# THE DAILY E WING TELEGRAPH-PHILADELPHIA, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 13, 1869.

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## CONVERSATIONS WITH BOSSINI.

In the autumn of 1855 a happy chance led me to Trouville-that curious mixture of the fashionable bathing-place and the quiet coun-try town. Bossini, at the time of my visit, was the great lion of the place, and the object of the most universal and extraordinary attentions. He had only to show his face to be surrounded by the best and handsomest people in the place; the front seats at the concerts were always his; streets were named after him, and, to crown all, a tailor's signbore, the name of "Cuiller, Tailleur de Mon-sienr G. Rossini." board in the principal thoroughfare bears, or

My first introduction to the great composer was as a very young man in Paris. Both there and at Milan I saw him often, and was always treated by him with the greatest kindness and consideration.

During my three weeks at Trouville, we spent most of our time together. We promenaded for hours on the terrace by the sea. only occasionally suspending our walk for a game at dominoes. But even that serious occupation hardly interrupted our conversation; and Rossini would continue through it all inexhaustible in his stories and insatiable in his questions. Our chief topic was music, notwithstanding, or perhaps because, owing to the want of a good piano, I was able to play to him but seldom.

Though sixty-three years of age, his features were still almost unchauged. It would be difficult to find a more intelligent face, a more delicately cut nose, a more expressive month, more speaking eyes, or a nobler forehead. There was a southern vivacity about his countenance which was immensely effective both in fun and in earnest; and inimitable in irony, anger, or drollery. His voice was no less pleasant than flexible, and could be infinitely sweet when he chose. His nature was the most sociable one can imagine, and he never tired of chatting and talking, or-often more difficult still-of listening. He had that equanimity characteristic of the nations of the south-for old or young, great or small, always the right word and always the same demeanor to all. In short, he had one of those happy dispositions in which everything is native and spontaneous-nothing forced. As his music, so was he. His memory was prodigious, and his knowledge of music and musicians-not only of Italy, but et other countries-far greater thau most of my countrymen will give him credit for; while his judgment always seemed to me perfectly clear, sensible, and unbiassed, and ever ready to be convinced by argument.

"Those terrible |newspaper people!" cried Rossini, one day, "one of them says that I hate railways almost as much as I do German music. What do you think of that? Besides really loving the great German composers, 1 studied them, as a lad, of my own accord, and never lost an opportunity of knowing them better and better. What pleasure I have had in hearing you play Bach

"I certainly have never played his glorious music with more pleasure than when playing to you.

"What a colossal creature to write that mass of music in such a style! It is inconceivable. What to others would be difficult

or impossible was mere child's play to him." "Bach's portrait is splendid," began Ros-sini again, "so full of life and vigor. He must surely have been a great player."

"Yes. He is said to have improvised things

"It certainly is pretty strong. One can understand learning a cavatina by humming it after somebody, but how they manage to remember the middle parts of the *tuitis* is a riddle to me."

"One must be either very musical or very upmusical; but please let us return to your-If. Where did yon begin to learn music?" "At Bologna. A certain Prinetti, of Navara, self.

taught me the spinet. He was a queer fellow; who made liquor, gave a few music lessons, and so just managed to rub along. He never possessed a bed, but slept standing. At night he wrapped his cloak round him, leaned against the wall in the corner of some arcade and slept. The watchman knew him and didn't disturb him. Then he came to me very early, got me out of bed, which I didn't at all like, and made me play. Sometimes he hadn't slept enough, and used to go off standing, whilst I was hard at work at my spinet; but always took advantage of that, and crept back under the bedclothes. When he woke and found me there, he was quite content with my assuring him that, while he slept, I had played through my piece without any faults. His method was by no means the newest; for example, he made me play the scales with the thumb and finger."

"That did you as little harm as shirking the canons. But who else taught you ?"

"A certain Angelo Tesei taught me to play from figured bass, and how to accompany, and made me practise solfeggi. A once cele brated tenor, Babini, gave me more advanced lessons.

"You had a lovely voice ?"

"As a boy I sang well, and I once played the part of a boy in Paer's Camilla. But that was my first and last appearance."

"Did any of your companions at the Liceo turn out well ?" "The first year which I spent there was

Morlacchi's last, and my third year was Donizetti's first."

"I thought that Donizetti was a pupil of Simon Mair's ?"

"He tried for a time, but his real musical education was acquired at Bologna; and that he learned to some purpose no one will deny."

"Who were the Mombelli for whom you wrote Demetrio e Polibio?"

"Mombelli was a good tenor," said Rossini "He had two daughters, one soprano and the other contralto; they got a bass to complete the vocal quartette, and then, without further help, gave operas in Bologua, Milan, and other places. They made their first appear-ance at Bologna in a small but very fair opera of Portogallo's."

"A Portuguese ?"

"No, an Italian. He was not without talent, and thoroughly understood the voice. His compositions were much in favor with many of the best singers. My first wife, Madame Colbran, had about forty of his things in her repertoire. The way in which I made Mombelli's acquaintance was funny enough. Though but a boy of thirteen, I was an ardent admirer of the fair sex. One of my fair friends wished for an aria out of an opera of Mombelli's. I went to the copyist, but he wouldn't hear of it. Then I tried Mombelli himself, but he also refused. 'Very well,' said I, 'I'll hear the opera again to-night, and then write out whatever I like.' 'We shall see,' answered Mombelli. In the evening, I listened to the opera as hard as I could, and wrote out a complete pianoforte copy, which I carried to Mombelli. He couldn't believe it, called the copyist a rogue, and so on. 'If you can't give me credit for that,' said I, 'I will hear it a few more times, and then write out the full score before your own eyes.' My great self-confidence, in this case perfectly justifiable, conquered his suspicion, and we became good friends."

"I have often witnessed your extraordinary memory, but to put a whole opera on paper is quite marvellous."

"Well, it was not a score like Mozart's Figaro; but I really may pride myself on my tremendous musical memory at that time. As a young man, I could have accompanied Haydn's Oratorios without a book. I knew the whole Creation by heart, down to the smallest recitative-true, I had played it through and accompanied it often enough." "But to return to Demetrio e Polibio. Mombelli asked you, then, to write the opera ?" "He first gave me the words for a dust. then for an arietta, and paid mea few plastres for each, so as to make me get on faster; and in this way I wrote my first opera almost without knowing it. Babini gave me plenty of good advice over it. He was violently opposed to certain figures of melody then in vogue, and used every effort to make me avoid them. "I remember a quartette from Demetrio which had a certain celebrity when I was in Italy, and was quoted as a specimen of your precocity. When the opera was put on the stage, did you do anything more to it ?" No, I was away; Mombelli brought it out at Milan without my knowledge. The thing which astonished people so much in that quartette was its ending with a sort of exclamation from all the voices, instead of the usual close. A dust out of it was much sung for a long time; it was very easy, and that is the chief thing."

in London it was not as a composer that made money, but as an accompanyist." "Still, that was because you were a cele-brated composer."

"That was what they said to make me

do it. "It may have been prejudice, but I had a kind of repugnance to taking money for accompanying on the pianoforte, and I did it nowhere but in London. All they wanted was to see my nose and hear my wife. I had fixed the rather high price of fifty pounds for our attendance at soirces, and as we went to about sixty it was worth the trouble. Bat in London musicians do anything for money, and I had some queer experiences. For instance, the first time I accompanied at one of these soirces, they told me that Pozzi the horn-player and Dragonetti the contra-bassist were to be there. Of course I thought they would play solos; but nothing of the kind. They were to help me to accompany! 'Have you got your parts for all these pieces ?' I asked. I should think not,' was the answer; 'we get well paid and play whatever we like.' However, such improvised instrumentation seemed to me rather too dangerous, so l begged Dragonetti to content himself with a ew pizzicatos when I gave him the wink, and Puzzi merely to put in a few notes at the end, which, being a good musician, he easily managed. So it all went off smoothly, and every one was pleased.

"I knew a man in London," continued he, "who made a great fortune by teaching singing and music. He played the flute wretchedly, and that was all he could do. Another man, tremendously run after as a singing-master, didn't even know his notes. He kept an ac-companyist, who drummed into him all the pieces he taught, and accompanied them at the lesson; but then he had a good voice."

"Don't you feel that a really good singing-master is very seldom to be met with ?" "Most of the famous singers of our time,

like Rubini and Pasta, owe their talent more to nature than to hard work. The real art del bel Canto ceased with the Castrati; though one certainly would not wish them back again. To these people their art was necessarily every thing; and they devoted themselves with the most intense application and untiring care to their own development. They always became thorough musicians, and when their voices failed were capital teachers."

#### The Holyoke Dam.

The Hartford Times has a very interesting article in reference to the great dam on the Connecticut river at Holyoke, Mass. Very per Phila important improvements are in progress, and these are described as follows:-

The work of improvement here is one of far greater magnitude than we had supposed, and its impressiveness as a triumph of engineering skill and a proof of what man's labor can effect

over the rude forces of Nature, can be properly appreciated only by being seen. In the flood of last spring the front timbers of the dam were slightly lossened by the concussion of a huge and heavy bridge, which came crashing down on the flood from some point a hundred miles above. An examination of the front foundations, while it disclosed no serious injury to the great dam, revealed another fact of some interest. The river bed at this place is for a considerable distance composed of rock-but a rock full of seams; and the steady, continuous fall of the great sheet had by hydrostatic pres-sure *lifted out* the rock in masses, and scattered boulders of a ton to twenty tons weight for a considerable distance down stream-making at last a great hole in front of the dam, from twenty-six to thirty feet deep! or as deep as the deepest places in New London harbor.

It was found necessary to check this destruc-tive work; and accordingly the dam, which has for so many years presented a sheer fall from its edge, will now be made with a sloping front as well as rear; so that it would, if the river were dry, present an outline similar to that of the peaked roof of a house. This front extension is firity feet in diameter at the base, presenting a uniform slope to the top, that will so graduate the fall for its entire width of over a thousand feet, as to make it look more like a great rapid than the old iamiliar Holyoke dam. s-the first which

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equal to those which the best composers of the day are glad to be able to master,' said L. "Are his works much performed in Ger-

many ?' "Not so much as they should be: but still a

good deal."

"That is impossible in Italy, and now more so than ever. We cannot get together large amateur choirs as you do. We used to have good singers in our churches and chapels, but that is all over now. Since Baini's death even the Sistine is going backwards. Apropos, how stands the question about the authenticity of Mozart's Requiem? Has anything definite been discovered ?"

"Nothing new," said I.

"Anyhow, no one but Mozart wrote the Confutatis. Isn't it grand ? And the sotto voce at the end? What modulations! I always had a liking for sotto voce in a choras, but this one sends a cold chill down my back. Poor Mozart !"

"In a biography which concerns you, it is said that Mozart laughed, at most, three times in his life. What do you think of such nonsense? By the by, there are several things in that book which I want to ask you about. For instance, is it true that, after you had been learning a short time with Padre Mattei, you asked him if you knew enough to write an opera; and, on his saying Yes, at once made off?

"Not a bit of it ! I shad studied three years at the Liceo at Bologna, during which time I had to support myself and help my parents. This I managed, though very scantily. I accompanied the recitatives at the theatre at six pauls per night. I also had a good voice, and sang in church. Then, besides my exercises for Matter, I used to write things for Zamboni and other singers to introduce into operas or to sing at concerts, and this also brought me in a trifle. When I had got through counterpoint and fague, I asked Mattei what I might do next. "Pleinchant and canon" was his reply. Hew much time must "I give to them? "About two years." That was too long for me, so I told the good padre, and he perfectly understood, and never bore me a grudge. But I have often regretted since that I did not work longer with

"I suppose you had written a great many things before you went to Mattei ?"

"A whole opera, Demetrio e Polubio, which in the list of my works, is always mentioned later because it was not performed until after some of my other dramatic attempts, four or five years later. I composed it for the Mombelli family, not even knowing that it would become an opera. When I began studying with Mattel, I could not produce anything for months; I trembled over every bass note, and each middle part made me shudder. But my old courage soon returned."

"Had you begun music at Pesaro ?"

"I left Pesaro in my earliest childhood. My father was town-trumpeter, and also played the horn at the theatre: so we got on pretty well till the French arrived, when he lost his place. My mother had a nice voice, and made use of it to save us from want; and so we left Pesaro. My poor mother ! she had some talent, though she did not know a note. She sang, as we say, orecchiante, purely by ear-which, by the way, is the case with eighty out of every hundred Italian aingers."

"Inconceivable !"

"It is strange that with your beautiful voice you never thought of being a singer."

"I thought of nothing else, my friend; but I wanted to learn music more thoroughly than most of the singers I met. I found it easy at an early age, and got a place as maëstro al cembalo; my first attempts at composition were favorably received, and so I took to it almost by chance, and stuck to it, though I could always see how far better singers were paid than composers."

"No doubt of that. Beethoven barely got as much for all his works as they give Cruvelli every year at the Grand Opera."

"It had not then reached such an insane pitch; but the difference was the same; where the composer earned fifty ducats, the singer would get a thousand," said Rossini, apgrily. "I confess that I have never been able to get over this injustice, and have often vented my ill-temper about it to the singers. 'You are a g ood-for-nothing set,' I said to them; 'you can't even sing as well as I can, and yet in one night you earn more than I get for a whole score.' But what's one to do? The German composers are no better off."

"Not a bit. But they get posts which, if not brilliantly paid, are enough to keep them from actual want. No German has yet been able to live on his operas. But in Italy such matters seem to have improved."

"Decidedly. The early Italian composers had to write God knows how many operas merely to gain a scanty existence. It was much the same with me before I got my appointment with Barbaja."

"Wasn't Tancredi your first opera to make a noise in the world? How much did you get for it ?

"Five hundred francs. And when I wrote Semiramide, my last Italian opera, at Venice, and stipulated for 5000 francs, not only the manager, but the whole public, regarded me as a thief.

"It's a consolation to think that singers, managers, and publishers have all grown rich through you.

"A fine consolation. Excepting during my stay in England I never earned enough by music to enable me to put by anything. And

This work is done b Henn J. C. Edwa was begun in September and is now nearly finished, being 269 feet wide in the middle of the dam Geor H F

It is made of solid timbers, fastened in layers cross-wise, in the way known to builders as "crib-work," and filled in with an enormous These solid masses of ballasting of stone. timber, bolied and riveled together for such an extent and height, present, to one unaccustomed to it, a very impressive sight. Unlike the old dam, the new front will be solid; no open-work timbers. The timber 'cribs" are sunk, and the rock ballast filled solidly in be-neath them in the higher part, with a good deal of engineering skill. The engineer is Mr. S. S. Chase, whose uncle, we believe, built the original dam. He floats down a good deal of his timber rom Vermont. It consists largely of hemiock, a timber which resists decay and the action of water beyond most others. Chopping into the wood of the old dam shows that twenty years have failed to damage it a particle; it is as sound as ever. They have put down in this section about one

million feet of timber. That fact tells the story of the literal solidity of the new dam.

It is found that the weight or force of the stream exerted against the dam at all times is nearly four thousand tons. The weight of this new structure above the water is thirtcen

thousand tons. Looking at it from the shore, this section of two hundred and sixty-nine feet seems but a little part of the whole breadth of the fail, but to a person standing on it at its lower or its upper edge it seems in itself a 'big thing." The company are expending from \$75,000 to

\$100,000 on these changes at the dam. They have at work a large gang of men, lumbermen and loggers from Maine and builders from other regions, and the boom derricks, axes, adzes, and saws are kept busy, winter though it be.

Next summer the work of completing the front extension will be begun. This mid-lle section, now substantially completed, is the most important part of it.

The construction of the fish-way, for salmoa and shao, had to be delayed on account of this improvement on the dam. It will be made, at the east end of the dam, as soon as the latter is

finished. One of the rocks lifted out of its natural bed by the hydrostatic pressure in front of the old dam weighted, before Mr. Chase blasted it, twelve tons; and yet it had been taken out and moved a hundred feet down stream by "waar power.'

#### Worthy a Vote–What a Michigan Womaa has Done. \$1.10

From the Detroit Post, Jan. 9.

We would like to hear a good sound argument against this woman's voting:-She lives near Dowagiac, in Van Buren county, in the western Bali part of this State Eighteen months ago, dressed in man's clothes, she bought forty acres pa of land, and promised when her house was completed to reveal her name. In a year and completed to rescal her name. In a year and a half, with her own hands, she has built a comfortable frame house; grabbed out fourteen acres of heavy oak, and made them ready for the plow, and chopped and split rails, and con-structed a fence that is said to be the envy and the admiration of the neighborhood. She has eight acres sown with wheat. She has dug "a superior ditch" on one side of her land. She furnishes her neighbors with ax-helves and epiint baskets. She dug up a tree, sawed some Cas furnishes her heighbors with ax-herves and epiint baskets. She dug up a tree, sawed some runn ers out with a handsaw, and manutactured a pair of "bob sleds." She hires a team of her neighbors by doing extra work for them. Two months after her arrival she went into her new house and out of her old clothes, and said her neighbors was Anna Starcy. In addition to these name was Anna Starcy. In addition to these remarkable accomplishments, and the conquest of the obstacles we have mentioned, she has had pluck and definess enough to overcome the disabilities of half a century of age, and the loss of the use of one leg below the knee.

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