

**EDWARDS
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HISTORY OF THE OPERA
FROM ITS ORIGIN IN ITALY
TO THE PRESENT TIME

Henry Edwards

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H. Sutherland Edwards

History of the Opera from its Origin in Italy to the present Time With Anecdotes of the Most Celebrated Composers and Vocalists of Europe

HISTORY OF THE OPERA

CHAPTER I.

PREFACE, PRELUDE, PROLOGUE, INTRODUCTION, OVERTURE, ETC. – THE ORIGIN OF THE OPERA IN ITALY, AND ITS INTRODUCTION INTO GERMANY. – ITS HISTORY IN EUROPE; DIVISION OF THE SUBJECT

IT has often been said, and notably, by J. J. Rousseau, and after him, with characteristic exaggeration, by R. Wagner, that "Opera" does not mean so much a musical work, as a musical, poetical, and spectacular work all at once; that "Opera" in fact, is "the work," *par excellence*, to the production of which all the arts are necessary.¹ The very titles of the earliest operas prove this notion to be incorrect. The earliest Italian plays of a mixed character, not being constructed according to the ancient rules of tragedy and comedy, were called by the general name of "Opera," the nature of the "work" being more particularly indicated by some such epithet or epithets as *regia, comica, tragica, scenica, sacra, esemplare, regia ed esemplare, &c.*; and in the case of a lyrical drama, the words *per musica, scenica per musica, regia ed esemplare per musica*, were added, or the production was styled *opera musicale* alone. In time the mixed plays (which were imitated from the Spanish) fell into disrepute in Italy, while the title of "Opera" was still applied to lyrical dramas, but not without "musicale," or "in musica" after it. This was sufficiently vague, but people soon found it troublesome, or thought it useless, to say *opera musicale*, when opera by itself conveyed, if it did not express, their meaning, and thus dramatic works in music came to be called "Operas." Algarotte's work on the Opera (translated into French, and entitled *Essai sur l'Opéra*) is called in the original *Saggio sopra l'Opera in musica*. "Opera in music" would in the present day sound like a pleonasm, but it is as well to consider the true meaning of words, when we find them not merely perverted, but in their perverted sense made the foundation of ridiculous theories.

¹ Wagner calls the composer of an opera "the sculptor or upholsterer," (which is complimentary to sculptors,) and the writer of the words "the architect." I would rather say that the writer of the words produces a sketch, on which the composer paints a picture. Since writing the above I find that the greatest of French poets describes an admirable *libretto* of his own as "*un canevas d'opéra plus ou moins bien disposé pour que l'œuvre musicale s'y superpose heureusement;*" and again, "*une trame qui ne demande pas mieux que de se dérober sous cette riche et éblouissante broderie qui s'appelle la musique.*" (Preface to Victor Hugo's *Esméralda*.) I may add, that, in comparing Rossini with Beaumarchais, it must always be remembered that the former possesses the highest dramatic talent of a serious, passionate kind – witness *Otello* and *William Tell*; whereas Beaumarchais's serious dramatic works, such as *La Mère Coupable*, *Les Deux Amis*, and *Eugénie* (the best of the three), are very inferior productions.

THE FIRST OPERA

The Opera proceeds from the sacred musical plays of the 15th century as the modern drama proceeds from the mediæval mysteries. Méneſtrier, however, the Jesuit father, assigns to it a far greater antiquity, and considers the Song of Solomon to be the earliest Opera on record, founding his opinion on these words of St. Jérôme, translated from Origen: —*Epithalamium, libellus, id est nuptiale carmen, in modum mihi videtur dramatis a Solomone conscriptus quem cecinit instar nubentis sponsæ.*²

Others see the first specimens of opera in the Greek plays; but the earliest musical dramas of modern Italy, from which the Opera of the present day is descended directly, and in an unbroken line, are "mysteries" differing only from the dramatic mysteries in so far that the dialogue in them was sung instead of being spoken. "The Conversion of St. Paul" was played in music, at Rome, in 1440. The first profane subject treated operatically, was the descent of Orpheus into hell; the music of this *Orfeo*, which was produced also at Rome, in 1480, was by Angelo Poliziano, the libretto by Cardinal Riario, nephew of Sixtus IV. The popes kept up an excellent theatre, and Clement IX. was himself the author of seven *libretti*.

At this time the great attraction in operatic representations was the scenery – a sign of infancy then, as it is a sign of decadence now. At the very beginning of the sixteenth century, Balthazar Peruzzi, the decorator of the papal theatre, had carried his art to such perfection, that the greatest painters of the day were astonished at his performances. His representations of architecture and the illusions of height and distance which his knowledge of perspective enabled him to produce, were especially admired. Vasari has told us how Titian, at the Palace of la Farnesina, was so struck by the appearance of solidity given by Peruzzi to his designs in profile, that he was not satisfied, until he had ascended a ladder and touched them, that they were not actually in relief. "One can scarcely conceive," says the historian of the painters, in speaking of Peruzzi's scenic decorations, "with what ability, in so limited a space, he represented such a number of houses, palaces, porticoes, entablatures, profiles, and all with such an aspect of reality that the spectator fancied himself transported into the middle of a public square, to such a point was the illusion carried. Moreover, Balthazar, the better to produce these results, understood, in an admirable manner the disposition of light as well as all the machinery connected with theatrical changes and effects."

DAFNE

In 1574, Claudio Merulo, organist at St. Mark's, of Venice, composed the music of a drama by Cornelio Frangipani, which was performed in the Venetian Council Chamber in presence of Henry III. of France. The music of the operatic works of this period appears to have possessed but little if any dramatic character, and to have consisted almost exclusively of choruses in the madrigal style, which was so successfully cultivated about the same time in England. Emilio del Cavaliere, a celebrated musician of Rome, made an attempt to introduce appropriateness of expression into these choruses, and his reform, however incomplete, attracted the attention of Giovanni Bardi, Count of Vernio. This nobleman used to assemble in his palace all the most distinguished musicians of Florence, among whom were Mei, Caccini, and Vincent Galileo, the father of the astronomer. Vincent Galileo was himself a discoverer, and helped, at the Count of Vernio's musical meetings, to invent recitative – an invention of comparative insignificance, but which in the system of modern opera plays as important a part, perhaps, as the rotation of the earth does in that of the celestial spheres.

² Méneſtrier, des représentations en musique, anciennes et modernes, page 23.

Two other Florentine noblemen, Pietro Strozzi and Giacomo Corsi, encouraged by the example of Bardi, and determined to give the musical drama its fullest development in the new form that it had assumed, engaged Ottavio Rinuccini, one of the first poets of the period, with Peri and Caccini, two of the best musicians, to compose an opera which was entitled *Dafne*, and was performed for the first time in the Corsi Palace, at Florence, in 1597.

Dafne appears to have been the first complete opera. It was considered a masterpiece both from the beauty of the music and from the interest of the drama; and on its model the same authors composed their opera of *Euridice*, which was represented publicly at Florence on the occasion of the marriage of Henry IV. of France, with Marie de Medicis, in 1600. Each of the five acts of *Euridice* concludes with a chorus, the dialogue is in recitative, and one of the characters, "Tircis," sings an air which is introduced by an instrumental prelude.

New music was composed to the libretto of *Dafne* by Gagliano in 1608, when the opera thus rearranged was performed at Mantua; and in 1627 the same piece was translated by Opitz, "the father of the lyric stage in Germany," as he is called, set to music by Schutz, and represented at Dresden on the occasion of the marriage of the Landgrave of Hesse with the sister of John-George I., Elector of Saxony. It was not, however, until 1692 that Keiser appeared and perfected the forms of the German Opera. Keiser was scarcely nineteen years of age when he produced at the Court of Wolfenbüttel, *Ismene* and *Basilius*, the former styled a Pastoral, the latter an opera. It is said reproachfully, and as if facetiously, of a common-place German musician in the present day, that he is "of the Wolfenbüttel school," just as it is considered comic in France to taunt a singer or player with having come from Carpentras. It is curious that Wolfenbüttel in Germany, and Carpentras in France (as I shall show in the next chapter), were the cradles of Opera in their respective countries.

MONTEVERDE, AND HIS ORCHESTRA

To return to the Opera in Italy. The earliest musical drama, then, with choruses, recitatives, airs, and instrumental preludes was *Dafne*, by Rinuccini as librettist, and Caccini and Peri as composers; but the orchestra which accompanied this work consisted only of a harpsichord, a species of guitar called a chitarone, a lyre, and a lute. When Monteverde appeared, he introduced the modern scale, and changed the whole harmonic system of his predecessors. He at the same time gave far greater importance in his operas to the accompaniments, and increased to a remarkable extent the number of musicians in the orchestra, which under his arrangement included every kind of instrument known at the time. Many of Monteverde's instruments are now obsolete. This composer, the unacknowledged prototype of our modern cultivators of orchestral effects, made use of a separate combination of instruments to announce the entry and return of each personage in his operas; a dramatic means employed afterwards by Hoffmann in his *Undine*,³ and in the present day with pretended novelty by Richard Wagner. This newest orchestral device is also the oldest. The score of Monteverde's *Orfeo*, produced in 1608, contains parts for two harpsichords, two lyres or violas with thirteen strings, ten violas, three bass violas, two double basses, a double harp (with two rows of strings), two French violins, besides guitars, organs, a flute, clarions, and even trombones. The bass violas accompanied Orpheus, the violas Euridice, the trombones Pluto, the small organ Apollo; Charon, strangely enough, sang to the music of the guitar.

Monteverde, having become chapel master at the church of St. Mark, produced at Venice *Arianna*, of which *Rinuccini* had written the libretto. This was followed by other works of the same kind, which were produced with great magnificence, until the fame of the Venetian operas spread throughout Italy, and by the middle of the seventeenth century the new entertainment was established at Venice, Bologna, Rome, Turin, Naples, and Messina. Popes, cardinals and the most illustrious

³ See Vol. II.

nobles took the Opera under their protection, and the dukes of Mantua and Modena distinguished themselves by the munificence of their patronage.

Among the most celebrated of the female singers of this period were Catarina Martinella of Rome, Archilei, Francesca Caccini (daughter of the composer of that name and herself the author of an operatic score), Adriana Baroni, of Mantua, and her daughter Leonora Baroni, whose praises have been sung by Milton in his three Latin poems "Ad Leonoram Romæ canentem."

THE ITALIAN OPERA ABROAD

The Italian opera, as we shall afterwards see, was introduced into France under the auspices of Cardinal Mazarin, who as the Abbé Mazarini, had visited all the principal theatres of Italy by the express command of Richelieu, and had studied their system with a view to the more perfect representation of the cardinal-minister's tragedies. The Italian Opera he introduced on his own account, and it was, on the whole, very inhospitably received. Indeed, from the establishment of the French Opera under Cambert and his successor Lulli, in the latter half of the seventeenth century, until the end of the eighteenth, the French were unable to understand or unwilling to acknowledge the immense superiority of the Italians in everything pertaining to music. In 1752 Pergolese's *Serva Padrona* was the cause of the celebrated dispute between the partisans of French and Italian Opera, and the end of it was that *La Serva Padrona* was hissed, and the two singers who appeared in it driven from Paris.

In England the Italian Opera was introduced in the first years of the eighteenth century, and under Handel, who arrived in London in 1710, attained the greatest perfection. Since the production of Handel's last dramatic work, in 1740, the Italian Opera has continued to be represented in London with scarcely noticeable intervals until the present day, and, on the whole, with remarkable excellence.

Of English Opera a far less satisfactory account can be given. Its traditions exist by no means in an unbroken line. Purcell wrote English operas, and was far in advance of all the composers of his time, except, no doubt, those of Italy, who, we must remember were his masters, though he did not slavishly copy them. Since then, we have had composers (for the stage, I mean) who have utterly failed; composers, like Dr. Arne, who have written Anglo-Italian operas; composers of "ballad operas," which are not operas at all; composers of imitation-operas of all kinds; and lastly, the composers of the present day, by whom the long wished-for English Opera will perhaps at last be established.

In Germany, which, since the time of Handel and Hasse, has produced an abundance of great composers for the stage, the national opera until Gluck (including Gluck's earlier works), was imitated almost entirely from that of Italy; and the Italian method of singing being the true and only method has always prevailed.

Throughout the eighteenth century, we find the great Italian singers travelling to all parts of Europe and carrying with them the operas of the best Italian masters. In each of the countries where the opera has been cultivated, it has had a different history, but from the beginning until the end of the eighteenth century, the Italian Opera flourished in Italy, and also in Germany and in England; whereas France persisted in rejecting the musical teaching of a foreign land until the utter insufficiency of her own operatic system became too evident to be any longer denied. She remained separated from the rest of Europe in a musical sense until the time of the Revolution, as she has since and from very different reasons been separated from it politically.

OPERA IN FRANCE

Nevertheless, the history of the Opera in France is of great interest, like the history of every other art in that country which has engaged the attention of its ingenious amateurs and critics. Only, for a considerable period it must be treated apart.

In the course of this narrative sketch, which does not claim to be a scientific history, I shall pursue, as far as possible, the chronological method; but it is one which the necessities of the subject will often cause me to depart from.

CHAPTER II. INTRODUCTION OF THE OPERA INTO FRANCE AND ENGLAND

French Opera not founded by Lulli. – Lulli's elevation from the kitchen to the orchestra. – Lulli, M. de Pourceaugnac, and Louis XIV. – Buffoonery rewarded. – A disreputable tenor. – Virtuous precaution of a *prima donna*. – Orthography of a stage Queen. – A cure for love. – Mademoiselle de Maupin. – A composer of sacred music. – Food for cattle. – Cambert in England. – The first English Opera. – Music under Cromwell. – Music under Charles II. – Grabut and Dryden. – Purcell.

ORFEO AND DON GIOVANNI

IN a general view of the history of the Opera, the central figures would be Gluck and Mozart. Before Gluck's time the operatic art was in its infancy, and since the death of Mozart, no operas have been produced equal to that composer's masterpieces. Mozart must have commenced his *Idomeneo*, the first of his celebrated works, the very year that Gluck retired to Vienna, after giving to the Parisians his *Iphigénie en Tauride*; but, though contemporaries in the strict sense of the word, Gluck and Mozart can scarcely be looked upon as belonging to the same musical epoch. The compositions of the former, however immortal, have at least an antique cast. Those of the latter have quite a modern air; and it must appear to the audiences of the present day that far more than twenty-three years separate *Orfeo* from *Don Giovanni*, though that is the precise interval which elapsed between the production of the opera by which Gluck, and of the one by which Mozart, is best known in this country. Gluck, after a century and a half of opera, so far surpassed all his predecessors that no work by a composer anterior to him is ever performed. Lulli wrote an *Armide*, which was followed by Rameau's *Armide*, which was followed by Gluck's *Armide*; and Monteverde wrote an *Orfeo* a hundred and fifty years before Gluck produced the *Orfeo* which was played only the other night at the Royal Italian Opera. The *Orfeo*, then, of our existing operatic repertory takes us back through its subject to the earliest of regular Italian operas, and similarly Gluck, through his *Armide* appears as the successor of Rameau, who was the successor of Lulli, who usually passes for the founder of the Opera in France, a country where it is particularly interesting to trace the progress of that entertainment, inasmuch as it can be observed at one establishment, which has existed continuously for two hundred years, and which, under the title of Académie Royale, Académie Nationale, and Académie Impériale (it has now gone by each of those names twice), has witnessed the production of more operatic masterpieces than any other theatre in any city in the world. To convince the reader of the truth of this latter assertion I need only remind him of the works produced at the Académie Royale by Gluck and Piccinni immediately before the Revolution; and of the *Masaniello* of Auber, the *William Tell* of Rossini, and the *Robert the Devil* of Meyerbeer, – all written for the said Académie within sixteen years of the termination of the Napoleonic wars. Neither Naples, nor Milan, nor Prague, nor Vienna, nor Munich, nor Dresden, nor Berlin, has individually seen the birth of so many great operatic works by different masters, though, of course, if judged by the number of great composers to whom they have given birth, both Germany and Italy must be ranked infinitely higher than France. Indeed, if we compare France with our own country, we find, it is true, that an opera in the national language was established there earlier than here, though in the first instance only as a private entertainment; but, on the other hand, the French, until Gluck's time, had never any composers, native or adopted, at all comparable to our Purcell, who produced his *King Arthur* as far back as 1691.

Lulli is generally said to have introduced Opera into France, and, indeed, is represented in a picture, well known to Parisian opera-goers, receiving a privilege from the hands of Louis XIV. as

a reward and encouragement for his services in that respect. This privilege, however, was neither deserved nor obtained in the manner supposed. Cardinal Mazarin introduced Italian Opera into Paris in 1645, when Lulli was only twelve years of age; and the first French Opera, entitled *Akébar, Roi de Mogol*, words and music by the Abbé Mailly, was brought out the year following in the Episcopal Palace of Carpentras, under the direction of Cardinal Bichi, Urban the Eighth's legate. Clement VII. had already appeared as a librettist, and it has been said that Urban VIII. himself recommended the importation of the Opera into France; so that the real father of the lyric stage in that country was certainly not a scullion, and may have been a Pope.

THE ACADEMY OF MUSIC

The second French Opera was *La Pastorale en musique*, words by Perrin, music by Cambert, which was privately represented at Issy; and the third *Pomone*, also by Perrin and Cambert, which was publicly performed in Paris in 1671 – the year in which was produced, at the same theatre, *Psyché*, a *tragédie-ballet*, by the two greatest dramatic poets France has ever produced, Molière and Corneille. *Pomone* was the first French Opera heard by the Parisian public, and it was to the Abbé Perrin, its author, and not to Lulli, that the patent of the Royal Academy of Music was granted. A privilege for establishing an Academy of Music had been conceded a hundred years before by Charles IX. to Antoine de Baif, – the word "*Académie*" being used as an equivalent for "*Accademia*," the Italian for concert. Perrin's license appears to have been a renewal, as to form, of de Baif's, and thus originated the eminently absurd title which the chief operatic theatre of Paris has retained ever since. The Academy of Music is of course an academy in the sense in which the Théâtre Français is a college of declamation, and the Palais Royal Theatre a school of morality; but no one need seek to justify its title because it is known to owe its existence to a confusion of terms.

Six French operas had been performed before Lulli, supported by Madame de Montespan, succeeded in depriving Perrin of his "privilege," and securing it for himself – at the very moment when Perrin and Cambert were about to bring out their *Ariane*, of which the representation was stopped. The success of Lulli's intrigue drove Cambert to London, where he was received with much favour by Charles II., and appointed director of the Court music, an office which he retained until his death. Lulli's first opera, written in conjunction with Quinault, being the seventh produced on the French stage, was *Cadmus and Hermione* (1673).

LULLI'S DISGRACE

The life of the fortunate, unscrupulous, but really talented scullion, to whom is falsely attributed the honour of having founded the Opera in France, has often been narrated, and for the most part very inaccurately. Every one knows that he arrived from Italy to enter the service of Mademoiselle de Montpensier as page, and that he was degraded by that lady to the back kitchen: but it is not so generally known that he was only saved through the influence of Madame de Montespan from a shameful and horrible death on the Place de Grève, where his accomplice was actually burned and his ashes thrown to the winds. Mademoiselle de Montpensier, in one of her letters, speaks of Lulli asking for his congé; but it is quite certain that he was dismissed, though it would be as impossible to give a complete account of the causes of his dismissal as to publish the original of the needlessly elaborate reply attributed to a certain French general at Waterloo.⁴ We may mention, however, that Lulli had composed a song which was a good deal sung at the court, and at which the Princess had every right to be offended. A French dramatist has made this affair of the song the subject of a very

⁴ Cambronne, by the way is said to have been very much annoyed at the invention of "*La garde meurt et ne se rend pas*;" and with reason, for he didn't die and he *did* surrender.

ingenious little piece, which was represented in English some years since at the Adelphi Theatre, but in which the exact nature of the objectionable composition is of course not indicated. Suffice it to say, that Lulli was discharged, and that Louis XIV., hearing the libellous air, and finding it to his taste, showed so little regard for Mademoiselle de Montpensier's feelings, as to take the young musician into his own service. There were no vacancies in the king's band, and it was, moreover, a point of etiquette that the court-fiddlers should buy their places; so to save trouble, and, perhaps, from a suspicion that his ordinary players were a set of impostors, his majesty commissioned Lulli to form a band of his own, to which the name of "*Les petits violons du roi*" was given. The little fiddles soon became more expert musicians than the big ones, and Louis was so pleased with the little fiddle-in-chief, that he entrusted him with the superintendence of the music of his ballets. These ballets, which corresponded closely enough to our English masques, were entertainments not of dancing only, but also of vocal and instrumental music; the name was apparently derived from the Italian *ballata*, the parent of our own "ballad."

Lulli also composed music for the interludes and songs in Molière's comedies, in which he sometimes appeared himself as a singer, and even as a burlesque actor. Once, when the musical arrangements were not quite ready for a ballet, in which the king was to play four parts – the House of France, Pluto, Mars and the Sun – he replied, on receiving a command to proceed with the piece – "*Le roi est le maître; il peut attendre tant qu'il lui plaira.*" His majesty did not, as I have seen it stated, laugh at the facetious impertinence of his musician. On the contrary, he was seriously offended; and great was Lulli's alarm when he found that neither the House of France, nor Pluto, nor Mars, nor the Sun, would smile at the pleasantries with which, as the performance went on, he endeavoured to atone for his unbecoming speech. The wrath of the Great Monarch was not to be appeased, and Lulli's enemies already began to rejoice at his threatened downfall.

LULLI A BUFFOON

Fortunately, Molière was at Versailles. Lulli asked him at the conclusion of the ballet to announce a performance of *M. de Pourceaugnac*, a piece which never failed to divert Louis; and it was arranged that just before the rise of the curtain Molière should excuse himself, on the score of a sudden indisposition, from appearing in the principal character. When there seemed to be no chance of *M. de Pourceaugnac* being played, Lulli, that the king might not be disappointed, nobly volunteered to undertake the part of the hero, and exerted himself in an unprecedented manner to do it justice. But his majesty, who generally found the troubles of the Limousin gentleman so amusing, on this occasion did not even smile. The great scene was about to begin; the scene in which the apothecaries, armed with their terrible weapons, attack M. de Pourceaugnac and chase him round the stage. Louis looked graver than ever. Then the comedian, as a last hope, rushed from the back of the stage to the foot lights, sprang into the orchestra, alighted on the harpsichord, and smashed it into a thousand pieces. "By this fall he rose." Probably he hurt himself, but no matter; on looking round he saw the Great Monarch in convulsions of laughter. Encouraged by his success, he climbed back through the prompter's box on to the stage; the royal mirth increased, and Lulli was now once more reinstated in the good graces of his sovereign.

Molière had a high opinion of Lulli's facetious powers. "*Fais nous rire, Baptiste,*" he would say, and it cannot have been any sort of joke that would have excited the laughter of the greatest of comic writers. Nevertheless, he fell out with Lulli when the latter attained the "privilege" of the Opera, and, profiting by the monopoly which it secured to him, forbade the author of *Tartuffe* to introduce more than two singers in his interludes, or to employ more than six violins in his orchestra. Accordingly, Molière entrusted the composition of the music for the *Malade Imaginaire*, to Charpentier. The songs and symphonies of all his other pieces, with the exception of *Mélicerte*, were composed by Lulli.

The story of Lulli's obtaining letters of nobility through the excellence of his buffoonery in the part of the Muphti, in the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* has often been told. This was in 1670, but once a noble, and director of the Royal Academy of Music, he showed but little disposition to contribute to the diversion of others, even by the exercise of his legitimate art. Not only did he refuse to play the violin, but he would not even have one in his house. To overcome Lulli's repugnance in this respect, Marshal de Gramont hit upon a very ingenious plan. He used to make one of his servants who possessed the gift of converting music into noise, play the violin in Lulli's presence. Upon this, the highly susceptible musician would snatch the instrument from the valet's hands, and restore the murdered melody to life and beauty; then, excited by the pleasure of producing music, he forgot all around him, and continued to play to the great delight of the marshal.

Many curious stories are told of Lafontaine's want of success as a librettist; Lulli refused three of his operas, one after the other, *Daphné*, *Astrée*, and *Acis et Galathée*— the *Acis et Galathée* set to music by Lulli being the work of Campistron. At the first representation of *Astrée*, of which the music had been written by Colasse (a composer who imitated and often plagiarised from Lulli), Lafontaine was present in a box behind some ladies who did not know him. He kept exclaiming every moment, "Detestable! detestable!"

LAFONTAINE'S IMPARTIALITY

Tired of hearing the same thing repeated so many times, the ladies at last turned round and said, "It is really not so bad. The author is a man of considerable wit; it is written by M. de la Fontaine."

"*Cela ne vaut pas le diable*," replied the *librettist*, "and this Lafontaine of whom you speak is an ass. I am Lafontaine, and ought to know."

After the first act he left the theatre and went into the Café Marion, where he fell asleep. One of his friends came in, and surprised to see him, said – "M. de la Fontaine! How is this? Ought you not to be at the first performance of your opera?"

The author awoke, and said, with a yawn – "I've been; and the first act was so dull that I had not the courage to wait for the other. I admire the patience of these Parisians!"

Compare this with the similar conduct of an English humourist, Charles Lamb, who, meeting with no greater success as a dramatist than Lafontaine, was equally astonished at the patience of the public, and remained in the pit to hiss his own farce.

Colasse, Lafontaine's composer, and Campistron, one of Lulli's librettists – when Quinault was not in the way – occasionally worked together, and with no very favourable result. Hence, mutual reproaches, each attributing the failure of the opera to the stupidity of the other. This suggested the following epigram, which, under similar circumstances, has been often imitated: —

"Entre Campistron et Colasse,
Grand débat s'émeut au Parnasse,
Sur ce que l'opéra n'a pas un sort heureux.
De son mauvais succès nul ne se croit coupable.
L'un dit que la musique est plate et misérable,
L'autre que la conduite et les vers sont affreux;
Et le grand Apollon, toujours juge équitable,
Trouve qu'ils ont raison tous deux."

Quinault was by far the most successful of Lulli's librettists, in spite of the contempt with which his verses were always treated by Boileau. Boileau liked Lulli's music, but when he entered the Opera, and was asked where he would sit, he used to reply, "Put me in some place where I shall not be able to hear the words."

THE FIDDLE IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Lulli must have had sad trouble with his orchestra, for in his time a violinist was looked upon as merely an adjunct to a dancing-master. There was a king of the fiddles, without whose permission no cat-gut could be scraped; and in selling his licenses to dancing-masters and the musicians of ball-rooms, the ruler of the bows does not appear to have required any proof of capacity from his clients. Even the simple expedient of shifting was unknown to Lulli's violinists, and for years after his death, to reach the C above the line was a notable feat. The pit quite understood the difficulty, and when the dreaded *démancement* had to be accomplished, would indulge in sarcastic shouts of "*gare l'ut! gare l'ut!*"

The violin was not in much repute in the 17th, and still less in the 16th, century. The lute was a classical instrument; the harp was the instrument of the Troubadours; but the fiddle was fit only for servants, and fiddlers and servants were classed together.

"Such a one," says Malherbe, "who seeks for his ancestors among heroes is the son of a lacquey or a fiddler."

Brantôme, relating the death of Mademoiselle de Limeuil, one of the Queen's maids of honour, who expired, poor girl, to a violin accompaniment, expresses himself as follows: —

"When the hour of her death had arrived, she sent for her valet, such as all the maids of honour have; and he was called Julien, and played very well on the violin. 'Julien,' said she, 'take your violin and play to me continually, until you see me dead, the *Defeat of the Swiss*,⁵ as well as you are able; and when you are at the passage *All is lost*, sound it four or five times as piteously as you can; which the other did, while she herself assisted him with her voice. She recited it twice, and then turning on the other side of her pillow said to her companions, 'All is lost this time, as well I know,' and thus died."

These musical valets were as much slaves as the ancient flute players of the Roman nobles, and were bought, sold, and exchanged like horses and dogs. When their services were not required at home, masters and mistresses who were generously inclined would allow their fiddlers to go out and play in the streets on their own account.

Strange tales are told of the members of Lulli's company. Duménil, the tenor, used to steal jewellery from the soprano and contralto of the troop, and get intoxicated with the baritone. This eccentric virtuoso is said to have drunk six bottles of champagne every night he performed, and to have improved gradually until about the fifth. Duménil, after one of his voyages to England, which he visited several times, lost his voice. Then, seeing no reason why he should moderate his intemperance at all, he gave himself up unrestrainedly to drinking, and died.

OPERATIC ORTHOGRAPHY

Mlle. Desmâtins, the original representative of *Armide* was chiefly celebrated for her beauty, her love of good living, her corpulence, and her bad grammar. She it was who wrote the celebrated letter communicating to a friend the death of her child, "*Notre anfan ai maure, vien de boneure, le mien ai de te voire.*" Mlle. Desmâtins took so much pleasure in representing royal personages that she assumed the (theatrical) costume and demeanour of a queen in her own household, sat on a throne, and made her attendants serve her on their knees. Another vocalist, Marthe le Rochois, accused of grave flirtation with a bassoon, justified herself by showing a promise of marriage, which the gallant instrumentalist had written on the back of an ace of spades.

⁵ "The battle or defeat of the Swiss on the day of Marignan."

The Opera singers of this period were not particularly well paid, and history relates that Mlles. Aubry and Verdier, being engaged for the same line of business, had to live in the same room and sleep in the same bed.

Marthe Le Rochois was fond of giving advice to her companions. "Inspire yourself with the situation," she said to Desmâtins, who had to represent Medea abandoned by Jason; "fancy yourself in the poor woman's place. If you were deserted by a lover, whom you adored," added Marthe, thinking, no doubt, of the bassoon, "what should you do?" "I should look out for another," replied the ingenuous girl.

But by far the most distinguished operatic actress of this period was Mlle. de Maupin, now better known through Théophile Gauthier's scandalous, but brilliant and vigorously written romance, than by her actual adventures and exploits, which, however, were sufficiently remarkable. Among the most amusing of her escapades, were her assaults upon Duménil and Thévenard, the before-mentioned tenor and baritone of the Academie. Dressed in male attire she went up to the former one night in the Place des Victoires, caned him, deprived him of his watch and snuff-box, and the next day produced the trophies at the theatre just as the plundered vocalist was boasting that he had been attacked by three robbers, and had put them all to flight. She is said to have terrified the latter to such a degree that he remained three weeks hiding from her in the Palais Royal.

Mlle. de Maupin was in many respects the Lola Montes of her day, but with more beauty, more talent, more power, and more daring. When she appeared as Minerva, in Lulli's *Cadmus*, and taking off her helmet to the public, showed all her beautiful light brown hair, which hung in luxuriant tresses over her shoulders, the audience were in ecstasies of delight. With less talent, and less powers of fascination, she would infallibly have been executed for the numerous fatal duels in which she was engaged, and might even have been burnt alive for invading the sanctity of a convent at Avignon, to say nothing of her attempting to set fire to it. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that Lola Montes was the Mlle. Maupin of *her* day; a Maupin of a century which is moderate in its passions and its vices as in other things.

A COMPOSER OF SACRED MUSIC

Moreau, the successor of Lulli, is chiefly known as having written the music for the choruses of Racine's *Esther*, (1689). These choruses, re-arranged by Perne, were performed in 1821, at the Conservatoire of Paris, and were much applauded. Racine, in his preface to *Esther*, says, "I cannot finish this preface without rendering justice to the author of the music, and confessing frankly that his (choral) songs formed one of the greatest attractions of the piece. All connoisseurs are agreed that for a long time no airs have been heard more touching, or more suitable to the words." Nevertheless, Madame de Maintenon's special composer was not eminently religious in his habits. The musician whose hymns were sung by the daughters of Sion and of St. Cyr sought his inspiration at a tavern in the Rue St. Jacques, in company with the poet Lainez and with most of the singers and dancers of the period. No member of the Opera rode past the Cabaret de la Barre Royale without tying his horse up in the yard and going in for a moment to have a word and a glass with Moreau. Sometimes the moment became an hour, sometimes several. The horses of Létang and Favier, dancers at the Académie, after being left eight hours in the court-yard without food, gnawed through their bridles, and, looking no doubt for the stable, found their way into a bed-room, where they devoured the contents of a dilapidated straw mattress. "We must all live," said Lainez, when he saw a mattress charged for among the items of the repast, and he hastened to offer the unfortunate animals a ration of wine.

FRENCH MUSIC IN ENGLAND

When Cambert arrived in London he found Charles II. and his Court fully disposed to patronise any sort of importation from France. Naturally, then, the founder of French Opera was well received. Even Lock, in many of his pieces, had imitated the French style; and though he had been employed to compose the music for the public entry of Charles II., at the Restoration, and was afterwards appointed composer in ordinary to His Majesty, Cambert, immediately on his arrival, was made master of the king's band; and two years afterwards an English version of his *Ariadne* was produced. "You knew Cambert," says de Vizé, in *Le Mercure Galant*; "he has just died in London (1677), where he received many favours from the King of England and from the greatest noblemen of his Court, who had a high opinion of his genius. What they have seen of his works has not belied the reputation he had acquired in France. It is to him we owe the establishment of the operas that are now represented. The music of those of *Pomona*, and of the *Pains and Pleasures of Love*, is by him, and since that time we have had no recitative in France that has appeared new." In several English books, Grabut, who accompanied Cambert to England, is said to have arranged the music of *Ariadne*, and even to have composed it; but this is manifestly an error. This same Grabut wrote the music to Dryden's celebrated political opera *Albion and Albanus*, which was performed at the Duke's Theatre in 1685, and of which the representations were stopped by the news of Monmouth's invasion. Purcell, who was only fifteen years of age when *Ariadne* was produced, was now twenty-six, and had written a great deal of admirable dramatic music. Probably the public thought that to him, and not to the Frenchman, might have been confided the task of setting *Albion and Albanus*, for in the preface to that work Dryden says, as if apologetically, that "during the rehearsal the king had publicly declared more than once, that the composition and choruses were more just and more beautiful than any he had heard in England." Then after a warm commendation of Grabut Dryden adds, "This I say, not to flatter him, but to do him right; because among some English musicians, and their scholars, who are sure to judge after them, the imputation of being a Frenchman is enough to make a party who maliciously endeavour to decry him. But the knowledge of Latin and Italian poets, both of which he possesses, besides his skill in music, and his being acquainted with all the performances of the French operas, adding to these the good sense to which he is born, have raised him to a degree above any man who shall pretend to be his rival on our stage. When any of our countrymen excel him, I shall be glad, for the sake of Old England, to be shown my error: in the meantime, let virtue be commended, though in the person of a stranger."

Neither Grabut nor Cambert was the first composer who produced a complete opera in England. During the Commonwealth, in 1656, Sir William Davenant had obtained permission to open a theatre for the performance of operas, in a large room, at the back of Rutland House, in the upper end of Aldersgate Street; and, long before, the splendid court masques of James I. and Charles I. had given opportunities for the development of recitative, which was first composed in England by an Italian, named Lanieri, an eminent musician, painter and engraver. The Opera had been established in Italy since the beginning of the century, and we have seen that in 1607, Monteverde wrote his *Orfeo* for the court of Mantua. But it was still known in England and France only through the accounts, respectively, of Evelyn and of St. Evrémont.

THE FIRST ENGLISH OPERA

The first English opera produced at Sir William Davenant's theatre, the year of its opening, was *The Siege of Rhodes*, "made a representation by the art of perspective in scenes, and the story sung in recitative music." There were five changes of scene, according to the ancient dramatic distinctions made for time, and there were seven performers. The part of "Solyman" was taken by Captain Henry

Cook, that of "Ianthé" by Mrs. Coleman, who appears to have been the first actress on the English stage – in the sense in which Heine was the first poet of his century (having been born on the 1st of January, 1800)⁶ and Beaumarchais the first poet in Paris (to a person entering the city from the Porte St. Antoine).⁷ The remaining five parts were "doubled." That of the "Admiral" was taken by Mr. Peter Rymon, and Matthew Lock, the future composer of the music to *Macbeth*; that of "Mustapha," by Mr. Thomas Blagrave, and Henry Purcell, the father of the composer of *King Arthur*, and himself an accomplished musician. The vocal music of the first and fifth "entries" or acts, was composed by Henry Lawes; that of the second and third, by Captain Henry Cook, afterwards master of the children of the Chapel Royal; that of the fourth, by Lock. The instrumental music was by Dr. Charles Coleman and George Hudson, and was performed by an orchestra of six musicians.

The first English opera then was produced, ten years later than the first French opera; but the *Siege of Rhodes* was performed publicly, whereas, it was not until fifteen years afterwards (1671) that the first public performance of a French opera (Cambert's *Pomone*) took place. Ordinances for the suppression of stage plays had been in force in England since 1642, and in 1643, a tract was printed under the title of *The Actor's Remonstrance*, showing to what distress the musicians of the theatre had been already reduced. The writer says, "But musike that was held so delectable and precious that they scorned to come to a tavern under twenty shillings salary for two hours, now wander with their instruments under their cloaks (I mean such as have any) to all houses of good fellowship, saluting every room where there is company with 'will you have any musike, gentlemen.'" In 1648, moreover, a provost-marshal was appointed with power to seize upon all ballad singers, and to suppress stage plays.

Nevertheless, Oliver Cromwell was a great lover of music. He is said to have "entertained the most skilful in that science in his pay and family;" and it is known that he engaged Hingston, a celebrated musician, formerly in the service of Charles, at a salary of one hundred a-year – the Hingston, at whose house Sir Roger l'Estrange was playing, and continued to play when Oliver entered the room, which gained for this *virtuoso* the title of "Oliver's fiddler." Antony à Wood, also tells a story of Cromwell's love of music. James Quin, one of the senior students of Christ Church, with a bass voice, "very strong and exceeding trouling," had been turned out of his place by the visitors, but, "being well acquainted with some great men of those times that loved music, they introduced him into the company of Oliver Cromwell, the Protector, who loved a good voice and instrumental music well. He heard him sing with great delight, liquored him with sack, and in conclusion, said, 'Mr. Quin, you have done well, what shall I do for you?' To which Quin made answer, 'That your highness would be pleased to restore me to my student's place,' which he did accordingly." But the best proof that can be given of Oliver Cromwell's love for music is the simple fact that, under his government, and with his special permission, the Opera was founded in this country.

CROMWELL'S LOVE OF MUSIC

We have seen that in Charles II's reign, the court reserved its patronage almost exclusively for French music, or music in the French style. When Cambert arrived in London, our Great Purcell (born, 1659) was still a child. He produced his first opera, *Dido and Æneas*, the year of Cambert's death (1677); but, although, in the meanwhile, he wrote a quantity of vocal and instrumental music of all kinds, and especially for the stage, it was not until after the death of Charles that he associated himself with Dryden in the production of those musical dramas (not operas in the proper sense of the word) by which he is chiefly known.

⁶ This was Heine's own joke.

⁷ And this, Beaumarchais's.

In 1690, Purcell composed music for *The Tempest*, altered and shamefully disfigured by Dryden and Davenant.

PURCELL

In 1691, *King Arthur*, which contains Purcell's finest music, was produced with immense success. The war-song of the Britons, *Come if you Dare*, and the concluding duet and chorus, *Britons strike Home*, have survived the rest of the work. The former piece in particular is well known to concert-goers of the present day, from the excellent singing of Mr. Sims Reeves. Purcell died at the age of thirty-six, the age at which Mozart and Raphael were lost to the world, and has not yet found a successor. He was not only the most original, and the most dramatic, but also the most thoroughly English of our native composers. In the dedication of the music of the *Prophetess* to the Duke of Somerset, Purcell himself says, "Music is yet but in its nonage, a forward child, which gives hope of what it may be hereafter in England, when the masters of it shall find more encouragement. 'Tis now learning Italian, which is its best master, and studying a little of the French air to give it somewhat more of gaiety and fashion." Here Purcell spoke in all modesty, for though his style may have been formed in some measure on French models, "there is," says Dr. Burney, "a latent power and force in his expression of English words, whatever be the subject, that will make an unprejudiced native of this island feel more than all the elegance, grace and refinement of modern music, less happily applied, can do; and this pleasure is communicated to us, not by the symmetry or rhythm of modern melody, but by his having tuned to the true accents of our mother tongue, those notes of passion which an inhabitant of this island would breathe in such situations as the words describe. And these indigenous expressions of passion Purcell had the power to enforce by the energy of modulation, which, on some occasions, was bold, affecting and sublime. Handel," he adds, "who flourished in a less barbarous age for his art, has been acknowledged Purcell's superior in many particulars; but in none more than the art and grandeur of his choruses, the harmony and texture of his organ fugues, as well as his great style of concertos; the ingenuity of his accompaniments to his songs and choruses; and even in the general melody of the airs themselves; yet, in the accent, passion and expression of *English words*, the vocal music of Purcell is, sometimes, to my feelings, as superior to Handel's as an original poem to a translation."

CHAPTER III.

ON THE NATURE OF THE OPERA, AND ITS MERITS AS COMPARED WITH OTHER FORMS OF THE DRAMA

Opera admired for its unintelligibility. – The use of words in opera. – An inquisitive amateur. – New version of a chorus in *Robert le Diable*. – Strange readings of the *Credo* by two chapel masters. – Dramatic situations and effects peculiar to the Opera. – Pleasantries directed against the Opera; their antiquity and harmlessness. — *Les Opéras* by St. Evrémond. – Beaumarchais's *mot*. – Addison on the Italian Opera in England. – Swift's epigram. – Béranger on the decline of the drama. – What may be seen at the Opera.

UNINTELLIGIBILITY OF OPERA

WHEN Sir William Davenant obtained permission from Cromwell to open his theatre for the performance of operas, Antony à Wood wrote that, "Though Oliver Cromwell had now prohibited all other theatrical representations, he allowed of this because being in an unknown language it could not corrupt the morals of the people." Thereupon it has been imagined that Antony à Wood must have supposed Sir William Davenant's performances to have been in the Italian tongue, as if he could not have regarded music as an unknown language, and have concluded that a drama conducted in music would for that reason be unintelligible. Nevertheless, in the present day we have a censor who refuses to permit the representation of *La Dame aux Camélias* in English, or even in French,⁸ but who tolerates the performance of *La Traviata*, (which, I need hardly say, is the *Dame aux Camélias* set to music) in Italian, and, I believe, even in English; thinking, no doubt, like Antony à Wood, that in an operatic form it cannot be understood, and therefore cannot corrupt the morals of the people. Since Antony à Wood's time a good deal of stupid, unmeaning verse has been written in operas, and sometimes when the words have not been of themselves unintelligible, they have been rendered nearly so by the manner in which they have been set to music, to say nothing of the final obscurity given to them by the imperfect enunciation of the singers. The mere fact, however, of a dramatic piece being performed in music does not make it unintelligible, but, on the contrary, increases the sphere of its intelligibility, giving it a more universal interest and rendering it an entertainment appreciable by persons of all countries. This in itself is not much to boast of, for the entertainment of the *ballet* is independent of language to a still greater extent; and *La Gitana* or *Esmeralda* can be as well understood by an Englishman at the Opera House of Berlin or of Moscow as at Her Majesty's Theatre in London; while perhaps the most universally intelligible drama ever performed is that of Punch, even when the brief dialogue which adorns its pantomime is inaudible.

Opera is *music in a dramatic form*; and people go to the theatre and listen to it as if it were so much prose. They have even been known to complain during or after the performance that they could not hear the words, as if it were through the mere logical meaning of the words that the composer proposed to excite the emotion of the audience. The only pity is that it is necessary in an opera to have words at all, but it is evident that a singer could not enter into the spirit of a dramatic situation if he had a mere string of meaningless syllables or any sort of inappropriate nonsense to utter. He must first produce an illusion on himself, or he will produce none on the audience, and he must, therefore, fully inspire himself with the sentiment, logical as well as musical, of what he has to sing. Otherwise, all we want to know about the words of *Casta diva* (to take examples from the most popular, as also

⁸ *La Dame aux Camélias* was to have been played at the St. James's Theatre last summer, with Madame Doche in the principal part; but its representation was forbidden by the licenser.

one of the very finest of Italian operas) is that it is a prayer to a goddess; of the Druids' chorus, that it is chorus of Druids; of the trio, that "Norma" having confronted "Pollio" with "Adalgisa," is reproaching him indignantly and passionately with his perfidy; of the duet that "Norma" is confiding her children to "Adalgisa's" care; of the scene with "Pollio," that "Norma" is again reproaching him, but in a different spirit, with sadness and bitterness, and with the compressed sorrow of a woman who is wounded to the heart and must soon die. I may be in error, however, for though I have seen *Norma* fifty times, I have never examined the *libretto*, and of the whole piece know scarcely more than the two words which I have already paraded before the public – "*Casta Diva*."

WONDERFUL INSTANCE OF CURIOSITY

One night, at the Royal Italian Opera, when Mario was playing the part of the "Duke of Mantua" in *Rigoletto*, and was singing the commencement of the duet with "Gilda," a man dressed in black and white like every one else, said to me gravely, "I do not understand Italian. Can you tell me what he is saying to her?"

"He is telling her that he loves her," I answered briefly.

"What is he saying now?" asked this inquisitive amateur two minutes afterwards.

"He is telling her that he loves her," I repeated.

"Why, he said that before!" objected this person who had apparently come to the opera with the view of gaining some kind of valuable information from the performers. Poor Bosio was the "Gilda," but my horny-eared neighbour wondered none the less that the Duke could not say "I love you," in three words.

"He will say it again," I answered, "and then she will say it, and then they will say it together; indeed, they will say nothing else for the next five minutes, and when you hear them exclaim 'addio' with one voice, and go on repeating it, it will still mean the same thing."

What benighted amateur was this who wanted to know the words of a beautiful duet; and is there much difference between such a one and the man who would look at the texture of a canvas to see what the painting on it was worth?

Let it be admitted that as a rule no opera is intelligible without a libretto; but is a drama always intelligible without a play-bill? A libretto, for general use, need really be no larger than an ordinary programme; and it would be a positive advantage if it contained merely a sketch of the plot with the subject, and perhaps the first line of all the principal songs.

IMITATIVE MUSIC

Then the foolish amateur would not run the risk of having his attention diverted from the music by the words, and would be more likely to give himself up to the enjoyment of the opera in a rational and legitimate manner. Another advantage of keeping the words from the public would be, that composers, full of the grossest prose, but priding themselves on their fancy, would at last see the inutility as well as the pettiness of picking out one particular word in a line, and "illustrating" it: thus imitating a sound when their aim should be to depict a sentiment. Even the illustrious Purcell has sinned in this respect, and Meyerbeer, innumerable times, though always displaying remarkable ingenuity, and as much good taste as is compatible with an error against both taste and reason. It is a pity that great musicians should descend to such anti-poetical, and, indeed, nonsensical trivialities; but when inferior ones are unable to let a singer wish she were a bird, without imitating a bird's chirruping on the piccolo, or allude in the most distant manner to the trumpet's sound, without taking it as a hint to introduce a short flourish on that instrument, I cannot help thinking of those literal-minded pictorial illustrators who follow a precisely analogous process, and who, for example, in picturing the scene in which "Macbeth" exclaims – "Throw physic to the dogs," would represent a man throwing

bottles of medicine to a pack of hounds. What a treat, by the way, it would be to hear a setting of Othello's farewell to war by a determined composer of imitative picturesque music! How "ear-piercing" would be his fifes! How "spirit-stirring" his drums.

The words of an opera ought to be good, and yet need not of necessity be heard. They should be poetical that they may inspire first the composer and afterwards the singer; and they should be rythmical and sonorous in order that the latter may be able to sing them with due effect. Above all they ought not to be ridiculous, lest the public should hear them and laugh at the music, just where it was intended that it should affect them to tears. Everything ought to be good at the opera down to the rosin of the fiddlers, and including the words of the libretto. Even the chorus should have tolerable verses to sing, though no one would be likely ever to hear them. Indeed, it is said that at the Grand Opera of Paris, by a tradition now thirty years old, the opening chorus in *Robert le Diable* is always sung to those touching lines – which I confess I never heard on the other side of the orchestra: —

La sou-l pe aux choux | se fait dans la mar l-mite
 Dans la | marmi-l-te on fait la soupe aux | choux.

I have said nothing about the duty of the composer in selecting his libretto and setting it to music, but of course if he be a man of taste he will not willingly accept a collection of nonsense verses. English composers, however, have not much choice in this respect, and all we can ask of them is that they will do their best with what they have been able to obtain; not indulging in too many repetitions, and not tiring the singer and provoking such of the audience as may wish to "catch" the words by setting more than half a dozen notes to the same monosyllable especially if the monosyllable occurs in the middle of a line, and the vowel e, or worse still, i, in the middle of the monosyllable. One of our most eminent composers, Mr. Vincent Wallace, has given us a striking example of the fault I am speaking of in his well-known trio – "Turn on old Time thy hour-glass" (*Maritana*) in which, according to the music, the scanning of the first half line is as follows: —

Tŭrn ōn | ōld Tī | ǎ-ī || ǎ-ǎ-ǎ – ime | &c.

WORDS FOR MUSIC

To be sure Time is infinite, but seven sounds do not convey the notion of infinity; and even if they did, it would not be any the more pleasant for a singer to have to take a five note leap, and then execute five other notes on a vowel which cannot be uttered without closing the throat. If I had been in Mr. Vincent Wallace's place, I should, at all events, have insisted on Mr. Fitzball making one change. Instead of "Old Time," he should have inserted "Old Parr."

Tŭrn ōn | ōld Pā-l ǎ-ā || ǎ-ǎ-ǎ-arr | &c.,

would not have been more intelligible to the audience than – "Turn on old Ti-i-i-i-i-ime, &c., and it would have been a thousand times easier to sing. Nor in spite of the little importance I attach to the phraseology of the libretto when listening to "music in a dramatic form," would I, if I were a composer, accept such a line as —

"When the proud land of Poland was ploughed by the hoof,"

with a suspension of sense after the word hoof. No; the librettist might take his hoof elsewhere. It should not appear in *my* Opera; at least, not in lieu of a plough. Mr. Balfe should tell such poets to keep such ploughs for themselves.

Sic vos *pro* vobis fertis aratra boves,

he might say to them.

The singer ought certainly to understand what he is singing, and still more certainly should the composer understand what he is composing; but the sight of Latin reminds me that both have

sometimes failed to do so, and from no one's fault but their own. Jomelli used to tell a story of an Italian chapel-master, who gave to one of his solo singers the phrase *Genitum non factum*, to which the chorus had to reply *Factum non genitum*. This transposition seemed ingenious and picturesque to the composer, and suited a contrast of rhythm which he had taken great pains to produce. It was probably due only to the bad enunciation of the choristers that he was not burned alive.

Porpora, too, narrowly escaped the terrors of the inquisition; and but for his avowed and clearly-proved ignorance of Latin would have made a bad end of it, for a similar, though not quite so ludicrous a blunder as the one perpetrated by Jomelli's friend. He had been accustomed to add *non* and *si* to the verses of his libretto when the music required it, and in setting the creed found it convenient to introduce a *non*. This novel version of the Belief commenced—*Credo, non credo, non credo in Deum*, and it was well for Porpora that he was able to convince the inquisitors of his inability to understand it.

UNNATURALNESS OF OPERA

Another chapel-master of more recent times is said, in composing a mass, to have given a delightfully pastoral character to his "Agnus Dei." To him "a little learning" had indeed proved "a dangerous thing." He had, somehow, ascertained that "agnus" meant "lamb," and had forthwith gone to work with pipe and cornemuse to give appropriate "picturesqueness" to his accompaniments.

Besides accusations of unintelligibility and of *contra-sense* (as for instance when a girl sentenced to death sings in a lively strain), the Opera has been attacked as essentially absurd, and it is satisfactory to know that these attacks date from its first introduction into England and France. To some it appears monstrous that men and women should be represented on the stage singing, when it is notorious that in actual life they communicate in the speaking voice. Opera was declared to be unnatural as compared with drama. In other words, it was thought natural that Desdemona should express her grief in melodious verse, but unnatural that she should do so in pure melody. (For the sake of the comparison I must suppose Rossini's *Otello* to have been written long before its time). Persons, with any pretence to reason, have long ceased to urge such futile objections against a delightful entertainment which, as I shall endeavour to show, is in some respects the finest form the drama has assumed. Gresset answered these music-haters well in his *Discours sur l'harmonie*.—"After all," he says, "if we study nature do we not find more fidelity to appropriateness at the Opera than on the tragic stage where the hero speaks the language of declamatory poetry? Has not harmony always been much better able than simple declamation to imitate the true tones of the passions, deep sighs, sobs, bursts of grief, languishing tenderness, interjections of despair, the inflexions of pathos, and all the energy of the heart?"

For the sake of enjoying the pleasures of music and of the drama in combination, we must adopt certain conventions, and must assume that song is the natural language of the men and women that we propose to show in our operas; as we assume in tragedy that they all talk in verse, in comedy that they are all witty and yet are perpetually giving one another opportunities for repartee; in the ballet that they all dance and are unable to speak at all. The form is nothing. Give us the true expression of natural emotion and all the rest will seem natural enough. Only it would be as well to introduce as many dancing characters and dancing situations as possible in the *ballet*—and to remember in particular that Roman soldiers could not with propriety figure in one; for a ballet on the subject of "Les Horaces" was once actually produced in France, in which the Horatii and the Curiatii danced a double *pas de trois*; and so in the tragedy the chief passages ought not to be London coal-heavers or Parisian water-carriers; and similarly in the Opera, scenes and situations should be avoided which in no way suggest singing.

THE OPERATIC CHORUS

And let me now inform the ignorant opponents of the Opera, that there are certain grand dramatic effects attainable on the lyric stage, which, without the aid of music, could not possibly be produced. Music has often been defined; here is a new definition of it. It is *the language of masses*—the only language that masses can speak and be understood. On the old stage a crowd could not cry "Down with the tyrant!" or "We will!" or even "Yes," and "No," with any intelligibility. There is some distance between this state of things and the "Blessing of the daggers" in the *Huguenots*, or the prayer of the Israelites in *Moses*. On the old stage we could neither have had the prayer (unless it were recited by a single voice, which would be worse than nothing) before the passage, nor the thanksgiving, which, in the Opera, is sung immediately after the Red Sea has been crossed; but above all we could not obtain the sublime effect produced by the contrast between the two songs; the same song, and yet how different! the difference between minor and major, between a psalm of humble supplication and a hymn of jubilant gratitude. This is the change of key at which, according to Stendhal, the women of Rome fainted in such numbers. It cannot be heard without emotion, even in England, and we do not think any one, even a professed enemy of Opera, would ask himself during the performance of the prayer in *Mosé*, whether it was natural or not that the Israelites should sing either before or after crossing the Red Sea.

Again, how could the animation of the market scene in *Masaniello* be rendered so well as by means of music? In concerted pieces, moreover, the Opera possesses a means of dramatic effect quite as powerful and as peculiar to itself as its choruses. The finest situation in *Rigoletto* (to take an example from one of the best known operas of the day) is that in which the quartet occurs. Here, three persons express simultaneously the different feelings which are excited in the breast of each by the presence of a fourth in the house of an assassin, while the cause of all this emotion is gracefully making love to one of the three, who is the assassin's sister. The amorous fervour of the "Duke," the careless gaiety of "Maddalena," the despair of "Gilda," the vengeful rage of "Rigoletto," are all told most dramatically in the combined songs of the four personages named, while the spectator derives an additional pleasure from the art by which these four different songs are blended into harmony. A magnificent quartet, of which, however, the model existed long before in *Don Giovanni*.

All this is, of course, very unnatural. It would be so much more natural that the "Duke of Mantua" should first make a long speech to "Maddalena;" that "Maddalena" should then answer him; that afterwards both should remain silent while "Gilda," of whose presence outside the tavern they are unaware, sobs forth her lamentations at the perfidy of her betrayer; and that finally the "Duke," "Maddalena," and "Gilda," by some inexplicable agreement, should not say a word while "Rigoletto" is congratulating himself on the prospect of being speedily revenged on the libertine who has robbed him of his daughter. In the old drama, perfect sympathy between two lovers can scarcely be expressed (or rather symbolized) so vividly as through the "*ensemble*" of the duet, where the two voices are joined so as to form but one harmony. We are sometimes inclined to think that even the balcony duet between "Romeo" and "Juliet" ought to be in music; and certainly no living dramatist could render the duet in music between "Valentine and Raoul" adequately into either prose or verse. Talk of music destroying the drama, – why it is from love of the drama that so many persons go to the opera every night.

EXPLODED PLEASANTRIES

But is it not absurd to hear a man say, "Good morning," "How do you do?" in music? Most decidedly; and therefore ordinary, common-place, and trivial remarks should be excluded from operas, as from poetical dramas and from poetry of all kinds except comic and burlesque verse. It

was not reserved for the unmusical critics of the present day to discover that it would be grotesque to utter such a phrase as "Give me my boots," in recitative, and that such a line as "Waiter, a cutlet nicely browned," could not be advantageously set to music. All this sort of humour was exhausted long ago by Hauteroche, in his *Crispin Musicien*, which was brought out in Paris three years after the establishment of the Académie Royale de Musique, and revived in the time of Rameau (1735) by Palaprat, in his *Concert Ridicule* and *Ballet Extravagant* (1689-90), of which the author afterwards said that they were "the source of all the badinage that had since been applauded in more than twenty comedies; that is to say, the interminable pleasantries on the subject of the Opera;" and by St. Evrémond, in his comedy entitled *Les Opéras*, which he wrote during his residence in London.

In St. Evrémond's piece, which was published but not played, "Chrisotine" is, so to speak, opera-struck. She thinks of nothing but Lulli, or "Baptiste," as she affectionately calls him, after the manner of Louis XVI. and his Court; sings all day long, and in fact has altogether abandoned speech for song. "Perrette," the servant, tells "Chrisotine" that her father wishes to see her. "Why disturb me at my songs," replies the young lady, singing all the time. The attendant complains to the father, that "Chrisotine" will not answer her in ordinary spoken language, and that she sings about the house all day long. "Chrisotine" corroborates "Perrette's" statement, by addressing a little *cavatina* to her parent, in which she protests against the harshness of those who would hinder her from singing the tender loves of "Hermione" and "Cadmus."

"Speak like other people, Chrisotine," exclaims old "Chrisard," or I will issue such an edict against operas that they shall never be spoken of again where I have any authority."

"My father, Baptiste; opera, my duty to my parents; how am I to decide between you?" exclaims the young girl, with a tragic indecision as painful as that of Arnold, the son of Tell, hesitating between his Matilda and his native land.

ST. EVREMOND'S BURLESQUE

"You hesitate between Baptiste and your father," cries the old gentleman. "*O tempora! O mores!*" (only in French).

"Tender mother! Cruel father! and you, O Cadmus! Unhappy Cadmus! I shall see you no more," sings "Chrisotine;" and soon afterwards she adds, still singing, that she "would rather die than speak like the vulgar. It is a new fashion at the court (she continues), and since the last opera no one speaks otherwise than in song. When one gentleman meets another in the morning, it would be grossly impolite not to sing to him: – '*Monsieur comment vous portez vous?*' to which the other would reply – '*Je me porte à votre service.*'"

"First Gentleman. – '*Après dîner, que ferons nous?*'"

"Second Gentleman. – '*Allons voir la belle Clarisse.*'"

"The most ordinary things are sung in this manner, and in polite society people don't know what it means to speak otherwise than in music."

Chrisard. – "Do people of quality sing when they are with ladies?"

Chrisotine. – "Sing! sing! I should like to see a man of the world endeavour to entertain company with mere talk in the old style. He would be looked upon as one of a by-gone period. The servants would laugh at him."

Chrisard. – "And in the town?"

Chrisotine. – "All persons of any importance imitate the court. It is only in the Rue St. Denis and St. Honoré and on the Bridge of Notre Dame that the old custom is still kept up. There people buy and sell without singing. But at Gauthier's, at the Orangery; at all the shops where the ladies of the court buy dresses, ornaments and jewels, all business is carried on in music, and if the dealers did not sing their goods would be confiscated. People say that a severe edict has been issued to that effect.

They appoint no Provost of Trade now unless he is a musician, and until M. Lulli has examined him to see whether he is capable of understanding and enforcing the rules of harmony."

The above scene, be it observed, is not the work of an ignorant detractor of opera, of a brute insensible to the charms of music, but is the production of St. Evrémond, one of the very first men, on our side of the Alps, who called attention to the beauties of the new musical drama, just established in Italy, and which, when he first wrote on the subject, had not yet been introduced into France. St. Evrémond had too much sense to decry the Opera on account of such improbabilities as must inevitably belong to every form of the drama – which is the expression of life, but which need not for that reason be restricted exclusively to the language of speech, any more than tragedy need be confined to the diction of prose, or comedy to the inane platitudes of ordinary conversation. At all events, there is no novelty, and above all no wit, in repeating seriously the pleasantries of St. Evrémond, which, we repeat, were those of a man who really loved the object of his good-natured and agreeable raillery.

ADDISON ON THE OPERA

Indeed, most of the men who have written things against the Opera that are still remembered have liked the Opera, and have even been the authors of operas themselves. "*Aujourd'hui ce qui ne vaut pas la peine d'être dit on le chante,*" is said by the Figaro of Beaumarchais – of Beaumarchais, who gave lessons in singing and on the harpsichord to Louis XV.'s daughters, who was an enthusiastic admirer of Gluck's operas, and who wrote specially for that composer the libretto of *Tarare*, which, however, was not set to music by him, but by Salieri, Gluck's favourite pupil. Beaumarchais knew well enough – and *Tarare* in a negative manner proves it – that not only "what is not worth the trouble of saying" cannot be sung, but that very often such trivialities as can with propriety be spoken in a drama would, set to music, produce a ludicrous effect. Witness the lines in St. Evrémond's *Les Opéras*—

"Monsieur comment vous portez vous?"

"Je me porte à votre service" —

which might form part of a comedy, but which in an opera would be absurd, and would therefore not be introduced into one, except by a foolish librettist, (who would for a certainty get hissed), or by a wit like St. Evrémond, wishing to amuse himself by exaggerating to a ridiculous point the latest fashionable mania of the day.

Addison's admirably humorous articles on Italian Opera in the *Spectator* are often spoken of by musicians as ill-natured and unjust, and are ascribed – unjustly and even meanly, as it seems to me – to the author's annoyance at the failure of his *Rosamond*, which had been set to music by an incapable person named Clayton. Addison could afford to laugh at the ill-success of his *Rosamond*, as La Fontaine laughed at that of *Astrée*; and to assert that his excellent pleasantries on the subject of Italian Opera, then newly established in London, had for their origin the base motives usually imputed to him by musicians, is to give any one the right to say of *them* that this one abuses modern Italian music, which the public applaud, because his own English music has never been tolerated or that that one expresses the highest opinion of English composers because he himself composes and is an Englishman. To impute such motives would be to assume, as is assumed in the case of Addison, that no one blames except in revenge for some personal loss, or praises except in the hope of some personal gain. And after all, what *has* Addison said against the Opera, an entertainment which he certainly enjoyed, or he would not have attended it so often or have devoted so many excellent papers to it? Let us turn to the *Spectator* and see.

ADDISON ON THE OPERA

Italian Opera was introduced into England at the beginning of the 18th century, the first work performed entirely in the Italian language being *Almahide*, of which the music is attributed to Buononcini, and which was produced in 1710, with Valentini, Nicolini, Margarita de l'Epine, Cassani and "Signora Isabella," in the principal parts. Previously, for about three years, it had been the custom for Italian and English vocalists to sing each in their own language. "The king,⁹ or hero of the play," says Addison, "generally spoke in Italian, and his slaves answered him in English; the lover frequently made his court, and gained the heart of his princess in a language which she did not understand. One would have thought it very difficult to have carried on dialogues in this manner without an interpreter between the persons that conversed together; but this was the state of the English stage for about three years.

"At length, the audience got tired of understanding half the opera, and, therefore, to ease themselves entirely of the fatigue of thinking, have so ordered it at present, that the whole opera is performed in an unknown tongue. We no longer understand the language of our own stage, insomuch, that I have often been afraid, when I have seen our Italian performers chattering in the vehemence of action, that they have been calling us names and abusing us among themselves; but I hope, since we do put such entire confidence in them, they will not talk against us before our faces, though they may do it with the same safety as if it were behind our backs. In the meantime, I cannot forbear thinking how naturally an historian who writes two or three hundred years hence, and does not know the taste of his wise forefathers, will make the following reflection: – In the beginning of the 18th century, the Italian tongue was so well understood in England, that operas were acted on the public stage in that language.

"One scarce knows how to be serious in the confutation of an absurdity that shows itself at the first sight. It does not want any great measure of sense to see the ridicule of this monstrous practice; but what makes it the more astonishing, it is not the taste of the rabble, but of persons of the greatest politeness, which has established it.

"If the Italians have a genius for music above the English, the English have a genius for other performances of a much higher nature, and capable of giving the mind a much nobler entertainment. Would one think it was possible (at a time when an author lived that was able to write the *Phedra and Hippolitus*) for a people to be so stupidly fond of the Italian opera as scarce to give a third day's hearing to that admirable tragedy? Music is, certainly, a very agreeable entertainment; but if it would take entire possession of our ears, if it would make us incapable of hearing sense, if it would exclude arts that have much greater tendency to the refinement of human nature, I must confess I would allow it no better quarter than Plato has done, who banishes it out of his commonwealth.

ADDISON ON THE OPERA

"At present, our notions of music are so very uncertain, that we do not know what it is we like; only, in general, we are transported with anything that is not English; so it be of foreign growth, let it be Italian, French, or High Dutch, it is the same thing. In short, our English music is quite rooted out, and nothing yet planted in its stead."

The *Spectator* was written from day to day, and was certainly not intended for *our* entertainment; yet, who can fail to be amused at the description of the stage king "who spoke in Italian and his slaves answered him in English;" and of the lover who "frequently made his court and gained the heart of

⁹ *Spectator*, No. 18.

his princess in a language which she did not understand?" What, too, in this style of humour, can be better than the notion of the audience getting tired of understanding half the opera, and, to ease themselves of the trouble of thinking, so ordering it that the whole opera is performed in an unknown tongue; or of the performers who, for all the audience knew to the contrary, might be calling them names and abusing them among themselves; or of the probable reflection of the future historian, that "in the beginning of the 18th century the Italian tongue was so well understood in England that operas were acted on the public stage in that language?" On the other hand, we have not, it is true, heard yet of any historian publishing the remark suggested by Addison; probably, because those historians who go to the opera – and who does not? – are quite aware that to understand an Italian opera, it is not at all necessary to have a knowledge of the Italian language. The Italian singers might abuse us at their ease, especially in concerted pieces, and in grand finales; but they might in the same way, and equally, without fear of detection, abuse their own countrymen. Our English vocalists, too, might indulge in the same gratification in England, and have I not mentioned that at the Grand Opera of Paris —

'La soupe aux choux se fait dans la marmite.'

has been sung in place of Scribe's words in the opening chorus of *Robert le Diable*; and if *La soupe*, &c., why not anything else? But it is a great mistake to inquire too closely into the foundation on which a joke stands, when the joke itself is good; and I am almost ashamed, as it is, of having said so much on the subject of Addison's pleasantries, when the pleasantries spoke so well for themselves. One might almost as well write an essay to prove seriously that language was *not* given to man "to conceal his thoughts."

MUSIC AS AN ART

The only portion of the paper from which I have extracted the above observations that can be treated in perfect seriousness, is that which begins – "If the Italians have a genius for music, &c.," and ends – "I would allow it no better quarter than Plato has done," &c. Now the recent political condition of Italy sufficiently proves that music could not save a country from national degradation; but neither could painting nor an admirable poetic literature. It is also better, no doubt, that a man should learn his duty to God and to his neighbour, than that he should cultivate a taste for harmony, but why not do both; and above all, why compare like with unlike? The "performances of a much higher nature" than music undeniably exist, but they do not answer the same end. The more general science on which that of astronomy rests may be a nobler study than music, but there is nothing consoling or *per se* elevating in mathematics. Poetry, again, would by most persons be classed higher than music, though the effect of half poetry, and of imaginative literature generally, is to place the reader in a state of reverie such as music induces more immediately and more perfectly. The enjoyment of art – by which we do not mean its production, or its critical examination, but the pure enjoyment of the artistic result – has nothing strictly intellectual in it; no man could grow wise by looking at Raphael or listening to Mozart. Nor does he derive any important intellectual ideas from many of our most beautiful poems, but simply emotion, of an elevated kind, such as is given by fine music. Music is evidently not didactic, and painting can only teach, in the ordinary sense of the word, what every one already knows; though, of course, a painter may depict certain aspects of nature and of the human face, previously unobserved and unimagined, just as the composer, in giving a musical expression to certain sentiments and passions, can rouse in us emotions previously dormant, or never experienced before with so much intensity. But the fine arts cannot communicate abstract truths – from which it chiefly follows that no right-minded artist ever uses them with such an aim; though there is no saying what some wild enthusiasts will not endeavour to express, and other enthusiasts equally wild pretend to see, in symphonies and in big symbolical pictures. If Addison meant to insinuate that *Phædra and Hippolytus* was a much higher performance than any possible opera, he was decidedly in error. But

he had not heard *Don Juan*, *William Tell*, and *Der Freischütz*; to which no one in the present day, unless musically deaf, could prefer an English translation of *Phèdre*. It would be unfair to lay too much stress on the fact that the music of Handel still lives, and with no declining life, whereas the tragedies of Racine, resuscitated by Mademoiselle Rachel, have not been heard of since the death of that admirable actress; Addison was only acquainted with the earliest of Handel's operas, and these *are* forgotten, as indeed are most of his others, with the exception, here and there, of a few detached airs.

OPERA AND DRAMA

In the sentence commencing "Music is certainly a very agreeable entertainment, but," &c., Addison says what every one, who would care to see one of Shakespeare's plays properly acted (not much cared for, however, in Addison's time), must feel now. Let us have perfect representations of Opera by all means; but it is a sad and a disgraceful thing, that in his own native country the works of the greatest dramatist who ever lived should be utterly neglected as far as their stage representation is concerned. It is absurd to pretend that the Opera is the sole cause of this. Operas, magnificently put upon the stage, are played in England, at least at one theatre, with remarkable *completeness* of excellence, and, at more than one, with admirable singers in the principal and even in the minor parts. Shakespeare's dramas, when they are played at all, are thrown on to the stage anyhow. This would not matter so much, but our players, even in *Hamlet*, where they are especially cautioned against it, have neither the sense nor the good taste to avoid exaggeration and rant, to which, they maintain, the public are now so accustomed, that a tragedian acting naturally would make no impression. Their conventionality, moreover, makes them keep to certain stage "traditions," which are frequently absurd, while their vanity is so egregious that one who imagines himself a first-rate actor (in a day when there are no first-rate actors) will not take what he is pleased to consider a second-rate part. Our stage has no tragedian who could embody the jealousy of "Otello," as Ronconi embodies that of "Chevreuse" in *Maria di Rohan*, nor could half a dozen actors of equal reputation be persuaded in any piece to appear in half a dozen parts of various degrees of prominence, though this is what constantly takes place at the Opera.

In Addison's time, Nicolini was a far greater actor than any who was in the habit of appearing on the English stage; indeed, this alone can account for the success of the ridiculous opera of *Hydaspes*, in which Nicolini played the principal part, and of which I shall give some account in the proper place. Doubtless also, it had much to do with the success of Italian Opera generally, which, when Addison commenced writing about it in the *Spectator*, was supported by no great composer, and was constructed on such frameworks as one would imagine could only have been imagined by a lunatic or by a pantomime writer struck serious. If Addison had not been fond of music, and moreover a very just critic, he would have dismissed the Italian Opera, such as it existed during the first days of the *Spectator*, as a hopeless mass of absurdity.

STAGE DECORATION

Every one must in particular admit the justness of Addison's views respecting the incongruity of operatic scenery; indeed, his observations on that subject might with advantage be republished now and then in the present day. "What a field of raillery," he says, "would they [the wits of King Charles's time] have been let into had they been entertained with painted dragons spitting wildfire, enchanted chariots drawn by Flanders mares, and real cascades in artificial landscapes! A little skill in criticism would inform us, that shadows and realities ought not to be mixed together in the same piece; and that the scenes which are designed as the representations of nature should be filled with resemblances, and not with the things themselves. If one would represent a wide champaign country, filled with herds and flocks, it would be ridiculous to draw the country only upon the scenes, and to

crowd several parts of the stage with sheep and oxen. This is joining together inconsistencies, and making the decoration partly real and partly imaginary. I would recommend what I have here said to the directors as well as the admirers, of our modern opera."

In the matter of stage decoration we have "learned nothing and forgotten nothing" since the beginning of the 18th century. Servandoni, at the theatre of the Tuileries, which contained some seven thousand persons, introduced as elaborate and successful mechanical devices as any that have been known since his time; but then as now the real and artificial were mixed together, by which the general picture is necessarily rendered absurd, or rather no general picture is produced. Independently of the fact that the reality of the natural objects makes the artificiality of the manufactured ones unnecessarily evident as when the branches of real trees are agitated by a gust of wind, while those of pasteboard trees remain fixed – it is difficult in making use of natural objects on the stage to observe with any accuracy the laws of proportion and perspective, so that to the eye the realities of which the manager is so proud, are, after all, strikingly unreal. The peculiar conditions too, under which theatrical scenery is viewed, should always be taken into account. Thus, "real water," which used at one time to be announced as such a great attraction at some of our minor playhouses, does not look like water on the stage, but has a dull, black, inky, appearance, quite sufficient to render it improbable that any despondent heroine, whatever her misfortune, would consent to drown herself in it.

The most contemptuous thing ever written against the Opera, or rather against music in general, is Swift's celebrated epigram on the Handel and Buononcini disputes: —

"Some say that Signor Buononcini
Compared to Handel is a ninny;
While others say that to him, Handel
Is hardly fit to hold a candle.
Strange that such difference should be,
'Twixt Tweedledum and Tweedledee."

Capital, telling lines, no doubt, though is it not equally strange that there should be such a difference between one piece of painted canvas and another, or between a statue by Michael Angelo and the figure of a Scotchman outside a tobacconist's shop? These differences exist, and it proves nothing against art that savages and certain exceptional natures among civilized men are unable to perceive them. We wonder how the Dean of St. Patrick's would have got on with the Abbé Arnauld, who was so impressed with the sublimity of one of the pieces in Gluck's *Iphigénie*, that he exclaimed, "With that air one might found a new religion!"

BERANGER ON THE DECLINE OF THE DRAMA

One of the wittiest poems written against our modern love of music (cultivated, it must be admitted, to a painful extent by many incapable amateurs) is the lament by Béranger, in which the poet, after complaining that the convivial song is despised as not sufficiently artistic, and that in the presence of the opera the drama itself is fast disappearing, exclaims:

Si nous t'enterrons
Bel art dramatique,
Pour toi nous dirons
La messe en musique.

Without falling into the same error as those who have accused Addison of a selfish and interested animosity towards the Opera, I may remark that song-writers have often very little

sympathy for any kind of music except that which can be easily subjected to words, as in narrative ballads, and to a certain extent ballads of all kinds. When a man says "I don't care much for music, but I like a good song," we may generally infer that he does not care for music at all. So play-wrights have a liking for music when it can be introduced as an ornament into their pieces, but not when it is made the most important element in the drama – indeed, the drama itself.

Favart, the author of numerous opera-books, has left a good satirical description in verse of French opera. It ends as follows: —

Quiconque voudra
Faire un opéra,
Emprunte à Pluton,
Son peuple démon;
Qu'il tire des cieux
Un couple de dieux,
Qu'il y joigne un héros
Tendre jusqu' aux os.
Lardez votre sujet,
D'un éternel ballet.
Amenez au milieu d'une fête
La tempête,
Une bête,
Que quelqu'un tûra
Dès qu'il la verra.
Quiconque voudra faire un opéra
Fuir de la raison
Le triste poison.
Il fera chanter
Concerter et sauter
Et puis le reste ira,
Tout comme il pourra.

PANARD ON THE OPERA

This, from a man whose operas did not fail, but on the contrary, were highly successful, is rather too bad. But the author of the ill-fated "Rosamond" himself visited the French Opera, and has left an account of it, which corresponds closely enough to Favart's poetical description. "I have seen a couple of rivers," he says, (No. 29 of the *Spectator*) "appear in red stockings, and Alpheus, instead of having his head covered with sedge and bulrushes, making love in a fair, full-bottomed, periwig, and a plume of feathers, but with a voice so full of shakes and quavers that I should have thought the murmurs of a country brook the much more agreeable music. I remember the last opera I saw in that merry nation was the "Rape of Proserpine," where Pluto, to make the more tempting figure, puts himself in a French equipage, and brings Ascalaphus along with him as his *valet de chambre*." This is what we call folly and impertinence, but what the French look upon as gay and polite."

Addison's account agrees with Favart's song and also with one by Panard, which contains this stanza: —

"J'ai vu le soleil et la lune
Qui faissent des discours en l'air

*J'ai vu le terrible Neptune
Sortir tout frisé de la mer."*

Panard's song, which occurs at the end of a vaudeville produced in 1733, entitled *Le départ de l'Opéra*, refers to scenes behind as well as before the curtain. It could not be translated with any effect, but I may offer the reader the following modernized imitation of it, and so conclude the present chapter.

WHAT MAY BE SEEN AT THE OPERA

I've seen Semiramis, the queen;
I've seen the Mysteries of Isis;
A lady full of health I've seen
Die in her dressing-gown, of phthisis.

I've seen a wretched lover sigh,
"Fra poco" he a corpse would be,
Transfix himself, and then – not die,
But coolly sing an air in D.

I've seen a father lose his child,
Nor seek the robbers' flight to stay;
But, in a voice extremely mild,
Kneel down upon the stage and pray.

I've seen "Otello" stab his wife;
The "Count di Luna" fight his brother;
"Lucrezia" take her own son's life;
And "John of Leyden" cut his mother.

I've seen a churchyard yield its dead,
And lifeless nuns in life rejoice;
I've seen a statue bow its head,
And listened to its trombone voice.

I've seen a herald sound alarms,
Without evincing any fright:
Have seen an army cry "To arms"
For half an hour, and never fight.

I've seen a naiad drinking beer;
I've seen a goddess fined a crown;
And pirate bands, who knew no fear,
By the stage manager put down;

Seen angels in an awful rage,
And slaves receive more court than queens,
And huntresses upon the stage

Themselves pursued behind the scenes.

I've seen a maid despond in A,
Fly the perfidious one in B,
Come back to see her wedding day,
And perish in a minor key.

I've seen the realm of bliss eternal,
(The songs accompanied by harps);
I've seen the land of pains infernal,
With demons shouting in six sharps!

PANARD AT THE OPERA

CHAPTER IV. INTRODUCTION AND PROGRESS OF THE BALLET

The Ballets of Versailles. – Louis XIV. astonished at his own importance. – Louis retires from the stage; congratulations addressed to him on the subject; he re-appears. – Privileges of Opera dancers and singers. – Manners and customs of the Parisian public. – The Opera under the regency. – Four ways of presenting a petition. – Law and the financial scheme. – Charon and paper money. – The Duke of Orleans as a composer. – An orchestra in a court of justice. – Handel in Paris. – Madame Sallé; her reform in the Ballet, and her first appearance in London.

A CORPS OF NOBLES

AFTER the Opera comes the Ballet. Indeed, the two are so intimately mixed together that it would be impossible in giving the history of the one to omit all mention of the other. The Ballet, as the name sufficiently denotes, comes to us from the French, and in the sense of an entertainment exclusively in dancing, dates from the foundation of the Académie Royale de Musique, or soon afterwards. During the first half of the 17th century, and even earlier, ballets were performed at the French court, under the direction of an Italian, who, abandoning his real name of Baltasarini, had adopted that of Beaujoyeux. He it was who in 1581 produced the "*Ballet Comique de la Royne*," to celebrate the marriage of the Duc de Joyeuse. This piece, which was magnificently appointed, and of which the representation is said to have cost 3,600,000 francs, was an entertainment consisting of songs, dances, and spoken dialogue, and appears to have been the model of the masques which were afterwards until the middle of the 17th century represented in England, and of most of the ballets performed in France until about the same period. There were dancers engaged at the French Opera from its very commencement, but it was difficult to obtain them in any numbers, and, worst of all, there were no female dancers to be found. The company of vocalists could easily be recruited from the numerous cathedral choirs; for the Ballet there were only the dancing-masters of the capital to select from, the profession of dancing-mistress not having yet been invented. Nymphs, dryads, and shepherdesses were for some time represented by young boys, who, like the fauns, satyrs, and all the rest of the dancing troop wore masks. At last, however, in 1681, Terpsichore was worthily represented by dancers of her own sex, and an aristocratic corps de ballet was formed, with Madame la Dauphine, the Princess de Conti, and Mdlle. de Nantes as principal dancers, supported by the Dauphin, the Prince de Conti and the Duke de Vermandois. They appeared in the *Triomphe de l'Amour*, and the astounding exhibition was fully appreciated. Previously, the ladies of the court, when they appeared in ballets, had confined themselves to reciting verses, which sometimes, moreover, were said for them by an orator engaged for the purpose. To see a court lady dancing on the stage was quite a novelty; hence, no doubt, the success of that spectacle.

QUADRILLES AND COUNTRY DANCES

The first celebrated *ballerina* at the French Opera was Mademoiselle La Fontaine, styled *la reine de la danse*— a title of which the value was somewhat diminished by the fact that there were only three other professional danseuses in Paris. Lulli, however, paid great attention to the ballet, and under his direction it soon gained importance. To Lulli, who occasionally officiated as ballet-master, is due the introduction of rapid style of dancing, which must have contrasted strongly with the stately solemn steps that were alone in favour at the Court during the early days of Louis XIV's reign. The minuet-loving Louis had notoriously an aversion for gay brilliant music. Thus he failed

altogether to appreciate the talent of "little Baptiste" not Lulli, but Anet, a pupil of Corelli, who is said to have played the sonatas of his master very gracefully, and with an "agility" which at that time was considered prodigious. The Great Monarch preferred the heavy monotonous strains of his own Baptiste, the director of the Opera. It may here be not out of place to mention that Lulli's introduction of a lively mode of dancing into France (it was only in his purely operatic music that he was so lugubriously serious) took place simultaneously with the importation from England of the country-dance – and corrupted into *contre-danse*, which is now the French for quadrille. Moreover, when the French took our country-dance, a name which some etymologists would curiously enough derive from its meaningless corruption – we adopted their minuet which was first executed in England by the Marquis de Flamarens, at the Court of Charles II. The passion of our English noblemen for country-dances is recorded as follows in the memoirs of the Count de Grammont: – "Russel was one of the most vigorous dancers in England, I mean for country-dances (*contre-danses*). He had a collection of two or three hundred arranged in tables, which he danced from the book; and to prove that he was not old, he sometimes danced till he was exhausted. His dancing was a good deal like his clothes; it had been out of fashion twenty years."

Every one knows that Louis XIV. was a great actor; and even his mother, Anne of Austria, appeared on the stage at the Court of Madrid to the astonishment and indignation of the Spaniards, who said that she was lost for them, and that it was not as Infanta of Spain, but as Queen of France, that she had performed.

On the occasion of Louis XIV.'s marriage with Marie Therèse, the celebrated expression *Il n'y plus de Pyrénées* was illustrated by a ballet, in which a French nymph and a Spanish nymph sang a duet while half the dancers were dressed in the French and half in the Spanish costume.

Like other illustrious stars, Louis XIV. took his farewell of the stage more than once before he finally left it. His Histrionic Majesty was in the habit both of singing and dancing in the court ballets, and took great pleasure in reciting such graceful compliments to himself as the following: —

"Plus brillant et mieux fait que tous les dieux ensemble
La terre ni le ciel n'ont rien qui me ressemble."

(*Thétis et Pélée.* – *Benserade.* 1654),

"Il n'est rien de si grand dans toute la nature
Selon l'âme et le cœur au point où je me vois;
De la terre et de moi qui prendra la mesure
Trouvera que la terre est moins grande que moi."

(*L'Impatience.* – *Benserade.* 1661).

On the 15th February, 1669, Louis XIV. sustained his favourite character of the Sun, in *Flora*, the eighteenth ballet in which he had played a part – and the next day solemnly announced that his dancing days were over, and that he would exhibit himself no more. The king had not only given his royal word, but for nine months had kept it, when Racine produced his *Britannicus*, in which the following lines are spoken by "Narcisse" in reference to Nero's performances in the amphitheatre.

Pour toute ambition pour vertu singulière
Il excelle à conduire un char dans la carrière;
A disputer des prix indignes des ses mains,
A se donner lui-même en spectacle aux Romains,
A venir prodiguer sa voix sur un théâtre
A réciter des chants qu'il veut qu'on idolâtre;

Tandis que des soldats, de moments en moments,
Vont arracher pour lui des applaudissements.

LOUIS RETURNS TO THE STAGE

The above lines have often been quoted as an example of virtuous audacity on the part of Racine, who, however, did not write them until the monarch who at one time did not hesitate to "*se donner lui même en spectacle, &c.*," had confessed his fault and vowed never to repeat it; so that instead of a lofty rebuke, the verses were in fact an indirect compliment neatly and skilfully conveyed. So far from profiting by Racine's condemnation of Nero's frivolity and shamelessness, and retiring conscience-stricken from the stage (of which he had already taken a theatrical farewell) Louis XIV. reappeared the year afterwards, in *Les amants magnifiques*, a *Comédie-ballet*, composed by Molière and himself, in which the king figured and was applauded as author, ballet-master, dancer, mime, singer, and performer on the flute and guitar. He had taken lessons on the latter instrument from the celebrated Francisco Corbetta, who afterwards made a great sensation in England at the Court of Charles II.

If Louis XIV. did not scruple to assume the part of an actor himself, neither did he think it unbecoming that his nobles should do the same, even in presence of the general public and on the stage of the Grand Opera. "We wish, and it pleases us," he says in the letters patent granted to the Abbé Perrin, the first director of the Académie Royale de Musique (1669) "that all gentlemen (*gentilshommes*) and ladies may sing in the said pieces and representations of our Royal Academy without being considered for that reason to derogate from their titles of nobility, or from their privileges, rights and immunities." Among the nobles who profited by this permission and appeared either as singers, or as dancers at the Opera, were the Seigneur du Porceau, and Messieurs de Chasré and Borel de Miracle; and Mesdemoiselles de Castilly, de Saint Christophe, and de Camargo. Another privilege accorded to the Opera was of such an infamous nature that were it not for positive proof we could scarcely believe it to have existed. It had full control, then, over all persons whose names were once inscribed on its books; and if a young girl went of her own accord, or was persuaded into presenting herself at the Opera, or was led away from her parents and her name entered on the lists by her seducer – then in neither case had her family any further power over her. *Lettres de cachet* even were issued, commanding the persons named therein to join the Opera; and thus the Count de Melun got possession of both the Camargos. The Duke de Fronsac was enabled to perpetrate a similar act of villany. He it is who is alluded to in the following lines by Gilbert: —

"Qu'on la séduise! Il dit: ses eunuques discrets,
Philosophes abbés, philosophes valets,
Intriguent, sèment l'or, trompent les yeux d'un père,
Elle cède, on l'enlève; en vain gémit sa mère.
Echue à l'Opéra par un rapt solennel,
Sa honte la dérobe au pouvoir paternel."

INVENTION OF THE BALLET

As for men they were sent to the Opera as they were sent to the Bastille. Several amateurs, abbés and others, the beauty of whose voices had been remarked, were arrested by virtue of *lettres de cachet*, and forced to appear at the Académie Royale de Musique, which had its conscription like the army and navy. On the other hand, we have seen that the pupils and associates of the Académie

enjoyed certain privileges, such as freedom from parental restraint and the right of being immoral; to which was afterwards added that of setting creditors at defiance. The pensions of singers, dancers, and musicians belonging to the Opera were exempted from all liability to seizure for debt.

The dramatic ballet, or *ballet d'action*, was invented by the Duchess du Maine. We soon afterwards imported it into England as, in Opera, we imported the chorus, which was also a French invention, and one for which the musical drama can scarcely be too grateful. The dramatic *ballet*, however, has never been naturalized in this country. It still crosses over to us occasionally, and when we are tired of it goes back again to its native land; but even as an exotic, it has never fairly taken root in English soil.

The Duchess du Maine was celebrated for her *Nuits de Sceaux*, or *Nuits Blanches*, as they were called, which the nobles of Louis XIV.'s Court found as delightful as they found Versailles dull. The Duchess used to get up lotteries among her most favoured guests, in which the prizes were so many permissions to give a magnificent entertainment. The letters of the alphabet were placed in a box, and the one who drew O had to get up an opera; C stood for a comedy; B for a ballet; and so on. The hostess of Sceaux had not only a passion for theatrical performances, but also a great love of literature, and the idea occurred to her of realising on the stage of her own theatre something like one of those pantomimes of antiquity of which she had read the descriptions with so much pleasure. Accordingly, she took the fourth act of *Les Horaces*, had it set to music by Mouret, just as if it were to be sung, and caused this music to be executed by the orchestra alone, while Balon and Mademoiselle Prévost, who were celebrated as dancers, but had never attempted pantomime before, played in dumb show the part of the last Horatius, and of Camilla, the sister of the Curiatii. The actor and actress entered completely into the spirit of the new drama, and performed with such truthfulness and warmth of emotion as to affect the spectators to tears.

Mouret, the musical director of *Les Nuits Blanches*, composed several operas and *ballets* for the Académie; but when the establishment at Sceaux was broken up, after the discovery of the Spanish conspiracy, in which the Duchess du Maine was implicated, he considered himself ruined, went mad and died at Charenton in the lunatic asylum.

THE FREE LIST

"Long live the Regent, who would rather go to the Opera than to the Mass," was the cry when on the death of Louis XIV., the reins of government were assumed by the Duke of Orleans. At this time the whole expenses of the Opera, including chorus, ballet, musicians, scene painters, decorators, &c. – from the prima donna to the bill-sticker – amounted only to 67,000 francs a year, being considerably less than half what is given now to a first-rate soprano alone. The first act of the Regent in connexion with the Opera was to take its direction out of the hands of musicians, and appoint the Duc d'Antin manager. The new *impresario*, wishing to reward Thévanard, who was at that time the best singer in France, offered him the sum of 600 francs. Thévanard indignantly refused it, saying "that it was a suitable present, at most, for his valet," upon which d'Antin proposed to imprison the singer for his insolence, but abstained from doing so, for fear of irritating the public with whom Thévanard was a prodigious favourite. He, however, resigned the direction of the Opera, saying that he "wished to have nothing more to do with such *canaille*."

The next operatic edict of the Regent had reference to the admission of authors, who hitherto had enjoyed the privilege of free entry to the pit. In 1718 the Regent raised them to the amphitheatre – not as a mark of respect, but in order that they might be the more readily detected and expelled in case of their forming cabals to hiss the productions of their rivals, which, standing up in the pit in the midst of a dense crowd, they had been able to do with impunity. Even to the present day, when authors exchange applause much more freely than hisses, the regulations of the French theatre do not admit them to the pit, though they have free access to every other part of the house.

At the commencement of the 18th century, the Opera was the scene of frequent disturbances. The Count de Talleyrand, MM. de Montmorency, Gineste, and others, endeavouring to force their way into the theatre during a rehearsal, were repulsed by the guard, and Gineste killed. The Abbés Hourlier and Barentin insulted M. Fieubet; they were about to come to blows when the guard separated them and carried off the obstreperous ecclesiastics to For l'Evêque, where they were confined for a fortnight. On their release Hourlier and Barentin, accompanied by a third abbé, took their places in the balcony over the stage, and began to sing, louder even than the actors, maintaining, when called to order, that the Opera was established for no other purpose, and that if they had a right to sing anywhere, it was at the Académie de Musique.

PETER THE GREAT AT THE OPERA

A balustrade separated the stage balconies from the stage, but continual attempts were made to get over it, and even to break into the actresses' dressing rooms, which were guarded by sentinels. At this period about a third of the *habitués* used to make their appearance in a state of intoxication, the example being set by the Regent himself, who could proceed direct from his residence in the Palais Royal to the Opera, which adjoined it. To the first of the Regent's masked balls the Councillor of State, Rouillé, is said to have gone drunk from personal inclination, and the Duke de Noailles in the same condition, out of compliment to the administrator of the kingdom.

When Peter the Great visited the French Opera, in 1717, he does not appear to have been intoxicated, but he went to sleep. When he was asked whether the performance had wearied him, he is said to have replied, that on the contrary he liked it to excess, and had gone to sleep from motives of prudence. This story, however, does not quite accord with the fact that Peter introduced public theatrical performances into Russia, and encouraged his nobles to attend them.

Nothing illustrates better the heartless selfishness of Louis XV. than his conduct, not at the Opera, but at his own theatre in the Louvre, immediately after the occurrence of a terrible and fatal accident. The Chevalier de Fénélon, an ensign in the palace guard, in endeavouring to climb from one box to another, lost his footing, and fell headlong on to a spiked balustrade, where he remained transfixed through the neck. The theatre was stained with blood in a horrible manner, and the unfortunate chevalier was removed from the balustrade a dead man. Just then, the Very Christian king made his appearance. He gave the signal for the performance to commence, and the orchestra struck up as if nothing had happened.

Some idea of the morality of the French stage during the regency and the reign of Louis XV., may be formed from the fact that, in spite of the great license accorded to the members of the Académie, or at least, tolerated and encouraged by the law, it was found absolutely necessary in 1734 to expel the *prima donna* Mademoiselle Pélissier, who had shocked even the management of the Opera. She was, however, received with open arms in London. Let us not be too hard on our neighbours.

Soon afterwards, Mademoiselle Petit, a dancer, was exiled for negligence of attire and indiscretion behind the scenes. I must add that this negligence was extreme. The most curious part of the affair, was that the Abbé de la Marre, author of several *libretti*, undertook the young lady's defence, and published a pamphlet in justification of her conduct, which is to be found among his *Œuvres diverses*.

Another *danseuse*, however, named Mariette, ruled at the Opera like a little autocrat. "The Princess," as she was named, from the regard the Prince de Carignan, titular director of the academy, was known to entertain for her, applied to the actual managers, Lecomte and Lebœuf, for a payment of salary which she had already received, and which they naturally refused to give twice. Upon this they were not only dismissed from their places (which they had purchased) but were exiled by *lettres de cachet*.

PELISSIER AT TABLE

The prodigality of favourite and favoured actresses under the regency was extreme. The before-mentioned Mademoiselle Pélissier and her friend Mademoiselle Deschamps, both gluttonous to excess, were noted for their contempt of all ordinary food, and of everything that happened to be nearly in season, or at all accessible, not merely to vulgar citizens, but to the generality of opulent sensualists. It is not said that they aspired to the dissolution of pearls in their sauces, but if green peas were served to them when the price of the dish was less than sixty francs, they sent them away in disdain. Mademoiselle Pélissier was in the receipt of 4,000 francs (£160) a year from the Opera. Mademoiselle Deschamps, who was only a figurante, contrived to get on with a salary of only sixteen pounds. And yet we have seen that they were neither of them economical.

One of the most facetious members of the Académie under the regency, was Tribou, a performer, who seems to have been qualified for every branch of the histrionic profession, and to have possessed a certain literary talent besides. This humourist had some favour to ask of the Duke of Orleans. He presented a petition to him, and after the regent had read it, said gravely —

"If your Highness would like to read it again, here is the same thing in verse."

"Let me see it," said the Duke.

Tribou presented his petition in verse, and afterwards expressed his readiness to sing it. He sang, and no sooner had he finished, than he added —

"If *mon Seigneur* will permit me, I shall be happy to dance it."

"Dance it?" exclaimed the regent; "by all means!"

When Tribou had concluded his *pas*, the duke confessed that he had never before heard of a petition being either danced or sung, and for the love of novelty, granted the actor his request.

During the regency, wax was substituted for tallow in the candelabra of the Opera. This improvement was due to Law, who gave a large sum of money to the Académie for that special purpose. On the other hand, Mademoiselle Mazé, one of the prettiest dancers at the Opera, was ruined three years afterwards by the failure of this operatic benefactor's financial scheme. The poor girl put on her rouge, her mouches, and her silk stockings, and in her gayest attire, drowned herself publicly in the middle of the day at La Grenouillère.

HOW TO CROSS THE STYX

After the break up of Law's system, the regent, terrified by the murmurs and imprecations of the Parisians, endeavoured to turn the whole current of popular hatred against the minister, by dismissing him from the administration of the finances. When Law presented himself at the Palais Royal, the regent refused to receive him; but the same evening, he admitted him by a private door, apologized to him, and tried to console him. Two days afterwards, he accompanied Law to the Opera; but to preserve him from the fury of the people, he was obliged to have him conducted home by a party of the Swiss guard.

In the fourth act of Lulli's *Alceste*, Charon admits into his bark those shades who are able to pay their passage across the Styx, and sends back those who have no money.

"Give him some bank notes," exclaimed a man in the pit to one of these penniless shades. The audience took up the cry, and the scene between Charon and the shades was, at subsequent representations, the cause of so much tumult, that it was found necessary to withdraw the piece.

The Duke of Orleans appears to have had a sincere love of music, for he composed an opera himself, entitled *Panthée*, of which the words were written by the Marquis de La Fare. *Panthée* was produced at the Duke's private theatre. After the performance, the musician, Campra, said to the composer,

"The music, your Highness, is excellent, but the poem is detestable."

The regent called La Fare.

"Ask Campra," he said, "what he thinks of the Opera; I am sure he will tell you that the poem is admirable, and the music worthless. We must conclude that the whole affair is as bad as it can be."

The Duke of Orleans had written a motet for five voices, which he wished to send to the Emperor Leopold, but before doing so, entrusted it for revision to Bernier, the composer. Bernier handed the manuscript to the Abbé de la Croix, whom the regent found examining it while Bernier himself was in the next room regaling himself with his friends. The immediate consequences of this discovery were a box on the ear for Bernier, and ten louis for de La Croix.

The Regent also devoted some attention to the study of antiquity. He occupied himself in particular with inquiries into the nature of the music of the Greeks, and with the construction of an instrument which was to resemble their lyre.

MUSIC IN COURT

To the same prince was due the excellent idea of engaging the celebrated Italian Opera Company of London, at that time under the direction of Handel, to give a series of performances at the Académie. A treaty was actually signed in presence of M. de Maurepas, the minister, by which Buononcini the conductor, Francesca Cuzzoni, Margarita Durastanti, Francesco Bernardi, surnamed *Senesino*, Gaetano Bernesta, and Guiseppe Boschi were to come to Paris in 1723, and give twelve representations of one or two Italian Operas, as they thought fit. Francine, the director of the Académie, engaged to pay them 35,000 francs, and to furnish new dresses to the principal performers. This treaty was not executed, probably through some obstacle interposed by Francine; for the manager signed it against his will, and on the 2nd of December following, the regent, with whom it had originated, died. The absurd privileges secured to the Académie Royale, and the consequent impossibility of giving satisfactory performances of Italian Opera elsewhere than at the chief lyrical theatre must have done much to check the progress of dramatic music in France. From time to time Italian singers were suffered to make their appearance at the Grand Opera; but at the regular Italian Theatre established in Paris, as at the Comédie Française, singing was only permitted under prescribed conditions, and the orchestra was strictly limited, by severe penalties, rigidly enforced, to a certain number of instruments, of which not more than six could be violins, or of the violin family.

At the Comédie Italienne an ass appeared on the stage, and began to bray.

"Silence," exclaimed Arlechinno, "music is forbidden here."

Among the distinguished amateurs of the period of the regency was M. de Saint Montant, who played admirably on the viola, and had taught his sons and daughters to do the same. Being concerned in a law suit, which had to be tried at Nimes, he went with his family of musicians to visit the judges, laid his case before them, one after the other, and by way of peroration, gave them each a concert, with which they were so delighted that they decided unanimously in favour of M. de Saint Montant.

A law suit had previously been decided somewhat in the same manner, but much more logically, in favour of Joseph Campra, brother of the composer of that name, who was the conductor of the orchestra at the Opera of Marseilles. The manager refused to pay the musicians on the ground that they did not play well enough. In consequence, he was summoned by the entire band, who, when they appeared in court, begged through Campra that they might be allowed to plead their own cause. The judges granted the desired permission, upon which the instrumentalists drew themselves up in orchestral order and under the direction of Campra commenced an overture of Lulli's. The execution of this piece so delighted the tribunal that with one voice it condemned the director to pay the sum demanded of him.

A still more curious dispute between a violinist and a dancer was settled in a satisfactory way for both parties. The dancer was on the stage rehearsing a new step. The violinist was in the orchestra performing the necessary musical accompaniment.

"Your scraping is enough to drive a man mad," said the dancer.

"Very likely," said the musician, "and your jumping is only worthy of a clown. Perhaps as you have such a very delicate ear," he added, "and nature has refused you the slightest grace, you would like to take my place in the orchestra?"

LA CAMARGO

"Your awkwardness with the bow makes me doubt whether your most useful limbs may not be your legs," replied the dancer. "You will never do any good where you are. Why do you not try your fortune in the ballet? Give me your violin," he continued, "and come up on to the stage. I know the scale already. You can teach me to play minuets, and I will show you how to dance them."

The proposed interchange of good offices took place, and with the happiest results. The unmusical fiddler, whose name was Dupré, acquired great celebrity in the ballet, and Léclair, the awkward dancer, became the chief of the French school of violin playing.

Marie-Anne Cupis de Camargo did not lose so much time in discovering her true vocation. She gave evidence of her genius for the ballet while she was still in the cradle, and was scarcely six months old when the variety of her gestures, the grace of her movements, and the precision with which she marked the rhythm of the tunes her father played on the violin led all who saw her to believe that she would one day be a great dancer. The young Camargo, who belonged to a noble family of Spanish origin, made her *début* at the Académie in 1726, and at once achieved a decided success. People used to fight at the doors to obtain admittance the nights she performed; all the new fashions were introduced under her name, and in a very short space of time her shoemaker made his fortune. All the ladies of the court insisted on wearing shoes *à la Camargo*. But the triumph of one dancer is the despair of another. Mademoiselle Prévost, who was the queen of the ballet until Mademoiselle de Camargo appeared was not prepared to be dethroned by a *débutante*. She was so alarmed by the young girl's success that she did her utmost to keep her in the background, and contrived before long to get her placed among the *figurantes*. But in spite of this loss of rank, Mademoiselle de Camargo soon found an opportunity of distinguishing herself. In a certain ballet, she formed one of a group of demons, and was standing on the stage waiting for Dumoulin, who had to dance a *pas seul*, when the orchestra began the soloist's air and continued to play it, though still no Dumoulin appeared. Mademoiselle de Camargo was seized with a sudden inspiration. She left the demoniac ranks, improvised a step in the place of the one that should have been danced by Dumoulin and executed it with so much grace and spirit that the audience were in raptures. Mademoiselle Prévost, who had previously given lessons to young Camargo, now refused to have anything to do with her, and the two *danseuses* were understood to be rivals both by the public and by one another. The chief characteristics of Camargo's dancing were grace, gaiety, and above all prodigious lightness, which was the more remarkable at this period from the fact that the mode chiefly cultivated at the Opera was one of solemn dignity. However, she had not been long on the stage before she learned to adopt from her masters and from the other dancers whatever good points their particular styles presented, and thus formed a style of her own which was pronounced perfection.

STAGE COSTUME

Mademoiselle de Camargo, in spite of her charming vivacity when dancing, was of a melancholy mood off the stage. She was not remarkably pretty, but her face was highly expressive, her figure exquisite, her hands and feet of the most delicate proportions, and she possessed considerable

wit. Dupré, the ex-violinist, who had leaped at a bound from the orchestra to the stage, was in the habit of dancing with Camargo, and also with Mademoiselle Sallé, another celebrity of this epoch, who afterwards visited London, where she produced the first complete *ballet d'action* ever represented, and at the same time introduced an important reform in theatrical costume.

The art of stage decoration had made considerable progress, even before the Opera was founded, but it was not until long after Mademoiselle Sallé had given the example in London that any reasonable principles were observed in the selection and design of theatrical dresses. In 1730, warriors of all kinds, Greek, Roman, and Assyrian, used to appear on the French stage in tunics belaced and beribboned, in cuirasses, and in powdered wigs bearing tails a yard long, surmounted by helmets with plumes of prodigious height. The tails, of which there were four, two in front and two behind, were neatly plaited and richly pomatumed, and when the warrior became animated, and waved his arm or shook his head, a cloud of hair powder escaped from his wig. It appeared to Mademoiselle Sallé, who, besides being an admirable dancer, was a woman of taste in all matters of art, that this sort of thing was absurd; but the reforms she suggested were looked upon as ridiculous innovations, and nearly half a century elapsed before they were adopted in France.

This ingenious *ballerina* enjoyed the friendship and regard of many of the most distinguished writers of her time. Voltaire celebrated her in verse, and when she went to London she took with her a letter of introduction from Fontenelle to Montesquieu, who was then ambassador at the English Court. Another danseuse, Mademoiselle Subligny came to England with letters of introduction from Thiriot and the Abbé Dubois to Locke. The illustrious metaphysician had no great appreciation of Mademoiselle de Subligny's talent, but he was civil and attentive to her out of regard to his friends, who were also hers, and, in the words of Fontenelle, constituted himself her "*homme d'affaires*."

PHILOSOPHERS AND ACTRESSES

Mademoiselle Sallé was not only esteemed by literature, she was adored by finance, and Samuel Bernard, the Court banker and money lender, gave her a hundred golden louis for dancing before the guests at the marriage of his daughter with the President Molé. The same opulent amateur sent a thousand francs to Mademoiselle Lemaure, by way of thanking her for resuming the part of "Délie," in the "*Les Fêtes Grecques et Romaines*," on the occasion of the Duchess de Mirepoix's marriage. I must mention that at this period it was not the custom in good society for young ladies to appear at the Opera before their marriage. Their mothers were determined either to keep their daughters out of harm's way, or to escape a dangerous rivalry as long as possible; but once attached to a husband the newly-married girl could show herself at the Opera as often as she pleased, and it was a point of etiquette that through the Opera she should make her entrance into fashionable life. These *débutantes* of the audience department presented themselves to the public in their richest attire, in their most brilliant diamonds; and if the effect was good the gentlemen in the pit testified their approbation by clapping their hands.

But to return to Mademoiselle Sallé. What she proposed to introduce then, and did introduce into London, in addition to her own admirable dancing, were complete dramatic ballets, with the personages attired in the costumes of the country and time to which the subject belonged. To give some notion of the absurdity of stage costumes at this period we may mention that forty-two years afterwards, when Mademoiselle Sallé's reform had still had no effect in France, the "*Galathea*," in Rousseau's *Pygmalion*, wore a damask dress, made in the Polish style, over a basket hoop, and on her head an enormous *pouf*, surmounted by three ostrich feathers!

In her own *Pygmalion*, Mademoiselle Sallé carried out her new principle by appearing, not in a Polish costume, nor in a Louis Quinze dress, but in drapery imitated as closely as possible from the statues of antiquity. Of her performance, and of *Pygmalion* generally, a good account is given in the following letter, written by a correspondent in London, under the date of March 15th, 1734, to the

"Mercure de France." In the style we do not recognise the author of the "Essay on the Decadence of the Romans," and of the "Spirit of Laws," but it is just possible that M. de Montesquieu may have responded to M. de Fontenelle's letter of introduction, by writing a favourable criticism of the bearer's performance, for the "influential journal" in which the notice actually appeared.

"Mdlle. Sallé," says the London correspondent, "without considering the embarrassing position in which she places me, desires me to give you an account of her success. I have to tell you in what manner she has rendered the fable of Pygmalion, and that of Ariadne and Bacchus; and of the applause with which these two ballets of her composition have been received by the Court of England.

"Pygmalion has now been represented for nearly two months, and the public is never tired of it. The subject is developed in the following manner.

MADemoISELLE SALLE

"Pygmalion comes into his studio with his pupils, who perform a characteristic dance, chisel and mallet in hand. Pygmalion tells them to draw aside a curtain at the back of the studio, which, like the front is adorned with statues. The one in the middle above all the others attracts the looks and admiration of every one. Pygmalion gazes at it and sighs; he touches its feet, presses its waist, adorns its arms with precious bracelets, and covers its neck with diamonds, and, kissing the hands of his dear statue, shows that he is passionately in love with it. The amorous sculptor expresses his distress in pantomime, falls into a state of reverie, and then throwing himself at the feet of a statue of Venus, prays to the goddess to animate his beloved figure.

"The goddess answers his prayer. Three flashes of light are seen, and to an appropriate symphony the marble beauty emerges by degrees from her state of insensibility. To the surprise of Pygmalion and his pupils she becomes animated, and evinces her astonishment at her new existence, and at the objects by which she is surrounded. The delighted Pygmalion extends his hand to her; she feels, so to speak, the ground beneath her with her feet, and takes some timid steps in the most elegant attitudes that sculpture could suggest. Pygmalion dances before her, as if to instruct her; she repeats her master's steps, from the easiest to the most difficult. He endeavours to inspire her with the tenderness he feels himself, and succeeds in making her share that sentiment. You can understand, sir, what all the passages of this action become, executed and danced with the fine and delicate grace of Mdlle. Sallé. She ventured to appear without basket, without skirt, without a dress, in her natural hair, and with no ornament on her head. She wore nothing, in addition to her bodice and under-petticoat, but a simple robe of muslin, arranged in drapery after the model of a Greek statue.

"You cannot doubt, sir, of the prodigious success this ingenious ballet, so well executed, obtained. At the request of the king, the queen, the royal family, and all the court, it will be performed on the occasion of Mademoiselle Sallé's benefit, for which all the boxes and places in the theatre and amphitheatre have been taken for a month past. The benefit takes place on the first of April.

"Do not expect that I can describe to you Ariadne like Pygmalion: its beauties are more noble and more difficult to relate; the expressions and sentiments are those of the profoundest grief, despair, rage and utter dejection; in a word all the great passions perfectly declaimed by means of dances, attitudes and gestures suggested by the position of a woman who is abandoned by the man she loves. You may announce, sir, that Mademoiselle Sallé becomes in this piece the rival of the Journets, the Duclos, and the Lecouvreurs. The English, who preserve so tender a recollection of their famous Oldfield, whom they have just laid in Westminster Abbey among their great statesmen (!) look upon her as resuscitated in Mademoiselle Sallé when she represents Ariadne.

"P. S. The first of this month the Prince of Orange, accompanied by the Prince of Wales, the Duke of Cumberland and the Princesses, went to Covent Garden Theatre [Théâtre du *Commun Jardin* the French newspaper has it] to see the tragedy of King Henry IV., when there was a numerous assembly; and all the receipts of the representation were for the benefit of Mademoiselle Sallé."

MADemoiselle SALLE

A PROFITABLE PERFORMANCE

M. Castil Blaze, who publishes the whole of the above letter, with the exception of the postscript, in his history of the Académie Royale, is wrong in concluding from Mademoiselle Sallé having appeared at Covent Garden, that she was engaged to dance there by Handel, who was at that time director of the Queen's Theatre (reign of Anne) in the Haymarket. M. Victor Schœlcher may also be in error when, in speaking of the absurd fable that Handel being in Paris heard a canticle by Lulli,¹⁰ and coming back to England gave it to the English, as God Save the King, he assures us that Handel never set foot in Paris at all. It is certain that Handel went to Italy to engage new singers in 1733, and it is by no means improbable that he passed through Paris on his way. At all events, M. Castil Blaze assures us that in that year he visited the Académie Royale de Musique, and that "while lavishing sarcasms and raillery on our French Opera," he appreciated the talent of Mademoiselle Sallé. "A thousand crowns (three thousand francs) was the sum," he continues, "that the *virtuose* asked for composing two ballets and dancing in them at London *during the carnival* of 1734. The director of a rival enterprise watched for her arrival in that city, and offered her three thousand guineas instead of the three thousand crowns which she had agreed to accept from Handel; adding that nothing prevented her from making this change, inasmuch as she had signed no engagement. 'And my word,' answered the amiable dancer; 'is my word to count for nothing?' This reply, applauded and circulated from mouth to mouth, prepared Mademoiselle Sallé's success, and had the most fortunate influence on the representation given for her benefit. All the London journals gave magnificent accounts of the triumphs of Marie Taglioni, and of the marks of admiration and gratitude that she received. Equally flattering descriptions reached us from the icy banks of the Neva. Mere trifles, *niaiseries*, *debollezze!* This *furor*, this enthusiasm, this fanaticism, this royal, imperial liberality was very little, or rather was nothing, in comparison with the homage which the sons of Albion offered to and lavished upon the divine Sallé. History tells us that at the representation given for her benefit people fought at the doors of the theatre; that an infinity of amateurs were obliged to conquer at the point of the sword, or at least with their fists, the places which had been sold to them by auction, and at exorbitant prices. As Mademoiselle Sallé made her last curtsey and smiled upon the pit with the most charming grace, furious applause burst forth from all parts and seemed to shake the theatre to its foundation. While the whirlwind howled, while the thunder roared, a hailstorm of purses, full of gold, fell upon the stage, and a shower of bonbons followed in the same direction. These bonbons, manufactured at London, were of a singular kind; guineas – not like the doubloons, the louis d'or in paste, that are exhibited in the shop-windows of our confectioners, but good, genuine guineas in metal of Peru, well and solidly bound together – formed the sweetmeat; the *papillote* was a bank-note. Projectiles a thousand times, and again a thousand times precious. Arguments which sounded still when the fugitive tempest of applause was at an end. Our favourite *virtuoses* place now on their heads, after pressing them for a moment to their hearts, the wreaths thrown to them by an electrified public. Mademoiselle Sallé put the proofs of gratitude offered by her host of admirers into her pockets or rather into bags. The light and playful troop of little Loves who hovered around the new dancer, picked up the precious sugar-plums as they fell, and eight dancing satyrs carried away in cadence the improvised treasures. This performance brought Mademoiselle Sallé more than two hundred thousand francs."

¹⁰ "Life of Handel," by Victor Schœlcher.

What M. Castil Blaze tells us about the bonbons of guineas and bank-notes may or may not be true – I have no means of judging – but it is not very likely that eight dancing satyrs appeared on the stage at Mademoiselle Sallé's benefit, inasmuch as the ballet given on that occasion was not *Bacchus and Ariadne*, as M. Castil Blaze evidently supposes, but *Pygmalion*. The London correspondent of the *Mercure de France* has mentioned that *Pygmalion* was to be performed by desire of "the king and the queen, the royal family, and all the court," and naturally that was the piece selected. According to the letter in the *Mercure* the benefit was fixed for the first of April; indeed, the writer in his postscript speaks of it as having taken place on that day, but he says nothing about purses of gold, nor does he speak of guineas wrapped up in bank-notes.

It appears from the *Daily Journal* that Mademoiselle Sallé took her benefit on the 21st of March (which would be April 1, New Style), when the first piece was *Henry IV., with the humours of Sir John Falstaff*, and the second *Pigmalion* (with a Pig). It was announced that on this occasion "servants would be permitted to keep places on the stage," whereas in most of the Covent Garden play bills of the period the following paragraph appears: – "It is desired that no person will take it ill their not being admitted behind the scenes, it being impossible to perform the entertainment unless these passages are kept clear."

MADemoiselle SALLE AND HANDEL

At this time Handel was at the Queen's Theatre, and it was not until the next year, long after Mademoiselle Sallé had left England, that he moved to Covent Garden. The rival who is represented as having offered such magnificent terms to Mademoiselle Sallé with the view of tempting her from her allegiance to Handel, must have been, if any one, Porpora; though if M. Castil Blaze could have identified him as that celebrated composer he would certainly have mentioned the name. Porpora, who arrived in England in 1733, was in 1734 director of the "Nobility's Theatre" in Lincoln's-Inn Fields.

The following is the announcement of Mademoiselle Sallé's first appearance in England: —

"At the THEATRE ROYAL COVENT GARDEN, On Monday, 11th March, will be performed a Comedy, called "*The WAY of the WORLD*, by the late Mr. Congreve, with entertainments of dancing, particularly the Scottish dance by Mr. Glover and Mrs. Laguerre, Mr. le Sac, and Miss Boston, M. de la Garde and Mrs. Ogden.

"The French Sailor and his Lass, by Mademoiselle Sallé and Mr. Malter.

"The Nassau, by Mr. Glover and Miss Rogers, Mr. Pelling and Miss Nona, Mr. Le Sac and Mrs. Ogden, Mr. de la Garde and Miss Batson.

"With a new dance, called *Pigmalion*, performed by Mr. Malter and Mademoiselle Sallé, M. Dupré, Mr. Pelling, Mr. Duke, Mr. le Sac, Mr. Newhouse, and M. de la Garde.

"No servants will be permitted to keep places on the stage."

It appears that at the King's Theatre on the night of Mademoiselle Sallé's benefit, at Covent Garden, there was "an assembly." "Two tickets," says the advertisement, "will be delivered to every subscriber, this day, at White's Chocolate House, in St. James's Street, paying the subscription-money; and if any tickets remain more than are subscribed for, they will be delivered the same day at the Opera office in the Haymarket, at six and twenty shillings each.

"Every ticket will admit either one gentleman or two ladies.

"N. B. – Five different doors will be opened at twelve for the company to go out, where chairs will easily be had.

N. B. – To prevent a crowd there will be but 700 tickets printed."

I find from the collection of old newspapers before me, that Handel, whose *Ariadne* was first produced and whose *Pastor Fido* was revived in 1734, is called in the playbills of the King's Theatre

"Mr. Handell." The following is the announcement of the performance given at that establishment on the 4th June, 1734, "being the last time of performing till after the holidays."

MR. HANDELL

"AT the KING'S THEATRE in the HAYMARKET, on Tuesday next, being the 4th day of June will be performed an Opera called

PASTOR FIDO,

Composed by Mr. Handell, intermixed with Choruses.

The Scenery after a particular manner.

Pit and Boxes will be put together, and no persons to be admitted without tickets, which will be delivered that day at the Office of the Haymarket, at half a guinea each.

GALLERY FIVE SHILLINGS

By His Majesty's COMMAND

No persons whatever to be admitted behind the scenes.

To begin at half an hour after six o'clock."

Handel had now been twenty-four years in London where he had raised the Italian Opera to a pitch of excellence unequalled elsewhere in Europe, except perhaps at Dresden, which during the first half of the 18th century was universally celebrated for the perfection of its operatic performances at the Court Theatre directed by Hasse. But of the introduction of Italian Opera into England, and especially of the arrival of Handel, his operatic enterprises, his successes and his failures, I must speak in another chapter.

CHAPTER V. INTRODUCTION OF ITALIAN OPERA INTO ENGLAND

Operatic Feuds. – Objections to Nose-pulling. – Arsinoe. – Camilla and the Boar. – Steele on insanity. – Handel and Clayton. – Nicolini and the lion. – Rinaldo and the sparrows. – Hamlet set to music. – Three enraged musicians. – Three charming singers.

IT was not until the close of the 17th century that England was visited by any Italian singers of note, among the first of whom was the well-known Margarita de l'Epine. This vocalist's name frequently occurs in the current literature of the period, and Swift in his "Journal to Stella" speaks in his own graceful way of having heard "Margarita and her sister and another drab, and a parcel of fiddlers at Windsor." This was in 1711, nineteen years after her arrival in England – a proof that even then Italian singers, who had once obtained the favour of the English public, were determined to profit by it as long as possible. Margarita was an excellent musician, and a virtuous and amiable woman; but she was ugly and was called Hecate by her husband, who had married her for her money.

OPERATIC FEUDS

The history of the Opera in England is, more than in any other country, the history of feuds and rivalries between theatres and singers. The rival of Margarita de l'Epine was Mrs. Tofts, who in 1703 was singing English and Italian songs at the theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields. Instead of enjoying the talent of both, the London public began to dispute as to which was the best; and what was still more absurd, to create disturbances at the very theatres where they sang, so that the English party prevented Margarita de l'Epine from being heard, while the Italians drowned the voice of Mrs. Tofts.¹¹ Once, when the amiable Margarita was singing at Drury Lane, she was not only hissed and hooted, but an orange was thrown at her by a woman who was recognised as being or having been in the service of the English vocalist. Hence considerable scandal and the following public statement which appeared in the *Daily Courant* of February 8th, 1704.

"Ann Barwick having occasioned a disturbance at the Theatre Royal on Saturday last, the 5th of February, and being thereupon taken into custody, Mrs. Tofts, in vindication of her innocence, sent a letter to Mr. Rich, master of the said Theatre, which is as followeth: – 'Sir, I was very much surprised when I was informed that Ann Barwick, who was lately my servant, had committed a rudeness last night at the playhouse by throwing of oranges and hissing when Mrs. L'Epine, the Italian gentlewoman, sang. I hope no one will think it was in the least with my privity, as I assure you it was not. I abhor such practices, and I hope you will cause her to be prosecuted that she may be punished as she deserves. I am, sir, your humble servant, KATHARINE TOFTS.'"

ARSINOE

At this period the unruly critics of the pit behaved with as little ceremony to those who differed from them among the audience as to those performers whom they disliked on the stage. In proof of this, we may quote a portion of the very amusing letter written by a linen-drapeer named Heywood (under the signature of James Easy), to the *Spectator*,¹² on the subject of nose-pulling. "A friend of

¹¹ I adhere to the custom of calling Margarita de l'Epine by her pretty Christian name, without any complimentary prefix, and of styling her probably more dignified competitor, Mrs. Tofts. Thus in later times it has been the fashion to say, Jenny Lind, and even Giulia Grisi, but not Theresa Titiens or Henrietta Sontag.

¹² *Spectator*, No. 261.

mine, the other night, applauding what a graceful exit Mr. Wilkes made," says Mr. Easy, "one of these nose-wringers overhearing him, pulled him by the nose. I was in the pit the other night," he adds, "when it was very crowded. A gentleman leaning upon me, and very heavily, I civilly requested him to remove his hand; for which he pulled me by the nose. I would not resent it in so public a place, because I was unwilling to create a disturbance; but have since reflected upon it as a thing that is unmanly and disingenuous, renders the nose-puller odious, and makes the person pulled by the nose look little and contemptible. This grievance I humbly request you will endeavour to redress."

Fifty years later, at the Grand Opera of Paris, a gentleman in the pit applauded the dancing of Mademoiselle Asselin. "*Il faut être bien bête pour applaudir une telle sauteuse,*" said his neighbour, upon which a challenge was given and received, the two amateurs went out and fought, when the aggressor fell mortally wounded.

In the letters of Frenchmen and Englishmen from Italy, describing the Italian theatres of the eighteenth century, we read neither of pelting with oranges, nor of nose-pulling, nor of duelling. One of the most remarkable things in the demeanour of the audience appears to have been the unceremonious manner in which the aristocratic occupants of the boxes behaved towards the people in the pit. The nobles, who were somewhat given to expectoration, thought nothing of spitting down into the parterre, and "what is still more extraordinary," says Baretti, who notices this curious habit, "those who received it on their faces and heads, did not seem to resent it much." We are told, however, that "they made the most curious grimaces in the world."

But to return to the rival singers of London. In 1705, then, Mrs. Tofts and Margarita were both engaged at Drury Lane; the former taking the principal part in *Arsinoe*, which was performed in English, the latter singing Italian songs before and after the Opera. *Arsinoe* ("the first Opera," says the *Spectator*, "that gave us a taste for Italian music") was the composition of Clayton, the *maestro* who afterwards wrote music for Addison's unfortunate *Rosamond*, and who described the purpose and character of his first work in the following words: – "The design of this entertainment being to introduce the Italian manner of singing to the English stage, which has not been before attempted, I was obliged to have an Italian Opera translated, in which the words, however mean in several places, suited much better with that manner of music than others more poetical would do. The style of this music is to express the passions, which is the soul of music, and though the voices are not equal to the Italian, yet I have engaged the best that were to be found in England; and I have not been wanting, to the utmost of my diligence, in the instructing of them. The music, being recitative, may not at first meet with that general acceptance, as is to be hoped for, from the audience's being better acquainted with it; but if this attempt shall be a means of bringing this manner of music to be used in my native country, I shall think my study and pains very well employed."

CAMILLA AND THE BOAR

Mr. Hogarth, in his interesting "Memoirs of the Opera," remarks that "though *Arsinoe* is utterly unworthy of criticism, yet there is something amusing in the folly of the composer. The very first song may be taken as a specimen. The words are —

Queen of Darkness, sable night,
Ease a wandering lover's pain;
Guide me, lead me
Where the nymph whom I adore,
Sleeping, dreaming,
Thinks of love and me no more.

The first two lines are spoken in a meagre sort of recitative. Then there is a miserable air, the first part of which consists of the next two lines, and concludes with a perfect close. The second part of the air is on the last two lines; after which, there is, as usual, a *da capo*, and the first part is repeated; the song finishing in the middle of a sentence, —

"Guide me, lead me
Where the nymph whom I adore" —

which, I venture to say, has not been beaten by Bunn, or Fitzball, or any of our worst librettists at their worst moments.

The music of *Camilla*, the second opera in the Italian style, performed in England, was by Marco Antonio Buononcini, the brother of Handel's future rival. The work was produced at the original Opera House, erected by Sir John Vanburgh, on the site of the present building, in 1705.¹³ It was sung half in English and half in Italian. Mrs. Tofts played the part of "Camilla," and kept to *her* mother tongue. Valentini played that of the hero, and kept to his. Both the Buononcinis were composers of high ability and the music of *Camilla* is said to have been very beautiful. The melodies given to the two principal singers were original, expressive, and well harmonized. Mrs. Tofts' impersonation of the Amazonian lady was much admired by persons of taste, and there was a part for a pig which threw the vulgar into ecstasies.

"Mr. Spectator," wrote a correspondent, "your having been so humble as to take notice of the epistles of the animal, embolden me, who am the wild boar that was killed by Mrs. Tofts, to represent to you that I think I was hardly used in not having the part of the lion in Hydaspes given to me. It would have been but a natural step for me to have personated that noble creature, after having behaved myself to satisfaction in the part above mentioned; but that of a lion is too great a character for one that never trode the stage before but upon two legs. As for the little resistance I made, I hope it may be excused when it is considered that the dart was thrown at me by so fair a hand. I must confess I had but just put on my brutality; and Camilla's charms were such, that beholding her erect mien, hearing her charming voice, and astonished with her graceful motion, I could not keep up to my assumed fierceness, but died like a man."

STEELE ON INSANITY

Mrs. Tofts quitted the stage in 1709, in consequence of mental derangement. We have seen Mademoiselle Desmâtins, half fancying in her excessive, vanity that she was really the queen or princess she had been representing the same night on the stage, and ordering the servants, on her return home, to prepare her throne and serve her on their bended knees. Poor Mrs. Tofts laboured under a similar delusion; only, in her case, it was not a moral malady, but the hallucination of a diseased intellect. "In the meridian of her beauty," says Hawkins, in his History of Music, "and possessed of a large sum of money, which she had acquired by singing, Mrs. Tofts quitted the stage, and was married to Mr. Joseph Smith, a gentleman, who being appointed consul for the English nation, at Venice, she went thither with him. Mr. Smith was a great collector of books, and patron of the arts. He lived in great state and magnificence; but the disorder of his wife returning, she dwelt sequestered from the world, in a remote part of the house, and had a large garden to range in, in which she would frequently walk, singing and giving way to that innocent frenzy which had seized her in the early part of her life."

The terrible affliction, which had fallen upon the favourite operatic vocalist, is touched upon by Steele, with singular want of feeling, of taste, and even of common decency, in No. 20 of the *Tatler*. "The theatre," he says, "is breaking, and there is a great desolation among the gentlemen and ladies

¹³ Burnt down in 1789. The present edifice was erected from designs by Michael Novosielski, (who, to judge from his name, must have been a Russian or a Pole), in 1790. Altered and enlarged by Nash and Repton, in 1816 – 18.

who were the ornaments of the town, and used to shine in plumes and diadems, the heroes being most of them pressed, and the queens beating hemp." Then with more brutality than humour he adds, "The great revolutions of this nature bring to my mind the distress of the unfortunate 'Camilla,' who has had the ill luck to break before her voice, and to disappear at a time when her beauty was in the height of its bloom. This lady entered so thoroughly into the great characters she acted, that when she had finished her part she could not think of retrenching her equipage, but would appear in her own lodgings with the same magnificence as she did upon the stage. This greatness of soul has reduced that unhappy princess to a voluntary retirement, where she now passes her time among the woods and forests, thinking on the crowns and sceptres she has lost, and often humming over in her solitude: —

'I was born of royal race,
Yet must wander in disgrace, &c.'

"But for fear of being overheard, and her quality known, she usually sings it in Italian: —

'Nacqui al regno, nacqui al trono,
E pur sono,
Sventatura pastorella.'"

STEELE AND DRURY LANE

It is "the Christian soldier" who wrote this; who rejoiced in this anti-christian and cowardly spirit at the dark calamity which had befallen an amiable and charming vocalist, whose only fault was that she had aided the fortunes of a theatre abhorred by Steele. And what cause had Steele for detesting the Italian Opera with the unreasonable and really stupid hatred which he displayed towards it? Addison, as it seems to me, has been most unfairly attacked for his strictures on the operatic performances of his day. They were often just, they were never ill-natured, and they were always enveloped in such a delightful garb of humour, that there is not a sentence, certainly not a whole paper, and scarcely even a phrase,¹⁴ in all he has published about the Opera, that a musician, unless already "enraged," would wish unwritten. It is unreasonable and unworthy to connect Addison's pleasantries on the subject of *Arsinoe*, *Camilla*, *Hydaspes*, and *Rinaldo*, with the failure of his *Rosamond*, which, as the reader is aware, was set to music by the ignorant impostor called Clayton. Addison, it is true, did not write any of his admirably humorous papers about the Italian Opera until after the production of *Rosamond*, but it was not until some time afterwards that the *Spectator* first appeared. St. Evrémond, who was a great lover of the Opera, wrote much more against it than Addison. In fact, the new entertainment was the subject of the day. It was full of incongruities, and naturally recommended itself to the attention of wits; and we all know that, as a rule, wits do not deal in praise. All that *Rosamond* proves is, that Addison liked the Opera or he would never have written it.

But about this Christian Soldier who endeavours to convince his readers that music is a thing to be despised because it does not appeal to the understanding, and who laughs at the misfortunes of a poor lunatic because she is no longer able to attract the public by her singing from the dramatic theatre in which he took so deep an interest, and of which he afterwards became patentee?¹⁵

¹⁴ It is to be regretted, however, that in sneering at an Italian librettist who called Handel "The Orpheus of our age," Addison thought fit to speak of the great composer with neither politeness, nor wit, nor even accuracy, as "Mynheer." —*Spectator*, No. V.

¹⁵ The same trenchant critics who attribute Addison's satire of the Opera to the failure of his *Rosamond*, explain Steele's attacks by his position as patentee of Drury Lane Theatre. Here, however, dates come to our assistance. The jocose paper on Mrs. Toft's insanity appeared in the *Tatler*, in 1709. The attacks of the unhappy Clayton on Handel (see following pages) were published under Steele's auspices in the *Spectator*, in 1711-12. Steele did not succeed Collier as manager or patentee of Drury Lane, together with

HANDEL V. AMBROSE PHILLIPS

Of course, if music appealed only to the understanding, mad Saul would have found no solace in the tones of David's harp, and it would be hideously irreverent to imagine the angels of heaven singing hymns to their Creator. Steele, of course, knew this, and also that the pleasure given by music is not a mere physical sensation, to be enjoyed as an Angora cat enjoys the smell of flowers, but he seems to have thought it was his duty (as it afterwards became his interest) to write up the drama and write down the Opera at all hazards. Powerful penmanship it must have been, however, that would have put down Handel, or that would have kept up Mr. Ambrose Phillips. It would have been easier, at least it would have been more successful, to have gone upon the other tack. We all know Handel, and (if the expression be permitted) he becomes more immortal every day. Steele, it is true, did not hold his music in any esteem, but Mozart, a competent judge in such matters, *did*, and reckoned it an honour to write additional accompaniments to the elder master's greatest work. And who was this Ambrose Phillips? some reader, not necessarily ignorant of his country's literature, may ask. He was Racine's thief. He stole *Andromaque*, and gave it to the English as his own, calling it prosaically and stupidly "The Distrest Mother," which is as if we should call "Abel" "The Uncivil Brother," or "Philoctetes" "The Man with the Bad Foot," or "Prometheus," "The Gentleman with the Liver Complaint." Steele wrote a paper¹⁶ on the reading of this new tragedy, in which he declares that "the style of the play is such as becomes those of the first education, and the sentiments worthy of those of the highest figure." He also says, "I congratulate the age that they are at last to see truth and human life represented in the incidents which concern heroes and heroines."

Translated Racine was very popular just then with writers who regarded Shakespeare as a dealer in the false sublime. "Would one think it was possible," asks Addison, "at a time when an author lived that was able to write the *Phedra and Hippolytus* (translate *Phèdre*, that is to say), for a people to be so stupidly fond of the Italian Opera as scarce to give a third day's hearing to that admirable tragedy."

Sensible people! It seems quite possible to us in the present day that they should have preferred Handel's music to Racine's rhymed prose, rendered into English rhymes by a man who had nothing of the poetical spirit which Racine, though writing in an unpoetical language, certainly possessed.

The triumphant success of Handel's *Rinaldo* was felt deeply by Steele and by the *Spectator's* favourite composer Clayton, a bad musician, and apart from the practice of his art, as base a scoundrel as ever libelled a great man. But of course critics who besides expatiating on the blemishes of Shakespeare dwelt on the beauties of Racine as improved by Phillips, would be sure to enjoy the cacophony of Clayton;

"Qui Bavium non odit amet tua carmina Mævi."

NICOLINI AND THE LION

However we must leave the chivalrous Steele and his faithful minstrel for the present. We have done with the writer's triumphant gloating over the insanity of the poor *prima donna*. We shall presently see the musician publishing impudent falsehoods, under the auspices of his literary patron, concerning Handel and his genius, and endeavouring, always with the same protection, to form a cabal for the avowed purpose of driving him from the country which he was so greatly benefiting.

Wilks, Doggett, and Cibber, until 1714.

¹⁶ *Spectator*, 290.

Before Handel's arrival in England Steele had not only insulted operatic singers, but in recording the success of Scarlatti's *Pyrrhus and Demetrius*, had openly proclaimed his chagrin thereat. "This intelligence," he says, "is not very agreeable to our friends of the theatre."

Pyrrhus and Demetrius, in which the celebrated Nicolini made his first appearance, was the last opera performed partly in English and partly in Italian.

In 1710, *Almahide*, of which the music is attributed to Buononcini, was played entirely in the Italian language, with Valentine, Nicolini, Margarita de l'Epine, Cassani, and "Signora Isabella" (Isabella Girardean), in the principal parts. The same year *Hydaspes* was produced. This marvellous work, which is not likely to be forgotten by readers of the *Spectator*, was brought out under the direction of Nicolini, the sopranoist, who performed the part of the hero. The other singers were those included in the cast of *Almahide*, with the addition of Lawrence, an English tenor, who was in the habit of singing in Italian operas, and of whom it was humourously said by Addison, in his proposition for an opera in Greek, that he "could learn to speak the language as well as he does Italian in a fortnight's time." "Hydaspes" is a sort of profane Daniel, who being thrown into an amphitheatre to be devoured by a lion, is saved not by faith, but by love; the presence of his mistress among the spectators inspiring him with such courage, that after appealing to the monster in a minor key, and telling him that he may tear his bosom but cannot touch his heart, he attacks him in the relative major, and strangles him.

NICOLINI AND THE LION

"There is nothing of late years," says Addison, in one of the most amusing of his papers on the Opera, "that has afforded matter of greater amusement to the town than Signior Nicolini's combat with a lion in the Haymarket, which has been very often exhibited to the general satisfaction of most of the nobility and gentry in the kingdom of Great Britain." Upon the first rumour of this intended combat, it was confidently affirmed, and is still believed by many in both galleries, that there would be a tame lion sent from the tower every Opera night, in order to be killed by Hydaspes; this report, though altogether so universally prevalent in the upper regions of the play-house, that some of the most refined politicians in those parts of the audience gave it out in whisper, that the lion was a cousin-german of the tiger who made his appearance in King William's days, and that the stage would be supplied with lions at the public expense, during the whole session. Many likewise were the conjectures of the treatment which this lion was to meet with from the hands of Signior Nicolini; some supposed that he was to subdue him in recitative, as Orpheus used to serve the wild beasts in his time, and afterwards to knock him on the head; some fancied that the lion would not pretend to lay his paws upon the hero, by reason of the received opinion, that a lion will not hurt a virgin. Several who pretended to have seen the Opera in Italy, had informed their friends, that the lion was to act a part in high Dutch, and roar twice or thrice to a thorough bass, before he fell at the feet of Hydaspes. To clear up a matter that was so variously reported, I have made it my business to examine whether this pretended lion is really the savage he appears to be, or only a counterfeit.

"But before I communicate my discoveries, I must acquaint the reader that upon my walking behind the scenes last winter, as I was thinking on something else, I accidentally justled against a monstrous animal that extremely startled me, and upon my nearer survey much surprised, told me in a gentle voice that I might come by him if I pleased, 'for,' says he, 'I do not intend to hurt any body.' I thanked him very kindly, and passed by him; and in a little time after saw him leap upon the stage, and act his part with very great applause. It has been observed by several, that the lion has changed his manner of acting twice or thrice since his first appearance; which will not seem strange, when I acquaint my reader that the lion has been changed upon the audience three several times. The first lion was a candle-snuffer, who being a fellow of a testy choleric temper, overdid his part, and would not suffer himself to be killed so easily as he ought to have done; besides, it was observed of him, that

he grew more surly every time he came out of the lion; and having dropped some words in ordinary conversation, as if he had not fought his best, and that he suffered himself to be thrown upon his back in the scuffle, and that he would wrestle with Mr. Nicolini for what he pleased, out of his lion's skin, it was thought proper to discard him; and it is verily believed to this day, that had he been brought upon the stage another time, he would certainly have done mischief. Besides, it was objected against the first lion, that he reared himself so high upon his hinder paws, and walked in so erect a posture, that he looked more like an old man than a lion.

NICOLINI AND THE LION

"The second lion was a tailor by trade, who belonged to the play-house, and had the character of a mild and peaceable man in his profession. If the former was too furious, this was too sheepish for his part; insomuch that after a short modest walk upon the stage, he would fall at the first touch of Hydaspes, without grappling with him, and giving him an opportunity of showing his variety of Italian trips. It is said, indeed, that he once gave him a rip in his flesh colour doublet; but this was only to make work for himself, in his private character of a tailor. I must not omit that it was this second lion who treated me with so much humanity behind the scenes. The acting lion at present is, as I am informed, a country gentleman who does it for his diversion, but desires his name may be concealed. He says, very handsomely, in his own excuse, that he does not act for gain; that he indulges an innocent pleasure in it; and that it is better to pass away an evening in this manner, than in gaming and drinking; but at the same time says, with a very agreeable raillery upon himself, and that if his name should be known, the ill-natured world might call him 'the ass in the lion's skin.' This gentleman's temper is made out of such a happy mixture of the mild and the choleric, that he outdoes both his predecessors, and has drawn together greater audiences than have been known in the memory of man.

"I must not conclude my narrative without taking notice of a groundless report that has been raised to a gentleman's disadvantage, of whom I must declare myself an admirer; namely, that Signior Nicolini and the lion have been sitting peaceably by one another, and smoking a pipe together, behind the scenes; by which their enemies would insinuate, it is but a sham combat which they represent upon the stage; but upon enquiry I find, that if any such correspondence has passed between them, it was not till the combat was over, when the lion was to be looked upon as dead, according to the received rules of the drama. Besides, this is what is practised every day in Westminster Hall, where nothing is more usual than to see a couple of lawyers, who have been tearing each other to pieces in the court, embracing one another.

"I would not be thought, in any part of this relation, to reflect upon Signior Nicolini, who, in acting this part, only complies with the wretched taste of his audience; he knows very well that the lion has many more admirers than himself; as they say of the famous equestrian statue on the Pont Neuf at Paris, that more people go to see the horse than the king who sits upon it. On the contrary, it gives me a just indignation to see a person whose action gives new majesty to kings, resolution to heroes, and softness to lovers, thus sinking from the greatness of his behaviour, and degraded into the character of a London 'prentice. I have often wished that our tragedians would copy after this great master in action. Could they make the same use of their arms and legs, and inform their faces with as significant looks and passions, how glorious would an English tragedy appear with that action which is capable of giving dignity to the forced thoughts, cold conceits, and unnatural expressions of an Italian Opera! In the meantime, I have related this combat of the lion, to show what are at present the reigning entertainments of the politer part of Great Britain."

RINALDO AND THE SPARROWS

But the operatic year of 1710 is remarkable for something more than the production of *Almahide* and *Hydaspes*; for in 1710 Handel arrived in England, and the year after brought out his *Rinaldo*, the first of the thirty-five operas which he gave to the English stage. For Handel we are indebted to Hanover. It was at Hanover that the English noblemen who invited him to London first met the great composer; and it was the Elector of Hanover, afterwards George I., who granted him permission to come, and who when he in his turn arrived in England to assume the crown, added considerably to the pension which Queen Anne had already granted to the former chapel-master of the Hanoverian court. In 1710 the director of the theatre in the Haymarket was Aaron Hill, who no sooner heard of Handel's arrival in London than he went to him, and requested him to compose an opera for his establishment. Handel consented, and Hill furnished him with a plan, sketched out by himself, on the subject of *Rinaldo and Armida* in Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*, the writing of the *libretto* being entrusted to an Italian poet of some note named Rossi. In the advertisements of this opera Handel's name does not appear; not at least in that which calls attention to its first representation and which simply sets forth that "at the Queen's Theatre in the Haymarket will be performed a new opera called *Rinaldo*."

It was in *Rinaldo* that the celebrated operatic sparrows made their first appearance on the stage – with what success may be gathered from the following notice of their performance, which I extract from No. 5 of the *Spectator*.

"As I was walking in the streets about a fortnight ago," says Addison, "I saw an ordinary fellow carrying a cage full of little birds upon his shoulder; and as I was wondering with myself what use he would put them to, he was met very luckily by an acquaintance, who had the same curiosity. Upon his asking him what he had upon his shoulder, he told him that he had been buying sparrows for the opera. 'Sparrows, for the opera,' says his friend, licking his lips, 'What! are they to be roasted?' 'No, no,' says the other, 'they are to enter towards the end of the first act, and to fly about the stage.'

RINALDO AND THE SPARROWS

"This strange dialogue wakened my curiosity so far that I immediately bought the opera, by which means I perceived the sparrows were to act the part of singing birds in a delightful grove, though upon a nearer inquiry I found the sparrows put the same trick upon the audience that Sir Martin Mar-all practised upon his mistress; for though they flew in sight, the music proceeded from a concert of flageolets and bird-calls, which were planted behind the scenes. At the same time I made this discovery, I found by the discourse of the actors, that there were great designs on foot for the improvement of the Opera; that it had been proposed to break down a part of the wall, and to surprise the audience with a party of a hundred horse; and that there was actually a project of bringing the New River into the house, to be employed in jetteaus and waterworks. This project, as I have since heard, is postponed till the summer season, when it is thought that the coolness which proceeds from fountains and cascades will be more acceptable and refreshing to people of quality. In the meantime, to find out a more agreeable entertainment for the winter season, the opera of *Rinaldo* is filled with thunder and lightning, illuminations, and fireworks; which the audience may look upon without catching cold, and indeed without much danger of being burnt; for there are several engines filled with water, and ready to play at a minute's warning, in case any such accident should happen. However, as I have a very great friendship for the owner of this theatre, I hope that he has been wise enough to insure his house before he would let this opera be acted in it.

"But to return to the sparrows. There have been so many flights of them let loose in this opera, that it is feared the house will never get rid of them; and that in other plays they may make their

entrance in very wrong and improper scenes, so as to be seen flying in a lady's bedchamber, or perching upon a king's throne; besides the inconveniences which the heads of the audience may sometimes suffer from them. I am credibly informed, that there was once a design of casting into an opera the story of 'Whittington and his Cat,' and that in order to it there had been set together a great quantity of mice, but Mr. Rich, the proprietor of the playhouse, very prudently considered that it would be impossible for the cat to kill them all, and that consequently the princes of the stage might be as much infested with mice as the prince of the island was before the cat's arrival upon it, for which reason he would not permit it to be acted in his house. And, indeed, I cannot blame him; for as he said very well upon that occasion, 'I do not hear that any of the performers in our opera pretend to equal the famous pied piper who made all the mice of a great town in Germany follow his music, and by that means cleared the place of those noxious little animals.'

"Before I dismiss this paper, I must inform my reader that I hear that there is a treaty on foot between London and Wise,¹⁷ (who will be appointed gardeners of the playhouse) to furnish the opera of *Rinaldo and Armida* with an orange grove; and that the next time it is acted the singing birds will be impersonated by tom tits: the undertakers being resolved to spare neither pains nor money for the gratification of their audience."

HAMLET SET TO MUSIC

Steele, in No. 14 of the *Spectator*, tells us that – "The sparrows and chaffinches at the Haymarket fly, as yet, very irregularly over the stage; and instead of perching on the trees and performing their parts, these young actors either get into the galleries or put out the candles," for which and other reasons equally good, he decides that Mr. Powell's Puppet-show is preferable as a place of entertainment to the Opera, and that Handel's *Rinaldo* is inferior as a production of art to a puppet-show drama. Indeed, though Steele, in the *Tatler*, and Addison in the *Spectator*, have said very civil things about Nicolini, neither of them appears to have been impressed in the slightest degree by Handel's music, nor does it even seem to have occurred to them that the composer's share in producing an opera was by any means considerable. Steele, thought the Opera a decidedly "unintellectual" entertainment (how much purely intellectual enjoyment is there, we wonder, in the pleasure derived from the contemplation of a virgin, by Raphael, and what is the meaning in criticising art of looking at it merely in its intellectual aspect?); but he at the same time bears testimony to the high (aesthetic) gratification he derived from the performance of Nicolini, who "by the grace and propriety of his action and gesture, does honour to the human figure," and who "sets off the character he bears in an opera by his action as much as he does the words of it by his voice."¹⁸

In 1711, in addition to Handel's *Rinaldo*, *Antiochus*, an opera, by Apostolo Zeno and Gasparini, was performed, and about the same time, or soon afterwards, *Ambleto*, by the same author and composer, was brought out. If we smile at Signor Verdi for attempting to turn *Macbeth* into an opera, what are we to say to Zeno's and Gasparini's experiment with the far more unsuitable tragedy of *Hamlet*? In *Macbeth*, the songs and choruses of witches, the banquet with the apparition of the murdered Banquo, and above all, the sleep-walking scene might well inspire a composer of genius; but a "Hamlet" without philosophy, or, worse still, a "Hamlet" who searches his own soul to orchestral accompaniments – this must indeed be absurd. I learn from Dr. Burney, that *Ambleto* was written for Venice, that it was represented at the Queen's Theatre, in London, and that "the overture had four movements ending with a jig!" An overture to *Hamlet* "ending with a jig!" To think that this was tolerated, and that we are shocked in the present day by burlesques put forth as such! The *Spectator*, while apparently keeping a sharp look out for all that is ridiculous, or that can be represented as

¹⁷ The Queen's gardeners.

¹⁸ *Tatler*, No. 113.

ridiculous in the operatic performances of the day, has not a word to say against *Ambleto*. But it must be remembered that since Milton's time, "Nature's sweetest child" had ceased to be appreciated in England even by the most esteemed writers – who, however, for the most part, if they were not good critics, could claim no literary merit beyond that of style. In a paper on Milton, one of whose noblest sonnets is in praise of Shakespeare, Addison, after showing how, by certain verbal expedients, bathos may be avoided and sublimity attained, calmly points to the works of Lee and Shakespeare as affording instances of the false sublime¹⁹, adding coolly that, "*in these authors* the affectation of greatness often hurts the perspicuity of the style."

THREE ENRAGED MUSICIANS

I have spoken of Steele's and Clayton's consternation, at the success of *Rinaldo*. Some months after the production of that work, the despicable Clayton, supported by two musicians named Nicolino Haym, and Charles Dieupart, (who were becomingly indignant at a foreigner like Handel presuming to entertain a British audience), wrote a letter to the *Spectator*, which Steele published in No. 258 of that journal, introducing it by a preface, full of wisdom, in which it is set forth that "pleasure and recreation of one kind or other are absolutely necessary to relieve our minds and bodies from too constant attention and labour," and that, "where public diversions are tolerated, it behoves persons of distinction, with their power and example, to preside over them in such a manner as to check anything that tends to the corruption of manners, or which is too mean or trivial for the entertainment of reasonable creatures." The letter from the "enraged musicians" is described as coming "from three persons who, as soon as named, will be thought capable of advancing the present state of music" – that is to say, of superseding Handel. But the same perverse public, which in spite of the *Spectator's* remonstrances, preferred *Rinaldo* to translated Racine, persisted in admiring Handel's music, and in paying no heed whatever to the cacophony of Clayton. Here is the letter from the three miserable musicasters to their patron and fellow-conspirator.

"We, whose names are subscribed, think you the properest person to signify what we have to offer the town in behalf of ourselves, and the art which we profess, – music. We conceive hopes of your favour from the speculations on the mistakes which the town run into with regard to their pleasure of this kind; and believing your method of judging is, that you consider music only valuable, as it is agreeable to and heightens the purpose of poetry, we consent that it is not only the true way of relishing that pleasure, but also that without it a composure of music is the same thing as a poem, where all the rules of poetical numbers are observed, though the words have no sense or meaning; to say it shorter, mere musical sounds in our art are no other than nonsense-verses are in poetry." [A beautiful melody then, apart from words, said no more to these musicians, and to the patron whose idiotic theory they are so proud to have adopted than a set of nonsense-verses!] "Music, therefore, is to aggravate what is intended by poetry; it must always have some passion or sentiment to express, or else violins, voices, or any other organs of sound, afford an entertainment very little above the rattles of children. It was from this opinion of the matter, that when Mr. Clayton had finished his studies in Italy, and brought over the Opera of *Arsinoe*, that Mr. Haym and Mr. Dieupart, who had the honour to be well-known and received among the nobility and gentry, were zealously inclined to assist, by their solicitations, in introducing so elegant an entertainment, as the Italian music grafted upon English poetry." [Such poetry, for instance, as which occurred in Clayton's *Arsinoe*– Haym, it may be remembered, was the ingenious musician who arranged *Pyrrhus and Demetrius* for the Anglo-Italian stage, when half of the music was sung in one language, and half in the other.] "For this end," continue the precious trio, "Mr. Dieupart and Mr. Haym, according to their several opportunities, promoted the introduction of *Arsinoe*, and did it to the best advantage so great a novelty would allow.

¹⁹ *Spectator*, No. 285.

It is not proper to trouble you with particulars of the just complaints we all of us have to make; but so it is that without regard to our obliging pains, we are all equally set aside in the present opera. Our application, therefore, to you is only to insert this letter in your paper, that the town may know we have all three joined together to make entertainments of music for the future at Mr. Clayton's house, in York Buildings. What we promise ourselves is, to make a subscription of two guineas, for eight times, and that the entertainment, with the names of the authors of the poetry, may be printed, to be sold in the house, with an account of the several authors of the vocal as well as the instrumental music for each night; the money to be paid at the receipt of the tickets, at Mr. Charles Lulli's. It will, we hope, sir, be easily allowed that we are capable of undertaking to exhibit, by our joint force and different qualifications, all that can be done in music" [how charmingly modest!] "but lest you should think so dry a thing as an account of our proposal should be a matter unworthy of your paper, which generally contains something of public use, give us leave to say, that favouring our design is no less than reviving an art, which runs to ruin by the utmost barbarism under an affectation of knowledge. We aim at establishing some settled notion of what is music, at recovering from neglect and want very many families who depend upon it, at making all foreigners who pretend to succeed in England to learn the language of it as we ourselves have done, and not be so insolent as to expect a whole nation, a refined and learned nation, should submit to learn theirs. In a word, Mr. Spectator, with all deference and humility, we hope to behave ourselves in this undertaking in such a manner, that all Englishmen who have any skill in music may be furthered in it for their profit or diversion by what new things we shall produce; never pretending to surpass others, or asserting that anything which is a science is not attainable by all men of all nations who have proper genius for it. We say, sir, what we hope for, it is not expected will arrive to us by contemning others, but through the utmost diligence recommending ourselves."

THREE ENRAGED MUSICIANS

"Guide me, lead me,
Where the nymph whom I adore

Poor Clayton seems, here and there, to have really fancied that it was his mission to put down Handel, and stuck to him for some time in most pertinacious style. One is reminded of the writer who endeavoured to turn Wilhelm Meister into ridicule, and of the epigram which that attempt suggested to Goethe, ending: —

"Hat doch die Wallfisch seine Laus."

THREE ENRAGED MUSICIANS

But Clayton was really a creator, and proposed nothing less than "to revive an art which was running to ruin by the utmost barbarism under an affectation of knowledge." One would have thought that this was going a little too far. Handel affecting knowledge – Handel a barbarian? Surely Steele in giving the sanction of his name to such assertions as these, puts himself in a lower position even than Voltaire uttering his celebrated dictum about the genius of Shakespeare; for after all, Voltaire was the first Frenchman to discover any beauties in Shakespeare at all, and it was in defending him against the stupid prejudices of Laharpe that he made use of the unfortunate expression with which he has so often been reproached, and which he put forward in the form of a concession to his adversary.

Clayton and his second fiddles returned to the attack a few weeks afterwards (January 18th, 1712). "It is industriously insinuated," they complained, "that our intention is to destroy operas in

general, but we beg of you (that is to say, the *Spectator*, as represented by Steele, who signs the number with his T) to insert this explanation of ourselves in your paper. Our purpose is only to improve our circumstances by improving the art which we profess" [the knaves are getting candid]. "We see it utterly destroyed at present, and as we were the persons who introduced operas, we think it a groundless imputation that we should set up against the Opera itself," &c., &c.

What became of Clayton, Haym, and Dieupart, and their speculation, I do not know, nor do I think that any one can care. At all events, even with the assistance of Steele and the *Spectator* they did not extinguish Handel.

The most celebrated vocalist at the theatre in the Haymarket, from the arrival of Handel in England until after the formation of the Royal Academy of Music, in 1720, was Anastasia Robinson, a *contralto*, who was remarkable as much for her graceful acting as for her expressive singing. She made her first appearance in a *pasticcio* called *Creso*, in 1714, and continued singing in the operas of Handel and other composers until 1724, when she contracted a private marriage with the Earl of Peterborough and retired from the stage. Lady Delany, an intimate friend of Lady Peterborough, communicated the following account of her marriage and the circumstances under which it was made, to Dr. Burney, who publishes it in his "History of Music."

ANASTASIA ROBINSON

"Mrs. Anastasia Robinson was of middling stature, not handsome, but of a pleasing, modest countenance, with large blue eyes. Her deportment was easy, unaffected, and graceful. Her manner and address very engaging, and her behaviour on all occasions that of a gentlewoman, with perfect propriety. She was not only liked by all her acquaintance, but loved and caressed by persons of the highest rank, with whom she appeared always equal, without assuming. Her father's house, in Golden Square was frequented by all the men of genius and refined taste of the times. Among the number of persons of distinction who frequented Mr. Robinson's house, and seemed to distinguish his daughter in a particular manner, were the Earl of Peterborough and General H – . The latter had shown a long attachment to her, and his attentions were so remarkable that they seemed more than the effects of common politeness; and as he was a very agreeable man, and in good circumstances, he was favourably received, not doubting but that his intentions were honourable. A declaration of a very contrary nature was treated with the contempt it deserved, though Mrs. Robinson was very much prepossessed in his favour.

"Soon after this, Lord Peterborough endeavoured to convince her of his partial regard for her; but, agreeable and artful as he was, she remained very much upon her guard, which rather increased than diminished his admiration and passion for her. Yet still his pride struggled with his inclination, for all this time she was engaged to sing in public, a circumstance very grievous to her; but, urged by the best of motives, she submitted to it, in order to assist her parents, whose fortune was much reduced by Mr. Robinson's loss of sight, which deprived him of the benefit of his profession as a painter.

"At length Lord Peterborough made his declaration to her on honourable terms. He found it would be in vain to make proposals on any other, and as he omitted no circumstance that could engage her esteem and gratitude, she accepted them. He earnestly requested her keeping it a secret till a more convenient time for him to make it known, to which she readily consented, having a perfect confidence in his honour.

"Mrs. A. Robinson had a sister, a very pretty accomplished woman, who married D'Arbuthnot's brother. After the death of Mr. Robinson, Lord Peterborough took a house near Fulham, in the neighbourhood of his own villa at Parson's-green, where he settled Mrs. Robinson and her mother. They never lived under the same roof, till the earl, being seized with a violent fit of illness, solicited her to attend him at Mount Bevis, near Southampton, which she refused with firmness, but upon

condition that, though still denied to take his name, she might be permitted to wear her wedding-ring; to which, finding her inexorable, he at length consented.

ANASTASIA ROBINSON

"His haughty spirit was still reluctant to the making a declaration that would have done justice to so worthy a character as the person to whom he was now united; and indeed his uncontrollable temper and high opinion of his own actions made him a very awful husband, ill suited to Lady Peterborough's good sense, amiable temper, and delicate sentiments. She was a Roman Catholic, but never gave offence to those of a contrary opinion, though very strict in what she thought her duty. Her excellent principles and fortitude of mind supported her through many severe trials in her conjugal state. But at last he prevailed on himself to do her justice, instigated, it is supposed by his bad state of health, which obliged him to seek another climate, and she absolutely refused to go with him unless he declared his marriage. Her attendance on him in this illness nearly cost her her life.

"He appointed a day for all his nearest relations to meet him at the apartment over the gateway of St. James's palace, belonging to Mr. Poyntz, who was married to Lord Peterborough's niece, and at that time preceptor of Prince William, afterwards Duke of Cumberland. He also appointed Lady Peterborough to be there at the same time. When they were all assembled, he began a most eloquent oration, enumerating all the virtues and perfections of Mrs. A. Robinson, and the rectitude of her conduct during his long acquaintance with her, for which he acknowledged his great obligation and sincere attachment, declaring he was determined to do her that justice which he ought to have done long ago, which was presenting her to all his family as his wife. He spoke this harangue with so much energy, and in parts so pathetically, that Lady Peterborough, not being apprised of his intentions, was so affected that she fainted away in the midst of the company.

"After Lord Peterborough's death, she lived a very retired life, chiefly at Mount Bevis, and was seldom prevailed on to leave that habitation but by the Duchess of Portland, who was always happy to have her company at Bulstrode, when she could obtain it, and often visited her at her own house.

"Among Lord Peterborough's papers, she found his memoirs, written by himself, in which he declared he had been guilty of such actions as would have reflected very much upon his character, for which reason she burnt them. This, however, contributed to complete the excellency of her principles, though it did not fail giving offence to the curious inquirers after anecdotes of so remarkable a character as that of the Earl of Peterborough."

DUCAL CONNOISSEURS

The deserved good fortune of Anastasia Robinson reminds me of the careers of two other vocalists of this period, one of them owed her elevation to a fortunate accident; while the third, though she entered upon the same possible road to the peerage as the second, yet never attained it. "The Duke of Bolton," says Swift, in one of his letters, "has run away with Polly Peachum, having settled four hundred a year on her during pleasure, and upon disagreement, two hundred more." This was the charming Lavinia Fenton, the original Polly of the Beggars' Opera, between whom and the Duke the disagreement anticipated by the amiable Swift never took place. Twenty-three years after the elopement, the Duke's wife died, and Lavinia then became the Duchess of Bolton. She was, according to the account given of her by Dr. Joseph Warton, "a very accomplished and most agreeable companion; had much wit, good strong sense, and a just taste in polite literature.

Her person was agreeable and well made," continues Dr. Warton, "though I think she never could be called a beauty. I have had the pleasure of being at table with her, when her conversation was much admired by the first character of the age, particularly by old Lord Bathurst and Lord Granville."

The beautiful Miss Champion, who was singing about the same time as Mrs. Tofts, and who died in 1706, when she was only eighteen, did *not* become the Duchess of Devonshire; but the heart-broken old Duke, who appears to have been most fervently attached to her, buried her in his family vault in the church of Latimers, Buckinghamshire, and placed a Latin inscription on her monument, testifying that she was wise beyond her years, and bountiful to the poor even beyond her abilities; and at the theatre, where she had some times acted, modest and pure; but being seized with a hectic fever, she had submitted to her fate with a firm confidence and Christian piety; and that William, Duke of Devonshire, had, upon her beloved remains, erected this tomb as sacred to her memory.

CHAPTER VI. THE ITALIAN OPERA UNDER HANDEL

Handel at Hamburgh. – Handel in London. – The Queen's Theatre. – The Royal Academy of Music. – Operatic Feuds. – Porpora and the Nobility's Opera.

THE great dates of Handel's career as an operatic composer and director are: —

1711, when he produced *Rinaldo*, his first opera, at the Queen's Theatre, in the Haymarket;

1720, when the Royal Academy of Music was established under his management at the same theatre, (which, with the accession of George I., had become "the King's");

1734, when in commencing the season at the King's Theatre with a new company, he had to contend against the "Nobility's Opera" just opened at the Theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields, under the direction of Porpora;

1735, when he moved to Covent Garden, Porpora and "la nobilita Britannica" going at the same time to the King's Theatre.

HANDEL AT HAMBURGH

Both operas failed in 1737, and Handel then went back to the King's Theatre, for which he wrote his last opera *Deidamia* in 1740.

Of Handel's arrival in England, and of the manner in which his first opera was received, I have spoken in the preceding chapter. Of his previous life in Germany but little is recorded; indeed, he left that country at the age of twenty-five. It is known, however, that he was for some time engaged at the Hamburgh theatre, where operas had been performed in the German language since 1678. Rinuccini's *Dafne*, set to music by Schutz, was represented, as has been already mentioned, at Dresden in 1627, (or according to other accounts 1630); but this was a private affair in honour of a court marriage, and the first opera produced in Germany in public, and in the German language, was Thiele's *Adam and Eve*, which was given at Hamburgh in 1678. The reputation of Keiser at the court of Wolfenbüttel caused the directors of the Hamburgh Theatre, towards the close of the century, to send and offer him an engagement; he accepted it, and in the course of twenty-seven years produced as many as one hundred and sixty operas. Mattheson states that both Handel and Hasse (who was afterwards director of the celebrated Dresden Opera) formed their styles on that of Keiser.²⁰ Mattheson, himself a composer, succeeded Keiser as conductor of the orchestra at the Hamburgh Theatre, holding that post, however, conjointly with Handel, whose quarrel and duel with Mattheson have often been related. Handel was presiding in the orchestra while Mattheson was on the stage performing in an opera of his own composition. The opera being concluded, Mattheson proposed to take Handel's place at the harpsichord, which the latter refused to give up. The rival conductors quarrelled as they were leaving the theatre. The quarrel led to a blow and the blow to a fight with swords in the market place, which was terminated by Mattheson breaking the point of his sword on one of his antagonist's buttons, or as others have it, on the score of his own opera, which Handel carried beneath his coat.

Handel went from Hamburgh to Hanover, where, as we have seen, he received an invitation from some English noblemen to visit London, and, with the permission and encouragement of the Elector, accepted it.

²⁰ It is also known that both profited by the study of Scarlatti's works.

HANDEL AT HAMBURGH

Handel's *Rinaldo* was followed at the King's Theatre by his *Il Pastor Fido* (1712), his *Teseo* (1713), and his *Amadigi* (1715). Soon after the production of *Amadigi*, the performances at the King's Theatre seem to have ceased until 1720, when the "Royal Academy of Music" was formed. This so-called "Academy" was the result of a project to establish a permanent Italian opera in London. It was supported by a number of the nobility, with George I. at their head, and a fund of £50,000 was raised among the subscribers, to which the king contributed £1,000. The management of the "Academy" was entrusted to a governor, a deputy governor, and twenty directors, (why not to a head master and assistants?) and for the first year the Duke of Newcastle was appointed governor; Lord Bingley, deputy governor; while among the directors were the Dukes of Portland and Queensberry, the Earls of Burlington, Stair and Waldegrave, Lords Chetwynd and Stanhope, Sir John Vanburgh, (architect of the theatre), Generals Dormer, Wade, and Hunter, &c. The worse than unmeaning title given to the new opera was of course imitated from the French; the governor, deputy governor, and directors being doubtless unacquainted with the circumstances under which the French Opera received the misnomer which it still retains.²¹ They might have known, however, that the "Académie Royale" of Paris, at that time under the direction of Rameau, was held in very little esteem, except by the French themselves, as an operatic theatre, and moreover, that Italian music was never performed there at all. Indeed, for half a century afterwards, the French execrated Italian music and would not listen to Italian singers – which gives us some notion of what musical taste in France must have been at the time of our Royal Academy being founded. The title would have been absurd even if the French Opera had been the finest in Europe; as it was nothing of the kind, and as it was, moreover, sworn to its own native psalmody, to give such a title to an Italian theatre, supported by musicians and singers of the greatest excellence, was a triple absurdity. Strangely enough, even in the present day, the Americans, as ingenious as the English of George I.'s reign, call their magnificent Italian Opera House at New York the Academy of Music. As a matter of association, it would be far more reasonable to call it the "St. Charles's Theatre," or the "Scale Theatre."

The musical direction of our Royal Academy of Music was confided to Handel, who, besides composing for the theatre himself, engaged Buononcini and Ariosti to write for it. He also proceeded to Dresden, already celebrated throughout Europe for the excellence of its Italian Opera, and engaged Senesino, Berenstadt, Boschi, and Signora Durastanti.

Handel's first opera at the Royal Academy of Music was *Radamisto*, which was hailed on its production as its composer's masterpiece. "It seems," says Dr. Burney, "as if he was not insensible of its worth, as he dedicated a book of the words to the king, George I., subscribing himself his Majesty's 'most faithful subject,' which, as he was neither a Hanoverian by birth, nor a native of England, seems to imply his having been naturalised here by a bill in Parliament."

ACADEMIES OF MUSIC

Buononcini, (who, compared with Handel, was a ninny, though others said that to him Handel was scarcely fit to hold a candle, &c.) produced his first opera also in 1720. It was received with much favour, and by the Buononcinists with enthusiasm.

The next opera was *Muzio Scevola*, composed by Handel, Buononcini, and Ariosti together. It is said that the task of joint production was imposed upon the three musicians by the masters of the Academy, by way of competitive examination, and with a view to test the abilities of each in a decisive

²¹ See Chapter II.

manner. If there were any grounds for believing the story, it might be asked, who among the directors were thought, or thought themselves qualified to act as judges in so difficult and delicate a matter.

In the meanwhile the opera of the three composers did but little good to the theatre, which, in spite of its admirable company, was found a losing speculation, after a little more than a year, to the extent of £15,000. Thirty-five thousand pounds remained to be paid up, but the rest of the subscription money was not forthcoming, and the directors were unable to obtain it until after they had advertised in the newspapers that defaulters would be proceeded against "with the utmost rigour of the law."

A new mode of subscription was then devised, by which tickets were granted for the season of fifty performances on receipt of ten guineas down, and an engagement to pay five guineas more on the 1st of February, and a second five guineas on the 1st of May. Thus originated the operatic subscription list which has been continued with certain modifications, and with a few short intervals, up to the present day.

Buononcini's *Griselda*, which passes for his best opera, was produced in 1722, with Anastasia Robinson in the part of the heroine. Handel's *Ottone* and *Flavio* were brought out in 1723; his *Giulio Cesare* and *Tamerlano* in 1724; his *Rodelinda* in 1725; his *Scipione* and *Alessandro* in 1726; his *Admeto* and *Ricardo* in 1727; his *Siroe* and *Tolomeo* in 1728 – when the Royal Academy of Music, which had been carried on with varying success, and on the whole with considerable ill success, finally closed.

FAILURE OF ITALIAN OPERA IN LONDON

Buononcini's last opera, *Astyanax*, was produced in 1727, after which the Duchess of Marlborough, his constant patroness, gave the composer a pension of five hundred a year. A few years afterwards, however, he stole a madrigal, the invention of a Venetian named Lotti, and the theft having been discovered and clearly proved, Buononcini left the country in disgrace. Similar thefts are practised in the present day, but with discretion and with ingeniously worded title pages. Buononcini should have simply called his plagiarism a "Venetian Madrigal, dedicated to the Duchess of Marlborough by G. Buononcini." This unfortunate composer, whom Swift had certainly described in a prophetic spirit as "a ninny," left England in 1733, with an Italian Count whose title appears to have been about as authentic as Buononcini's madrigal, and who pretended to possess the art of making gold, but abstained from practising it otherwise than by swindling. Buononcini was for a time the dupe of this impostor. In the meanwhile he continued the exercise of his profession, at Paris, where we lose sight of him. In 1748, however, he went to Vienna, and by command of the Emperor composed the music for the festivities given in celebration of the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle. Thence he proceeded with Montecelli, the composer, to Venice, where the affair of the madrigal was probably by this time forgotten. At all events, no importance was attached to it, and Buononcini was engaged to write an opera for the Carnival. He was at this time nearly ninety years of age. The date of his death is not recorded, but Dr. Burney tells us that he is supposed to have lived till nearly a hundred.

THE BEGGARS' OPERA

Besides the annual subscriptions, to the Royal Academy of Music the whole of the original capital of £50,000 was spent in seven years. In spite, then, of the admirable works produced by Handel, the unrivalled company by which they were executed, and the immense sums of money lavished upon the entertainment generally, the Italian Opera in London proved in 1728 what it had proved twelve years before, a positive and unmistakable failure. This could scarcely have been owing, as has been surmised, to the violence of the disputes concerning the merits of Handel and Buononcini, the composers, or of Faustina and Cuzzoni, the singers, for the natural effect of such contests would

have been to keep up an interest in the performances. Probably few at that time had any real love for Italian music. A certain number, no doubt, attended the Italian Opera for the sake of fashion, but the greater majority of the theatre-going public were quite indifferent to its charms. Dr. Arbuthnot, one of the few literary men of the day who seems to have really cared for music, writes as follows, in the *London Journal*, under the date of March 23rd, 1728: – "As there is nothing which surprises all true lovers of music more than the neglect into which the Italian operas are at present fallen, so I cannot but think it a very extraordinary instance of the fickle and inconstant temper of the English nation, a failing which they have always been endeavouring to cast upon their neighbours in France, but to which they themselves have just as good a title, as will appear to any one who will take the trouble to consult our historians." He points out that after adopting the Italian Opera with eagerness, we began, as soon as we had obtained it in perfection, to make it a pretext for disputes instead of enjoying it, and concludes that it was supported among us for a time, not from genuine taste, but simply from fashion. He observes that *The Beggars' Opera*, then just produced, was "a touchstone to try British taste on," and that it has "proved effectual in discovering our true inclinations, which, however artfully they may have been disguised for a while, will one time or another, start up and disclose themselves. Æsop's story of the cat, who, at the petition of her lover, was changed into a fine woman, is pretty well known, notwithstanding which alteration, we find that upon the appearance of a mouse, she could not resist the temptation of springing out of her husband's arms to pursue it, though it was on the very wedding night. Our English audience have been for some time returning to their cattish nature, of which some particular sounds from the gallery have given us sufficient warning. And since they have so openly declared themselves, I must only desire that they will not think they can put on the fine woman again just when they please, but content themselves with their skill in caterwauling. For my own part, I cannot think it would be any loss to real lovers of music, if all those false friends who have made pretensions to it only in compliance with the fashion, would separate themselves from them; provided our Italian Opera could be brought under such regulations as to go on without them. We might then be able to sit and enjoy an entertainment of this sort, free from those disturbances which are frequent in English theatres, without any regard, not only to performers, but even to the presence of Majesty itself. In short, my comfort is, that though so great a desertion may force us so to contract the expenses of our operas, as would put an end to our having them in as great perfection as at present, yet we shall be able at least to hear them without interruption."

The Faustina and Cuzzoni disputes, to which Arbuthnot alludes, where he speaks of "those disturbances which are frequent in English theatres," appear to have been quite as violent as those with which the names of Handel and Buononcini are associated. Most of this musical party-warfare (of which the most notorious examples are those just mentioned, the Gluck and Piccinni contests in Paris, and the quarrels between the admirers of Madame Mara and Madame Todi in the same city) has been confined to England and France, though a very pretty quarrel was once got up at the Dresden Theatre, between the followers of Faustina, at that time the wife of Hasse the composer, and Mingotti. The Italians have shown themselves changeable and capricious, and have often hissed one night those whom they have applauded the night afterwards; but, in the Italian Theatres, we find no instances of systematic partisanship maintained obstinately and stolidly for years, and I fancy that it is only among unmusical nations, or in an unmusical age, that anything of the kind takes place. The ardour and duration of such disputes are naturally in proportion to the ignorance and folly of the disputants. In science, or even in art, where the principles of art are well understood, they are next to impossible. Self-styled connoisseurs, however, with neither taste nor knowledge can go on squabbling about composers and singers, especially if they never listen to them, to all eternity.

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