A Visit to Rossini.

The friendly old gentleman, who was seated at the writing-table in little study, rose with some difficulty, but with the most winning cordiality, and held out his hand to me. We soon forced him back again into his arm-chair. Suddenly he asked us if Mozart's monument in Vienna was completed, and also Beethoven's. We threw Austrians were rather embarrassed, "I remember Beethoven remarkably well," continued Rossini, after a pause, "though very nearly half a century has elapsed; when I was in Vienna, I lost no time in going to see him." "Has he did not admit you, as Schindler and other biographers inform us?" "On the contrary," said Rossini, correcting me, "I got the Italian poet, Carpani, with whom I had previously been to Salieri's, to introduce me to Beethoven, who received us immediately and in a very polite manner. The visit, it is true, did not last long, for all conversation with Beethoven was absolutely painful. On the day in question, he happened to be worse than usual, and could not understand me, though I spoke in an exceedingly loud voice; perhaps, too, the little practice he had may have rendered the task of conversing in Italian still more difficult for him." I own that this statement of Rossini's, the truth of which was corroborated by many details, pleased me like an unexpected gift, for I had always been annoyed at this trait in Beethoven's biography, as well as at the pride of musical doctors who glorify the brutal Germanic virtue of shutting one's door in the face of a man like Rossini, but there is not a word of truth in the whole story. We accepted with pleasure Rossini's offer to take us up the stairs to the ground floor. We entered the light, spacious drawing-room, with its frieze adorned ceiling, and its lofty windows, through which rose-bushes peep. In the middle of the room stood a magnificent Pleyel's Grands. As we all know, Rossini, for the last few years, has exhibited a strong partiality for playing the piano, and this virtuosity deferred till so late affords him an opportunity of making a continuous succession of jokes, several of which are stereotyped. He has grown at ease to complain that Schindhoff would not give him a chance of getting on as a pianist. "It is true that I do not practice my scales every day like you young people, for, when I play them the whole length of the piano, I fall off my chair either right or left." During the rehearsal, Rossini gives six or eight musical *leaves* at his town residence, No. 3 Chaussée d'Antin. For an artist possessing so eminently the sense of the beautiful in music, the style of decoration adopted for his apartment is strikingly devoid of taste, with a touch of the *bourgeois*. Next to a copperplate engraving of the Madonna della Sedia is hung some Parisian idea in a very low-necked dress and all along the wall are bronze sconces with histories of the saints in relief. On the side-board, a crucifix rises out of a confused medley of small Japanese figures and Chinese pictures, for which Rossini appears to have a great partiality. In the way of portraits, the only ones I remarked were a small photograph of the King of Portugal and of Adelina Patti upon the mantel-shelf. Of Adelina Patti the maestro speaks with admiring esteem, always excepting her when he indulges in lamentations to the effect that the race of great vocal artists has completely died out. "Look there!" he said, pointing to the new opera-house, which rises, surrounded by scaffolding, before his windows. "We shall soon have a new theatre; but we have already no more singers. Shall you be better off when your new opera house is finished at Vienna?" To attend the *soirées* of the celebrated maestro is the ambition of every one in Paris. The most distinguished persons frequently take more trouble to obtain an invitation to Rossini's than to the Tuileries, and the papers never neglect giving, next day, an account of what took place. I was enabled to attend the last of these musical "evenings, and owe to having felt more honored than pleased. Rossini's residence is very far from being large enough to accommodate the number of persons invited. The heat was something indescribable, and the perspiration poured from the most desperate efforts were always necessary whenever a fair vocalist (especially one of the weight of Madame Sax) had to make her way from her seat to the piano. A host of ladies, sparkling with jewels, occupy the entire area of the music-room; the gentlemen stand, jammed together so as to be unable to move, at the open doors. Now and then a servant with refreshments worms through the gasping crowd, but it is an odd fact that only very *few* persons (and those mostly strangers) take anything worth mentioning. The lady of the house, it is said, does not like their doing so. About the present Madame Rossini I have nothing further to say than that she is rich, and was once beautiful. A boldly sculptured Roman nose rises, like a tower that has been spared, from out the remains of her former beauty; the rest was covered by brilliants. The programme of the concert (made up mostly, as was natural, of Rossini's music) included Italian and French vocal pieces, executed by the leading members of the opera, Mme. Sax, Mlle. Battu, Faure, and others. Two new Rossinian piano-forte pieces (played by a young virtuoso of the name of Diemer) were not so remarkable for originality as for the piling up of difficulties in them. They bore the strange titles, "Ivresse and Sudden Awakening," and "Tartarian Bolero." The vocal pieces are more serious and beautiful. They are not unfrequently original, and invariably models as regards the treatment of the voice. The master of the hotel himself accompanied two of the vocal pieces on the piano with entrancing delicacy. Otherwise, on such evenings, he generally sits, silent and tired, in the little entrance room, with his old co-league Carafa, or some other intimate friend, and is delighted if the pack of his adorers will leave him awhile in repose. I regret not having heard Rossini's new Mass. This work (the 14th of the series) is carefully guarded, and kept unpublished by its composer; it is said to contain some very striking beauties. "It is not the kind of sacred music fitted for you Germans," said Rossini, when I declining to accede to my request, "my most sacred music is never sung!—more than semi-serious." He calls his "Napoleon Hymn" (for the distribution of prizes on the first July) "pot-house music," and his opera "mutilated stuff." It is, indeed, impossible to talk seriously with the celebrated composer, who plays at and with his quiet jokes and mild banter; and when he jokes about his own compositions, it is always a mixture of dudgeon and of a laughing more at himself or at those whom he is addressing. Though we may blame the exaggeration in this grotesque self-depreciation, it is based on a motive—of feeling which we cannot fail to recognize on looking more nearly into the circumstances of the case. Rossini lives in the midst of a system of uninterrupted adoration and petting. There are but few men in the world to whom such homage is forever being paid. This room is never free from visitors; the highest notabilities of aristocracy, wealth and art come and go. He is overwhelmed with compliments and attention; out of a hundred persons, ninety-nine think themselves bound to say flattering things to him. Were Rossini to receive all such expressions of admiration with the self-satisfied, vainly modest air of a celebrated maestro is the ambition of every one in Paris, the most distinguished persons frequently take more trouble, obtain an invitation to Rossini's than to the Tuileries, and the papers never neglect giving, next day, an account of what took place. I was enabled to attend the last of these musical "evenings, and owe to having felt more honored than pleased. Rossini's residence is very far from being large enough to accommodate the number of persons invited. The heat was something indescribable, and the perspiration poured from the most desperate efforts were always necessary whenever a fair vocalist (especially one of the weight of Madame Sax) had to make her way from her seat to the piano. A host of ladies, sparkling with jewels, occupy the entire area of the music-room; the gentlemen stand, jammed together so as to be unable to move, at the open doors. 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