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DONIZETTI:

HIS LIFE AND WORKS.

BY M. DE THÉMINES.

Translated for the ART JOURNAL from the French,

BY MARGARET CECILIA CLEVELAND.

VIII.

Anna Bolena was composed by Donizetti, on the borders of the beautiful Lake of Como, whose azure waves, picturesque shores, and fresh breezes, I should almost say melodious atmosphere, are for a great part preserved in the beauty of the poetic or musical works that the writers and composers have written from the villas situated upon its waters.

La Sonnambula, of Bellini, was produced almost at the same period, in a delicious white *maisonette*, with green blinds, upon the borders of the Lake of Como.

At the same time that Donizetti was writ-

ing *Anna Bolena*, the author of *Il Pirata* and *La Straniera* was taking from the pure and healthful air of the plains of Lombardy a little of that vigor which, alas! left him so suddenly, and by which he profited to produce four or five *chefs-d'œuvres*.

There Bellini and Donizetti came together amicably and fraternally, talking over their works, their hopes and their projects.

The Genoese poet, Felix Romani, whom I shall have occasion to mention more than once in these pages, came to visit Donizetti at the Lake of Como; and there, with one mind, they selected their subject: it was the death of the unfortunate Anna Boleyn, who, replacing Katherine of Arragon in the bloody couch of Henry VIII., was in turn succeeded by the imprudent and beautiful Jane Seymour.

Donizetti began to write *Anna Bolena* the tenth of November, 1830, and the sixteenth of December, of the same year, that is to say, forty-five days after, the first representation took place in the Teatro Carcano, of Milan.

A month and a half to compose a great opera, to orchestrate it, to instruct the artists, to rehearse and perform it! In Paris, the merest *opérette* requires more time for rehearsal than was given to the musician to write it! *Anna Bolena* was only rehearsed during a week. It was Giuditta Pasta who created the rôle of "Anne Boleyn." She was then in the zenith of her theatrical career, at the climax of her scenic triumphs. The two other female rôles were filled by Orlandi and Laroche. The celebrated basso, Philip Galli, sustained the character of "Henry VIII." Lablache, who filled it later, was then in Paris; but once that he had taken possession of it, he rendered a successor impossible. It is this, perhaps, which has prevented the opera of *Anna Bolena*, one of the maestro's finest, from becoming as popular as many others of the same musician. Who would dare to attempt the rôle of "Henry VIII.," after Lablache? He seems to have inscribed upon it the device of the iron crown: Let no one touch me! "*Nessun me tocchi!*"

The rôle of the tenor was sung by Rubini. We will add no eulogies to this name; it suffices in itself.

Thus with Pasta and Orlandi, Galli and Rubini—the young musician could not dream of better interpreters. The opera had an immense success.

In fact, in reading over the cavatina of the tenor, the duo between the tenor and soprano, the choruses, the final air of Anna, and the trio—we inquire, why they do not reproduce this magnificent work in Paris, where it obtained so brilliant a success in 1831—a success to which I shall return soon.

Let us occupy ourselves for the moment with the effect that *Anna Bolena* produced on the peninsula. The reverberations of the applause that filled the Teatro Carcano reached as far as Nergande, the residence of Simon Mayr, Donizetti's old master. Mayr wrote very regularly to his former pupil, or to be exact, I should say that he replied regularly, for it was Donizetti who never forgot to write.

It is very curious to see, by the letters that the young musician preserved from his old professor, the scale of titles that the latter successively gave him. The first ran thus: "My dear pupil." A new series commenced: "My dear friend." From the success of *Anna Bolena*, Mayr changed these for this: "My dear maestro." At length, the last that he addressed him varied between "*Carissimo maestro*," and "*Illustrissimo maestro*."

It was the *Anna Bolena* which won the epaulettes for the young candidate. Until that time he had only been an under-officer, a simple pupil, the friend. He was from that period a master, "*maestro*."

He could compete in Italian scenes with Paolini, Mercandante and Bellini, who had succeeded Rossini, for the latter had already laid down his pen. We are in the year 1831. Everyone has heard that when the author of *William Tell* was asked why he no longer wrote, that he replied, with that witty and malicious smile so characteristic of him:

"I had been engaged by my impresario to write three operas; he has gone, and I no longer write. My impresario was the King, Charles X., for the opera belonged to the civil list."

In 1831, the first of September, *Anna Bolena* was given at the Théâtre Italien, of Paris, then under the management of Severini. Rossini was the *maitre dirigeant*, Tadolini the *maitre concertant*, and Herold the *maitre des choeurs*.

The work was interpreted by Lablache and Rubini, Pasta, Tadolini and Amigo; the latter sang the rôle of the page.

Mme. Tadolini was at that time also in all the power of her vocal glory. It is superfluous to speak of the other artists; their names are more than sufficient.

The success was immense.

They wrote from Paris to Mayr the day after the representation of *Anna Bolena*:

"At last they have ended by declaring here that Italy has not Rossini only; and that is a great deal for France! Your dear Gaetano has surpassed all the other Italian masters, and we owe this to you, who have given him the true doctrines and knew so well how to guide him."

I will leave you to imagine if poor old Mayr did not weep with joy.

IX.

We have dwelt with some length upon *Anna Bolena*, for the reason that this work represents one of the various stages of the

master's musical career. It is with that opera that the period terminates which might be called the first style of Donizetti.

After *Anna Bolena*, the rhythm, without losing any of its originality, yields to the yoke of traditions until that time respected as dogmas; the individuality of the musician began to manifest itself; he dared not leave off the *Rossinienne* ornamentation, but he attempted to free himself from certain melodic forms at that time too superannuated.

This act of emancipation was not entirely accomplished by the work that succeeded *Anna Bolena*, nor was it in the following operas, *Fausta*, and *Ugo, conte di Parigi*, the first written in 1831, the other in 1832. But these two operas represent one who is groping in the dark, the hesitations of one who has left the known way, and who is resolved to seek out a new path, even should he be obliged to mark out one himself.

One might almost say that he drew back in order to make the better spring,—for in truth the *Count of Paris* and even *Fausta* are far inferior, in beauty and success, to his *Anna Bolena*.

The *Count of Paris* contains nothing really remarkable except the overture, a duo, the adagio of a finale, a trio, and a chorus. The rest, we must confess, is very mediocre; but be reconciled; Donizetti recognized it himself; he knew, without the public taking the trouble to designate, which were his weakest pieces, and which were worthy of preservation. Thus the opera-oratorio entitled *Il Diluvio Universale*, should no longer exist. Donizetti had the profound conviction of having written a good work; the public were not of his opinion; they did not give a very bad reception to his *Diluvio*, but they certainly were not enthusiastic over it. The musician was displeased, and withdrew the score. But, in withdrawing it, he said to himself: "So be it; they will applaud it under another form and with other words."

He kept his word; and all the pieces of the *Diluvio* were introduced into successive scores.

With regard to *Fausta*, he did not venture to do the same; it is true, however, that *Fausta* met with a very different reception from that of *Ugo, conte di Parigi*. The famous final air,

Tu che voli già spirito beato,

is still sung in concerts, and the fine overture that he afterwards wrote for this opera we often hear at the present time. The composer was well rewarded for the pains he had taken in adding an overture after the work had already been represented, in the warm reception given it by the public.

Fausta was the first work upon which Donizetti collaborated with the poet for the libretto. It required a powerful motive, indeed, to decide him to do this: he could have had none graver than the death of the poet.

We allude to the maestro's favorite author, Giraldoni. He commenced the poem of *Fausta*, and Donizetti completed it. But as the poet was nearer death than life when he began it, and the musician was still suffering from the loss of his friend when he finished the interrupted work of the unfortunate Giraldoni, it proved but an indifferent work, devoid of dramatic interest, which injured the success of the score.

In short, neither *Fausta*, nor *Ugo, conte di Parigi*, in any way increased the renown of the composer.

I do not know what maestro had disap-

pointed the Milanese in the early part of the year 1832. An opera bouffe was absolutely necessary for Lent, and Lent had already commenced. Donizetti was called upon, there was no one but him who could do well and quickly,—since Rossini had abdicated.

The director of the Theatre of Milan had the courage—the *impresarii* in Italy fear nothing!—to say to Donizetti:

"Maestro, will you write me an opera-bouffe or semi-seria, but, on the galop?"

"Willingly," said Donizetti. "Have you the libretto?"

"No, but I have the poet."

"I do not care for your poets. I want Romani."

"I have ordered him in your name to come here."

"A la bonne heure. What do you mean by galop?"

"Two weeks."

"Words and music in fifteen days! Have you reflected?"

"I have said in two weeks. A week consists of seven days, therefore you have only fourteen days for your composition."

"You reckon marvellously."

"It is my profession; and I have counted upon your facility. I wish my season to continue until the end of Lent, and to do so, a new opera is necessary. I have calculated: fourteen days for the composer, and a week for the rehearsals will take twenty-one days. There are forty in Lent; four have passed, twenty-one will be required for the composition; there will then be fifteen days left for the representations. Will that suit you?"

"If Romani has a poem ready, it is all right."

Romani arrived during this transaction. He no more had a libretto ready than Donizetti had an opera.

They led the impresario to the door, and prayed him to return after breakfast. When he returned poet and musician had consulted. They could not dream of constructing a new poem; they would take a French opera-comique and adapt it to the Italian taste.

Donizetti proposed *Le Philtre*. Romani accepted it.

"Well?" said the impresario.

"In fourteen days," replied Donizetti, "you will have your opera."

"I will return then in two weeks."

"Come in eight days, and I will give you what may be done, for the copyists."

Here the steeple-chase commenced. Poet and musician seemed to struggle to see who should outstrip the other. Romani kept his word.

The next morning he returned with the scenario, which was approved of. Eleven days sufficed, *in all*, to Donizetti for the composition and orchestration of the score.

The impresario was in the height of felicity.

With one accord they agreed upon the title: the opera should be called *L'Elisir d'Amore*.

It was given on the appointed day, and had a triumphant success. After thirty-five years of success, *L'Elisir d'Amore* still fills the theatres at which it is given, and it has been played upon all the Italian lyrical stages of the Peninsula and elsewhere. There is no theatre where it has not been given, from St. Petersburg to Rio Janeiro, from London to Constantinople, from Lisbon to Berlin, without mentioning Paris, where notwithstanding *le Philtre*, it has become naturalized.