OF THOMAS J. MCKEE, ESQ.)

ners. She appeared not only in opera but in singing parts in plays. It would seem that she had little dramatic ability, either as a singer or as an actress; but for five years she was the most prominent musical person in New York and the surrounding country. At first, however, she was neglected, she having come before the American public in a neighboring city. For already had the public of New York arrogated to themselves the exclusive right of deciding upon the merits of artists of any pretensions who visited the country professionally. And it is true that if they received the approbation of New York, it was a favorable introduction to the public of other towns. Not so, however, with those who chose Philadelphia or Boston as the scene of their *début*. The selection was in itself regarded by the Manhattanese as a tacit acknowledgment of inferiority, or as a slight

to their pretensions as arbiters; and in such cases they were slow at bestowing their approval, however well it might be deserved.

Mrs. Austin owed her success in New York hardly more to her voice and her beauty than to the efforts of Mr. Berkeley, a member of a noble English family, who accompanied her, and managed all her affairs with an ardent devotion far beyond that of an ordinary man of business. Mr. Berkeley wrote quite well, and was a musical critic of fair abilities for his day. The constant support which his beautiful charge received from his pen, in the New York papers, not only gained for her before long the recognition which she deserved, yet might otherwise have been without, but did much to educate the musical taste of the New York public, and to prepare the way for a higher kind of musical criticism in New York journals.



MONTRESSOR. (FROM A WATER-COLOR DRAWING IN COLLECTION OF THOMAS J. MCKEE, ESQ.)

Notwithstanding her attractive person, her sweet voice, and the efforts of her champion, Mrs. Austin had a rival in popular favor, and one who, as an artist, was her superior. Madame Feron had attained a very considerable reputation in Europe. She was even said by Oxberry, a well-known London critic of the day, to be second to no English singer, and inferior to no Italian but Pasta—an opinion, by the way, strongly illustrative of Malibran's lack of European reputation at that time. Madame Feron made her first appearance at the Park Theater, in November, 1828, as *Floretta*. She produced a strong impression, and had an unqualified success. Her voice was a soprano, of fine quality and very considerable power. As a vocalist she stood, if not in the second rank (the first including only such rare artists as Pasta and Malibran), at least in the third. Her style united boldness, flexibility, and finish; and she was not without a very considerable dramatic power. Those who attended operatic performances for the sake of music, pure and simple, preferred her to Mrs. Austin, and with reason. But Mrs. Austin possessed rare beauty; Madame Feron escaped homeliness only by a certain intelligence and character in her face. She was dark, almost swarthy, and without the grace of person and charm of manner that won Mrs. Austin half her triumphs. Opera is not a mere musical entertainment; and before long Mrs.

Austin's popularity quite overtopped that of her more accomplished rival. Madame Feron appeared in 1829, at the Bowery ("New York") Theater, in "Il Trionfo della Musica," with Charles Horn, Angrisani, the bass of the former Garcia troupe, and a Madame Brichita, a contralto who was here for some years, and who attained a very considerable degree of popular favor. Madame Feron, after long absence and much wandering, returned to New York, and made her last appearance at the Park Theater, in 1833, as *Cinderella*; the *Baron Pompolino* of the occasion being the celebrated "Master Burke," who, as a boy, astonished the world by his histrionic and musical abilities, and who, in his maturer years, known as Mr. Joseph Burke, was a much admired violinist and an esteemed member of the musical profession.

Before this re-appearance of Madame Feron, however, a French opera company took brief possession of the boards of the Park Theater, in 1830. Their merit was not great, nor did the company contain any artist whose name deserves record here. It is worth while to remark that their performances were not left without severe and discreet criticism in the New York journals of the day. They, however, enabled New York people to hear operas like Boieldieu's "Jean de Paris" and Auber's "Fiancée" in their original form. After them, New York had Mrs. Austin and Madame Feron again, in English opera—"John of



ADELAIDE VARESE PEDROTTI. FROM A LITHOGRAPH FOR THE MUSICAL OPERA JOURNAL. (FROM THE COLLECTION OF THOMAS J. MCKEE, ESQ.)



L. FORNASARI. (FROM COLLECTION OF THOMAS J. MCKEE, ESQ.)

Paris," "Artaxerxes," "The White Lady," "The Marriage of Figaro," and "Cinderella"—the last of which had a long run (forty-five nights), which was brought to an end by the illness of Mrs. Austin, who soon disappears with her ardent business manager and eulogizing critic, and is heard of no more.

And now there comes a great change over the fortunes of the lyric drama in New York. Suddenly brought forward as a surprise by Garcia, known afterward only in a kind of hybrid form (as it was most commonly in England), and taking its chance, hap-hazard, on the boards of the ordinary theater, it was now to be presented with due dignity and consideration in its individual and self-contained proportions. New York was to have "an Italian opera."

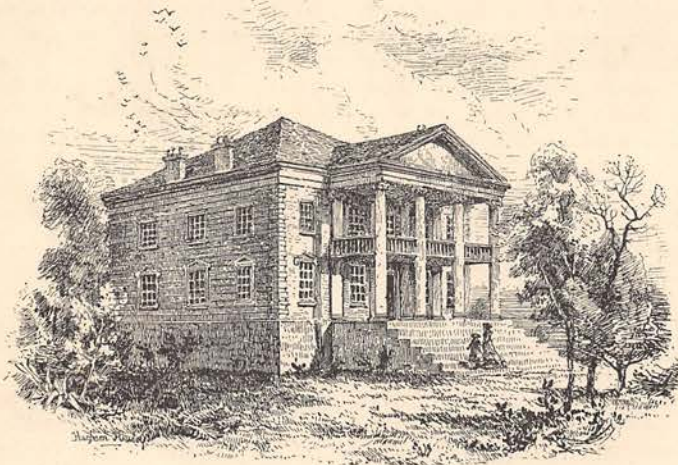
The uninformed New-Yorker of middle age who should visit the corner of Varick and Charlton streets, which is about half a mile below Fourteenth street and about a quarter of a mile from the Hudson River, would hardly suspect that at that spot his father, if he were a music-lover and a theater-

goer, made his first acquaintance with Italian opera in a complete and well-appointed form. But so it was. There stood what for some years was known as the Richmond Hill Theater. Richmond Hill was Aaron Burr's villa home. After his ruin it passed through many vicissitudes; but at last, during his life, it became a sort of suburban place of entertainment like Vauxhall, and was known as Richmond Hill Garden. One of its attractions was a small theater, which was not frequented by ladies who were fastidious as to their public associations. This little theater during Burr's lifetime became, in 1832, the stage of the first complete Italian opera company known in musical annals as pertaining peculiarly to New York.*

* Burr lived until 1836. I remember that as I was walking one day, in my early boyhood, with my father in Maiden Lane, he pointed out to me a little, shambling old man, with a ruffled white cravat, hair whiter than his cravat, and a rusty black coat—a very forlorn and doleful-looking creature. "When you are older," my father said, "the time will come when you will remember that you have seen that man: that is Aaron Burr."

It was on the 6th of October, 1832, that the Montessor company appeared there for the first time, in Rossini's opera, "La Cenerentola." Montessor, who was the first tenor as well as the manager of the company, had a voice of agreeable quality, without much power, a tolerably good style of vocalization, and an easy, gentleman-like carriage. He became a favorite. The prima-donna, Signorina Albina Stella, although she was a very good singer, failed to produce any impression. But, on the 17th of October, musical New York had its first sensation since the apparition of Maria Garcia. On that night Signorina Pedrotti came before it as *Elisa* in Mercadante's opera, "Elisa e Claudio." Not much had been said of her, for she had sung only in Lisbon and in Bologna, and had little reputation. But she took musical New York off its

eye upon him immediately. The street was almost deserted, and I saw him as if he were posing before me. He was very tall; his head looked like that of a youthful Jove;—dark hair in flaky curls; an open, blazing eye; a nose just heroically curved; lips strong, yet beautifully bowed, sweet and persuasive; and, withal, a large and easy grace of manner that belongs only to men from Mediterranean shores. He was dressed in a complete suit of light tawny pongee silk, and wore on his superb head an undressed Panama hat much of the same color. I had never seen such a man before; and when I got home I said to an old lady who had talked to me about musical matters, "I have seen Fornasari." "Nonsense, my boy," was the reply; "Fornasari went to Europe years ago." But I persisted in my belief that there could not be two



RICHMOND HILL HOUSE, OR THEATER. (FROM THE COLLECTION OF GEORGE P. ELDER, ESQ.)

feet again. She had a fine mezzo-soprano voice, of sympathetic quality; and, although she was far from being a perfectly finished vocalist, she had an impressive dramatic style, and a presence and a manner that enabled her to take possession of the stage. She was a handsome woman, tall, nobly formed, with brilliant eyes, and a face full of expression. She carried the town by storm.

Hardly less successful was the primo-basso of the company, Signor Fornasari, who was afterward to achieve European distinction. Fornasari had a noble voice, the most attractive Italian manner, and was long spoken of by New York women as one of the handsomest men that ever lived—not without reason, as I know. For, years afterward, as I was walking down Broadway one summer afternoon, I saw a man approaching me whose appearance was so striking that it fixed my

such men in the world at once; and it proved that I was right. The basso was passing through New York on his way from Cuba or Mexico.

With this company came some musicians of distinguished talent, whose after influence upon the musical taste and culture of New York was important. Chief among them were Bagioli, the musical director, Rapetti, first violin and leader of the orchestral band, and Casolani, contra-bassist. Bagioli became afterward a very successful singing-master in New York. Rapetti was a very accomplished violinist of the best Italian school, and for many years he ably led all the principal operatic performances in New York, and was a favorite instrumental performer at concerts of the best class. Casolani was much admired. Before his appearance no one in America ever thought of playing the double-bass except as

a support and emphasis for the fundamental harmony, nor of handling its huge strings without a glove. He played it almost as if it were a violoncello, and with a small white hand, from the fine wrist of which he turned back his wrist-bands, with the double purpose of convenience and display. He was a notably handsome man; and for the first time the double-bass became a favorite instrument with ladies. His reign lasted many years. He and Fornasari had, doubtless, no small part in effecting the change which was recorded by a journalist of the day when he said that the Montessor company "has taught our belles the road to Richmond Hill."

But, although society did astonish the remote purlieus of Richmond Hill by its unwonted presence, and although the Montessor company was in great favor with the New York public, its performances soon came to a ruinous end. Mismanagement and lack of adequate financial support brought it quickly to the same grand disastrous *finale* to which all Italian operatic enterprises were, and are, almost sure to come. As we follow the annals of music in New York we shall have to record failure after failure for Italian opera, and, on the other hand, frequent financial success for English. The reason of this is not any lack of liking for the performances of the Italian artists, nor the fact that their language is not understood. There has never been any difficulty in finding audiences for Italian opera in New York; the difficulty has been in finding money. Italian opera is by far the most expensive form of public entertainment. Italian singers and Italian instrumentalists must, notwithstanding the poverty of their country, receive much higher pay than English; and, besides, there must always be more of them for the same work. The expenses of a moderately well-appointed Italian opera company are quite twice as much as those of an English company of corresponding grade. The first operatic venture in New York, that of Garcia, was successful in every way. It was so profitable that, as we have seen, the "season" was prolonged to nearly a year without intermission; and it was brought to an end only by the imprisonment of the prima-donna's husband, and the wrathful disappearance of the manager and first tenor, her father. Not improbably, too, these first performances of Italian opera in New York were, in all the most important respects, the most admirable that have ever been heard there. For there can hardly be a doubt that three such artists as Malibran, Garcia, and Angrisani have never again been heard together on the American stage. But the performances of this company were deplora-

bly incomplete. The principal singers were of the very first quality; but the minor parts, the chorus, and the band were merely such as served the ordinary needs of a provincial theater, or as could be hastily procured for the occasion. They received little and they deserved less. Their performances were sometimes of so dreadful a nature that the irascible and sensitive Garcia was driven mad. One night the noble *finale* to the first act of "Don Giovanni" was so mangled by them that he, who was the *Don*, broke furiously away from his part, and rushing to the foot-lights, sword in hand, stopped the performance and made the band begin again.

The performances of the Montessor company were soon followed by those of an English, or rather Scotch, prima-donna of very considerable reputation—Mrs. Wood, who appeared at the Park Theater in September, 1833. Mrs. Wood had attained distinction in London as Miss Paton. Her voice was powerful, of uncommon compass, and agreeable in quality, although not sympathetic. Her vocalization was moderately good; her style brilliant; and as a *bravura* singer she could hold her own even with all but the greatest of the Italian prima-donnas of her day. It



MISS PATON (AFTERWARD MRS. WOOD) AS MANDANE.



MISS PATON, OF THE THEATER ROYAL, COVENT GARDEN. AFTER THE ENGRAVING ON STEEL BY R. NEWTON FROM A MINIATURE BY W. J. NEWTON. (FROM COLLECTION OF THOMAS J. MCKEE, ESQ.)

was in finish of vocalization, in purity and simplicity of style in *cantabile* passages (supreme test of high vocal art), and in expression that she fell short of their excellence. She was a "fine woman," but not handsome—her mouth being so large that, when she opened it, it became cavernous, with stalactic teeth. But her eyes were bright, and her face when she was acting pleased her audiences. She had been married to Lord William Lenox, a squint-eyed scapegrace, who treated her so brutally that she obtained a divorce from him, and eagerly accepted as her second husband Joseph Wood, a tall, handsome pugilist, whose fine but quite uncultivated

tenor voice took him out of the prize-ring, and who won her heart by giving her noble husband a thrashing.

The Woods soon rose very high in popular favor, and their performances were profitable to themselves and the theaters of New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. They sang English versions of "Cinderella," "The Marriage of Figaro," and "The Barber of Seville." To look forward a little, they were afterward joined by Mr. Brough, an Irish bass singer, who had a rich, heavy voice, but little style or skill; and with him they brought out "La Sonnambula" in an English version, which was one of the greatest operatic successes



JOSEPH WOOD. (FROM AN INDIA-INK DRAWING IN POSSESSION OF THOMAS J. MCKEE, ESQ.)

ever attained in America. Bellini's feminine genius was just then winning the popular ear away from the brilliant melodies of Rossini. The prettiness and, at times, the pathos of his sweet but somewhat feeble strains took the general public captive; and the dramatic interest of the librettos which he was fortunate in obtaining gave a great and a new zest to the enjoyment of his operas. Of all this the Woods first had the advantage in America. "La Sonnambula" was the delight of all music-loving people, cultivated and uncultivated, from North to South, from East to—but then there was no West. Nothing but "Still so gently o'er me stealing," or "Hear me swear now," was heard from the throats of singers, the fingers of piano-forte thrummers, and even the lips of whistlers; for never before was there such a pathetic puckering. Mrs. Wood was worshiped almost as if she had been a beauty. I remember, being at boarding-school, in the lowest form, how a young gentleman in the highest, the cock and the swell of the school,—an awful being who had attained the mature age of perhaps seventeen years, and of whom it was said that he "could raise whiskers,"—returning from Philadelphia, after the long vacation, brought

with him a lithographic portrait of Mrs. Wood as *Amina*. This he had had framed and hung in the most conspicuous part of his room, with a crimson cushion before it, upon which he compelled all his visitors to kneel, at least once, on pain of exclusion from his apartment and his good graces. The Woods preserved their popularity here until, on occasion of a petty quarrel with a New York actress named Conduit, there was a cabal raised against them, the American eagle screamed defiance, and, amid a disgraceful disturbance, which attained almost the proportions of a riot, they were driven from the stage of the Park Theater in 1836.

Among the remarkable men in the New York to which the present corner of Varick and Charlton streets was an almost suburban spot, was Lorenzo Daponte, an Italian poet of the minor order, who had been exiled from Venice because of a satirical sonnet, had afterward been Latin secretary to the Emperor Joseph II., and a friend of Mozart, and who was the author of the libretto of "Don Giovanni." He had finally come to New York, where he taught Italian, and where his charming manners and his noble beauty won him great social favor. He was much interested in the



LORENZO DAFONTE. (FROM COLLECTION OF THOMAS J. MCKEE, ESQ.)

Montessor opera venture, and, after its failure, did all in his power to promote the establishment of an Italian opera in New York by subscription. He succeeded; an association was formed, land purchased, and an opera-house built, which was opened to the public in the autumn of 1833, only eight years after the first performance of Italian opera here by the Garcias. The company, known as the Rivafinoli troupe, took its name from the Cavaliere di Rivafinoli, who was its projector and mismanager. The Cavaliere's intentions were largely beneficent; his promises and announcements were very imposing. Indeed, the affair, from beginning to end, was of an exquisiteness and a splendor such as has not since been seen in New York. The house, on the corner of Church and Leonard streets, was decorated by some of the most skillful Italian artists of the day, who were brought from Europe for this special purpose. The scenery was painted by similar hands. It was crowned by a dome, and lighted by a splendid chandelier. In this house first there was a parterre (since queerly called *parquette*), entered from the first balcony, so that ladies might sit in this part of the auditorium, which was not to be thought of when it was the old "pit." The seats in the parterre were mahogany chairs, upholstered in blue damask. In the first balcony the seats were mahogany sofas, upholstered in the same manner. The whole of the second balcony was occupied with pri-

vate boxes, which ran from the front quite back to the vestibule, and which were upholstered alternately in crimson and in blue silk, the fronts being decorated with crimson silk curtains, caught up by gilt cords and tassels. The price of these boxes was six thousand dollars each. The house was carpeted throughout. The audience was composed of the most exquisite people in the city—"exceeding soft society." A writer in the "Mirror" of the day (very plainly, I think, Willis himself—who, by the way, was as innocent of any intelligent knowledge of music as if he had no ears), remarking upon the audience, said: "As we looked at the pit at the opera, we drew a comparison between it and the House of Representatives, as we recollected to have seen it, and the result was unfavorable to the latter. In orderly demeanor and true gentlemanly breeding, the pit of the opera might be a pattern to our hat-crowned locomotive guardians of the public weal." Into the sacred precincts of the second tier the general public was not admitted. That was reserved for subscribers, each of whom owned a box—it might be for one night, or it might be for ever. It was told of a man who had suddenly risen to what was then great wealth, that, having taken a lady to the opera, he was met by the disappointing assurance that there were no seats to be had.

"What! nowhere?"

"Nowhere, sir; every seat in the house is taken, except, indeed, one of the private boxes that was not subscribed for."

"I'll have that."

"Impossible, sir! The boxes can only be occupied by subscribers and owners."

"What is the price of your box?"

"Six thousand dollars, sir."

"I'll take it."

And, drawing out his pocket-book, he filled up a check for six thousand dollars and escorted his lady to her seat, to the surprise and, indeed, to the consternation of the elegant circle which saw itself completed in this unexpected manner.

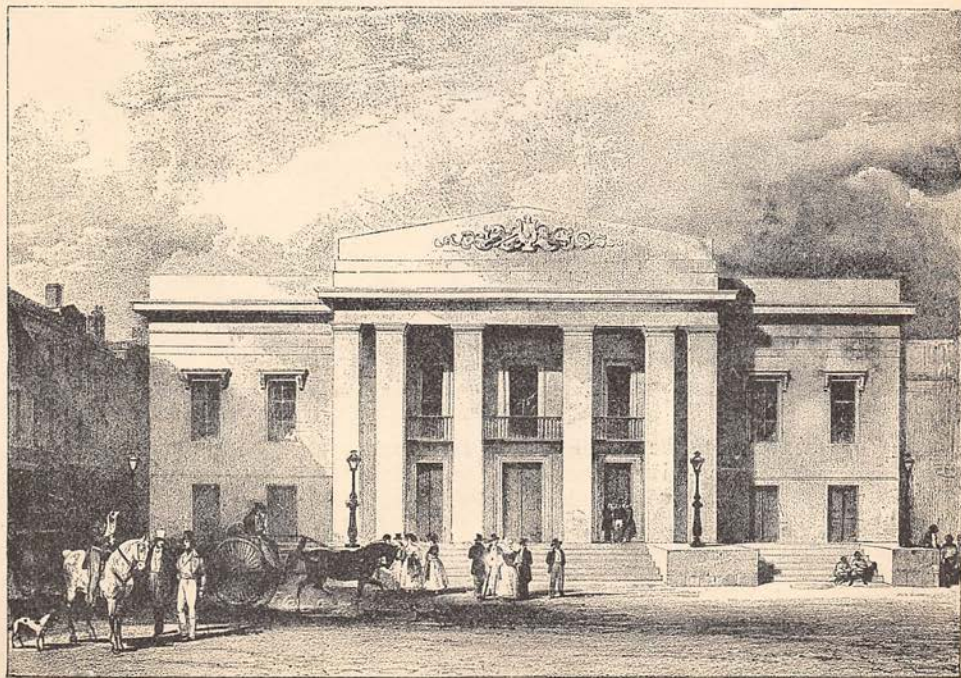
As to the singers who made their appearance under such splendid auspices, they were good, but not of a very high quality: Signora, or rather, as she was called, *Madamigella*, Fanti, soprano; Louisa Bordogni, *mezzo-soprano*; Madame Schneider-Maroncelli, *contralto*; Signor Fabj, *tenor*; De Rosa and Porto, *bassos*. In the orchestra were Boucher, an admirable *violoncellist*, who remained in New York as the principal performer on his charming instrument until his death, about fifteen years ago; Gambati, the first of those imposing *cornet-a-piston* players, who have since dominated our summer theaters and summer hotels; Caso-

lani, the handsome contra-bassist; and Cioffi, one of the greatest trombone-players that ever lived since the time when the sackbut and psaltery were heard on the plains of Dura.*

It was on Monday, the 18th of November, 1833, that the first performance of this company—the great social and musical event of the day—took place. The opera was “La Gazza Ladra” :—Fanti as *Ninetta*, Schneider-Maroncelli as *Pippo*, the tenor and bass parts distributed among the male members of the company aforesaid. It was a success socially, brilliant—quite overpowering, indeed; musically, moderate, and not in any way overpowering. The contralto had the best of it. She was a very pretty woman, with a lovely figure and a delicious voice. She was known and much esteemed as a teacher of music for many years afterward in New York. She was the wife of Piero Maroncelli, the friend and fellow-prisoner of Silvio Pellico, and her husband taught Italian and music in many of the old New York families. But of public singing, operatic or other, this company did little after its season was, with difficulty, worried through. It produced no very strong impression upon the American public, and, indeed, left no mark, in our musical experience, but that of its appearance and its extinction. Fanti had

that success which is called of esteem, because those to whom it is awarded are esteemed very little; Bordogni pleased by girlish beauty (she was but seventeen years old), and—well, that was about all. There was no merit in the company to equal it to that in which Montessor, and Pedrotti, and Fornasari appeared, or even to surpass the Woods, to say nothing of the Garcias and Angrisani; and so the writers in the journals plainly told the Cavaliere de Rivafinoli. There were sixty performances of the operas of the day—Rossini operas, and Bellini operas, and the operas of all time, including the first and last performances in America of that charming composition, “Il Matrimoni Segreto,” the greatest opera of the old Italian school. There were the usual benefit performances; and there was a benefit for Signor Daponte; and then the Rivafinoli opera troupe troops off, amid the wailing of disappointed prima-donnas, and the growling of bassos, and with an odor of explosion, and is no more heard of; and the splendid opera-house, with its dome and its chandelier, and its painted walls and carpeted floors, its damask-covered mahogany seats, and its exclusive row of private boxes awful in splendor—not to be invaded by common people except at the cost of six thousand dollars cash down, stands empty, gaping awhile, and is then put to base uses.

* The trombone is a modified form of the ancient sackbut.



ITALIAN OPERA-HOUSE, AFTERWARD NATIONAL THEATER. FROM A LITHOGRAPH AFTER A DRAWING BY R. BENGOUGH. (FROM COLLECTION OF GEORGE P. ELDER, ESQ.)

OPERA IN NEW YORK. II.



MME. CARADORI AS CRENSA. (AFTER THE DRAWING ON STONE BY JOHN HAYLER. FROM THE COLLECTION OF THOMAS J. MCKEE, ESQ.)

METEORS that blaze and burst into darkness, rockets that rush up in dazzling splendor and come slowly down again mere smoking sticks, prismatic bubbles that vanish into air, and leave behind but a drop of suds,—only these commonplaces of simile furnish an illustration of the course of Italian opera in New York in the years 1834 and 1835. It vanished utterly, not to appear again until ten years had passed, and then in a guise humbly contrasting with its former splendor. In 1836 the Opera-house became an ordinary theater; but even as a theater its prospects were clouded. A year would not have elapsed before the lease of such a beautiful house to a new manager but for a cause which had operated somewhat, perhaps, against the success of the Rivafinoli venture, and which would be much more likely to operate in case of an ordinary theater, or one used for English opera. This adverse circumstance was that at this time Church street was in worse repute than any other street in New York west of the Five Points. But as almost all ladies who

went to the Italian opera went in carriages, while a large proportion of those who went to English opera and to ordinary dramatic performances went on foot, this disadvantage of situation was of more importance after the going out of the Cavaliere Rivafinoli than before. The Opera-house passed into the hands of James W. Wallack, a very popular actor, the father of Mr. John Lester Wallack, but soon, with a notable consistency, passed out of them—in smoke. It was burned in 1839, having in its brief existence of six years brought misfortune upon all who had any connection with it. We shall hereafter turn to it, or rather to a new house built upon its site, to find the lyric drama established there in notable prosperity.

English now took the place of Italian opera as the favorite musical entertainment in New York; and for some years the performances and the performers were of no inconsiderable importance in the annals of music in America. In 1837, Caradori-Allan came to New York. She had not the highest position—that of Catalani or of Malibran; but she stood foremost in the second rank. Under the name of Caradori she had attained a world-wide reputation before she became Mrs. Allan; and she therefore retained the former name before the public. But even that name did not belong to her, and (in concession to a common prejudice) misrepresented her by its Italian form. Caradori was a German girl, of a highly respectable family named Munck. She had acquired her vocal skill by private instruction, and only for private and social enjoyment; but misfortune brought her before the public, when she assumed the name of Caradori. Her voice was a delicious soprano of unusual compass; her style was very pure; and within moderate limits, which she prudently did not attempt to pass, her vocalization was unexceptionable. She was beautiful, with large liquid blue eyes and golden hair, and a complexion of milk and roses; with a fine figure, too, so that she was quite as pleasing to the eyes as to the ears of her audience—a point hardly of secondary importance to a prima-donna. But Caradori, charming singer and beautiful woman, was entirely without dramatic power, and she therefore did not produce a great impression upon New-Yorkers as an operatic vocalist. She made her first appearance at the Park Theater in "The Barber of Seville," and afterward performed in Balfe's "Siege of Ro-

chelle," in "The Elixir of Love," and a few other light operas, all in English. But it was as a concert-singer that she won her popularity, and exercised a great and enduring influence for good upon the taste of the New York public. Her style was unimpeachable. No singing more pure and chaste than hers was ever heard; and its effect was greatly enhanced by her beauty and by the fact that singing, instead of distorting her face, increased the charm of its expression.* A favorite song of hers was Handel's "Angels ever Bright and Fair"; and when she sang it, so seraphic was her face and so did her voice seem imbued with the spirit of her song, that one of her enraptured hearers said that he would hardly have been surprised to see her soar out of sight on white wings heavenward. She often performed one little musical feat without making much fuss about it, as to which, nearly twenty years afterward, Jenny Lind's managers blew trumpets and beat drums—that of so mingling her voice with a flute accompaniment that it was difficult, indeed, almost impossible, to tell one from the other.† Her accompanist on these occasions was John Kyle, the son of a bassoon-player, who, having come to New York with some one of the Park Theater opera companies, had remained. He was in face and in manner the veriest John Bull that ever lived, so that when he was blowing away at his bassoon it seemed as if the British lion himself, with a pipe in his mouth, had got into the orchestra. But his son was a handsome, oval-faced young fellow, with very pleasant manners, and had the richest, sweetest tone on the flute that was ever heard.

* The author of "Musical Reminiscences of an Old Amateur," London, 1827 (anonymous, but known to be the eminent musical dilettante, the Earl of Mount Edgumbe), says of Caradori: "Though from want of power she is not to be ranked in the first line of prima-donnas, it may truly be said that she is *without a fault*. Her voice is sweet, but not strong, her knowledge of music very great, her taste and style excellent, full of delicacy and expression. In a room she is a perfect singer."

† This sort of music is in great favor with a certain sort of music-lover who affects the critical. What the fancy leads to, is illustrated by the following extract from a musical criticism of the period:

"We must likewise enter our protest against a mode of trilling and embellishing which we noticed on several occasions when we were expecting a full and clear key-note. * * * In the duet, 'Gia veggio in quel volto,' she sang most admirably, and in such perfect unison with the harp that we could not distinguish the vocal from the instrumental sounds."

The opinion of a critic who could not distinguish the tone of a soprano voice from the snap of a harp-string, and who, instead of embellishment, expected a "full key-note," is of a value quite inestimable. But in the earlier years of New York's musical history the taste of the audiences was far more trustworthy than the knowledge of the critics.

He was for a long time an important musical figure in New York, and was one of the original members of the Philharmonic Society, of which he was first flute for eight years. His wife was a woman of remarkable and imposing beauty. She was the daughter of one of the captains of the Black Ball line of Liverpool ships,—the aristocracy of the mercantile marine,—and she had many suitors whose position and means made them regarded as very desirable husbands in social circles above her own. But John Kyle, with his handsome face, his agreeable manners, and his flute, carried off the blonde Juno, to the making of some little talk in Gotham. He was always called upon to play the flute on great occasions, and was Caradori's frequent accompanist. Her concerts were given in the City Hotel, which stood just above Trinity Church, between Thames and Cedar streets, where the Trinity building stands now. In this hotel was a large room, which was used in those days for the most fashionable assembly-balls, as they were called, and for the most fashionable concerts. Here the last remnant of New York's acknowledged aristocracy might have been seen in its dying days. Here at assembly and at concert (from which it was not "the thing" to be absent) appeared the last man who, in evening dress, wore a sword as a mark of his position as a gentleman,—the elegant Beverley Robinson. His sword had a plain polished steel handle and a velvet scabbard.*

Caradori, who remained nearly two years in America, was succeeded by an English-opera company which made a strong impression, which stood for some years at the top of popularity, and which exercised much influence for good upon the general musical taste, not only of the city of New York, but of the country generally. This was the Shireff, Seguin & Wilson company, which in 1838 began its performances at the National Theater, for so the Rivafinoli Opera-house was now called. The prima-donna of this company, Jane Shireff, was a young English-woman with a pleasing face and a beautiful figure, and she added to these a captivating manner. She was not a great singer, nor had she much dramatic power; but her voice was of delicious quality, her vocalization was very good, and she was a clever actress. She became a great favorite. Seguin had a rich bass voice and a good dramatic style; and Wilson, the tenor, although he was rather too fat for a hero, and although he did not

* This was as late as the year 1830; but I give this, of course, and all that has preceded it, upon information from those who themselves knew and saw what they told me.

sing in the grand manner, had a genuine tenor voice, of such pleasing quality, and so correct a style, that he was liked by the public and approved by the critics. This company appeared in Rooke's "Amilie, or the Love Test," and were so successful that they performed this opera, as nearly as I can discover, through the whole autumn and winter season. The following gem of musical criticism is in place here as part of the history of opera in New York. It is from the "New York Mirror" (27th October, 1838), the elegant weekly paper of that day. The subject is the opera of "Amilie," and its performance :

"This is one of the gems scattered with no unsparing hand through the opera. The *adagio* in E, four sharps, major, is perfectly thrilling. The words 'Thou art gone,' with the response of the wind instruments, cannot be too highly appreciated, and a brilliant polonaise forms a happy termination. This scene was given by Miss Shireff with a pathos and effect quite startling. Her clear, bell-toned upper notes rang out like a trumpet. * * * The moment Mr. Seguin opened his mouth, the corresponding feature of his audience assumed the same appearance; one universal gape seemed to infect all: such was the astonishment produced by his magnificent organ.† * * * There is no straining after double F's, or S's, or D's; they come round and full and harmonious. His aria 'My boyhood's home' is a composition replete with genius and expression, and caused an immense sensation. *Amilie* here rushes in to claim the assistance of her friends against the persecution of *José* in her recent calamity."

† This is the earliest example that I have observed of the use of this favorite and highly effective phrase.

There is a mortal column and more of this sort.

Miss Shireff afterward appeared at Niblo's Garden, which was on the corner of Broadway and Prince street, where the Metropolitan Hotel now stands. Here she performed in Auber's "Masked Ball," and other light operas (all of course in English), singing in a theater that was open on one side to the air; for Niblo's was a place of summer entertainment. It was a great New York "institution" in its day—perhaps the greatest and most beneficent one of its sort that New York has ever known. It may be safely said that most of the elder generation of New-Yorkers now living have had at Niblo's Garden the greatest pleasure they have ever enjoyed in public. There were careless fun and easy jollity; there whole families would go at a moment's warning to hear this or that singer, but most of all, year after year, to see the Ravels—a family of pantomimists and dancers, upon earth and air, who have given innocent, thoughtless, side-shaking, brain-clearing pleasure to more Americans than ever relaxed their sad, silent faces in the presence of any other performers. The price of admission here was fifty cents, no seats reserved; "first come, first served." Niblo had kept a little coffee-house down town, and made a fortune, which, like Mr. Barnum, he owed to the perception of the fact that there

were hundreds of thousands of people who were willing and able to spend fifty cents for an evening's innocent pleasure, where there were not hundreds who were willing and able to spend one, two, or three dollars. Miss Shireff and her companions were not great artists, but they sang good operas (yet not too good), in a wholesome style. They could be heard with little expense, and without much fuss of any kind, either as to apparel or otherwise; and the consequence was that they diffused a taste for opera widely through the general public, and lined their own pockets comfortably. Miss Shireff's beauty, of course, helped very much in all this. Her character was quite irreproachable, and her reputation was untarnished among those who really knew anything of her.

Of a very different style from those of the Shireff company was the next operatic performance which claims our attention. In 1839, Beethoven's great and only opera "Fidelio" was produced at the Park Theater. Rumors of the readiness with which money was gathered in America by singers, operatic and other, were now rife among the musical profession in Eng-



CITY HOTEL, BROADWAY. (FROM COLLECTION OF THOMAS J. MCKEE, ESQ.)

land, and they brought over on the gold hunt a company, consisting of Miss Inverarity, Miss Poole, Mr. Manvers, Mr. Giubilei, and Mr. Martyn, who thought to take New York by storm with the breath of their own reputations and Beethoven's. Miss Inverarity, who retained in public her maiden name, although she was the wife of Mr. Martyn, was a tall Scotchwoman, undeniably handsome, or at least "fine," and with all the airs

freshness might have given it had disappeared before she crossed the ocean. The tenor, too, failed to impress his audience very favorably; and Mr. Martyn, the basso-profundo, sang just as the husband of a Scotch prima-donna might be expected to sing. Two members of the company, from whom little had been expected, were at once received into favor by the public. These were Miss Poole, the contralto, a pretty, black-eyed, mischievous minx,



MISS SHIREFF, OF COVENT GARDEN THEATER. (FROM A STEEL ENGRAVING AFTER A DRAWING BY A. WIVELL. FROM THE COLLECTION OF THOMAS J. MCKEE, ESQ.)

and expectations of an acknowledged beauty. She had, however, the misfortune to be taller than her tenor, and she careered (in these days "cavorted" might be the word) about the stage in rather too high-stepping a style for dignity and grace. She failed to captivate the New York people through their eyes, upon which she had evidently reckoned much. For as to her voice, it was worn; and like herself, never of first-rate quality, all the charm that

as plump as a partridge, with a deliciously rich voice, a style which if not irreproachable was very taking, and an arch manner, and Mr. Giubilei, an Anglicized Italian, who had a fine manly baritone voice and a goodly presence, not much marred by a squint that enabled him to see, or to seem to see, both sides of the house at once. These two singers the public warmed to without hesitation, taking little notice of the prima-donna and

the tenor. The company, however, deserved much at the hands of New-Yorkers—far more than they received—for the opportunity thus given to hear an opera of such quality, and so rarely heard, as Beethoven's "Fidelio." It has not been performed here since—for more than forty years. If the Inverarity company counts for little in the stream of operatic performers which has flowed pretty steadily through New York for more than half a century, the music which they presented, in at least a creditable and enjoyable style, entitles them to respectful remembrance. When they disbanded, Miss Poole and Mr. Giubilei remained in New York, and were for some years constantly before the American public.

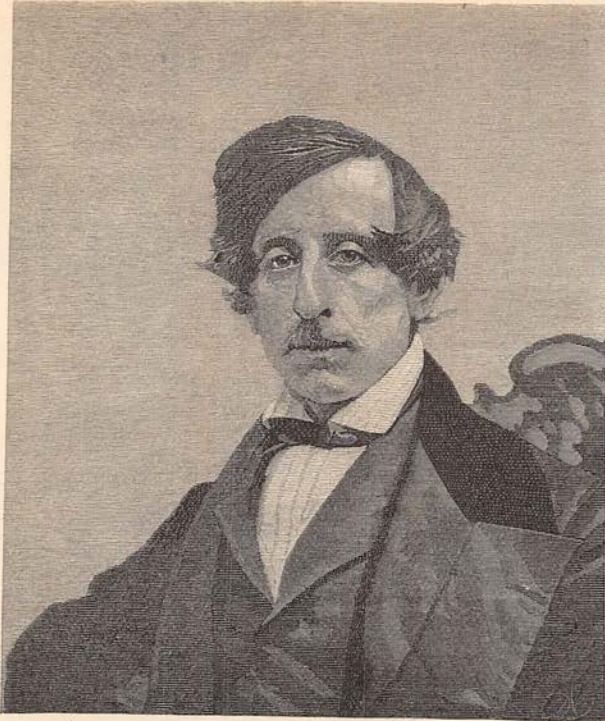
Perhaps one cause of the failure of this company was the house in which they made their appearance. No public building not indecently dirty or unhealthily exposed could be less suited to the assemblage of elegant people for elegant pleasure than the Park Theater. It was in all respects the very reverse of the splendid house which had just opened and closed under the management of the Cavaliere Rivafinoli. Its boxes were like pens for beasts. Across them were stretched benches, consisting of a mere board covered with faded red moreen, a narrower board, shoulder-high, being stretched behind to serve for a back. But one seat on each of the three or four benches was without even this luxury, in order that the seat itself might be raised upon its hinges for people to pass in. These sybaritic inclosures were kept under lock and key, by a fee-expecting creature, who was always half-drunk except when he was wholly drunk. The pit, which has in our modern theaters become the parterre (or, as it is often strangely called, the parquet), the most desirable part of the house, was in the Park Theater hardly superior to that in which the *Jacquerie* of old stood upon the bare ground (*par terre*), and thus gave the place its French name. The floor was dirty and broken into holes; the seats were bare, backless benches. Women were never seen in the pit; and although the excellence of the position (the best in the house) and the cheapness of admission (half a dollar) took gentlemen there, few went there who could afford to



FANNY ELSSLER.

study comfort and luxury in their amusements. The place was pervaded with evil smells; and not uncommonly, in the midst of a performance, rats ran out of the holes in the floor and across into the orchestra. This delectable place was approached by a long under-ground passage, with bare whitewashed walls, dimly lighted, except at a sort of booth, at which vile fluids and viler solids were sold. As to the house itself, it was the dingy abode of dreariness. The gallery was occupied by howling roughs, who might have taken lessons in behavior from the negroes who occupied a part of this tier, which was railed off for their particular use.

Such was the principal theater in New York in 1840, and for ten years afterward. It had been called, in memory of its London counterpart, Old Drury, which name was derisively modified into Old Dreary. Yet here there was usually good and sometimes great acting of good plays and great singing of good operas. Shakspeare was heard ten times in New York then for once that he is heard now; and the stock company of the Park Theater would, at a day's notice, perform a first-rate comedy in very satisfactory style, with completeness in all the parts. Here, too, was seen such ballet-dancing as never before was seen in America, and perhaps never before or after in the world since the days of Herodias; for here, in May, 1840, Fanny Elssler appeared before a house into which not another hand, not to say another body, could have been



EDWARD SEGUIN. (FROM DAGUERRETYPE IN POSSESSION OF MRS. EDWARD SEGUIN.)

squeezed by hydraulic pressure. And here she danced the gay New-Yorkers of that day into a frenzy that made it seem as if their brains were as light as her heels. Large and naturally strong, training had given her the limbs of an athlete, and she encompassed the stage with vast, sweeping bounds. To this physical superiority she added a fine although not beautiful face, and an arch, coquettish manner.

New-Yorkers had previously had some education in ballet and in pantomime—those low-born but bold and presuming handmaids of opera. Madame Celeste, a Frenchwoman from Southern France, with a rich and vigorous physical nature, and a power of expressing by gesture emotion and even thought with a vivacity and intensity rarely equaled, had, for some years, danced and played dumb parts in almost all the theaters in the city. And in December, 1836, Auber's ballet-opera "La Bayadère" had been produced at the Park Theater, with the beautiful Mlle. Augusta as the dancing *Bayadere*. Its success was splendid and lasting, and its heroine became a reigning popular favorite. The impression produced by these two Terpsichorean artists has hardly yet faded out of the memories of the elder New-Yorkers who saw Augusta in her youth and Celeste in her maturity.

In 1840, also, we find the Woods again at

the Park Theater, singing "La Sonnambula,"—ever "La Sonnambula," varied with "Fra Diavolo" and the like; and there, too, but a little while before, the second act of "The Elixir of Love" and the third act of "Fidelio" had been sung by Miss Poole, Mr. Manners, and Mr. Giubilei, on the same night, alternating with a comedietta, "Is He Jealous?" and the farce of "A Nabob for an Hour." Such were the fortunes of opera at "Old Dreary" forty years ago. But at the New National Opera-house, as it was called, there was, in the autumn and winter of this year, a combination of the best elements of the Seguin and Inverarity companies—Mrs. Seguin, soprano, Miss Poole, contralto, Mr. Horncastle, tenor, Mr. Giubilei, baritone,—flinging from his name an Italian aroma around the troupe,—and Mr. Seguin, bass, with a regular ballet; and there was great success, as, indeed, there should have been, and the performance of "La Gazza Ladra" and "La Cenerentola" and other of Rossini's operas in English, and triumphant success in the performance of "Don Giovanni," which was given every evening for some weeks; and, although the music of "*Non mi dir*" was not sung as Jenny Lind or even as Parepa sang it, or that of "*Batti batti*" as Malibran or as Alboni sang it, it was sung intelligently and



MRS. EDWARD SEGUIN.

conscientiously by artists of respectable abilities, and was enjoyed by audiences to whom the only attraction was the music. Let who will say that this was not a more reasonable scheme of opera, and more adapted to cultivate a genuine and elevated taste for music, than that adopted by the patrons of the Riva-finoli enterprise, with their six-thousand-dollar boxes.

It may be also here remarked that this scale of prices was monstrous, and would hardly have been tolerated in London. The rise in the price of admission to the opera in that city was very great at the end of the last century and the beginning of this; but it attained nothing like the extravagance of New York. Lord Mount Edgumbe is my authority (and there could be no better) for saying that, in the last quarter of the last century, the price of subscription to a box at the Italian opera, London, was twenty guineas a seat for fifty representations—two dollars a night; and this when there were but thirty-six private boxes in the house. These, and the balcony and pit, were filled only by the highest classes of society—always, of course, in full evening dress; and it was the custom after the performance for the company of the pit

and boxes to repair to the coffee-room attached to the theater, and there to sup, making this a reunion of the best society in London, private parties rarely being given on opera nights. When the number of performances was increased to sixty, the price of seats in private boxes rose to thirty guineas—being still, it will be seen, only two dollars and a half. It was Catalani who made the opera a luxury only to be enjoyed by a few rich people, or else by a great crowd in an enormous house, thus doing great injury to singers and to music. She suddenly doubled her demands, and the price of a whole box went up from one hundred and eighty to three hundred guineas. But three hundred guineas is only fifteen hundred dollars, and that is only one-quarter of six thousand dollars.

This year, 1840, saw the arrival in New York of one of the most remarkable singers the world has ever known—John Braham. His real name was Abraham, or Abrams, by both of which he was known when, as a boy, he made his first appearance at Covent Garden Theater as a singer of songs between the acts of plays. He had previously peddled pencils about London streets. His voice and his manner of singing were immediately the



SIGNOR GIUSEPPE DE BEGNIS, OF THE ITALIAN OPERA, LONDON. (ENGRAVED BY C. KNIGHT, FROM A MINIATURE PAINTED BY TITUS G. PERLOTTI. FROM THE COLLECTION OF THOMAS J. MCKEE, ESQ.)

theme of general admiration. When his voice changed it became a pure tenor, and such a tenor as it would seem was never heard before and has not been heard since. He had a compass of two octaves and three notes, and his voice was no less admirable in quality and in power than in extent. He went to Italy, and studied for some years both composition and vocalization. His supremacy was acknowledged even in the land of song and of tenors. "*Non e tenore in Italia come Braham*" was the confession made in musical circles all over the Continent. He returned to London and sang constantly in English opera for many years, always writing the music of his own part. He accumulated a fortune, lived like a prince, and the pencil-peddler was taken into "society." He became enamored of the arch and charming prima-donna, Storace (born in England of an English mother by an Italian father), and traveled with her over the continent of Europe. He lost his money in speculations. His voice, however, lasted longer than his prudence or his money; and he was always sure of a handsome income. At last, in the autumn of 1840, being then sixty-six years old, he came to New York, and after two or three concerts at Niblo's, appeared at the Park Theater in December, in an opera, "The Siege of Belgrade," which, in spite of the name of its composer, a Mr. Cobb, had been popular in London. His failure was utter and speedy. His voice was worn; his florid style was not liked; he was as awkward as a figure on an Assyrian

marble; he was five feet three inches high; and when he did not wear some other, he wore a reddish-brown wig of George IV.'s fashion. He went about the country giving concerts in a somewhat doleful, forlorn, and solitary manner; and he who had been the greatest tenor in Europe, had lived like a prince, and was the father of the future Lady Waldegrave (now lately dead), might have been heard in the lyceums and the Sunday-school rooms of small towns in America, bawling out his once thrilling high notes and trundling forth his old-fashioned roudades before depressed audiences, not large enough to pay for the gas by which they saw his senile insignificance. In a history of opera in New York it is necessary to remark upon the visit of such an artist as Braham, but he exercised no influence whatever upon the public taste, nor upon the fortunes of his art in America; and this less because of his voice, which had lost nothing but its freshness, than

because of his style and of the music that he sung. These were found by the public of New York insufferably dull: and it should seem with reason. He soon returned to London, where he died in 1850. In the very year in which he came to America on his



FRANCES, COUNTESS WALDEGRAVE.



MADAME CINTI DAMOUREAU. (FROM THE COLLECTION OF THOMAS J. MCKEE, ESQ.)

peripatetic singing tour, the pencil-peddler's daughter was married to the seventh Earl Waldegrave, she having been previously married to John Waldegrave, Esq., of Navestock. After the death of her second husband, within six years of her marriage, she became the wife of Grenville Vernon Harcourt, M. P., who dying said that he hoped that she might make some other man as happy as she had made him. She followed his advice and was married to her fourth husband, the Right Hon. Chichester Fortescue, M. P., in 1863, she being then at least fifty years old. What was the charm that brought this woman four such husbands it would be hard to tell. Certainly not beauty. For that her face lacked, while it had the peculiarities of her race.

Among the artists of reputation who were known in New York in the second quarter of this century, there was not a more remarkable figure than that of Signor Giuseppe De Begnis,

who was indisputably the great *buffo* of his time. He was a singer of the old Italian school, had been thoroughly trained in music from his childhood up, and would have been an accomplished artist even without his vocal gifts and his comic power. With him, buffo-singing did not mean buffoonery, and he thought great scorn of those who descended to low tricks to promote laughter. He had married the beautiful Ronzi, better known afterward as Ronzi De Begnis; but he was deserted by her, and after some years he came to New York, where he passed the rest of his life. He was a tall, well-made man, with a face which, once, perhaps, handsome, had been plowed and harrowed by small-pox, but without destroying its powers of expression. By a mere look he sometimes produced an irresistibly comical effect; and although his voice was rich and smooth, its inflections conveyed ludicrous ideas with a

delicacy and quickness which pierced his audiences with laughter. His principal operas were "Il Barbiere" and "Il Fanatico per la America." But he sang chiefly in concerts, at which he always appeared in breeches and silk stockings, shoes with large gold buckles, an enormous shirt-frill, and ruffles at his wrists. He had a well-secured competence, and he was quite indifferent about professional engagements except as a recognition of his position. He remained in New York simply because of his terror of the ocean—a dread not uncommon among Italian artists. The voyage over here filled him with such fear that he never returned. He lived a lonely life, this priest of the muses and of Momus; he had in all the world no one near enough of kin to be his legal heir; and at his death in 1849, his estate, valued at \$50,000, went into the hands of the public administrator.

In this same year, a French company which had been performing at New Orleans visited New York, and appeared at Niblo's Garden Theater. They had a distinguished success, and made their summer vacation very profitable, chiefly because of the attractions of Mlle. Calvé, their prima-donna, a charming singer in the light French style, and a captivating actress. The company, however, was an acceptable one generally, allowance being made for the thin, throaty, French way of singing; and the visit was of importance musically because it introduced to New-Yorkers the works of French composers, particularly those of Auber, such as "Le Domino Noir," "La Fille du Regiment," "Les Diamants de la Couronne," and the like, in their original form and sung by artists of the school for which they were written.

About this time there appeared in New York an artist who, as a dramatic singer, was surpassed by none and equaled by only one of his successors—the tenor Antognini, whose only equal upon the lyric stage was Ronconi. He was singing here in 1842, and, if a concert-bill in my possession is dated correctly, in 1841. He was the most supreme and absolute union of vocalist and actor that has been heard in this century, excepting Malibran and Ronconi. But although he was here in 1842, and perhaps in 1841, his proper place in this historical sketch is in our view of the next important venture in Italian opera, which was that of Palmo's Opera-house.

Ferdinand Palmo, a little Italian, with a long nose and a sharp chin, had kept a popular restaurant of the higher class in Broadway, just above Duane street. It was known as the *Café des Mille Colonnes*. Here the little Italian had striven and had accumulated a moderate fortune, which he determined to

venture in giving New York an Italian opera. Learning prudence from the failure of the pretentious Rivafinoli undertaking ten years before, he was moderate in his expenditure and modest in his expectations. He leased a building well known as Stoppani's Arcade Baths, in Chambers street, between Broadway and Center street. There were no boxes except in name. The seats were hard benches, with a board slat about shoulder-high as a support for the back. Upon these seats luxurious and extravagant people caused a covering of plush or of rep to be placed, with a modicum of hair stuffing beneath, all at their own expense. But rarely, if ever, has there been a keener enjoyment of Italian opera in New York than in this humble lyric shrine. It was opened in February, 1844. The conductor was Rapetti, who, as we have seen, came over with the Montessoro company. He was a fairly instructed musician, an admirable violin-player in the school of Rolla, whose pupil he was, and from the time of his appearance throughout his life he was an important musical figure in New York. The opera was "I Puritani," in which a Signora Borghese was the *Elvira*; the other artists do not merit special mention. Signora Borghese, although she does not take a place in the first rank of the brilliant array of prima-donnas by which opera was illustrated in New York between 1825 and 1860, should not be passed over without notice in such a sketch as this. She had a fine voice, although not a great one; her vocalization, regarded from a merely musical point of view, was of the corresponding grade, but as stage vocalization it had great power and deserved higher commendation. Her musical declamation was always effective and musico-rhetorically in good taste. She had a fine person, an expressive face, and much grace of manner. One might be content never to hear a better prima-donna if one were secured against ever hearing a worse. In her was first remarked here, among vocalists of distinction, that trembling of the voice when it is pressed in a *crescendo* which has since become so common as greatly to mar our enjoyment of vocal music. This great fault, unknown before the appearance of Verdi, is attributed by some musical critics to the influence of his vociferous and strident style. It may be so; but that which follows is not always a consequence of that after which it comes. Certain it is, however, that from this time forward very few of the principal singers who have been heard in New York—only the very greatest and those whose style was formed before Verdi domineered the Italian lyric stage—were without this tremble. Grisi,

Mario, Sontag, Jenny Lind, Alboni, and Salvi were entirely without it; their voices came from the chest pure, free, and firm. The following extract, from a not unintelligent criticism upon Borghese, in the "New World," is not only of interest as a contemporary record of the impression made by her, and as an example of the best style of the journalism of the period on such subjects, but as an illustration of that narrowness of view, that combination of ignorance and assumption in regard to the social and intellectual history of New York, which was remarked upon at the outset of these articles :

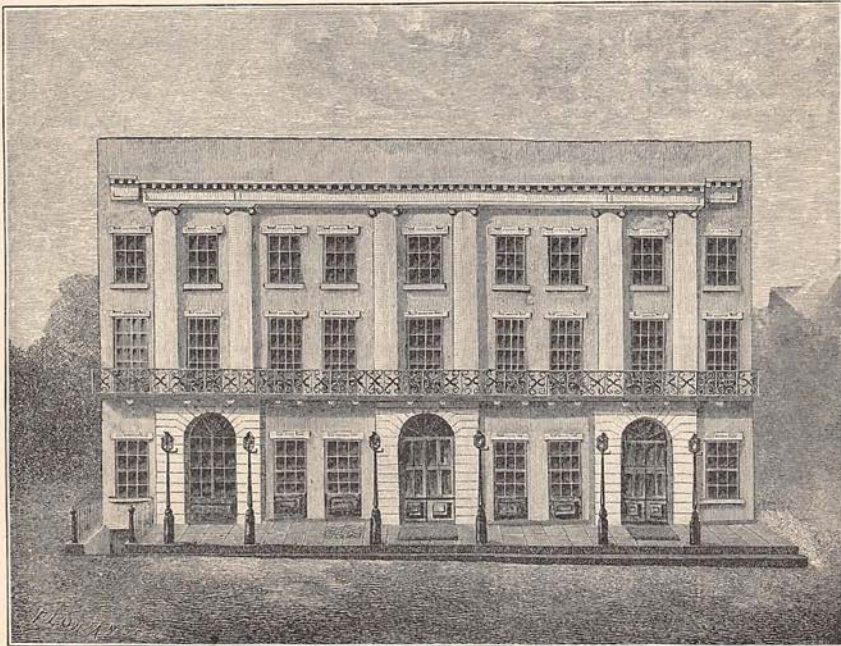
"Her voice is a soprano of unequal quality, the *mezza voce* being good, but somewhat weak, while the upper tones are produced with extraordinary power by means of the favorite Italian clap-trap, the vibrate style. She sings with intense passion, and throws so much soul into all that she does that she carries her hearers completely with her. Her execution is brilliant, although sometimes defective. On the whole, however, balancing her beauties against her defects, we conclude that she is the best singer—operatic—that we have heard on this side of the Atlantic."

Now, this writer had manifestly a more than common knowledge of music and of vocalization. The absurd remark with which this passage closes is plainly the result of ignorance. Signora Borghese was not worthy to tie the shoes of Malibran, or of Pedrotti, or Fanti, or Caradori, or even Mrs. Wood, and others

of less note whom we have passed in review were at least her equals. But of them this writer must have been quite ignorant. Probably he had not been in New York five years at the time of his writing.

The tenor Antognini made his first appearance at Palmo's on the 13th of March, 1844, as *Oronubello* in "Beatrice di Tenda." He produced a very great impression, and gave particular delight to the most cultivated part of his audience. Of all the tenors that have been heard in America, not excepting Mario and Salvi, this now utterly forgotten man was the undeniable superior. He was an artist of the first class, both by natural gifts and by culture. His voice, although not of notable compass, was an absolute tenor of a delicious quality and great power. His vocalization was unexceptionably pure, and his style was manly and noble. As a dramatic singer, I never heard his equal except Ronconi; as an actor, I never saw his equal, except Ronconi, Rachel, and Salvini. He had in perfection that power which *Hamlet* speaks of in his soliloquy, after he dismisses the players, when the speech about Pyrrhus is ended :

"Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit
That from her working all his visage wann'd;
Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
With forms to his conceit!"



PALMO'S OPERA-HOUSE, AFTERWARD BURTON'S THEATER. (AFTER A WATER-COLOR DRAWING IN THE COLLECTION OF THOMAS J. MCKEE, ESQ.)

I have seen the blood fade not only from Antognini's cheeks, but from his very lips, as he strode slowly forward to interrupt the nuptials in "Lucia di Lammermoor," and then flame back again as he broke into defiance of his foes. The inflections of his voice in passages of tenderness were ravishing, and his utterance of anger and despair was terrible. Nor was any tenor that has been heard here, not even Mario in his prime, his superior in that great test of fine vocalization, a sustained cantabile passage. His person was manly, his face distinguished and intelligent. He was one of those blonde Italians who are found on the northern border of the peninsula. Being all this, he nevertheless soon disappeared, and was forgotten except by a few of the most exacting and cultivated among his hearers; the reason of which was that his voice could not be depended upon for two nights together—not, indeed, for one alone. On Monday, he would thrill the house; on Wednesday, he would go about the stage depressed, almost silent, huskily making mouths at his fellow-actors and the audience. His voice would even desert him in the middle of an evening, thus producing an impression that he was trifling with his audience. No judgment could have been more unjust, for he was a conscientious artist; but the effect of this defect, as *Polonius* might say, was therefore no less disastrous, and he soon gave place to artists less admirable, indeed, but more to be relied upon.

In July, 1844, the eminent French prima-donna Cinti Damoureau appeared at Palmo's, she having come to this country on a professional tour with the violinist Artot. She had sung with Malibran and Sontag in "Il Matrimonio Segreto," and had held her own with them. Fétis pronounced her one of the greatest singers the world had known. Rossini wrote the soprano part of "Le Siège de Corinthe" for her, and Auber wrote for her "Le Domino Noir" and "L'Ambassadrice"—in the latter of which her elegance of manner as well as her beauty gave her great distinction. She was forty-three years old when she came to New York, but both her voice and her beauty were in fine preservation. Among the operas in which she appeared was "L'Italiana in Algeri," an early and rarely heard work of Rossini's, in which Antognini was the tenor. She sang also in many concert-rooms throughout the country, and her visit was of no little importance in the cultivation of a taste for the most delicate refinements of lyric music.

In October of this year, Signora Pico appeared at Palmo's, and was received at once into a place in public favor which she retained for some years. She was a swarthy, sweet-

lipped woman, in whose face that simple good-nature which is so peculiarly Italian found ceaseless expression; and her voice, a rich, creamy contralto, in no way very remarkable, was of corresponding texture and character. Her figure was as amply rounded as is compatible with theatrical success; and when she played page's parts, she stumped about the stage upon a pair of supporters that had something ludicrous in their heavy and yet not quite ugly shapelessness. She was the favorite contralto of New York for some three or four years.

Palmo did not fail at once, but fortune did not smile upon him. The operatic success of this period was again on the English side, and this time, it must be confessed, with small reason. In November of this year, 1844, Balfe's "Bohemian Girl" was produced at the Park Theater by the Seguins, who had with them this time, as first tenor, Mr. Fazer, a portly Scotchman. He had a very pleasing voice, and sang as well as a Scotchman can be expected to sing in opera. The success of "The Bohemian Girl" was phenomenal. It was performed through the whole season, and again, and yet again, through other seasons. Its trivial airs, with their vulgar rhythms and hideous intervals, were sung, and whistled, and thrummed, and hand-organged all day and all night the country over. One could not read or eat without hearing, in some form, "I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls," and sleep was disturbed, if not by the dream, at least by the musical telling of it, the echoes of which have hardly yet died away. It was like the chanting of "*ti revedro*" all over Italy, and then all over Europe, after the production of "Tancredi." But with what a difference in the occasion! "*Di tanti palpiti*" is a melody the grace of which is not unworthy of Mozart in his happiest, sunniest mood; whereas a more vulgar air or a sillier song than "I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls," was probably never heard upon the lyric stage. But the audiences of "The Bohemian Girl" were not those of "Don Giovanni," nor yet those of "La Sonnambula."

It is impossible in a sketch like this to give a record in detail of all operatic performances, or even to mention all the operatic artists that in their time attracted some attention; nor would such a detail be of interest even to the musical reader. We can but follow the general course of the operatic stream, and linger only where it is broadest and brightest. The year 1847 was notably fruitful in operatic events in New York. The January announcements at Palmo's present the names of artists of marked distinction. These were Clotilde Barili, a soprano; her brother, Antonio Barili,



SESTO BENEDETTI. (FROM INDIA-INK DRAWING FROM THE COLLECTION OF THOMAS J. MCKEE, ESQ.)

maestro and conductor; Benedetti, a tenor; and Sanquirico, a buffo. The Barilis were children of Catarina Barili, a prima-donna of the old school, much admired in Southern Europe, and certainly even in her decadence one of the finest singers in the grand style heard in this country—Malibran, Jenny Lind, and Alboni of course excepted, as they always must be in making comparisons. Catarina Barili became the wife of a tenor named Patti, and by him was the mother of Carlotta and of Adelina Patti. Clotilde Barili was a finished vocalist, with a pure soprano voice remarkable only for its compass in the upper register. She could give F sharp above the lines easily and gracefully. But her voice was thin, and so was her figure, and she was cold and tame, and produced little impression on the New York public. Her pretty face, however, ere long won her a husband, the son of a rich man well known in New York, and she disappeared from public life. Her brother Antonio was an excellent *maestro*, and for some fifteen years was a teacher of singing in New York, and there could hardly have been a better. After all his success,

however, he returned to Italy in disgust. He did not find the New York public to his taste.

Among all the tenors who have appeared in America, not one took such a hold upon the musical public as Benedetti, although he had not a great voice, nor a finished style, nor a handsome person. His vocalization was often open to severe criticism; indeed, he was but a half-taught singer; and his face, with a shapeless nose and little, Chinese-looking eyes, was almost ugly; nor was this defect made up by beauty of figure. But there was in the tone and quality of his voice something to which the heart could not say no; and his style of singing as well as his bearing on the stage was the perfection of manliness. His passion was manly; his tenderness was manly. The women worshiped him, and the men forgave him this and admired him. He was for years the beloved of the New York public. His great part was *Edgaro* in "Lucia"; and at one time it seemed as if he might have sung *Edgaro* every opera night without intermission for a year. He was great only upon the

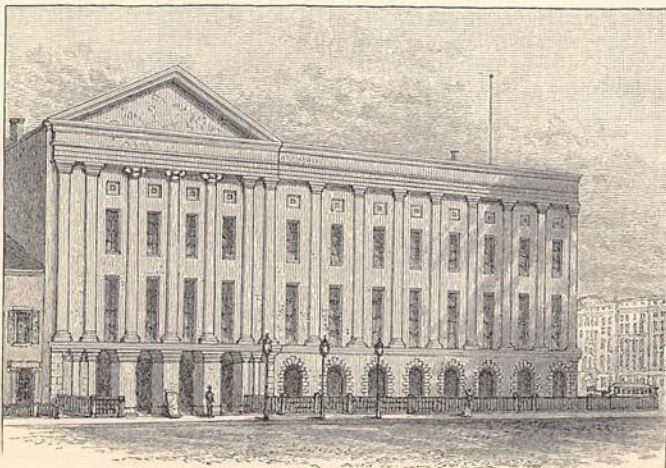


FORTUNATA TADESCO. (AFTER THE DRAWING ON STONE BY F. DAVIGNON, FROM THE DAGUERREOTYPE BY P. HAAS. FROM COLLECTION OF THOMAS J. MCKEE, ESQ.)

stage, and in dramatic parts; in the concert-room he failed to carry his audience with him.

Sanquirico, artist and *impresario*, was a buffo of rare comic power, which yet depended greatly upon a peculiarity of his face and of his voice. He had a nose like Punchinello's, and the quality of his voice in recitative and in speech

was also exactly like that of Mr. Punch. The sight of his queer visage, and the sound of his cackling voice, never failed to send laughter through an audience. He became an opera manager in New York, and was much esteemed for his intelligence and his character. These artists performed "Lucia," "Linda di Chamounix," "I Lombardi," "Lucrezia," and,



ASTOR PLACE OPERA-HOUSE. (FROM AN OLD PRINT IN THE COLLECTION OF GEO. P. ELDER, ESQ.)

indeed, went through the general repertory of Italian opera of the period.

April of this year brought to the Park Theater an opera company from Havana. They came to the North to avoid the sickly season of the tropics. The company was large, including, with instrumentalists and chorus-singers, seventy-three persons. These were all in training, and the performances had a large completeness which was not common in opera anywhere but in Paris. Among the principal artists were Fortunata Tadesco and Caranti-Vita, prima-donnas; Badiali, baritone; Luigi Arditi, musical director; and Bottesini, contra-bassist,—the last two destined to attain the highest honors of their profession in Europe. I must hasten on, and I can only say that Arditi and Bottesini, like Malibran, received their first recognition in New York. Coming here absolutely unknown, their talent was at once appreciated, and they received approval, which Europe soon afterward could but confirm. Tadesco was a great, handsome, ox-eyed creature, the picture of lovely laziness until she was excited by music; and then she poured out floods, or rather gusts, of rich, clear sound. She was not a great artist, but her voice was so copious and so musical that she could not be heard without pleasure, although it was not of the highest kind. This company performed "Ernani," "I Due Foscari," "Norma," "Mose in Egitto," and Pacini's "Saffo" among other operas. Tadesco was its chief attraction. She had a noble voice, a beautiful head, she sang well enough and acted not quite so well, was charming at times, brilliant at others, pleasing always, and always pretty. But she stirred no depth of feeling, nor did she in any way educate the public musical taste.

Soon after her came Madame Anna Bishop, known in England first as the beautiful Miss Rivière, then as the wife of Sir Henry Bishop (Knt.), the composer, whom she left to make an extended tour in company with Bochsa, the harpist. She was well advanced toward maturity when they came to this country, but retained the remarkable beauty both of her face and her figure, the latter being conspicuous in the part of *Tancredi* when she sang the hero's grand *scena* in that opera, which she did in very good style and with clever

execution. But her voice, never of first-rate quality, was worn and somewhat husky; she failed to produce the impression which she had expected to make; and, indeed, this venture resulted in loss. The visit of such an artist must be remarked upon; but it was really of no musical importance. The confusion and bankruptcy which seem to be the natural attendants upon Italian opera soon brought poor Palmò's little venture to an end.*



TERESA TRUFFI. (AFTER THE DRAWING BY N. SARONY. FROM THE COLLECTION OF THOMAS J. MCKEE, ESQ.)

His wit was not so sharp as his chin, and so his career was not so long as his nose. In the autumn of 1847 his little opera-house was deserted; and in 1848 it became Burton's Theater, where that most humorous of comedians made for himself, in a few years, a handsome fortune. Upon the site now stands the large and handsome building occupied by the American News Company.

The interest shown in the performances at Palmò's, however, particularly among the wealthy aspirers to "fashion," led to the formation of a subscription opera association or corporation, which built what was known as the Astor Place Opera-house, on the eastern end of the triangle formed by Astor Place, Eighth street, and Broadway. This opera-house, one of the most attractive the-

* It may be worth while to say that the prices of admission to Palmò's were, to the first balcony and the parterre, one dollar; to the second balcony, fifty cents.



MADAM BISHOP AS NINETTA (LA GAZZA LADRA). (AFTER THE DRAWING BY M. SALABERT.
FROM COLLECTION OF THOMAS J. MCKEE ESQ.)

aters ever erected, was opened on Monday, the 22d of November, 1847, with a performance of "Ernani," with this cast: *Elvira*, Signorina Teresa Truffi; *Ernani*, Signor Vietti; *Carlo V.*, Signor Avignone; *Silva*, Signor Rossi. This occasion was a musical event of the first importance in the musical annals of New York, and as such it was regarded by society and by musical amateurs generally. So elegant and socially impressive a spectacle as that presented by the house on the rising of the curtain had not been seen before in New York, and has not been seen since. New York had not then become quite the heterogeneous place it now is; and in such an assembly as that which graced the opening of the Astor Place Opera-house there was

a certain degree of congruity and of coherence. It may safely be said that there was hardly a person present who was not known, by name, at least, to a very considerable number of his or her fellow auditors.* A sociable feeling pervaded the assembly, and one almost of ownership in the elegant little house and in the enterprise, which added much to the glow of satisfaction with which they greeted one another and discussed the house and the artists. The impression produced by

* It is worthy of remark, in reference to a social evil connected formerly with theatrical entertainments, that the play-bill of the opening night at the Astor Place Opera-house, which is now before me, has the announcement: "No lady admitted unaccompanied by a gentleman."

the completely filled but not overcrowded house was somewhat peculiar. Rarely has there been an assembly, at any time or in any country, so elegant, with such a generally diffused air of good-breeding; and yet it could not be called splendid, in any one of its circles. At the Astor Place Opera-house that form of opera-toilet for ladies which is now peculiar to New York and a few other American cities came into vogue,—a demi-toilette of marked elegance and richness, and yet without that display, either of apparel and trimmings or of the wearer's personal charms, which is implied by full evening dress in fashionable parlance. This toilette is very pleasing in itself, and it is happily adapted to the social conditions of a country in which any public exhibition of superior wealth in places set apart for common enjoyment of refined pleasure is not in good taste. But we are neglecting the artists whom the lifted curtain revealed for the first time to the eyes of a New York audience. Of these, however, only two, the prima-donna and the bass, proved to be of sufficient importance to demand our particular attention.

Teresa Truffi stands first as a favorite among the operatic artists of the second rank who have visited New York. She was not a great singer; she was not a finished vocalist; she had not even a great voice, as Tadesco had. But there was that nameless something in the tone of her voice—nameless unless we call it the sympathetic quality—which enabled her to move her hearers when many a more finished vocalist would leave them as untouched as by the piping of a bulfinch. Her voice was noble, if it was not perfect—so noble, so touching, that all but the pedants of vocalization forgave its unmendable break between the two registers—a rupture which always appeared when she ran a scale. Her style was both admirable and charming; it impressed and it captivated. Her triumphs were those of feeling. She bore her audience away and aloft on a high tide of emotion. It must be confessed that this was partly due to her magnificent beauty and to her acting. She suggested the statue of a good and beautiful Roman empress, if there ever was one. The nobility of the woman's nature, bodily and mental, was so great and so strongly marked that she was far above coquetry or vanity, and she bore herself upon the stage as absolutely unconscious of her beauty and of its effect upon her audience as if she had been a seraph. She had much influence upon the taste of the generation that saw her. After her, they—those of them, at least, who were capable of the higher pleasures of art—could not easily tolerate frivo-

lous and vulgar artists, even when they were accomplished singers and pretty women. Truffi was naturally greatest in tragic parts,—in *Elvira*, in *Lucrezia*, in *Donna Anna Elisabetta*, in *Roberto Devereux*, and the like. She was, take her all in all,—dramatic singer, actress, and fitting person,—the greatest *Lucrezia* America has seen, not excepting Grisi. To hear her and see her in this part was like reading Italian history with living illustrations. In the scene in which *Lucrezia* resents *Don Alfonso's* severe treatment of her favorite *Gennaro*, Truffi seemed to embody the spirits of all the Italian viragoes of the *cinque cento* period. When she stood before him, taunting, upbraiding, threatening, in her outburst of contempt and wrath, as she reminded him that she was a woman not without experience of men—“*Don Alfonso, mio quarto marito!*” she looked like a beautiful goddess into whom had entered the soul of an infernal fury. There was a weight and a grandeur in her wrath, due in part to her personal magnificence, but no less to her union of a large and simple style with great impetuosity of passion, which gave her an air of irresistibility. It seemed as if the wave of that arm must sweep away all obstacles less grand and less beautiful.

Few men could afford to play *Alfonso* to such a *Lucrezia*. For *Alfonso* has to tame *Lucrezia*; and with most men it would be but too plain that this *Lucrezia* was “too many guns” for them. But Rossi, her *Alfonso*, was equal to the situation. Although his face had not the demi-god-like beauty of Fornasari's, it was handsome, strong, and manly, and his figure was like Jove's—towering, majestic, yet graceful. Such handsome legs as his are rarely seen even in Greek sculpture. He sang always well, always correctly, and always in good taste; but he was not admirable except upon the stage and in action; and although he remained in New York some years, always a favorite, his place was that of a fitting companion to Truffi; as in a pair of statuettes, one, of which the beauty may be undeniable, has yet its chief value as the fellow of the other.

Truffi was one of the few artists that I knew personally. With the enthusiasm of an un-hackneyed critic, and the ardor of a very young man, I had glorified her to the public from the night of her first appearance, and, although not without some critical reserves, with a very warm-hued admiration. It was intimated to me that she would like to know the man who had done her such service. The very next day, as it was not an opera day, and she was likely to be at leisure, I

presented myself. I was shown into a room quite unlike any one into which I had ever before entered. It was not large, and much of it was occupied by a great, lumbering piano-forte, on which were piles and loose sheets of music, a bonnet and shawl, a pair of soiled white shoes, a half-empty bottle of wine, and a plate containing a cut loaf and a huge piece of bologna sausage. Dingy disorder pervaded the apartment, in which I detected faintly an odor novel and indescribable, which might have been that of the sausage, but which certainly was not that of a large faded bouquet which stood upon a table, on which the cover lay awry. The prima-donna received me with gracious smiles; and if nothing else was fresh and sweet in the room, her lips and her complexion were. But her dress was a strange stuff gown; her hair was in disorder, and over her magnificent shoulders she had a queer little shawl, which she gathered closely around the ivory tower crowned by her beautiful head. She presented me to *mia madre*, one of the ugliest old she-Italians that I ever saw; in whose face, alas! there were some suggestions of her own. This ancient female, dressed in a dingy old loose gown, sat bent over in a rocking-chair, with a huge snuff-box in one hand, and in the other a silk handkerchief of varied colors. Notwithstanding the solid freshness of her beauty, which would bear the blaze of noonday, all my goddess's divinity was gone. Her figure was as grand as ever, her lips might have been stolen from Hebe, but she was utterly lacking in the charm of refined womanhood. On the stage, she had a graceful dignity which an empress might have envied; in her own parlor, no one could have mistaken her for a lady. My heart sank within me; but I kept my spirits up and entered into conversation, in which

I did not find the *signorina* very ready, although she radiated good-nature. Indeed, *mia madre* proved to be much the more conversible, and poured out upon me a flood of talk, of which I understood but little—partly because of her vile Milanese accent (which Truffi also had, of course), and partly because of my own want of practice in the language. But it was all about the brilliant talents of her daughter, and the lack of adequate recognition thereof, in money, by the *impresario*. All the while she regaled herself with snuff. At last, she paused; she raised one hand with the handkerchief spread out upon it, and lifted it slowly toward the organ which she had been titillating. I beheld the movement with some apprehension, but she staid her hand and her handkerchief in mid-air, and again she resumed her theme, and talked volubly, her nose poising and soaring above the outspread silk. She paused again, and then, after one or two more hesitating movements, the great beak swooped down in a blast that startled me from my propriety. But Teresa was as serene as a summer's morning. The handkerchief was folded, and alas!—*encore*. Then the flood of talk began again, punctuated by consolatory sweeps of the folded and refolded handkerchief across the irritated feature. And still Teresa, the magnificent, sat unmoved, smiling good-will upon me, and hugging her ivory throat with her dingy little shawl. "Great Phœbus," thought I, "and Truffi herself may come to this!" I soon gathered myself together and took my leave; and thereafter I was content to adore my goddess with the foot-lights between me and her divinity. Like many such "divinities," she was as much out of place in ordinary social life as a stage scene would be framed and hung on the walls of a drawing-room.

BUTTERFLIES IN MARCH.

DOUBTLESS it was good for ye,
 To huddle here all shivering,
 No blossom in the wood for ye;
 From hungry pangs delivering.
 No shelter for your quivering
 Black and blue and liver wing.
 'Twas best that so
 Ye too should know
 How frosty winds come slivering
 More solid things
 Than horns and wings,
 With all their dainty quivering.