THE MUSICAL SENSATION IN PARIS

Auber's New Opera—Grand Ovation to the Veteran Composer.

(Correspondence of The New York Times.)

PARIS, Feb. 21.—The "maestro" Auber has been the "lion" of the week in Paris. A wonderful old man seems an inexhaustible mine of musical treasures, and has actually at 85 years of age composed one of the freshest and most effective of *chef d'œuvres*. The first representation of this opera, *Le Premier jour de Bonheur*, produced in my last letter, was the occasion of a veritable ovation to the composer, which is compared to a similar great event in the life of the great Voltaire—the representation of *Irene* at the Theatre Francais. The comparison is not by any means a just one. *Irene* was in fact the most insignificant of Voltaire's pieces—indeed, the French do not hesitate to call it detestable and ignoble—and Voltaire received the magnificent triumph on the occasion of its first appearance, not as the author of the piece tragically which fell immediately before the public criticism, but for having consecrated his life in defence of ideas which in the actual were persecuted and misunderstood, but commencing to take deep root in the popular mind, and which led to the immense revolution of '89. Auber's case is not in the least similar. He has had entirely away from political agitations, and has contented himself by singing like a bird, without taking into account the changes of governments going on around him. When he wrote the *Muette de Portici* ("Massaniello") he had not the faintest idea that in the grand duo between *Pietro* and *Massaniello* he was assisting in overturning a throne and in sending a dynasty into exile. (This duo, it may be known, is one of the great republican songs of Naples.) Auber, in this case, was the unconscious spark destined to create a great conflagration. The immense success of the new piece is therefore not in the least due to a worship of the man, or even as a testimony of respect to his old age. Auber, at sixty years of age, brought out the "Alliance of the King of Cythera," which was a disastrous failure. The "Premier jour de Bonheur" has succeeded purely and simply on its own intrinsic merits, and one cannot help being surprised that the grey-headed old man should be capable of producing such exquisite—love-melodies as are to be found in the new opera. The libretto is full of charming—I have almost said, in modern opera, it must be admitted. The scene is laid in India, at the period when the Commander Dupleix defended the French Colonies against the aggressions of the English—far superior in numbers and with better appointed army. A young French officer, Gaston de Malipaz, has just arrived from Versailles. He is entirely received, and is hopelessly in love with an unknown fair one, whom he sees but a moment, during a passing visit to London. Under these circumstances he performs prodigies of valor in the hope of being put out of his misery by a "friendly" shot from the enemy. In the meantime, however, he makes his attributes to an Indian priestess, Djelma, who consoles him, and counsels him to live and hope. Suddenly a wonderful change comes over his fortunes. In the same day he is brevetted colonel, receives the announcement that he has fallen heir to a great estate, and towards evening his soldiers lead in a fair lady prisoner whom they have taken within the French lines. Of course, the fair lady proves to be the lovely Helene, his unknown charmer of London. This situation is, as may be supposed, too bright to last. Just as he thinks his happiness assured, his fortune is dissipated by his cousin Bergerac, his best friend challenges him for having been passed colonel over his head, and Helen announces that "Sir John," who had been brought into camp at the same time with herself, having accompanied her in the promenade, which ended so unlucky) —Sir John was her destined husband.

In the second act we are in Madras, in the drawing-rooms of the English Governor, who is giving a great ball in honor of the saturnine Sir Hector Helene, who has been released and returned to her uncle's protection by the two gallant Frenchmen, Bergerac and De Mailly. Here come a ballet to represent the gay dances of the Governor's guests, and in the height of the festivity is introduced our friend Gaston, who, in his turn, has been made prisoner in his exquisite—approach Helen after her liberation he has been surprised and taken. The Governor treats him as a guest and invites him to be of the party. He finds himself at once the object of the politeness and attention of all the company, as he is, of course, a model of civilivalry and elegance. Helen grows less shy. Bergerac and De Mailly have made efforts to conciliate him. Later, these sympathies of the company seem redoubled in the most incomprehensible fashion. Bergerac approaches and tells him that he renounces the disputed inheritance; De Mailly begs pardon for his ridiculous challenge; Helen, with tears in her eyes, allows herself to express to him the tenderest sentiments; Gaston does not try to analyze all his delightful sensations; he gives himself up to the charm of the hour. Alas! his dream is but a short one. The Governor advances, and with a thousand circumlocutions, declares that Sir John, during his captivity, had for pure pastime made a sketch of the French fortifications; this sketch had been found, and Sir John was accused of being a spy, and had been condemned to be shot; that the execution would take place at daybreak; and that, as he was a spy, he had decided by the General in command that Gaston should be shot at the same hour. Poor Gaston begins to comprehend the generosity of Bergerac, the remorse of De Mailly, and the sudden passion of Helen; but, after a moment's melancholy, he takes his place again in the dance, and continues to converse with Helen, with, however, much more tenderness and deeper feeling. Helen, full of sorrow, finds that she really loves the young hero, and responds fully to all his avowals. In the third act, Gaston is passing his last. He says adieu to Helen and Djelma, who have come to soften the bitterness of his last moments. But suddenly appears Sir John; the phlegmatic Englishman has come to request that he may be exchanged for Gaston, and, in case of refusal, he has given his "friends" orders to return to the French camp. The English General accepts the condition, but Gaston refuses. He prefers death to being witness to Helen's marriage with his cold rival. Sir John is determined to live at any price—consents to give up Helen, and every body is made happy. The success of the piece was immense, the whole theatre calling out for the author, but Auber did not make his appearance. Bouquets of the most magnificent proportions were ready to be thrown to him upon the stage; but he remained hidden in the back part of his box (one the stage), and, I fear, was entirely inconsolable because the Emperor had not concerned his Majesty with his imperial presence. All the loud huzzas were lost on him. He attempted to leave the theatre by a private door, but the crowd waited for him, and pressed around his carriage with acclamations and felicitations.

Stage Costume—Blunders of the Past.

A short historical sketch of the anachronisms of our stage costume will serve best to show how slow the friendly has been the progress of realism, natural as it now seems, that actors should wear the correct dress of the time and place which the author has used in the play he has given them to represent. In Shakespeare's day there was no attempt to dress characters correctly. The Earl of Southampton, Raleigh, and such patrons, gave their court-suits to the players. Hamlet was erected in the peascod doublet and bolstered hose of James the First's court; and the pretty pages and charmers boys who played Juliet and Imogene, played in large fardingales and white quilled ruffs. There was no more attention to correctness then than there is now in drawing-room charades. That great tragedian Betterton played Hamlet and Alexander the Great in the stiff square-cut dress of William of Orange, with tufts of ribbon on his shoulders and on his sword-hilt, knee-breeches and square-cut shoes. He pointed his periods with waves of his cocked hat and tossing of the huge powdered mane of his court wig. Over his manly breast streamed a broad steenkirk of Flemish lace; he not improbably took snuff and made a point of dropping his snuff-box from the sire his father's plate. As for the stage murderer, he always scowled from under a black Charles the Second wig. Quin played the gay lover in a heavy scarlet coat and waistcoat, black silk breeches, and with a big powdered wig, flowing down upon his breast.

Garrick, a scholarly man, and the friend of Hogarth, was not better. He dressed Hamlet in a black court suit and short bag-wig; he had ruffles on his wrists and buckles in his shoes. His cravats was of the time of William the Third, and streamed over his chest. Woodward, as the gay Macaroni, dangled his cane and ogled the pit through his eye-glass, and with a thousand circumlocutions, declares that Sir John, during his captivity, had for pure pastime made a sketch of the French fortifications; this sketch had been found, and Sir John was accused of being a spy, and had been condemned to be shot; that the execution would take place at daybreak; and that, as he was a spy, he had decided by the General in command that Gaston should be shot at the same hour. Poor Gaston begins to comprehend the generosity of Bergerac, the remorse of De Mailly, and the sudden passion of Helen; but, after a moment's melancholy, he takes his place again in the dance, and continues to converse with Helen, with, however, much more tenderness and deeper feeling. Helen, full of sorrow, finds that she really loves the young hero, and responds fully to all his avowals. In the third act, Gaston is passing his last. He says adieu to Helen and Djelma, who have come to soften the bitterness of his last moments. But suddenly appears Sir John; the phlegmatic Englishman has come to request that he may be exchanged for Gaston, and, in case of refusal, he has given his "friends" orders to return to the French camp. The English General accepts the condition, but Gaston refuses. He prefers death to being witness to Helen's marriage with his cold rival. Sir John is determined to live at any price—consents to give up Helen, and every body is made happy. The success of the piece was immense, the whole theatre calling out for the author, but Auber did not make his appearance. Bouquets of the most magnificent proportions were ready to be thrown to him upon the stage; but he remained hidden in the back part of his box (one the stage), and, I fear, was entirely inconsolable because the Emperor had not concerned his Majesty with his imperial presence. All the loud huzzas were lost on him. He attempted to leave the theatre by a private door, but the crowd waited for him, and pressed around his carriage with acclamations and felicitations.

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