

### OPERA IN NEW YORK. III.

A SINGLE season brought the operatic adventurers in Astor Place to bankruptcy. Following upon two splendid performances (one of *Romeo* by the veteran prima-donna, Catarina Barili-Patti, in which, notwithstanding the lack of freshness in her voice, she delighted the most appreciative part of her audience by her splendid and truly imposing display of the grand style in the old Italian school of singing, and one by Truffi of the Jewess in Verdi's "Nabucco," in which, by her nobility of person and of action, and no less by her fine musical declamation, she made an impression never to be effaced from the memories of those who received it), the doors of the new and beautiful lyric theater were closed, with great uncertainty as to when and by whom they would be re-opened.

New York was not, however, left without Italian opera, and that of no mean order. The Havana company returned in the spring of 1848, and appeared at Niblo's Theater. Their visits to New York were regular for a few years, and were events of musical importance. Not only was the number of the principal artists large, and their merit great, but such a chorus, and an orchestra so well filled and so ably directed (always by Arditi), American audiences were not accustomed to; nor were operatic performances of such completeness common even in Europe, except in some two or three of the great capitals. And these performances were given at a very low price; the object of the manager, Señor Marty, of Havana, being less to make money by the visits of his company to America, than to keep them together and preserve their health, and diminish his expenses during the sickly season in Cuba. Their visit this season was made remarkable by the appearance of a tenor, Salvi, who, as a vocalist, among the eminent tenors who have been heard in New York, was second only to Mario, the greatest of his time, and since whose retirement the world has heard none worthy even to be called his successor. Although Salvi was past his youth when he first sang in New York, his voice was yet in perfect preservation. It lacked nothing that is to be expected in a tenor voice of the first class: and it had that mingling of manliness and tenderness, of human sympathy and seraphic loftiness, which, for lack of any other or better word, we call divine. As a vocalist, he was not in the first rank; but he

stood foremost in the second. His presence was manly and dignified, and he was a good actor. But it was as a vocalist pure and simple that he captivated and moved his audiences. He was heard in America at brief intervals during a few years, and his influence upon the taste of the general music-loving public was very considerable and wholly good. Singing at Niblo's, at Castle Garden, and other like places, at which the price of admission was never more than one dollar, and was generally fifty cents, he gave to multitudes who would otherwise have had no such opportunity, that education in art which is to be had only from the performances of a great artist. In purity of style he was unexceptionable. He lacked only a little higher finish, a little more brilliancy of voice and impressiveness of manner, to take a position among tenors of the very first rank. Of these, however, there are never two in the world at the same time, scarcely two in the same generation; and so Salvi prepared the public for the coming Mario. His forte was the cantabile, and his finest effects were those in *mezza voce*, expressive of intense suppressed feeling. More than once, when he sang "*Spirto gentil*," as he rose to the crescendo of the second phrase, and then let his cry pass suddenly away in a dying fall, I have heard a whole house draw suspended breath, as if in pain; so nearly alike in their outward manifestations are pain and fine, keen pleasure.

With the Havana company came also at this time Signora Steffanone, a soprano, without some mention of whom these sketches would be thought ungratefully imperfect by all those who remember her satisfying voice, her admirable style, and her pleasing although notably ample person. It seemed as if she might and should have been a great prima-donna; and, always pleasing to the most exacting hearers, at certain moments, on certain nights, she rose to grandeur, and aroused her audiences to enthusiasm. But as time went on she deteriorated rather than improved; and it was said—truly, I believe—that she was addicted to habits of self-indulgence, which in the end are ruinous to a man and are swiftly destructive to a woman.

In this year, 1848, Max Maretzek made his appearance in the New York musical world, in which he was destined to fill the place both of musical director and operatic manager, some-

times one, sometimes the other, sometimes both, for more than a decade, with distinction, and not without success. He was a clever and well-instructed musician, but was inclined to seek success by the art of management rather than by the management of his art. He cannot be said to have done anything to educate or to elevate the public taste; but it would be unjust not to say that he appears never to have done anything willingly to degrade it. Under his baton, sometimes under his management, there were unseasonable seasons and disjointed performances of many old operas and some new ones, by companies made up of a jumble of all or some of the materials—*disjecta membra*—of companies which had gone to pieces; most of this leading only to insolvency, and nothing of it being here worthy of special mention. But Maretzek himself always showed ability. He merely could not do what was impossible.

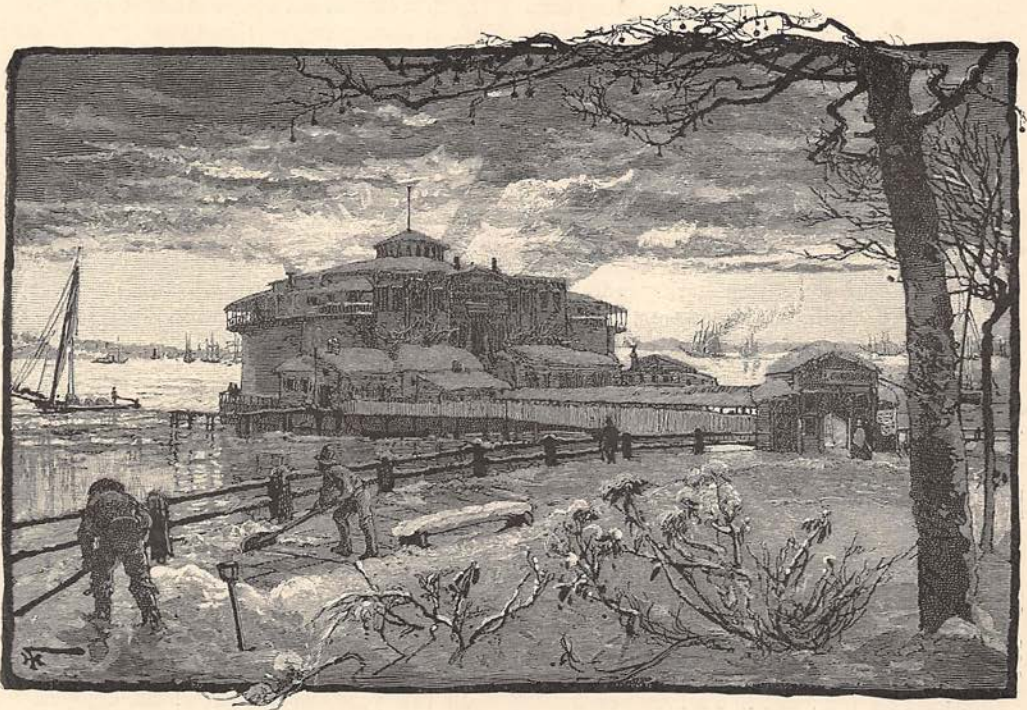
In the summer of 1850, Señor Marty's company came again from Havana to New York, and this time with an array of musical force that had in it something of grandeur. The chorus was large, and rich in well-trained voices; the orchestra was filled in like manner, Bottesini being the first contra-basso and Arditi the musical director and conductor; and the leading vocal artists were Tadesco, Steffanone, Salvi, Badiali, Marini, and others second only to them. The Park Theater had been burned to the ground in 1848, just half a century after it was first opened, and this noble opera company went almost perforce to Castle Garden, having gone first for a short time to Niblo's, and afterward to Astor Place. Castle Garden, which has been given over for many years to the invading hordes from Europe, was at one time (and to the present elder generation of New-Yorkers it must seem not long ago) the most widely known and generally frequented place of popular amusement in the city. It began to be so used in the days when the lower part of Broadway and Greenwich street were "fashionable," and when the Battery was the favorite promenade; the great walk being thronged, on fair afternoons, by elegant folk who took there their daily needed "constitutional" of air and gossip.\* At Castle Garden were the

grand exhibitions of fire-works; from Castle Garden balloons went up in the days when that peril supplied the craving for excitement now afforded by the flying trapeze; at Castle Garden the American Institute had its first fairs; at Castle Garden there were concerts and theatrical performances and operas; and there Beethoven's Ninth Symphony was performed, and well performed, at a time whereof those who went with large eyes and long ears to hear it at Steinway Hall, big with a consciousness of first discovery of its greatness, have no memory. There, or at Niblo's, in the summer of 1850, this great company performed "Norma," Verdi's "Attila," "La Favorita," "Lucia," "L'Elisir d'Amore," "I Puritani," "Lucrezia Borgia," and, of course, "Ernani,"—no opera season then without "Ernani," if there were a soprano in the company equal to it, and generally, also, if there were not. And the Havana troupe had in Steffanone and Tadesco two admirable *Elviras*, the former always singing with intelligence and dramatic power, and the voice of the latter gushing out in great floods of limpid sound that drowned the ear in sensuous delight.

In the Havana company at this time, however, there was an artist who gave New York a fresh and fine sensation of musical pleasure, such as it had not had for years. This was Angiolina Bosio. She appeared without any heralding; and, indeed, she was then entirely without reputation. But it was one admirable trait in the management of this noble company that there was never any preliminary puffing, either of its individual members or of it as a whole. There was the company. It would perform "Norma," or "Ernani," or "Lucia" to the best of its ability; come and hear it. Bosio's name had never been heard or seen in New York, until it appeared on the play-bills. When she came upon the stage her audience saw a woman not very young, slender and not tall, with little beauty of feature, except a pair of luminous and expressive dark eyes,—a person, indeed, quite insignificant, except for those eyes and for a certain distinction and elegance of manner. When she sang she displayed a voice not remarkable for either power or compass; nor could her style be called either impressive or brilliant. But ere long,—in the course of a few evenings,—she was recognized as an artist of a very high grade of merit, and became—this entirely unknown and not beautiful woman—the prime favorite of the company. Angiolina Bosio, born at Turin, in 1824, and educated in music at Milan, had sung in Italy, in Spain, and in Denmark with some success, but not enough to attract any attention in London, or Paris, or St.

\* Thus described by an already forgotten New York writer, Frederick Cozzens, in his exquisite imitation of Spenser, "Sir Clod his Undoinge":

"With Plackett lin'd, with joyous heart he hies  
To where the Battery's Alleys, cool and greene,  
Amid disparted Rivers daintie lies,  
With Fortresse brown and spacious Bridge betweene  
Two Baths, which there like panniers huge are seen:  
In shadie paths fair Dames and Maides there be  
With stalking Lovers basking in their eene,  
And solitary ones who scan the sea,  
Or list to vesper chimes of slumberous Trinity."



CASTLE GARDEN, 1850.

Petersburg, or at New York. She, however, appeared in Paris at the Théâtre Italien, in 1848, but obtained no recognition of her talent, "not even," as her biographer records, "a passing remark." Her immediate engagement for Havana by Marty brought her to

New York, where a different reception awaited her; and I believe that I myself had the pleasure of writing the first criticisms in which her vocal talent was recognized. I remember, too, that as I was writing one night (after her performance of *Lucrezia Borgia*, I believe), I thought of the charm that was in her face, notwithstanding its lack of beauty, and of her lustrous eyes, and I wrote her name Lady Beaux yeux; and she must have forgiven me for spelling it wrong, for she took the blunder with her to Europe, where she was known by it afterward. Like Malibran, and like Bottesini, Bosio, soon after her great success in New York, attained a great reputation in Europe. Soon; not immediately, however. She was engaged at the Royal Italian Opera, at London, where she appeared in June, 1852, as *Norina* in "L'Elisir d'Amore," one of the parts in which she was most admired in New York. But, as her biographer says, "she did not create by any means a favorable impression; her voice appeared 'worn,' and her intonation sharp; \* \* \* and she was pronounced 'a good second-rate singer, nothing more.'" At the end of the season, however, Madame Grisi having declined to sing in "I Puritani," Bosio was asked to undertake *Elvira*. She did so; and all at once Philistia woke up to the perception that Bosio was a great artist. She became the talk of musical London. Mr.



LORENZO SALVI. (FROM A PRINT BELONGING TO THE COLLECTION OF THOMAS J. MCKEE, ESQ.)

Gye engaged her immediately for three years. She went to Paris, and there had like success—she who only a year or two before, and after she had completed her studies, and was in the first freshness of her voice, had sung there without exciting a passing remark. From this time she was recognized as one of the great prima-donnas of her day. Her voice was a pure, silvery soprano, remarkable alike for its penetrating quality and for a charm so fine and delicate that it seemed almost intellectual. But she was not a remarkably dramatic singer, even in light comedy parts, which best suited her; and her style was not at all declamatory. She *sang*; and in her vocalization she showed the results of intelligent study in the old Italian school. Her phrasing was incomparably fine, and the delicacy of her articulation has been surpassed by no modern prima-donna, not even by Alboni. Thus much of her as a vocal artist; but her charm was greatly personal. Although her acting was always appropriate and in good taste, and at times—as, for example, in the saucy widow of “Don Pasquale”—very captivating, she never seemed to throw herself wholly into her part. She was always Angiolina Bosio, and appeared on the stage like a lady performing admirably in private theatricals. Her bearing was a delight to her audience, and seemed to be a performance, whereas it was only herself. She sang the music of all the great operatic composers to the admiration of the public and the critics of the most exacting disposition; but she was greatest in Rossini’s operas, and in Bellini’s and Donizetti’s. Yet her exquisitely charming and finished performance of *Zerlina* should not be passed over unmentioned. In 1856 she went to St. Petersburg, where she got gain and glory, which tempted her to return there again and yet again; and there, after having been nominated by the Emperor *première cantatrice* to the imperial court (she being the first who ever had that honor), she suddenly died in April, 1859, in the prime of her life and of her powers; for she was not yet quite thirty-five years old. This was the career of the woman of whom her biographer says, after recording the indifference with which she had been received in Paris, and before recounting the details of her slow recognition in London, that between these two non-eventful and semi-eventful periods, being in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston, “she was ardently admired by the Americans.” Possibly if the writer had known more, or had known anything, of “the Americans,” and of the capacity for the recognition of musical talent which they have never failed to show, she might have given more importance to their ardent admiration of the unknown Bosio.

Such recognition as Bosio received in New York is always more or less reciprocal in its benefit, and her performances here for two seasons were an education of the public taste in the appreciation of all the most delicate refinements of the art of vocalization. In this respect we owe her hardly less than we owe to any one of the greatest among her predecessors and successors, although they were Malibran, Caradori, Jenny Lind, and Alboni.

And yet another vocal artist of distinction belonging to this company, being, indeed, its musical manager, received at this time in New York his first recognition. This was the baritone Badioli—the great baritone, as he was afterward called in Europe. Signor Badioli, too, brought no reputation to New York, simply because he had none to bring. He had never before been heard of anywhere. But his noble voice, his fine style, and his remarkable powers as a dramatic vocalist were at once appreciated by the critics and the public of New York, and he became a prime favorite, and so continued for some years. Afterward he went to London, where he was so much admired that he said, “I wonder that I never thought of coming to London before.”

In this year, 1851, New York enjoyed a performance of *Norma* by Catarini Barilipatti. It was the last time that the grand old Italian style of singing was heard in America. I am inclined to think that it has never since been heard even in Europe;—that large simplicity of manner, severe and yet not hard; that thoroughness, that constantly present sense of the decorum of art, died out before we, who were brought up on Donizetti and on Verdi, came to the enjoyment of operatic delights. Catarina Barilipatti, the eminent mother of a still more eminent daughter, uttered the last notes of an expiring school, and closed her own career in the town in which Adelina Patti, her child but not her pupil, began her splendid course of triumph as the most brilliant vocalist of her day.

Perhaps it should be remarked that about this time Signorina Teresa Parodi appeared in New York as a prima-donna, and won great and well-deserved favor. She was an excellent *Norma*, a part which she much affected. She did not, however, produce any appreciable effect upon public taste, and was soon forgotten.

The two great musical events of the second half of the nineteenth century in America, as before in Europe, were now impending; I mean, it is hardly necessary to say, the appearance of Jenny Lind and of Marietta Alboni. Jenny Lind’s career has no claim upon our attention here; and, indeed, any remarks upon it would be out of place; for before she crossed the Atlantic she had abjured the stage, and



ALBONI. (FROM PHOTOGRAPH BY LE JEUNE.)

during her long sojourn in the United States she was heard only in the concert-room. Moreover, there has recently appeared in the pages of this magazine a full and appreciative account of her American experiences.\* There remains to be remarked upon her only the fact that so closely and exclusively did she rivet the attention of the musical public upon herself that, prudent although she was, she was in this unlike Prudence—that when she was present all the other divinities were absent. Little interest was manifested by New-Yorkers in operatic or concert music of a high order, other than hers, during her performances. When she left the city for other places, fashion would assemble at the opera, if there were one; and, indeed, mere fashion did this at all times; but the true music-lovers of the most cultivated society did not thus quickly and rudely disturb their memories of the great artist. Perhaps Mlle. Parodi might have made a stronger impression upon the public of New York had she not had the ill-fortune to make her American *début* in the first flush and fury of the Lind excitement. † She sang, during the next few

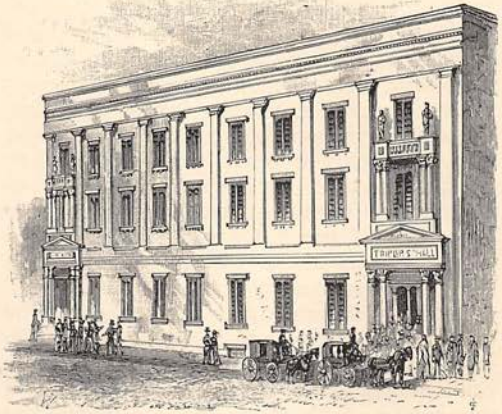
\* "Jenny Lind," by Sir Julius Benedict, accompanied by a full-page portrait, appeared in this magazine for May, 1881.

† It is, perhaps, just worth while to say that Mlle. Parodi is mentioned above a little before her place in the course of musical events. Jenny Lind preceded her a few weeks; the Swede having appeared at Castle Garden on the 12th September, 1850, and Mlle. Parodi at Astor Place on the 4th November following. Minute accuracy on unessential points is not pressed nor sought in these sketches. I am not writing a book of reference.

months, with good acceptance in "Norma," "Lucrezia," "Gemma di Vergy," "Giovanna di Napoli," "Il Barbiere," "Semiramide." About the same time, Truffi appeared in "Parisina" and "Il Giuramento," and Mr. Maurice Strakosch brought out at Astor Place his very clever opera, "Giovanna di Napoli," which, however, did not obtain more than a *succès d'estime*, that most unsuccessful of all so-called successes.

In 1851, Jenny Lind was singing in New York, from the first week in May until the 6th of June; and then came the Havana company again, and with it the enchanting Bosio. I find in my scrap-book an article which I wrote on the 9th of June, 1851, which is noticeable because of its laudation of her, and because her biographer says that she returned to Europe in 1851, and was engaged by Mr. Gye for the season of 1852, for the Royal Italian Opera of London, where she obtained her first European success. She was, therefore, in the summer of 1851 on the eve of departure from the scene of her triumphs.

From this time, although there was opera at Astor Place in the spring of 1852, and Jenny Lind returned as Madame Goldschmidt to give a series of concerts, there was no musical event of any note until the appearance of Alboni at Metropolitan (or Tripler) Hall, on the 23d of June in that year. Her coming had been announced, of course, and something of her reputation was known to all musical people; but nothing had been done to get up an excitement or even to awaken an interest in her movements in the general unmusical public. Thus it was, too, when she came before the public in London and in Paris. In London she had appeared, "almost unknown" in the midst of the Jenny Lind craze (April, 1847), with Grisi and Tamburini,



TRIPLER'S HALL, OR METROPOLITAN HALL, 1854. (FROM AN OLD PRINT IN THE COLLECTION OF GEORGE P. ELDER, ESQ.)



ANGIOLINA BOSIO.

in "Semiramide." Her success was assured before the end of the first act. Nevertheless, when she sang, the following October, in Paris for the first time, many of the Parisians asked, "Who is this Alboni?" They found out who she was on the next morning. It was because of this neglect to blow her own trumpet that the audience at her first concert here, although large enough to be respectable, even in relation to her merits, was not crowded, not a throng, and that she never had what the newspapers call "ovations." Her audiences were always large; and they were composed almost exclusively of the most earnest and most cultivated lovers of music.

Alboni was probably the greatest singer the world has seen since Malibran. She was not, in all respects, fitted to be a great operatic prima-donna; but as a vocalist, pure and simple, she was, both by her natural gifts and by her art, first among the foremost of her

generation. When she came to New York, in 1852, she was thirty years old, and was, like Jenny Lind, in the full maturity of her marvelous powers. She had been taught the elements of vocalization by Baglioli, but to his schooling she had the incomparable good fortune to add instructions from Rossini, who saw her talent, and at a time when, in his own words, she sang "like an itinerant ballad-singer," predicted her success. To his teaching may probably be attributed her love of his music and her mastery of it. She sang his great contralto parts as they had not been sung since the time of Pizaroni, the greatest contralto and the ugliest woman that ever trod the Italian stage. Alboni had appeared at Vienna, at Dresden, and at St. Petersburg before making her great success at London and at Paris, which was in 1847, five years before her visit to America. All that was known of her was that she was much thought



E. FREZZOLINI.

of in Europe, and that she was very stout ; so that there was a poor joke current at the time that "she was not all bony, but all fatty." There was not even the first spark of such a raging blaze of excitement as there had been about Jenny Lind. As to what she was, and how she sang, and the impression she produced, I do not know that I can do better than to quote from the article I wrote on the night of her first appearance in New York, and from its two immediate successors, the following passages : \*

"Madame Alboni herself then appeared for the grand cavatina in 'Semiramide.' As we saw her before we heard her, our first thought was that she had been unjustly and ungallantly treated on the point of her personal attractions. Although her amplitude exceeds even the most accommodating standard of symmetry, her features are unquestionably fine, and her face needs only a little attenuation to be decidedly handsome. [In fact, Alboni's face was a noble one of the pure Italian type, and very charming

in its expression. Her hair grew around her broad, low, white brow in that arched outline which is found in the finest antique statues, and her mouth was beautiful. Her smile was charming, and not only because it revealed the whitest of coral-set teeth ; and her laugh infected the air around her with hilarity. It was impossible not to laugh with her. But to resume my next morning's criticism.] Madame Alboni's voice impresses the ear at once with its sumptuous quality. There is not a moment's question as to the imperial rank of this gift of nature to her. Its powers are instantly manifest, and not only so, but in a moment they are all displayed. Its supremacy was as completely asserted at the close of the recitation of the first air as at the end of the concert. The impression was reiterated. It could not have been deepened. In this voice is the chief power of the singer. It is what we hear that we enjoy, not the thought that what we hear brings up. And it is in the quality, the calibre, and the copiousness of the voice, rather than in its extent or its flexibility, that its charm is found. It has a cool lusciousness which is peculiar. It comes bubbling, gurgling, gushing from that full throat and those gently parted lips, and reminds us of draughts of which poets have sung, but of which Bacchantes have only dreamed. Perfect equality throughout it has not ; its rather thin, plaintive, and hautbois-like tone in the upper register being somewhat inconsistent with the large and pompous character of the lower portion ; but this is an inequality of quantity only. The quality is throughout an extensive range (from F in the bass clef to C in alt of the G clef) identical. In all

\* It may be worth while to say, and it is not foreign to our subject to say, that I wrote the musical criticisms which appeared in the New York "Courier and Enquirer" at this time, while Mr. George William Curtis performed the same office for the "Tribune."

other respects it seems to us, on a single hearing, to be unimpeachable. Her style is not peculiar in any particular, save in the ease and freedom by which it is marked. Many hearers will be charmed by the carelessness of her manner. She seems to give no thought to what she does, but merely to let the flood of song pour itself forth. There are some who will regard this as the perfection of art. Her recitative in the cavatina from 'Semiramide' was large, simple, and grand, and her execution of the aria admirable, but the most charming performance of the evening would have been the duet from 'Don Pasquale,' were it not for the 'wanton heed and giddy cunning' with which she threaded the mazes of *Non piu mesta*. The duettino was so exquisitely sung, expressed so fully the fair, serene loveliness of the composition, that those who are curious in pretty sayings might well have called it moonlight made audible. As to the rondo from 'Cenerentola,' was there ever anything heard like it, or will there ever be again? Milton's charming paradoxical phrase, which we have already applied to it, alone helps us to express the quiet recklessness with which she thrived the intricate mazes of this lovely rondo. Every group of notes was a cluster of gems; every note was perfectly beautiful in itself, and beautiful in its place; and with these vocal jewels she played with a seeming pleased and unconscious carelessness, as if an infant sought a moment's sport in unstringing and scattering priceless pearls."

"That which is perfectly beautiful in its kind seems the more beautiful the more its beauties are scanned; and whatever may be the relative rank which æsthetic criticism may hereafter assign to the style of Madame Alboni, there can be no doubt, we think, in the mind of any one gifted with the ability to judge, that, in her style, her singing is as purely and absolutely beautiful as it is possible for anything earthly to be. There seems to be nothing wanting in the concurrence of voice, style, and method to make every phrase she utters complete in its expression of richness of resource, and of elegance, and in its sensuous charm. Added to this there is an indefinable something, more delicate than expression, yet akin to it, which makes her song float like a seductive aroma around her hearer, penetrating to the most delicate fibers of his being, and pervading him with a dreamy delight. This was manifest even in *Di piacer*, which, by the way, seems more suited to her style than *Una voce*. It is in the music of Rossini that the peculiar character

of Madame Alboni's talent finds its best expression. The geniality, the fullness of life, the impressive gayety of soul and conscious animal enjoyment which pervaded his music, even in its most dignified passages, in detail and in their union suit her. Their union, indeed, is her nature. She and Rossini have souls akin; and she is, to use a phrase of the day, but his 'medium.' Yet, last evening, Bellini had in her such an interpreter of one of his loveliest and most pathetic compositions as is rare even among great prima-donnas. *Ah non credea* as sung by her will be a treasured memory with all the devotees of music who were fortunate enough to hear it. How grandly was it phrased! how delicately accentuated!"

Yes, indeed; now, after almost thirty years, I can hear with my mind's ear the marvelously, almost miraculously, beautiful way in which she uttered the few notes of this simple phrase



with which she closed this movement, and which, passing in an instant, almost in the twinkling of an eye, yet had in every note, and in this relation of each note to its predecessor and its successor, and in its conception as a whole, and in its execution, an enchanting, subduing charm which produced a feeling of mingled transport and humiliation. One was tempted to go and kneel down before her and do something abject in grateful acknowledgment of this manifestation of supreme musical divinity.

My readers will probably observe in these paragraphs a varied and gradually enhanced appreciation of the great contralto. Yet it is difficult to explain how it was that with her unique voice,—a voice to which no other that has been heard for fifty years can be compared either in volume or in quality,—and with a method absolutely perfect, and a style the charm of which can hardly be expressed in words, she failed to stir her audiences as deeply as other singers did, who were less gifted and less accomplished. This negative trait of her performances became more apparent when she appeared in opera, which she did on the 27th of December, 1852, at the Broadway Theater, a large house then standing in Broadway, nearly opposite the old Hospital, in which, during its short existence,—of about ten years,—there was much good acting and singing. There Alboni went through a brief operatic season, beginning with "La Cenerentola" and including "La Figlia del Reggimento" and "La Sonnambula." The stage did not increase her attractions. She was not an actress; she was not a great operatic prima-donna; she was a singer simply and absolutely—the greatest singer of her half-century;



BROADWAY THEATER. (FROM OLD PRINT IN COLLECTION OF GEO. P. ELDER.)



nothing more. Not that she was awkward on the stage, or that her acting was without intelligence; but that it was matter-of-course acting; she did pretty well what she had seen others do better, and, at times, pleased her audience by the personal expression of her own gayety of heart and rich animal nature. Nor was her figure at all suited to *Cinderella*, to *Amina*, or to the *Daughter of the Regiment*. As she appeared with her *képi* and her canteen, one could not but think of a young Falstaff in short petticoats, and of the old Falstaff's death being "a march of twelve score." Yet this woman had in her heart a yearning to perform the grandest dramatic part known to the modern lyric stage.

One day I was with her in her own apartments, she avowed to me her disappointment with the degree of her success in America, where Mlle. Lind had gained a fortune, and she "hardly enough to buy wine with." Presently, nodding her handsome head to me, she said:

"*Un segreto!*" and then drew back, and looked at me with an arch smile, like a child.

"*Per esser felice!*" I rejoined, luckily thinking of the Brindisi which she sang so splendidly.

"*Sì, sì!*" she merrily cried, clapping her fat hands, and breaking into a soft peal of laughter, so charming and so infectious that a Grand Inquisitor, Torquemada himself, much more a young man *fanatico per la musica*, must have joined in it. Then, with mock gravity, she said: "*Quando io sarò stata buon'ragazza per lungo tempo, voglio mi fare una presenta*" [When I have been a good little girl for a long time I mean to make myself a present], adding, in reply to my look of inquiry, "*La Norma. Lo canterò per piacere solo*" [Norma. I shall sing it only for pleasure].

"Why not sing it now?" I asked.

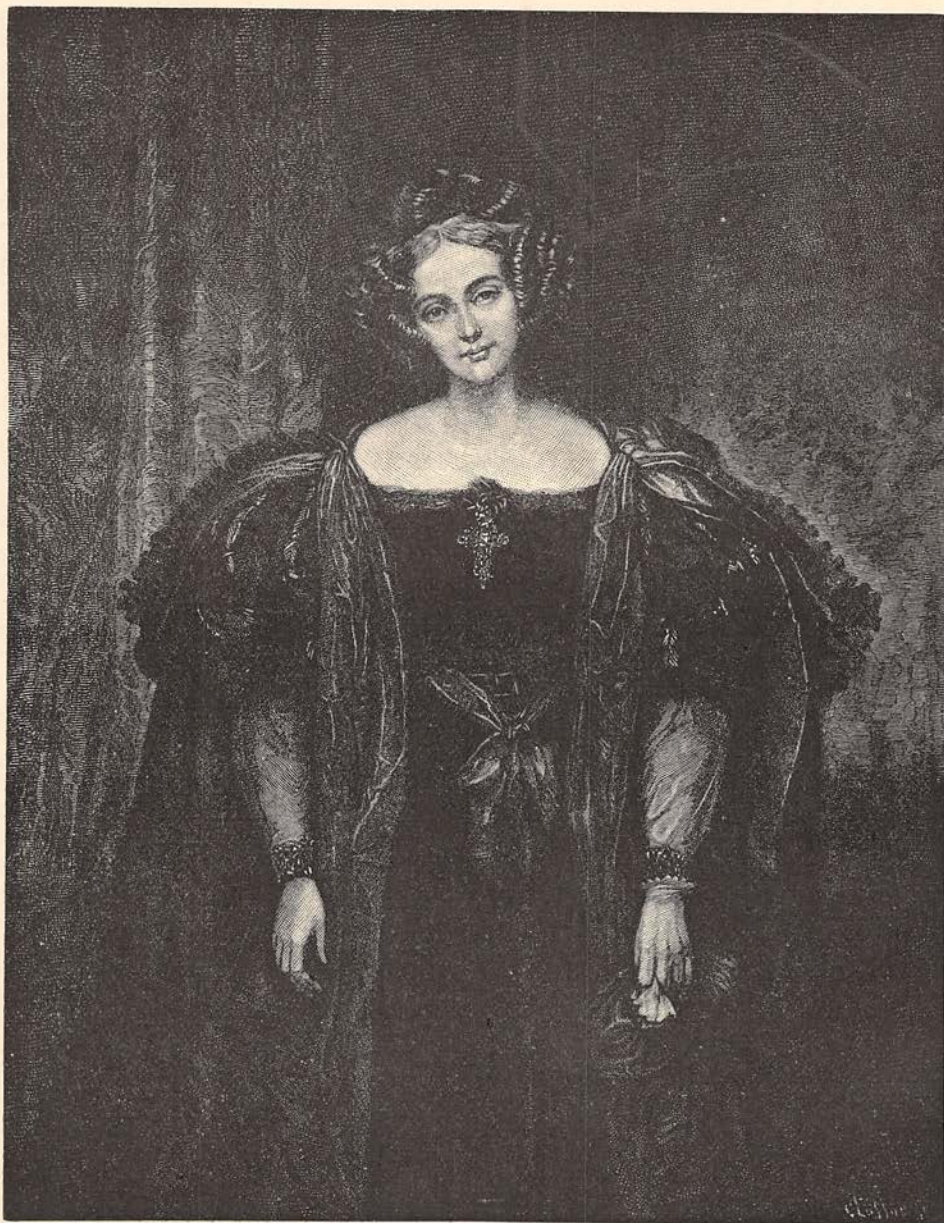
"Ah," she replied, "one must scream a little to sing Norma, and I do not yet know how to scream."

Yes, this queen of contraltos, not content with all the triumph she had achieved, hankered after *Norma*, the part of all parts for which she was most unfitted both in voice and in person, and to which her style was not less unsuited. Nor was she able to restrain her impatience for the long time which she had at first proposed; for on the 28th of January, 1853, she appeared at the Broadway Theater for the first time as *Norma*. To my surprise, she not only sang the music with passion and with fervor, but in her action showed intuitions of dramatic power which I had never before remarked in her. In the second act she was even fiercely impetuous.

She must have brooded over the part until it took complete possession of her. It was a very great performance, regarded from a certain point of view; but Norma-ly it was open to objection. Much of the music was transposed; and, on the other hand, her figure was composed of such a connected system of globes and ellipses that it was impossible to accept her as the Grand Priestess of the Druids, although we had not yet seen Grisi. I have not discovered any record of her performance of this part in Europe; and New York has at least the distinction of Alboni's first appearance, if not that of her only appearance, as *Norma*, as an incident in its operatic annals. Excepting Malibran, no singer, not even Jenny Lind, did so much as Alboni did to elevate and purify the taste of the higher class of music-lovers. She became the model, the standard by which others were to be tried. In the summer of 1853, she returned to Europe, and in July was married to the Conte di Pepoli. She was wealthy, but did not withdraw entirely from her prima-donna life until some years had passed. She is now not heard of, even in her retirement.

We must turn back a little from our continued companionship with the great contralto to give our attention to a soprano of hardly less eminence and of a more splendid career—Sontag, who made her first appearance in America at Metropolitan (Tripler) Hall, on the 27th of September, 1852. This was a very remarkable event; for Sontag was born in 1805; and she, who had sung with Malibran, and had been her rival, and then her reconciled friend (as we have already seen in the first of these sketches), was here in New York, where Malibran had more than a quarter of a century before taken her first step to glory, and had given America its first operatic sensation, opening the rich and varied musical spectacle of which I have been able to give but a sketch made up of outlines and of dots; and Malibran's rival was here in all her early beauty of person and of voice.

The occasion was briefly this. Henrietta Sontag, after a musical career in which all the possible experiences of a prima-donna of the first class were ideally combined,—after enchanting all Europe by her voice, her singing, her acting, and her beauty,—was married in 1828 to Count Rossi, a Sardinian nobleman. The marriage was secret on account of the opposition of the Count's family, although Mlle. Sontag, whose position among artists was exceptional, had been ennobled by the King of Prussia, under the title of Mlle. de Lauenstein. The marriage, however, transpired in 1829, under circumstances painful to the beautiful and unimpeachable young ma-



HENRIETTA SONTAG AS DONNA ANNA IN DON JUAN. (FROM THE ENGRAVING BY GIRARD  
AFTER THE PAINTING BY P. DELAROCHE.)

tron. Ere long she retired from the stage, and lived in such privacy as was possible to one who was not only the wife of a noble diplomat but herself a distinguished person. The revolution of 1848 ruined what there was to ruin in Count Rossi; and the Countess, laying aside her title and resuming the name under which she had acquired a reputation still remembered all over Europe, returned to her public artist-life. To the surprise and delight of Europe, she was still the enchanting Henrietta Sontag of twenty years before. After two or three years of renewed European success, she came to New York. The end of my article on her first concert is the following paragraph:

"Madame Sontag began last evening a strange and brilliant phase of her eventful career. When she gathered her first laurels, the metropolis of China might as soon have tempted her seaward as the metropolis of this Republic, which then held no such position. But since that lovely woman who last evening charmed thousands by the mere grace of her presence, first awoke the enthusiasm of Europe, we have become a mighty nation, and this has become a great city, one of the great centers of art and civilization on the globe. We have been growing old; and in our wearying, wearing struggles onward, the whole nation has become haggard and care-worn, even to making us a proverb and a by-word; but she seems to have drunk of the fabled spring which bestowed eternal youth and loveliness; and now to our faded youth comes this blooming matron, with all the bright gifts that were ever hers only mellowed by the gentle touch of enamored Time. It seems as if she might go on singing and charming the world forever; and as if our children might be enchanted, as we are now, by her who, save for the unimpeachable purity of her life, might then, if not now, be called, for her unfading youth and grace, the *Ninon de l'Enclos* of song."

Sontag, however, was only forty-seven when she came to New York. But she looked, in the concert-room at least, not more than twenty-seven: and a middle-aged musical connoisseur, a French gentleman, who had heard her in Paris in her youth, said to me that he found no change in her voice, except perhaps a little, a very little, loss of fullness and strength in the lower notes. Her singing was just what it had been before. A more remarkable preservation is not known in the annals of art. Hardly less astonishing had been her vocal precocity. It is told of her that at eight years of age she stood upon a table and there sang the grand aria of the *Queen of Night* in the "*Zauberflöte*," doing this in childish simplicity, "her arms hanging beside her, and her eye following the flight of a butterfly, while her voice, pure, penetrating, and of angelic tone, flowed as unconsciously as a limpid rill from a mountain-side." Afterward she had the advantage of singing children's parts under the direction of

Von Weber, then director of the orchestra at the Prague theater.

Sontag's voice was an absolute soprano, of full but not of extraordinary compass or remarkable power. Its peculiar beauty lay in its quality, that angelic tone which, as we have seen, it had even in her childhood, and in its union of flexibility with firmness. She rivaled the most skillful violin-players in the rapidity, the exactness, and the solidity of tone with which she ran scales, diatonic and chromatic, and with which she executed *fioriture*, and trills singly and in succession, and even staccato scales of two octaves. But she never sank into an accurate musical machine. There was always the inexplicable enchantment of quality, the angelic tone, in whatever she sang; and her style, although never grand, impressive, or deeply pathetic, was always charming. In person she was like her voice, not grandly beautiful, but very pretty, bewitching in her ways, and always elegant,—probably the most lady-like prima-donna that ever trod the stage; unless we must except that captivating embodiment of stately elegance, Mlle. Frezzolini, who came here in 1857, when her personal and vocal attractions were on the wane, but who preserved in the expression of her face and in her bearing a beauty that could never fade. She was the ideal of a beautiful great lady of the olden time. Sontag was always graceful, always seemed to express a certain daintiness of soul and body; she was personally reserved and retiring; and kept herself as aloof from the borders of Bohemia as if she had been a crown princess. Twenty years of life in courts, where, from the position of her husband, she sometimes had precedence of all other ambassadors' wives, had developed and perfected in the ennobled Mlle. de Lauenstein a social sentiment in this regard which was innate, and which was part of the charm that had made kings and princes of the finer sort her ardent and respectful admirers. Her figure was pretty; but she was celebrated for no beauty but that of her hands and feet. Her complexion was fair; her large eyes were a soft, pale blue; her hair a light auburn, in which, when she was here, she did not attempt to conceal a few streaks of gray, just perceptible in society, but invisible on the stage.

At her first concerts here, the wonderful young violinist, Paul Jullien, appeared with her. He was then a mere boy; hardly more than a child, for he was but ten years old; but his performance was already that of a virtuoso, and his tone and style were nearly those of a great master of the instrument. One evening, after Madame Sontag had been

here about a month, I went, at one of her concerts, to her private room, where she had been kind enough to receive me before, for she was one of the very few prima-donnas with whom I was on familiar terms. "Entrez!" said a male voice when I knocked at the half-open door. I entered, and what should I see but Count Rossi and Paul Jullien sitting together over a basin of water, which was between them on the sofa. Count Rossi looked up and smiled as he held out his hand without rising, and then blew into the bowl. He was engaged with Paul (who a few minutes before had astonished a delighted and cultivated audience) in sailing paper-boats, which the little fellow had begged the Count to make for him from concert programmes. The basin from Madame Sontag's wash-stand furnished the sea on which the fragile fleet was launched. The boy continued his amusement until Madame Sontag entered, and then hastily drying his hands upon another concert bill, took up his violin, and while I was yet musing in wonder at the strangeness of the scene, my rumination was disturbed by the outburst of applause which greeted the entrance of the little boat-sailer upon the stage.

Madame Sontag soon appeared in opera at Niblo's Theater, where she performed *Rosina* in "Il Barbiere," *Marie* in "La Figlia del Reggimento," *Amina* in "La Sonnambula," *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Lucrezia Borgia*, *Adina* in "L'Elisir d'Amore," and *Zerlina* in "Don Giovanni." Her dramatic success was not great. As *Rosina* she was captivating; as *Marie* she was pleasing; but in the serious parts of even "La Sonnambula" and "Lucia" she failed to impress her audience, except by her exquisitely finished singing, and as *Lucrezia Borgia* she failed wholly, except in rendering the tender and delicate beauty of "Quanto e bello." I felt obliged to say this very plainly, and at last, owing to a perversion of what I had said, to declare that "every tragic opera, and every act of every tragic opera, and every scene of every act of every tragic opera, in which she has appeared, have plainly shown to close observation that whatever knowledge, and taste, and hard work may have done for her, she is wholly deficient in tragic power." Nor, indeed, had she much dramatic power of even the comic sort. She was arch and elegant—she never could be other than elegant—as *Rosina*; but in "La Figlia del Reggimento" she was entirely lacking in that comic power, which, for example, we have all admired so much in Minnie Hauk's performance of *Carmen*. Moreover, she looked older on the stage than in the concert-room. In her ordinary dress no one

ever thought of her age, only of her charm; but when she was tricked out and touched up as the daughter of the regiment, it put ten years upon her face, and she looked like a middle-aged woman playing young.

I found her most youthful and most charming in private, and in particular on one occasion when I dined with her and her husband just before she left New York for the South and Mexico.\* Even in the concert-room she lost somewhat of that seductive personal charm, partly intellectual, partly physical, which had made her, next to Malibran, the most idolized prima-donna of modern days. She was very intelligent, talked with spirit, with wit, and sometimes even with humor. And at table she showed the wondrous beauty of her hands. I have known no woman, except Mrs. J. S., with such hands. Of her conversation, I chiefly remember her lively but rueful description of the boredom of high society in England, which she underwent as the Countess Rossi, wife of the Sardinian diplomat. Her visit to America was fatal to her. She died in Mexico, on the 17th of June, 1854, of cholera.

\* I desire to remark here upon a matter somewhat personal, and yet not foreign to a sketch of the history of opera in New York. My personal intercourse with Madame Sontag was not at all affected by my strong adverse criticisms upon her serious acting, as I feared it would be. In regard to such matters I had a somewhat peculiar experience. I had been brought up in such a secluded way that I was entirely ignorant, as ignorant as a little child, of the manner in which theatrical and operatic and journalistic matters were managed, having, indeed, never been half a dozen times in a theater when I was called upon to write criticisms upon operatic performances. Absolutely unacquainted with the machinery of puffing, I had never even suspected that the laudatory articles that I saw in newspapers could be paid for, or that there could be an interested motive for the expression of adverse opinion. But I soon found out the true state of the case, to my sorrow. For my articles did much to spoil and break up the business of musical criticism, so called, in New York, which then was in the hands of a few old hack newspaper writers, men equally incompetent and venal. Whatever the value of my criticisms, they were absolutely independent; equally regardless of the interests of artists, managers, and of the journal in which they were published—"The Courier and Enquirer," then the leading newspaper of the city. And I made myself inaccessible to artists and their agents. I had stipulated at first that my name should be concealed, as I (then a law student) had no desire to go into journalism. But after about one year my identity was discovered, and I was approached on all sides. I then laid down for myself an absolute rule, from which I never swerved, not in a single instance, during the ten years in which I wrote musical and dramatic criticisms—this was not to make the acquaintance of an artist, either singer or actor, until after I had fully expressed my opinion in regard to him or her, so that there was nothing to be gained even by being civil to me; also never to ask a favor of any kind, however slight, from a manager or from the agent of an artist; so that I never even asked a seat or a ticket from one. Without a dollar to spare, I yet subscribed for my seat at the opera for the season.

One artist's manager, a little German Hebrew, was so incensed at my severe criticisms that he gave me notice that I should not be admitted to his concerts, even with my bought ticket; but in the end he thought better of this. Furious at his inability to modify my criticisms, or to approach me in any way, he went to the editor of the paper in which they were published (with which I had then no connection), and accused me of being paid by a rival artist to injure his business. He was detained and a messenger dispatched for me, the office in which I was a student being near by. To his evident surprise I soon came in; and he was then invited to repeat his accusation. He could not refuse. I stepped up to him and said:

"You know that you are lying, and if you don't confess it, I'll ——" and I stretched out my hand.

He fled precipitately, but soon returned with a lawyer, and said that he would have me arrested and bound over to keep the peace, unless I would give him my word, in the presence of the lawyer and the editor, that I would not harm him. I, laughing, told him he might do as he pleased, but assured those gentlemen that I would not touch him. His accusation was utterly disregarded, and he was sent about his business; for the editor—the late Charles King—knew me well, as his junior, Mr. Henry J. Raymond, also did, and I went on my way unquestioned. This fellow, however, who was a shrewd, able business man, and as unscrupulous as an adder, threatened me with vengeance, and fulfilled his threat by scattering abroad his insinuations, sowing them in willing and often in fruitful ears. The fact that, from my strict adherence to my pre-

scribed course, they could not possibly be true, was my consolation; but it did not help me with the writers for the other papers, who, with one exception,—Mr. Curtis,—pursued quite a contrary course. It was under these circumstances that Count Rossi called upon me, and said that his wife would like to know me. I told him frankly my rule, and the reason for it.

"*Dame,*" he replied, "*vous avez raison. Mais, ne soyez pas trop difficile. Venez nous voir, je vous prie, sans façon. Nous ne sommes pas comme les autres.*"

I accepted the invitation, but not until I had written two or three more articles. And it was some time after I had written my partly adverse articles that I received a dinner invitation from the "Count and Countess Rossi"; for I remarked that in her private relations she took her rank. Jenny Lind was not so magnanimous. When she first appeared, my criticisms withheld from her an acknowledgment of eminence in the Italian dramatic school of singing. At this she took offense; which not all my praise of her singing in what is sometimes called the classical school could do away. I was among the most enthusiastic of her admirers, and the journal in which my articles appeared gave her more attention than any other singer that ever came to New York, and did more for her than any other journal at that time could do. But she never forgave my first qualification of my praise, and she showed her pique in various ways. And thus it was that I never spoke with Jenny Lind, or saw her except upon the platform of a concert-room. Nor did I ever meet Grisi and Mario, who soon followed her to New York, and who will next engage our attention.

*Richard Grant White.*

## THE TRANSFERRED GHOST.

THE country residence of Mr. John Hinckman was a delightful place to me, for many reasons. It was the abode of a genial, though somewhat impulsive, hospitality. It had broad, smooth-shaven lawns and towering oaks and elms; there were bosky shades at several points, and not far from the house there was a little rill spanned by a rustic bridge with the bark on; there were fruits and flowers, pleasant people, chess, billiards, rides, walks, and fishing. These were great attractions, but none of them, nor all of them together, would have been sufficient to hold me to the place very long. I had been invited for the trout season, but should, probably, have finished my visit early in the summer had it not been that upon fair days, when the grass was dry, and the sun was not too hot, and there was but little wind, there strolled beneath the lofty elms, or passed lightly through the bosky shades, the form of my Madeline.

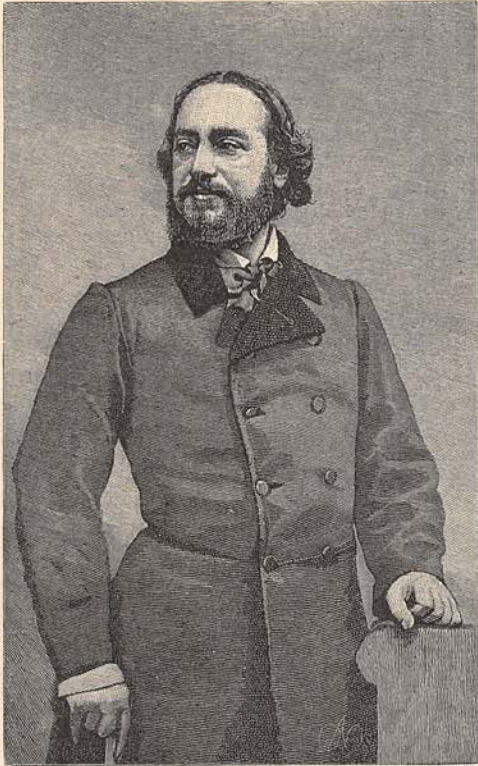
This lady was not, in very truth, my Madeline. She had never given herself to me, nor had I, in any way, acquired possession of her. But as I considered her possession the only sufficient reason for the continuance of my existence, I called her, in my reveries,

mine. It may have been that I would not have been obliged to confine the use of this possessive pronoun to my reveries had I confessed the state of my feelings to the lady.

But this was an unusually difficult thing to do. Not only did I dread, as almost all lovers dread, taking the step which would in an instant put an end to that delightful season which may be termed the ante-interrogatory period of love, and which might at the same time terminate all intercourse or connection with the object of my passion; but I was, also, dreadfully afraid of John Hinckman. This gentleman was a good friend of mine, but it would have required a bolder man than I was at that time to ask him for the gift of his niece, who was the head of his household, and, according to his own frequent statement, the main prop of his declining years. Had Madeline acquiesced in my general views on the subject, I might have felt encouraged to open the matter to Mr. Hinckman, but, as I said before, I had never asked her whether or not she would be mine. I thought of these things at all hours of the day and night, particularly the latter.

I was lying awake one night, in the great bed in my spacious chamber, when, by the

OPERA IN NEW YORK. IV.



MARIO.

IN the season of 1854, after some miscellaneous performances of opera, by miscellaneous companies at miscellaneous places, New York was called upon to welcome two artists whose reputations had been more widely known, for ten or fifteen years, than those of any other two in the world. On the 4th of September, 1854, Grisi and Mario made their first appearance in America at Castle Garden, in "Lucrezia Borgia." Susini, who had a noble bass voice, and who looked as if he were what he had been, a colonel of cavalry, was the *Duke Alfonso*. The price of seats had been raised to three dollars, and the choice of them was put up at auction. The advent of these distinguished artists produced a very perceptible ripple upon the surface of society; but there was no great excitement. The audience was large, but the Castle was not thronged, as it had been for Jenny Lind. Grisi was very warmly welcomed; but there was a queer little misunderstanding between her and her audience. *Lucrezia* enters upon the scene

masked, and, as often as Grisi attempted to go on with the performance, such applause broke forth as made it impossible for her to do so. She had to curtsy again and again profoundly before her audience ceased this demonstration of welcome. The case was that the people who gave her such an unusual welcome thought that courtesy would dictate to her the removal of her mask one moment, that she might receive and acknowledge their greeting in her own person. The *début* was undeniably successful; but no very profound impression was produced on the musical public until, in the second week, Grisi appeared as *Norma*. The performances of the two distinguished artists were undeniably very fine. Grisi, although showing in person and in voice that she was past her prime, was superb, and Mario, who was in his prime, both of voice and person, sang exquisitely; but there was a certain degree of disappointment. This was due, in a great measure, to the fact that Grisi and Mario brought to the New Yorkers nothing remarkably new or striking, either in music or in its performance. They sang the old operas very admirably in the received style, and according to the received models, which they, indeed, had largely contributed to form. But for that very reason they gave their New York public no fresh sensation. Of Grisi's *Norma*, in which part she appeared on the 11th of September, I find the following appreciation in the "Courier and Enquirer" of the next morning:

"Madame Grisi's *Norma* differs in no respect, as to its conception, from several others that we have enjoyed before; it is only, in some respects, better in execution. We cannot remember a situation in the opera which she treated in a spirit at all new to us, except the scene in which she listened to *Adalza's* relation of the birth and growth of her love. Grisi stood with her back to the girl, and, as the tale was told, and the memory of the dawn of her own passion was awakened by the timid confession of her companion in guilt, the face of the Arch-Druideess beamed with tender joy; she clasped her trembling fingers timidly; her breathing was as gentle as a child's; her eyes were bright with the light of youthful love; and then, for the first time, we saw how lovely Grisi must have been. The scene which follows this was as grand as wrath and scorn hurled from female lips can be. The woman towered above her towering passion, which did not make her repulsive, but the object of it pitiable. Her eye flashed his doom upon him; her arms waved the vengeance of heaven down to him; she spurned him with her voice, as a man spurns with his foot the thing that he most loathes; she looked a beautiful Fury. Her vocalization of the passage which the composer has assigned to this situation was in-



GRISI.

comparably fine—brilliant, powerful, impetuous. Her voice seemed unrestrained by consciousness, and abandoned to the sway of her all-controlling rage. The notes flashed out like lightning, and when they were arrested with the same suddenness with which lightning vanishes into darkness, there was just an appreciable instant of utter silence; and then the thunder shook the house. Few who saw it will forget that scene. The finale, the pathos of which is so grand and so touching, she gave with all the dramatic power of which she is supreme mistress. One action was new, and may possibly have been a happy inspiration of the moment. As *Pollione* knelt at her feet repentant, and again her lover, but too late, there was a silent moment; one hand fell from her averted face upon his shoulder. She drew it gently but firmly away, and, as it passed across his head, it lingered for an instant, and its mute fingers told an agony of love and grief beyond the utterance of words. Her singing of 'Casta Diva' was valuable more as an indication of her conception of the music than as a remarkable execution of it. And yet, even thus rendered, it was a study for the lovers of art. The woman's style is so incomparably fine, so unexceptionably correct. As a mere vocalist, we are inclined to doubt her preëminence, even in the plenitude of her powers."

(Sontag, always kind and generous in her criticisms, said to me once: "Madame Grisi cannot sing"; and, judged by Sontag's standard, Grisi could not sing.)

After a few more performances, including "I Puritani," which was received with great favor, these eminent artists were withdrawn from Castle Garden, which had become most inconveniently remote from the habitat of opera-going New Yorkers, who then were obliged to drive between three and four miles down to the opera, and back again at a late hour. It had been happily thought that their

assistance would give distinction to an event of some importance in the musical annals of New York, one which brings me near to the end of my task—the opening of the Academy of Music. This took place on the 2d of October, 1854, the opera being "Norma." I find to my surprise, on referring to my contemporary record of the occasion, published the next morning, that the audience was neither very large nor very brilliant. At the Academy, Grisi and Mario repeated the operas which they had performed before; and added to them "La Favorita," "Don Giovanni," and "Lucia di Lammermoor." *Edgardo* is such a test part for a great operatic tenor that I shall not apologize for repeating here a criticism written when I was fresh from Mario's performance of it:

"Signor Mario, though not in perfect voice, vocalized the charming music of the two airs in the finale in a style quite worthy of his great reputation. His tones were full of tenderness and sorrow. He had tears in his voice,—gentle tears, however, discreetly measured, and daintily poured out. He sang '*Fra poco a me ricovero*' with such exquisite appreciation of light and shade, such a sustained and symmetrical flow of voice, such delicate inflections and modulations, and withal such a lachrymose expression, that it seemed as if nothing audible could be more exquisitely shaded, more symmetrical, delicate, or lachrymose, until he sang '*Tu che a Dio*,' which was the climax of his complainings, and of his vocal skill. But we confess that in the recitative which introduces this scene we missed that expression of the emotions of *Ravenswood* which it may be made to embody, and which, considering the dramatic requirements of the situation, is of far greater value than any exhibition of skill and taste in vocalization. Signor Allegri's pencil, charged with the hues of passion and of sadness, had in a measure performed the office of the two acts of the drama which find in this scene their culmination, and we looked for the entrance of a man whose visage and whose very gait told utter wretchedness, and the tones of whose voice were modulated by despair, and hate, and love. When he uttered:

'Tombe degli avi miei, l'ultimo avanzo  
D'una stirpe infelice,  
Deh raccogliete voi,'

our ears were eager for the accents of one who felt that he *was* the last of an unhappy race, and who came deliberately to lay himself and his weight of woe among those who were akin to him no less in fortune than in blood. When the next phrase fell from his lips,

'Cessa dell' ira  
Il breve fuoco:—sul nomico acciario  
Abbandonar mi vo,'

we longed for the inflections and the tones of one who was so utterly bowed down with manly grief, so lonely and abandoned in his crushing sorrow, that he met his mortal enemy only to seek death from his sword. When he continued,

'Per me la vita  
E' orrendo peso:—l'universo intero  
E' un deserto per me senza Lucia!'

we wanted a voice that, whether we would or no, pierced our very heart of hearts, to make us feel that

to him life was in very deed a burthen, and that all the beauty of the earth and the glory of the heavens was naught to him. Above all did we demand that when he uttered '*Ingrata donna!*' he should do it in the tones and with the manner of a man who was stung to the soul by a cruel wrong; who was not merely grieving the loss of a beloved mistress; but who thought with bitterness that the last pang of a life of suffering was inflicted by the 'ungrateful lady' to whom he had sacrificed even the revenge which he had sworn upon his father's ashes. We looked for a *Ravenswood* the intensity of whose grief and wrath was tempered and dignified by manliness of mien and severe simplicity of manner; who bore about him the consciousness that he was the last of a proud and fallen race; and therefore when Signor Mario begged *Lucia* so pathetically to respect at least the ashes of him who died for her, we were not satisfied; we demanded an utterance which amid all its grief was less a prayer which she could not refuse to grant than a mandate which she would not dare to disobey. Nay, even in pathos, when pathos should have been grand, we found the great Mario wanting. We listened in vain for the heart-rending tones in which *Edgardo*, knowing by premonition the answer he will receive, should exclaim:

'Di chi mai, di chi mai, di chi piangete?'

and in vain for that cry of anguish which is wrung from him when the question is answered. The one was a beautifully vocalized phrase, the other an exquisitely diminished note; but they were nothing more. Signor Mario has the sweetest tenor voice in the world, and is supreme master of all the delicate mysteries of *nuance*; he is the prince of romance singers; but there are effects that cannot be compassed by a sweet voice and *nuance*, and which are beyond, we will not say above, the reach of the romance singer. So at least we think; and we find that our demands are not altogether the requirements of an ideal standard, but reminiscences of past delights. Shall we ever see or hear a *Ravenswood* again—fierce, gloomy, passionate; abandoned alternately to his haughty pride, his implacable revenge, and his devoted love? Is it because we have grown a few years older and more world-worn that 'the music and the doleful tale' can thrill our hearts no longer! Or is it true that the breath from no other lips can so make music with our heart-strings?"

This criticism is filled with a reminiscence of *Edgardo* as performed by Benedetti, of whom I have spoken in the second of these sketches. As a vocalist he was no more to be compared to Mario than a garnet is to a diamond; but he was red with warm blood. In the concert-room he appeared to little advantage; but on the stage his accents and his action alike stirred the heart to its very depths. After seeing and hearing his *Edgardo* and Antognini's, Mario's was tame and puppet-like. He married Truffi, the magnificent, and took her to Italy.

And here, at the opening, by the two most distinguished artists in the world, of our fourth, and, as it has proved, our permanent opera-house, let us pause a moment. I have passed, lightly of necessity, and unsystematically by design, but with reasonable attention to the order of time, over a period of hardly

more than a quarter of a century; and we are still eight years from that landmark, the war. And yet we have seen, as the musical experience of New York in that remote twenty-five years, the enjoyment of the performances of such artists of the highest rank as Malibran, Signor Garcia, Caradori, De Begnis, Bosio, Jenny Lind, Alboni, Sontag, Grisi, and Mario; while of artists of the second and third rank, who yet were not without notable European reputations, there had been enough to make a chorus. The intelligent appreciation of all of these, shown equally by the complete and unhesitating recognition of such unknown artists as Malibran and Bosio, and the partial and discriminating admiration of such celebrities as Sontag, Grisi, and Mario, shows in New York audiences of former days a capacity of musical apprehension and an independence of judgment which, joined to the rich experience of those past years, should teach some critics, at home as well as abroad, whose acquaintance with New York was made "since the war," that neither her musical culture nor her familiarity with great operatic artists began with the dawning of their knowledge of the world and of music.

The opportune presence in New York of two such eminent artists as Grisi and Mario when the Academy of Music was finished was, however, due not to the managerial powers that ruled the destinies of the Academy, but to a speculative enterprise of the distinguished actor, Mr. James H. Hackett (father of the late Recorder Hackett), who brought the pair to the United States to make money by them. In this Mr. Hackett was successful; but it is probable that he and the great soprano and the great tenor were the only persons who profited by the undertaking. He received, as he admitted, some sixty thousand and odd dollars above all his expenses, including of course the sum which he had guaranteed to Madame Grisi and Signor Mario, without which guarantee they would not have crossed the Atlantic. It has been thus for more than a hundred years. Artists who have attained a position on the operatic stage will always find managers or speculators ready to engage their services, pay all their expenses and guarantee them large salaries. They do not sing without security; and whoever may lose—and somebody generally loses—by their performances, they do not. Mr. Hackett, making his contract with the managers of the Academy (a few New York gentlemen who had stepped in to sustain and conduct the new enterprise) was both the representative and the proprietor of Grisi and Mario, and therefore, like them, he was secured against loss. But notwithstanding the celebrity of the





LOUISA PYNE.

artists, the money received at their performances was not sufficient to meet the expense involved. It was found that even with a continued succession of the largest audiences which had yet been gathered in the Academy (and they had been large as well as brilliant), the management would be loser at the rate of *about two thousand dollars weekly*. Such losses are not uncommon in the conduct of opera. They fall upon the manager, the owners of the opera-houses, the tradesmen, and the artisans employed by them, and sometimes upon the poor chorus singers, and the orchestral performers; never, or very rarely, upon the principal artists.

The inevitable result of this condition of financial things at the Academy was that its managers closed their engagement with Mr. Hackett as soon as possible. The Academy was opened with Grisi and Mario on the 2d of October, 1854, with much flourish and high expectations: by the middle of December the virtual bankruptcy of the management was admitted, if not announced, and Mr. Hackett withdrew with his forces. After a brief visit to Boston, they returned to New York and appeared at the Metropolitan Theater. Here they gave only three or four performances before they took their departure for Europe. The operas were "Norma," "La Favorita," "Don Giovanni," and "Semiramide." Grisi appeared to great advantage in all of these operas. She was indeed not quite equal to the lofty vocal style required for the style of "Don Giovanni"; and in "Non mi dir" and the trio in masks, her singing was of coarser quality than her music. And not only was she a notably mature-looking *Donna Anna*, but the costume of the part enhanced a certain defect in her carriage, which that of other

parts palliated, and which at worst, strange to say, was not without its charm—a peculiarity in her gait which was certainly the most alluring awkwardness that ever caught the eye of man. Mario distinguished himself as *Don Ottavio* (a part in which great tenors are reluctant to appear, as they are in that of *Pollione*), and he sang "Il mio tesoro" with a purity and grace which seemed the perfection of vocalization. But Grisi never appeared to such advantage, in New York at least, as in "Semiramide." Her port and person suited the character of the semi-barbarous Assyrian queen, and the splendid costume with its trailing robes suited her. Indeed, the performance of "Semiramide" by the Grisi and Mario company was for several reasons an event of some mark in the history of opera in New York.

This, however, was less because of the intrinsic merit of the work than because of certain incidents of the occasion, as it was remarked immediately after the performance. Rossini's genius has rarely indeed found more brilliant manifestation than in some passages of "Semiramide"; and yet it is, both as a drama and as a musical composition, so incongruous, so monstrous, that, regarded in its entirety as a work of art, it is laughably absurd—only less so than "Die Zauberflöte," that mine of gems of melody and harmony. Its libretto treats a grand and tragic theme in a style which would justly provoke disparaging criticism in the nursery; and its music, never rising



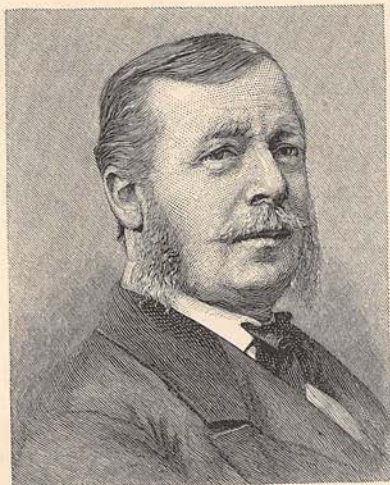
BRIGNOLI.

even to true dignity, although sometimes to pompousness, vibrates between sensuous splendor and sensuous triviality. To situations truly awful, as, for instance, the scene immediately succeeding the apparition of

Ninus, the composer has awarded strains which ought to set the whole Assyrian court dancing, led off by Semiramis and the chief of the Magi, and brought up with the vigor

so radiant, and so expressive, that her singing could not be judged with exact and impartial justice, until her judges were smitten with blindness. She was the tallest woman that I ever saw upon the stage; I believe the tallest woman I ever encountered; but she was also one of the most beautifully formed. Indeed, as she moved so superbly about as the martial *Arsace*, her helmed head overtopping that of every woman on the stage, it seemed as if Britomart had stepped out of the pictured pages of the "Faerie Queen," or, "so proud were her looks yet sweet," as if Argante-like, we saw the vision of Tasso's Clarinda in her panoply. For, in his own words, as they were translated two hundred and fifty years ago, by Fairfax:

"Like her it was in armor and in weed,  
In statue, beauty, countenance, and face,  
In looks, in speech, in gesture, and in pace."



RONCONI.

and unction of their race by the sable youths who bear the presents of the King of India; and for others dignified and solemn, as where the principal personages swear obedience to the Queen, he has written only graceful and pleasing melodies which can hardly be saved by a sustained pomp of utterance from dwindling into prettiness. But it was not Rossini's fault that he could not write tragic music; and, if the world must needs have tragic dramas furnished with lyric utterance by the popular composer of the day, the world must sometimes be content to hear the voice of Thalia issuing from the mask of Melpomene.

Grisi did all that could be done by mature beauty, by queenly bearing, and by singing which was grandiose, if not simply grand, to set off this music, and Mario appeared unwontedly in the minor tenor part, charming the female half of his audience by the beauty and quaint richness of his costume, one noted item of which was a pale green India shawl, so fine that it could have been drawn through a lady's bracelet, which he wore as a girdle.

On this occasion Signorina Vestvali burst upon the astonished gaze of New York, which as *Arsace*, the Assyrian commander-in-chief, she might have expected to take by storm. And rarely, indeed, had a more formidably handsome woman made that attack. Her contralto voice was fresh, full, sympathetic, and of unusual compass, but it had the happiness to dwell in a body of such entire and stately symmetry, and to be aided by a countenance so blooming with healthful beauty,

She made, for the moment, a tremendous sensation; but it was soon discovered by her eye-charmed New York audience that this magnificent singing animal was a very incomplete artist; that her voice, although equal in all its register, had not been sufficiently worked to conceal its breaks, as it passed from one register to another, that her method was imperfect, that her style was always declamatory, and that she frequently sang out of tune. Moreover, magnificent as she was, she was too large. Of all which the consequence was that she soon disappeared from the opera boards of New York, and was no more heard of.

This performance of "Semiramide" was also graced by the appearance of another woman, the dark splendor of whose beauty still lights up the memory of those who had the good fortune to see her; and whose grace was



MARIA PICCOLOMINI.

not less charming than her beauty. This was the Señorita Soto, a young Spanish dancer, who united in their perfection all the personal charms which are assumed to be characteristically Spanish, but which are rarely seen in Spanish women. The alluring charm natural to her face was enhanced by a lazy coquetry, which ever and anon was enlivened by the flashes of her dark, bright eyes. She was as supple as a greyhound, and as lithe as a serpent. Her grace of carriage and of movement was so remarkable and so peculiar, that one morning, some weeks after she had left New York and was supposed to be in Mexico or Cuba, I, walking down Broadway with a friend, and observing a female figure somewhat in advance of us on the other side of the street, dressed in a rumpled brown linen traveling suit, with a fan in her hand, said, after looking a moment, "That is Soto." My friend laughed at my confident assertion of the identity of a woman of whose back only we had had a glimpse; but when we had quickened our pace a little and crossed the street, his laugh was changed to expressions of admiration of the beautiful Spaniard; for Soto it was. I think that I was aided in my diagnosis by the turn of her wrist as she opened and shut her fan. A well-trained Spanish woman performs this little feat with an unconscious, languid grace attainable by no other sort of woman in the world. On the evening in question the attractions of Grisi and Mario and Vestvali were supplemented by those of this splendid dancing woman, which made the occasion one of mark. For although it was somewhat at variance with the truth of history, about which there is so much talk of late years, for Semiramis and all the rank and fashion of Nineveh to stay a solemn ceremony, Anno 2180 B. C., that a handsome Spanish girl in a crimson bodice and short and flimsy skirt might dance "La Zingarella" before the image of Belus; still under the circumstances the severest critic had not the heart to find fault with the fair Iberian, either for being a trifle of three thousand years out of place or for not conforming her costume to the fashion of the country and the period in which she found herself.

The Academy of Music was reopened on the 19th of February, 1855, under the management of the very distinguished Norse violinist, Ole Bull, who leased that vast and splendid void for a short season. Among his artists were Clotilde Patti, Vestvali, Brignoli, and Badiali; and he offered a prize of one thousand dollars for the best original grand opera by an American composer on an American subject; the copyright to be retained by the author—a vain proposal and an unwise

limitation. Music is not cultivated thus; neither by prize-giving, nor by efforts to elevate art and encourage native artists, and still less by insisting upon native subjects. The whole history of literature and of the fine arts is a rebuke to such folly. It was in keeping with this project that Ole Bull should go to ruin as a manager with greater speed than any of his predecessors. He did not last two months; and his short managerial career is worthy of this brief warning notice only because of his distinction as a violin virtuoso, and because in that capacity he had shown no less skill in manipulating public curiosity than in handling his instrument.

And now we pause for a while in following the course of Italian opera to glance backward briefly upon the career of an English prima donna of distinction who visited New York about this time. Miss Louisa Pyne made her first appearance in America at the Broadway theater, on the 9th of October, 1854, in "La Sonnambula." She came of a family which had already produced an artist of some note, the well-known English tenor Pyne being her father's brother. After singing in concerts she made her *début* in opera at Boulogne, in 1849, and from that time continued to grow in public favor. Her voice was a light soprano, of delicious quality, more than common compass, and very flexible. Her method was unexceptionally good, no Italian vocalist of her day being her superior in this respect except Alboni, if a discrimination can be made between two perfections of the same sort. Her intonation was singularly certain, and her execution delicate and finished to the highest degree. Her style was good; never in violation of taste; but it was somewhat tame and colorless. In person, she was a little below the middle height, with light blue eyes and pale brown hair; but although this made her not a very effective figure on the stage, these rather negative traits were strengthened and enlivened by the intelligence and expressiveness of her countenance. Although her New York audience had been accustomed to see handsomer, or at least more impressive, women as prima-donnas on their operatic boards, they were not slow to recognize the fine musical abilities of the new-comer, who at once took a high place in public favor. She added "The Bohemian Girl" and Wallace's "Maritana" to "Sonnambula," the composer himself conducting "Maritana." She remained in America two years and more, and left the country not only profited by her pecuniary success but benefited by the discipline of her American audiences. Her country-woman, Miss E. C. Clayton, who wrote a sketch of her life, re-



PAREPA ROSA.

marks that "it was noticed that Miss Pyne's transatlantic experiences had given her confidence and knowledge of the stage, both in singing and acting, while her voice, though it had lost somewhat of its power, had gained in mellowness and richness." In fact, Louisa Pyne was the great English vocalist of her day; and had she been more impressive in person and in manner, and the possessor of a more powerful voice, she would have been a great prima donna. In vocalization she had no superior but Jenny Lind and Alboni. She did much to cultivate the taste of the English opera-going public in America.

This sketch does not profess to give a complete list of performers or of performances, to read which would be as toilsome and barren a task as to write it; but the appearance of such an artist as the baritone Amodio must not be passed over, coincident as it was, too, with the first performance in America of Verdi's "Il Trovatore." This took place at the Academy of Music on the 30th of April, 1855. The opera at once became a favorite; and so, also, did the singer whom it introduced to the New York public. Amodio had one of the most beautiful baritone voices ever heard. It was of almost unexampled richness and sweetness,—a large, free-flowing voice, and seeming almost as flexible as that of a *tenore di grazia*. His vocalization was remarkably good and his style pleasing,—a serene, very simple, *cantabile* style. But he had little dramatic power, and his deficiency in this respect was emphasized by the unfitness of his person for the stage. He was fatter than Alboni, and no taller. He was *Falstaff* sing-

ing in Italian. When he appeared in a close and antique costume, with a little round hat upon his little head, he looked like a plum-pudding set upon sausages. And yet so beautiful was his voice and so pleasing his style, that he was the favorite baritone in New York for some years.

On the occasion of the production of "Il Trovatore," the *Leonora* was Signora Steffanone, the *Azucena*, Signorina Vestvali, who have been particularly spoken of before. The *Marrico* was Signor Brignoli, a tenor who took Benedetti's place for some years in New York, where he was a great favorite, chiefly with very young ladies. For the temper and the constitution of the New York audiences had changed; and the young woman of the period had elbowed her way much nearer the front as an arbiter in art and elegance. Her admiration of Brignoli was not greatly to the credit of her taste. He had one of those tenor voices that seem like the bleating of a sheep made musical. His method was perfectly good; but he sang in a very commonplace style, and was as awkward as the man that a child makes by sticking two skewers into a long potato; and he walked the stage, hitching forward first one side and then the other, much as the child would make his creature walk. But he was a very "nice" young man, was always ready to sing, and, *faute de mieux*, it became the fashion with very young ladies to like him. But there never was a tenor of any note in New York whose singing was so utterly without character or significance, and who was so deficient in histrionic ability. His high and long-continued favor is one of those puzzling popular freaks not uncommon in dramatic annals.

In the spring of 1855 there was "fat in the fire" at the Academy of Music. Incompetent management, jealousy between rival singers, furious strife between rival musical agents, and interference of influential newspapers combined to make Italian opera at that time in New York the most inharmonious and, indeed, actively discordant institution that could be found in the country. There was a three-cornered kind of duel in which, however, each party desired to destroy the other two, and for the moment it seemed as if each one would succeed in its wishes, with the disappearance of all as a consequence, and the closing of the Academy for an indefinite period. The details of such squabbles are utterly without interest when they have subsided; and it is only necessary to say here that this one was quieted by an arrangement for the appearance at the Academy of the La Grange company, so called from the name of its prima donna and principal artist. Madame



CLARA LOUISE KELLOGG, IN AIDA.

de La Grange's voice was a soprano of extraordinary compass and very pleasing quality. It was not notably powerful, but it was very telling even in concerted music, and was heard through and above the din and clang of a finale, so penetrating were its vibrations. Withal she vocalized the most intricate passages with such delicately perfect execution as is attained only by the few among the leading singers of a generation. It is very rarely that the possessor of a voice, and a vocal style of this kind, has dramatic style or histrionic ability; but Madame La Grange possessed both. She did not however take a position among the great prima donnas, mainly, I am inclined to think, because of deficiencies purely personal. She was not an ugly woman, nor an ungraceful one; but her lean and lady-like figure was not attractive, nor was her voice or her manner what is called "sympathetic." Such various qualities

go to the making of that complex captivating creature a great prima donna, and of this variety so much is purely personal, pertaining, that is, to the woman irrespective of the artist. Grisi, one of the most admired and petted among prima donnas, and one of those who reigned longest, was a notable instance of the superiority of the feminine to the artistic element of attraction.

With Madame de La Grange appeared a notably good tenor named Mirate. He was one of the handsomest men seen upon the New York operatic stage since the time of Fornasari. His voice was a pure, robust tenor, fresh and of a delicious sympathetic quality and well delivered. His presence was noble, the very ideal of what a manly tenor should be; and his manner, although somewhat artificial, commanded attention if not always admiration. His defect was a heaviness of style in singing, and a lack of lightness and



ADELINA PATTI.

spirit upon the stage. He was much admired at first; but before long he began to be admired reluctantly, because he was found dull; and dullness is the one thing that dullness never can forgive. I do not remember (for I am

now writing from my own memory of musical events), nor discover that the favor of this tenor with the noble person and the noble voice lasted more than one season; and I believe that it endured hardly so long. I

remember how his singing was as *Don Ottavio* in "Don Giovanni"; and that he gave us the air "*Dalla tua pace*," which is rarely heard even in Europe, because first-rate tenors do not take the part; and even among first-rate tenors not all can easily compass this beautiful air which requires the most perfect cantabile style, and also a power of *sostenuto* in the upper register which is very rare.

On the 31st of December, 1855, the Academy was closed after a moderately successful season, in which Madame de La Grange, Amodio, and Brignoli were the principal attractions, and it was not opened again until March 1856, when the same artists re-appeared, reënforced at times by the always admirable and always admired Badiali, who had not yet won his European reputation nor even thought of going to London. As to the operas performed about this time, it is needless to specify them. They were the same that were performed all over the operatic world, in Paris, London, St. Petersburg, etc.—Verdi, Bellini, Donizetti, Meyerbeer, with once in a while Rossini.

The winter season of 1857-58 introduced two artists of distinguished ability to the audiences at the Academy—Madame D'Angri and Carl Formes. Madame D'Angri was a contralto, endowed by nature with a full, rich voice and impassioned manner, which gave her, in a large degree, a certain kind of dramatic power. She had also a fine artistic sense. She was not attractive personally, and she made her principal success as the gipsy mother, *Azucena*, in "*Il Trovatore*." Yet, such are the demands of the stage and such the versatility, real and supposed, of artists, and such their ambition, that this large, strong, middle-aged woman appeared also as *Zerlina* in "Don Giovanni." To see her play the coquette, and hear her sing "*Vedrai carino*," was like eating tough mutton with mint sauce.

Carl Formes lacked but two of the qualifications for a great lyric artist,—tact as an actor and true intonation as a singer. He had a grand stage presence, a voice noble in quality and in volume, a fine dramatic style of singing, with tragic power, and humor, too, although these were rather Germanish; and to all this he added, or rather into all this he inspired, that unnamable quality which interests, irrespective of skill and art, or even of personal appearance. He was very impressive, both as *Bertrand* in "*Robert le Diable*," and as *Leporello* in "Don Giovanni." But he sang out of tune so much that he as often gave as much pain as pleasure to sensitive hearers; and in his acting, with all its spirit and force, he so frequently passed the limits prescribed by the reserves of art that his brief career in America

resulted in failure, notwithstanding his European reputation.

This season of 1857-8, which was declared by the management to be "the longest and most prosperous season ever given at the Academy of Music," was closed by the production of Mr. William H. Fry's grand opera, "*Leonora*," the libretto of which was written by his brother, Mr. J. R. Fry. This opera had been previously produced in Philadelphia with great success. It was on the whole much admired in New York, and some of its airs became popular. Its composer was not only an accomplished musician and critic, but a man born with the creative musical faculty and also with fine perceptions in musical rhetoric and the requirements in this respect of the lyric drama. His opera, like the early work of all artists, was so colored by the tone of his predecessors as to seem almost an imitation, now of one and now of another; but it also showed a constructive power and a mastery of the resources of the opera, vocal and instrumental, which promised, with encouragement and time, to produce something of which musical Americans might have been proud. But he did not have encouragement, nor yet time; he soon fell ill of a decline, which went on steadily until his death.

In the spring of 1858, the Italian opera bloomed out again in its humble old nook in a very remarkable manner. At Burton's theater in Chambers street, (the old Palm's Opera house,) there was a very short season, in which Ronconi made his first appearance in New York. It was as *Dr. Dulcamara* in "*L'Elisire d'Amore*." The *Adina* was Madame de La Grange; but the interest of all the more intelligent lovers of the lyric drama, was concentrated upon Ronconi. With them he at once took place as the greatest artist that had been seen on the operatic stage of New York, since a time whereof their memory ran not to the contrary. He appeared also in "*Il Barbiere*" and in "*Linda di Chamouni*." It might be said that he was equally great in all these dissimilar parts, if he had not been greatest in the last. *Dr. Dulcamara* is a part which pertains to broad farce; *Figaro* carries light comedy to the extreme possible on the lyric stage; *Antonio* is tragic, and in Ronconi's hands it became grandly tragic. He had performed *Dulcamara* with a rankness which would have passed the limits of the permissible but for the richness of his humor and his artistic tact; his *Figaro* was a ceaseless bubbling, sparkling flow of gaiety and fun; and with the memory of these performances in the minds of his audience, he came before them to simulate the woes of a bereaved and

shame-stricken father in humble life, and it proved that he came to achieve the success of a great tragedian. From no tragic actor that had been seen in New York for twenty years, or that has been seen since, saw and heard we such an overpowering expression of love, and grief, and woe, and manly dignity as from Ronconi in the second act of "Linda," in which he finds his way into his lost daughter's chamber. Here he burst into a passion that was heroic; here he rose into grandeur. His singing and his action were alike in the largest, noblest style; his every accent, his every gesture was simply and nobly pathetic. When throwing upon the ground his daughter's alms, he cried out:

"L'elemosina a suo padre  
La mia Linda non può far,"

the anguish in the tone of his voice, the horror in his countenance, and the wounded dignity of his bearing, surpassed in pathos and in noble passion anything that I ever heard and saw upon the stage;—I will not except the performances of Salvini, nor even those of Rachel. The only approach to it that I ever saw on the lyric stage was by that grand torso of a tenor Antognini. It must have been by an intuitive dramatic sense that Ronconi attained his great effects. His voice was not remarkable, even among voices of the second grade; his vocalization was good, but it would not have attracted attention in itself; he sometimes sang out of tune; in person he was not striking either as to face or figure; and yet he was—Ronconi, greatest among the lyric artists of his day.

In the autumn of 1858 the Academy reopened with a company which demands no special consideration; and at Burton's a rival company performed, among the members of which were Madame Gazzaniga, Madame Patti-Strakosch, and Signor Brignoli. The conductor was Maurice Strakosch, who had become a personage of importance among the musicians of New York, because of his musical and managerial ability no less than because of his connection with the musical Barili-Patti family which was to produce the most admired prima-donna of her time.

In the autumn of this year, 1858, there appeared at the Academy a young Italian lady who had risen within two years into what may be called a favorable musical notoriety, for it was not fame. Before the spring of 1856, no one beyond the circle of her own family and friends had heard of Maria Piccolomini; and yet in the winter of 1856, and in 1857, she was singing and making a sensation in London and Paris. She was of the well-

known noble Italian family, the Piccolomini, and was connected with others of the same quality. Nevertheless, she appeared on the stage when she was but sixteen years old, and made a great success—of a certain sort. After two seasons more of this success in Europe, she came to reap her share of the golden rewards which America bestows upon its favorites.

Signorina Piccolomini first sang before a New York audience on the 20th of October, 1858, in Verdi's "La Traviata." This opera had been much heard in New York just before that time; but it was well selected for Signorina Piccolomini's *début*; for the part of *Violetta* was one in which she had attained not only a great but a peculiar distinction. On this occasion there appeared upon the programmes the following "Particular Notice," the first of its kind that I remember having seen: "As Mlle. Piccolomini appears immediately on the rising of the curtain, visitors are particularly requested to be in their seats before eight. Those who should arrive later can be conducted to their seats only on the conclusion of the *Brindisi* by Mlle. Piccolomini." The lesson and the purpose of the latter sentence are better than its language, and after this good beginning a like restraint was frequently placed upon the disturbing powers of late comers both at operas and at concerts.

When the curtain did rise it showed a childish, over-dressed figure, almost like a great show-doll. When the little prima donna sang, it was, if not in a doll-like, almost in a childish way. Her voice was quickly recognized as a fresh, light soprano, of good compass, flexible, and quite pleasant in quality. As to her singing, it was well enough; but New York had amateurs who were her superiors both in vocalization and in dramatic power. Between her singing and that of Mrs. R —, or Miss G —, there could be no hesitation as to preference. Nor was she either beautiful or a good actress. And yet, when the curtain which had been lifted with such unusual precaution came down, she had again achieved her peculiar success. The truth about Mlle. Piccolomini was that she was the most perfectly lady-like coquette that had been seen on the lyric stage of her generation. She played the coquette on the stage; she played the coquette with her audience: her very grief was coquettish; she was tragic with an alluring glance; and she died in the most piquant manner. She sang always prettily, and sometimes brilliantly. But what was her singing to the way in which she tripped across the stage, and flirted her handkerchief so that every





CHRISTINE NILSSON.

man in the house thought that he had a personal interest in the maneuver? And yet she always impressed her audiences with the sense that she was a gentlewoman. Indeed, seeing Piccolomini was, to the public, like getting a glimpse of private theatricals of the very highest grade, socially and artistically. This was the secret of Piccolomini's brief success, and this was all. As a vocalist or as an actress she demands no particular consideration. She appeared in "La Figlia del

Reggimento," "La Zingara," "Don Pasquale," as *Susanna* in "Le Nozze di Figaro," and as *Zerlina* in "Don Giovanni." Had she been a true artist, the last-named part would have been a triumph for her. But it was not so. She was very charming to the superficial eye; she flirted about in the prettiest manner possible, and played the coquette with a relish that communicated itself to her audience; nor was her singing without grace. But both in conception and in execution her *Zerlina* was poor, thin, very second-rate, and intellectually vulgar. She produced no serious impression in New York, and she soon returned to Europe, where, after a brief struggle, she sank into obscurity.

The season of 1859 was remarkable for two musical events—one the first complete performance in America of Mozart's "Zauberflöte," the other the first appearance of a new and very young prima donna. On one of my visits some years before to Madame Barilli-Patti, before mentioned, whom I found to be a very motherly looking, if not matronly seeming, woman, who showed all of her forty-five or fifty years, I observed a slender, swarthy, bright-eyed little girl, in short skirts, who ran into the room and chirped at her mother, and ran out of it, caroling as she went through the passage-way, and then ran in and out again in the same fashion, until the middle-aged prima donna with whom I was talking called out, rather sharply :



PAULINE LUCCA.



ANNIE LOUISE CARY.

"*Adelina, tacete! e venite a me, o andate via.*"

The child chose to come, but soon she left her mother's side for mine, and then, with the freedom of Italian childhood, she who was to be the "*diva Patti*" of the present day half sat upon my knee, swinging one little red-stockinged leg as she glanced from her mother's face to mine. I asked Madame Barili-Patti if her little daughter promised to be a singer like her sisters and her mother, to which she replied: "*Lo spero; lo credo.*" And then, "*Canta uno poco, Adelina, per il signore*"; and she suggested something, whereupon the girl, without leaving her perch, sang, like a bird, a little Italian air that I did not know, and soon ran away on some childish errand. I did not see her again before she made her appearance, on the 24th of November, 1858, as *Lucia*—of course, Donizetti's *Lucia*.

Meantime she had been taught by Maurice Strakosch, who had married her eldest sister, and I suppose by her half-brother, too, Antonio Barili, an excellent master, who "formed" many of the best amateurs in New York. But to be with her mother must have been "a liberal education" in music; and the examples before her night and day, the very atmosphere she breathed, tended to

foster her musical talents. All that she had to furnish was voice, intelligence, and practice. Her *début*, it need hardly be recorded, was a very remarkable performance considering her age;—she was then but sixteen years old. Her voice was a flute-like, flexible soprano, which she delivered with purity and managed with great skill and taste. Still, she was not even in vocalization a prima donna; moreover, her voice lacked amplitude, richness, power, and her manner, although not awkward or constrained, was that of a very young girl. But her capabilities were at once recognized by her audiences, and her future was foretold by her critics, although, at that time, musical criticism in New York was fallen very much below the point at which it stood five years before, and that to which it has risen since. The attention of American newspaper-readers was concentrated upon other topics. John Brown had just been hanged. The mutterings of the great civil war in the not remote distance were of more interest than the chanting of heavenly cherubs would have been. Of *Adelina* it was remarked, however, that she was "one of those rare singers who appear at long intervals on the musical horizon, to revive not only the hopes of managers but the enthusiasm of the public." This was im-



MINNIE HAUK.

mediately upon her singing *Lucia* and *Amina* for the first time, after which she went on from triumph to triumph.

Nevertheless, I do not hesitate to express my doubts of her claims to the position of a great prima donna. She is the best of her time; but her time is barren of great singers. There is, for example, not one great contralto, or one great tenor, or one great baritone now before the world—not one whom even managers, with all their pretensions and all their needs, will venture to call great. What is it to be the greatest in a day of such dearth? The boy was next to head in his class; but, as it proved, the class consisted of him and a little girl. That Adelina Patti sings with perfect method, the highest finish, and in unexceptionable taste, is not to be disputed. What, then, does she lack to be a great prima donna? Two things of the very first importance—a great voice and a rich, impassioned nature. Adelina Patti, like her sisters, is the daughter, musically, of her father, not of her mother. Signor Patti was a respectable tenor singer, with a smooth, soft, piping voice, a correct style of singing,

and very good stage manner. He was so plump, so like a middle-aged belle advanced into *embonpoint*, and in voice and person so generally suggestive of pinguidity, that when I laughingly called him *Patti de foie gras*, the name stuck to him for a long time. Now, this man was not only Adelina Patti's father, but her musical begetter. Neither she nor either of her sisters has a first-rate voice. Hers is much the best, but it lacks largeness, power, nobility, sympathy. Nor is her style the grand style. Her method is perfect, almost beyond criticism; she is brilliant, she is exquisitely delicate in finish; but she is little. It may be said of her, as Pasta said of Sontag: She is the best of her school, but her school is not the best. As I write now, I have not heard Adelina Patti since she made her great European success; and I therefore may have to modify my opinion hereafter.\* But of this I have not a very troubling apprehension. Her qualities are too essential, too inherent, to be changed by time and culture. The Adelina Patti who sang

\* These articles were written in the summer of 1881.

in New York in 1859 and 1860 was not to be made into a great prima donna by being raised to the hundredth power. For that she needed a new voice and a new nature, physical and mental.

The year 1860 was distinguished by the operatic *début* of the most distinguished artist that any one of the United States has yet given to the lyric stage. In the autumn of that year Miss Clara Louise Kellogg, a New York girl, whose vocal gifts and musical intelligence had been discovered and cultivated through the encouragement of New York friends, appeared at the Academy of Music as *Gilda* in Verdi's "Rigoletto." I was present on the occasion, and I confess that the impression that I received was not one that led me to look forward to the success that, in the course of a few years, the fair young *débutante* achieved. Her chief deficiency seemed to be in strength—strength of voice, strength of body, strength of emotional expression. And on all these points she not only was, but still remains, somewhat lacking. Nor was her vocalization better than tolerable. But on two other points she was amply furnished: she had strength of character and strength of will. She persevered. Her voice grew stronger by exercise, as also did her body; she improved herself very much in her singing, and although she never became an effective dramatic vocalist, she had the power of revealing dramatic conceptions of great delicacy, purity, and sweetness. This she showed first in the *Margherita* of Gounod's "Faust," which still remains her finest impersonation. It was in 1864, and as she was soon succeeded in this opera by two distinguished European prima donnas Nilsson and Lucca, it may be well to remark here upon all the three comparatively.

Miss Kellogg's voice is a high soprano, very clear, very pure, very fine, close and firm in quality, and capable of the most exquisitely delicate and tender inflections. Her intonation is remarkably correct. Her dramatic power is suited to her voice; and all that she does is marked by a fine and pure intelligence which has a certain sweet homeliness in its mode of manifestation. Hence her performance of *Margherita*—toward her conception of which she had no help nor even any model—was ideal, and purely poetical in its character. It had no marked individuality, and very little local color; but it was feminine, lovely, tender, and above all, pure. There was a simplicity about it, too, that gave it character—such character as the tint and the perfume of the lilac shows among roses and lilies. I remember one striking exhibition of the delicacy and discipline

of Miss Kellogg's vocal powers, my telling of which I hope that she will pardon. I was sitting by her side at a private theatrical performance at Mr. Jerome's private theater, and between the acts I spoke to her of the "Faust," and of the beautiful music of the garden scene. "What, this?" she said, smiling. And, as I bent my head toward her, she, smiling still, sang into my ear, in a voice which, amid the buzzing of tongues around us, was unheard except by me, the greater part of that enchanting passage, and sang it with what seemed to me all the expression which she gave to it in full voice upon the stage. I was delighted, of course, and much flattered by her frank kindness; but I was also astonished, for it was a remarkable feat of vocalization. She has probably forgotten this; but I shall never forget it; nor how I then felt a sort of conviction of sin in that I had greeted her so coldly when she made her *début* four years before. But what may not four years of hard work do for a vocalist who has the capacity of improvement?

Mlle. Nilsson was a prima donna of richer vocal endowment and higher academic training. She came here puffed as a second Jenny Lind; but she was nothing of the sort. She was, however, a very gifted and highly finished vocalist of the second rank, standing in its fore front. She, too, had a high soprano voice, but it had a very considerable breadth, and a strength of vibration which was almost like that of a clarinet. The tone of it was singularly firm. Her singing was never either very astonishing or very touching, but it was always correct in expression, always in good taste. So with her performances dramatically: they always pleased, if they did not satisfy, the most exacting taste, and never offended the most fastidious. Her *Margherita* had more character than Miss Kellogg's. She was more a creature of flesh and blood, but not so tender, not so ideal, not so expressive of that moral *aura* of the character which Goethe himself suggests but fails to express. Mlle. Nilsson's finest performance—that which showed her powers at their highest and her finish at its greatest—was that of *Elsa* in "Lohengrin," which was produced at the Academy of Music on her second visit to New York. Her conception of this character was notable for its elevation, and her performance of it, both vocal and dramatic, for sustained power. Mlle. Nilsson had a fine, intelligent Norse face, well suited to such parts as *Margherita* and *Elsa*, but not so to the strongly emotioned heroines of most of the modern operas. In "Lohengrin" she was ably seconded by Signor Campanini, a tenor who was the best of his time, and who,



ETELKA GERSTER.

for several seasons, was a great favorite in New York, notwithstanding a voice which seemed, with all its strength, to be very much worn, and never to have been rich or sympathetic in quality. He was, however,—I should rather say he is,—a fine dramatic singer, and deserves the favor in which he is held; for he is now the great tenor of the present generation of opera-goers.

Pauline Lucca was as unlike Miss Kellogg as one singing woman can be unlike another—unlike in person, unlike in voice, unlike in manner, unlike in character; or, rather, as unlikeness may exist among those of the same sort, I should say opposed—totally and absolutely opposed—to Miss Kellogg on all these points. She was a strong, not to say a coarse, peasant woman, whose inherent rudeness of fiber was softened and enriched by a warmly emotional nature, and by something that Miss Kellogg and Mlle. Nilsson both

lacked entirely—humor. Her voice was large and luscious, and full of warmth; but it was altogether lacking in the capability of expressing elevation of feeling or serenity. Her performance of the saucy *Cherubino* was charming, although even here we might have welcomed a little more refinement. Her *Margherita* was as real as Miss Kellogg's was ideal. She was merely a strong-bodied, simple-minded, warm-hearted peasant girl, who had fallen desperately in love with a handsome fellow who captivated her eye, stirred her emotional nature, and flattered her vanity by sending her fine presents. It would have been impossible to have more local color and less of poetic feeling and of sentiment in Lucca's presentation of Goethe's heroine. Her singing was of a piece with her acting. It was of the flesh, fleshly.

In the autumn of 1865—perhaps earlier, but I find no other record—Mlle. Parepa

came before the New York public in the concert-room, and was received with joyous acclamation; for she was a joyous woman. An ample dame, copious of voice and of person; standing truly somewhat tun-wise upon the stage, yet brightly handsome withal, and tightly girt with elegantest hooping of silk and satin. She soon sang in opera, in which her conductor was always a young violinist named Carl Rosa, much to her pleasing, as the end showed, as well as to the public's. She had voice and vocal skill to delight her audiences, although she offered them nothing new or great, nor taught them anything. Singing and smiling with a certain sumptuousness, she was always received as if she brought more than she really had to give. After a year or two, she kindly took Carl Rosa to husband; and after three or four years more she went with him to Europe, where she lived not long. She left such a feeling behind her, that her admirers would have mourned less a greater artist.

Miss Kellogg is the only prima donna of celebrity that may be properly called "American"; and if to her we add those excellent and popular contraltos Miss Phillips and Miss Cary, we have fairly summed up the contribution of the United States to the higher department of vocal art. But Canada has given the world one prima donna who, making her operatic *début* in New York, rose rapidly afterward in Europe to a position second only to that of Adelina Patti. She made her first appearance at the Academy of Music, in December, 1874, quite unknown and unheard of; and here follows a critical sketch of her written at the time:

"She stands behind the foot-lights, smiling and courtesying, so living an embodiment of her real name, *La Jeunesse*, that it seems a pity that she should have changed it for the Italianized form of the name of the place, Albany, where she happened to be born. Under any name, however, this last-born daughter of song is welcome. Not a great prima donna, she is a very charming singer; not an actress of remarkable powers, she is yet a very pleasing one; not a beauty, she has yet an exceedingly attractive and captivating person—one that brings up an old word that our grandfathers used when they spoke of our grandmothers before they married them—engaging. She glides across the stage, her dark blue eyes swimming in liquid light, and her full, alluring lips and white, shapely throat promise just the delicious tones that issue from them. Her voice is clear, sound, and pure, and is delivered with a freedom that is rare in a singer born on this side of the Atlantic, or, it may be said, on this side of the British Channel. Inferior singers, badly taught or unteachable, have almost always some awkwardness in the action of the throat or the lips that half chokes or distorts the sound—gives an impression of conscious effort in its utterance and mars pure musical vibration. Nilsson, with all her finish of vocalization, was not wholly without this; Albani has none of it, but is in this respect as unimpeachable as Jenny Lind or even

Albani. In quality, her voice is like a sweet A clarinet above the *chalumeau*—clear, vibrating, smooth, and of an evenness rare and admirable. So fitted by nature were its registers to blend, and so well has she been trained, that it seems as if they were but one. From the lowest note to the top of her compass there is but one quality, one even, unbroken gradation of delicious sound. She is in the first bloom of her youth, and consequently in the fullness of her inexperience. Should she continue to study as she has begun, and keep her health, she will be a better singer five years hence than she has yet become. Even now, the delicacy of her musical articulation is admirable; and her style, that is her musical elocution, is both graceful and impressive. More elegant phrasing, or so good, we have not had here for a long time. This charming, but not very moving, style suits perfectly well with her voice, which flows as clear, as equal, as fresh and bright as a running spring, and almost as cold—no, not cold, but cool, and without a tear-drop in it. Yet she is not impassive on the stage, but seems to express the feelings of a very sensitive nature; and she makes love divinely.

"If I were to assign Albani a place among singers, I should rate her, as a mere vocalist, in the middle of the second rank, with the capability of taking a foremost place in that rank. First-rate, of course, she can never become, for she has not a first-rate voice."

This was the opinion passed upon Mlle. Albani on her first appearance in New York. She has since then reached the high position which was expected for her, and, although not a great artist, is one of the few who are recognized as the notable singers of the world.

In the autumn of 1878, the Academy season was opened with much flourish of trumpets by Mr. Mapleson, who announced a double company from "Her Majesty's Theater." And, although the performance did not come quite up to promise, the stage and the orchestra were well filled by artists of ability. Signor Arditì, most skillful and painstaking of conductors, wielded the baton, and there was a rich variety in the programmes. The season was chiefly remarkable for the production of Bizet's opera, "*Carmen*," for the return of Miss Minnie Hauk to New York, and for the first appearance here of Madame Gerster. Miss Hauk, a young German girl, born in New York, had, after receiving much encouragement in her native place, gone to Europe to study. She studied to advantage, appeared there in opera with very considerable applause, and returned to the public which she had left merely a gifted but imperfectly taught girl, in the fullness of her powers, to achieve her first great success. She opened the season as *Violetta* in "*La Traviata*," but the delicacy of the character was not suited to her strong and highly characteristic style. Her performance of *Carmen*, however, soon displayed her peculiar qualities to the great delight of her audiences. The music of this opera is not of a high order, but it has a character of its own—a rhythm and a swing

which, although undeniably vulgar, are captivating, for a time at least, to the general ear. *Carmen* herself is an insufferable creature; and yet as she is represented by Minnie Hauk we follow her actions with interest, and even mourn the death that she deserves. Miss Hauk took this character to herself; she seemed to have been born to play it. In America and in Europe there was but one *Carmen*. Miss Hauk's success was rather that of an actress than that even of a dramatic vocalist.

Madame Gerster made her first appearance at the Academy on the 11th of November, 1878, as *Amina*. She had been much "puffed" in Europe, and, on the other hand, her eminence as a vocalist had been stoutly disputed by critics of acknowledged good judgment. Much interest and unusual curiosity was manifested in her New York *début*. She had not sung many bars of "*Come per me sereno*" before she showed that she was a vocalist of no mean powers. Her voice was—we may rather say is—a true soprano, which, if not remarkably brilliant, sympathetic, or powerful, has a bewildering flexibility well suited to arouse popular musical enthusiasm; and her vocalization is of a corresponding character. She triumphs over difficulties with great ease.

In the midst of a passage of no remarkable interest, she will suddenly dazzle the musical perceptions of her audience by some dextrous feat of vocalization, which astonishes and pleases quite as much by the perfect ease and careless certainty with which it is accomplished as by its intrinsic beauty, or even its difficulty. Her special excellence is an exquisitely delicate and sharply brilliant *staccato* in the upper register of her voice. She will suddenly rise an octave, and almost an octave above the staff, and touch a note with exquisite lightness and certainty; or she will dot the air with brilliant points of sound, flinging them out like stars from a bursting rocket. It is rather in such bewildering feats of vocalization than in a pure and sustained cantabile that she shines. She had a very great popular success as *Amina*, as *Lucia*, as *Elvira* ("I Puritani"), and also as the *Queen of Night* in "*Die Zauberflöte*." She was not an actress; she had not an impressive manner; she was as awkward as a clothes-horse: she was simply a vocalist of wonderful capacity and skill. She is the last prima donna and the last artist of distinction that has appeared on the New York operatic boards; and upon her success we drop our curtain.

Richard Grant White.

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## IN THE HAUNTS OF BREAM AND BASS.

### I.

DREAMS come true and everything  
Is fresh and lusty in the spring.  
In groves, that smell like ambergris,  
Wind-songs, bird-songs never cease.  
Go with me down by the stream,  
Haunt of bass and purple bream;  
Feel the pleasure, keen and sweet,  
When the cool waves lap your feet;  
Catch the breath of moss and mold,  
Hear the grosbeak's whistle bold;  
See the heron all alone  
Mid-stream on a slippery stone,  
Or, on some decaying log,  
Spearing snail or water-frog,  
Whilst the sprawling turtles swim  
In the eddies cool and dim!

### II.

The busy nuthatch climbs his tree,  
Around the great bole spirally,

Peeping into wrinkles gray,  
Under ruffled lichens gay,  
Lazily piping one sharp note  
From his silver-mailed throat,  
And down the wind the catbird's song  
A slender medley trails along.  
Here a grackle chirping low,  
There a crested vireo;  
Every tongue of Nature sings,  
The air is palpitant with wings!  
Halcyon prophesies come to pass  
In the haunts of bream and bass.

### III.

Bubble, bubble flows the stream,  
Like an old tune through a dream.  
Now I cast my silken line;  
See the gay lure spin and shine—  
While, with delicate touch, I feel  
The gentle pulses of the reel.