

# Great Singers, First Series eBook

## Great Singers, First Series

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## FAUSTINA BORDONI.

**The Art-Battles of Handel's Time.—The Feud between Cuzzoni and Faustina.—The Character of the Two Rivals as Women and Artists.—Faustina's Career.—Her Marriage with Adolph Hasse, and something about the Composer's Music.—Their Dresden Life.—Cuzzoni's Latter Years.—Sketch of the Great Singer Farinelli.—The Old Age of Hasse and Faustina.**

### I.

During the early portion of the eighteenth century the art of the stage excited the interests and passions of the English public to a degree never equaled since. Politics and religion hardly surpassed it in the power of creating cabals and sects and in stirring up animosities. This was specially marked in music. The great Handel, who had not then found his true vocation as an oratorio composer, was in the culmination of his power as manager of the opera, though he was irritated by hostile factions. The musical quarrels of the time were almost as interesting as the Gluck-Piccini war in Paris in the latter part of the same century, and the *literati* took part in it with a zest and wit not less piquant and noticeable. Handel, serenely grand in his musical conceptions, was personally passionate and fretful; and the contest of satire, scandal, and witticism raged without intermission between him and his rivals, supported on each hand by princes and nobles, and also by the great dignitaries of the republic of letters. In this tumult the singers (always a *genus irritabile*, like the race of poets) who belonged to the opera companies took an active part.

Not the least noteworthy episode of this conflict was the feud between two foremost sirens of the lyric stage, Francesca Cuzzoni and Faustina Bordoni. When the brilliant Faustina appeared in London, as a fresh importation of Handel, who was as indefatigable in purveying novelties as any modern Mapleson or Strakosch, Cuzzoni was the idol of the public, having succeeded to that honor after Anastasia Robinson retired from the stage as Countess of Peterborough. Handel some years before had introduced Cuzzoni to the English stage, and, though kept in constant turmoil by her insolence and caprice, had taken great pains to display her fine voice by the composition of airs specially suited to her. It is recorded that one morning, after she had refused at rehearsal to sing a song written for her by the master, such rage took possession of Handel that he seized her fiercely, and threatened to hurl her from the window unless she succumbed. One of the arias composed for this singer extorted from Main-waring, a musician bitterly at odds with Handel, the remark, "The great bear was certainly inspired when he wrote that song."



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Cuzzoni's popularity with the public had so augmented her native conceit and insolence as to make a rival unbearable. Though she was ugly and ill made, of a turbulent and obstinate temper, ungrateful and capricious, she deported herself as if she possessed all the graces of beauty, art, and genius, and regarded the allegiance of the public as her native right. London had indeed given her some claim to this arrogance, as from the first it had treated her with brilliant distinction, so that fashionable ladies had adopted the style of her stage dresses, and duels were fought by the young "bucks" and "swells" of the time over the right to escort her to her carriage. The bitterness with which Cuzzoni hated Faustina was aggravated by the fact that the latter, in addition to her great ability as a singer, was younger, far more beautiful, and of most fascinating and amiable manner. Handel and the directors of the King's theatre were in ecstasies that they had secured two such exquisite singers; but their joy was destined to receive a sudden check in the bitter squabbles which speedily arose. Indeed, the two singers did not meet in battle for the first time, for seven years before they had been rival candidates for favor in Italy. Faustina Bordoni possessed remarkable beauty of figure and face, an expression full of fire and intelligence, to which she united tact, amiability, and prudence. As singers the rivals were nearly equal; for Faustina, while surpassing the Cuzzoni in power of execution, had not the command of expression which made the latter's art so pathetic and touching. Dr. Burney, the musical historian, and father of Madame d'Arblay, describes Cuzzoni in these words: "A native warble enabled her to execute divisions with such facility as to conceal every appearance of difficulty; and so soft and touching was the natural tone of her voice, that she rendered pathetic whatever she sang, in which she had leisure to unfold its whole volume. The art of conducting, sustaining, increasing, and diminishing her tones by minute degrees, acquired for her among professors the title of complete mistress of her art. In a *canta-bile* air, though the notes she added were few, she never lost a favorable opportunity of enriching the cantilena with all the refinements and embellishments of the time. Her shake was perfect; she had a creative fancy, and the power of occasionally accelerating and retarding the measure in the most artificial manner by what the Italians call *tempo rubato*. Her high notes were unrivaled in clearness and sweetness, and her intonations were so just and fixed that it seemed as if it were not in her power to sing out of tune." The celebrated flute-player Quantz, instructor of Frederick II., also gave Dr. Burney the following account of Faustina's artistic qualities: "Faustina had a mezzo-soprano voice, that was less clear than penetrating. Her compass now was only from B flat to G in alt; but after this time she extended its limits downward.

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She possessed what the Italians call *un cantar granito*; her execution was articulate and brilliant. She had a fluent tongue for pronouncing words rapidly and distinctly, and a flexible throat for divisions, with so beautiful a shake that she put it in motion upon short notice, just when she would. The passages might be smooth, or by leaps, or consisting of iterations of the same note; their execution was equally easy to her as to any instrument whatever. She was, doubtless, the first who introduced with success a swift repetition of the same note. She sang adagios with great passion and expression, but was not equally successful if such deep sorrow were to be impressed on the hearer as might require dragging, sliding, or notes of syncopation and *tempo rubato*. She had a very happy memory in arbitrary changes and embellishments, and a clear and quick judgment in giving to words their full value and expression. In her action she was very happy; and as her performance possessed that flexibility of muscles and face-play which constitute expression, she succeeded equally well in furious, tender, and amorous parts. In short, she was born for singing and acting."

Faustina's amiability would have kept her on good terms with a rival; but Cuzzoni's malice and envy ignored the fact that their respective qualities were rather adapted to complement than to vie with each other. Handel, who had a world of trouble with his singers, strove to keep them on amicable terms, but without success. The town was divided into two parties: the Cuzzoni faction was headed by the Countess of Pembroke, and that of Faustina by the Countess of Burlington and Lady Delawar, while the men most loudly declared for the Venetian beauty.

At last the feud came to a climax. On the 20th of June, 1727, a brilliant gathering of rank and fashion filled the opera-house to hear the two *prime donne*, who were to sing together. On their appearance they were received with a storm of mingled hissing and clapping of hands, which soon augmented into a hurricane of catcalls, shrieking, and stamping. Even the presence of royalty could not restrain the wild uproar, and accomplished women of the world took part in these discordant sounds. Dr. Arbuthnot, in alluding to the disgraceful scene, wrote in the "London Journal" this stinging rebuke: "Aesop'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 his arms, 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 must not think they can put on the fine woman again just when they please, but content themselves with their skill in caterwauling." The following epigram was called out by the proceedings of the evening, which were mostly stimulated by the Pembroke party, who supported Cuzzoni:

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"Old poets sing that beasts did dance  
Whenever Orpheus played:  
So to Faustina's charming voice  
Wise Pembroke's asses brayed."

The two fair cantatrices even forgot themselves so far as to come to blows on several occasions, and the scandalous chronicle of the times was enlivened with epigrams, lampoons, libels, and duels in rapid succession. This amusing but disgraceful feud was burlesqued in a farce called "Contretemps, or The Rival Queens," which was performed at Heidigger's theatre. Faustina as the *Queen of Bologna* and Cuzzoni as *Princess of Modena* were made to seize each other by the hair, and lacerate each other's faces. Handel looks on with cynical attention, and calmly orders that the antagonists be "left to fight it out, inasmuch as the only way to calm their fury is to let them satisfy it."

The directors of the opera finally solved the difficulty in the following manner: Cuzzoni had solemnly sworn never to accept a guinea less than her rival. As Faustina was far more attractive and manageable, she was offered just one guinea more than Cuzzoni, who learning the fact broke her contract in a fury of indignation, and accepted a Viennese engagement. The well-known Ambrose Philips addressed the following farewell lines to the wrathful singer:

"Little siren of the stage,  
Charmer of an idle age,  
Empty warbler, breathing lyre,  
Wanton gale of fond desire;  
Bane of every manly art,  
Sweet enfeebler of the heart;  
Oh! too pleasing is thy strain.  
Hence to southern climes again,  
Tuneful mischief, vocal spell;  
To this island bid farewell:  
Leave us as we ought to be—  
Leave the Britons rough and free."

## II.

Faustina Bordoni, who from the time of her radiant *debut* was known as the "New Siren," was the daughter of a noble Venetian family, formerly one of the governing families of the republic. Born in the year 1700, she began to study her art at an early age under Gasparoni, who developed a beautiful and flexible voice to the greatest advantage. She made her first appearance at the age of sixteen in Pollarolo's "Ariodante," and her beauty, which was ravishing, her exquisite voice, dramatic power, and artistic skill, gave her an immediate place as one of the greatest ornaments of the

lyric stage. She came into rivalry with Cuzzoni even at this early period, but carried off the palm of victory as she did in after-years. Venice, Naples, Florence, and Vienna were successively the scenes of her triumphant reign as an artist, and she became acknowledged as the most brilliant singer in Europe. At Vienna she was appointed court singer at a salary of fifteen thousand thalers. Here she was found by Handel, who carried her to London, where she made her *debut* May 5, 1726, in that great composer's "Alessandro,"

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very appropriately singing *Statira* to the *Roxana* of Cuzzoni. Faustina's amiable and unobtrusive character seems to have made her an unwilling participant in the quarrels into which circumstances forced her, and to have always deserved the eulogium pronounced by Apostolo Zeno on her departure from Vienna: "But whatever good fortune she meets with, she merits it all by her courteous and polite manners, as well as talents, with which she has enchanted and gained the esteem and affection of the whole court." Throughout life a sweet temper and unspotted purity of character made her the idol of her friends as well as of the general public. Faustina seems to have left London gladly, though her short career of two years there was a brilliant artistic success. The scandalous bickerings and feuds through which she passed made her departure more of a pleasure to herself than to the lovers of music in turbulent London.

She returned to Venice in 1728, where she met Adolph Hasse, who was leader of the orchestra at the theatre in which she was engaged. Faustina, in the full bloom of her loveliness, was more than ever the object of popular adulation; and many of the wealthy young nobles of Venice laid their names and fortunes at her feet. But the charming singer had found her fate. She and Hasse had fallen in love with each other at first sight, and Faustina was proof against the blandishments of the gilded youth of Italy. Hasse was the most popular dramatic composer of the age, and had so endeared himself to the Italian public that he was known as "*il caro Sassone*," a title which had also been previously given to Handel. Hasse had commenced life as a tenor singer, but his talent for composition soon lifted him into a higher field of effort. His first opera was produced at Brunswick, but its reception showed that he must yet master more of the heights and depths of musical science before attaining any deserved success. So he proceeded to Italy, and studied under Porpora and Alessandro Scarlatti. In a few years he became a celebrity, and the opera-houses of Italy eagerly vied with each other in procuring new works from his fecund talent. Faustina, then at the zenith of her powers and charms, and Hasse, the most admired composer of the day, were congenial mates, and their marriage was not long delayed.

Of this composer a few passing words of summary may be interesting. His career was one long success, and he wrote more than a hundred operas, besides a host of other compositions. Few composers have had during their lifetime such world-wide celebrity, and of these few none are so completely forgotten now. The facile powers of Hasse seem to have reflected the most genial though not the deepest influences of his time. He had nothing in common with the grand German school then rising into notice, or with the simple majesty of the early Italian writers. Himself originally a singer, and living in an age of brilliant singers, he was one of the first representatives

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of that school of Italian opera which was called into being by the worship of vocal art for its own sake. He had an inexhaustible flow of tunefulness, and the few charming songs of his now extant show great elegance of melodic structure, and such sympathy with the needs of the voice as make them the most perfect vehicle for expression and display on the part of the singer. For ten years, that most wonderful of male singers, as musical historians unite in calling Farinelli, charmed away the melancholy of Philip V. of Spain by singing to him every evening the same two melodies of Hasse, taken from the opera of "Artaserse."

In 1731 the celebrated couple accepted an offer from the brilliant Court of Dresden, presided over by Augustus II., as great a lover of art and literature as Goethe's Duke of Saxe-Weimar, or as the present Louis of Bavaria. This aesthetic monarch squandered great sums on pictures and music, and gave Hasse unlimited power and resources to place the Dresden opera on such a footing as to make it foremost in Europe. His first opera produced in Dresden was the masterpiece of his life, "Alessandro dell' Indie," and its great success was perhaps owing in part to the splendid singing and acting of Faustina, for whom indeed the music had been carefully designed. As the husband of the most fascinating prima donna of her age, Hasse had no easy time. His life was still further embittered by the presence and intrigues of Porpora, his old master and now rival, and jealousy of Porpora's pupil, Mingotti, who threatened to dispute the sway of his wife. Hasse's musical spite was amusingly shown in writing an air for Mingotti in his "Demofonte." He composed the music for what he thought was the defective part of her voice, while the accompaniment was contrived to destroy all effect. Mingotti was nothing daunted, but by hard study and ingenious adaptation so conquered the difficulties of the air, that it became one of her greatest show-pieces. A combination of various causes so dissatisfied the composer with Dresden, that he divided his time between that city, Venice, Milan, Naples, and London, though the Saxon capital remained his professed home. One of his diversions was the establishment of opera in London in opposition to Handel; but he became so ardent an admirer of that great man's genius, that he refused to be a tool in the hands of the latter's enemies, though several of his operas met with brilliant success in the English capital.

Dresden life at last flowed more easily with Hasse and Faustina on the advent of Augustus III., who possessed his father's connoisseurship without his crotchets and favoritism. Here he remained, with the exception of a short Venetian sojourn, till late in life. On the evening of Frederick the Great's entrance into Dresden in 1745, after the battle of Kesselsdorf, Hasse's opera of "Arminio" was performed by command of the conqueror, who was so charmed with the work and Faustina's singing that he invited

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the composer and wife to Berlin. During the Prussian King's occupation he made Faustina many magnificent gifts, an exceptional generosity in one who was one of the most penurious of monarchs as well as one of the greatest of soldiers. Faustina continued to sing for eight years longer, when, at the age of fifty-two, she retired from the long art reign which she had enjoyed, having held her position with unchanged success against all comers for nearly forty years.

### III.

In notable contrast to the career of Faustina was that of her old-time rival, Cuzzoni. After the Venetian singer retired from London, Cuzzoni again returned to fill an engagement with the opposition company formed by Handel's opponents. With her sang Farinelli and Senesino, the former of whom was the great tenor singer of the age—perhaps the greatest who ever lived, if we take the judgment of the majority of the musical historians. Cuzzoni was again overshadowed by the splendid singing of Farinelli, who produced an enthusiasm in London almost without parallel. Her haughty and arrogant temper could not brook such inferiority, and she took the first opportunity to desert what she considered to be an ungrateful public. We hear of her again as singing in different parts of Europe, but always with declining prestige. In the London "Daily Post" of September 7, 1741, appeared a paragraph which startled her old admirers: "We hear from Italy that the famous singer, Mrs. C-z-ni, is under sentence of death, to be beheaded for poisoning her husband." If this was so, the sentence was never carried into execution, for she sang seven years afterward in London at a benefit concert. She issued a preliminary advertisement, avouching her "pressing debts" and her "desire to pay them" as the reason for her asking the benefit, which, she declared, should be the last she would ever trouble the public with. Old, poor, and almost deprived of her voice by her infirmities, her attempt to revive the interest of the public in her favor was a miserable failure; her star was set for ever, and she was obliged to return to Holland more wretched than she came. She had scarcely reappeared there when she was again thrown into prison for debt; but, by entering into an agreement to sing at the theatre every night, under surveillance, she was enabled to obtain her release. Her recklessness and improvidence had brought her to a pitiable condition; and in her latter days, after a career of splendor, caprice, and extravagance, she was obliged to subsist, it is said, by button-making. She died in frightful indigence, the recipient of charity, at a hospital in Bologna, in 1770.

### IV.



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Associated with the life and times of Faustina Bordoni, and the most brilliant exponent of the music of her husband, Hasse, Carlo Broschi, better known as Farinelli, stands out as one of the most remarkable musical figures of his age. This great artist, born in Naples in 1705, was the nephew of the composer Farinelli, whose name he adopted. He was instructed by the celebrated singing-master Porpora, who trained nearly all the great voices of Europe for over half a century; and at his first appearance in Rome, in 1722, common report had already made him famous. So wonderful was his execution, even at this early age, that he was able to vie with a trumpet-player, then the admiration of Rome for his remarkable powers. Porpora had written an obligato part to a song, in which his pupil rivaled the instrument in holding and swelling a note of extraordinary purity and volume. The virtuoso's execution was masterly, but the young singer so surpassed him as to carry the enthusiasm of the audience to the wildest pitch by the brilliance of his singing and the difficult variations which he introduced. Farinelli left the guidance of Porpora in 1724, and appeared in different European cities with a success which made him in three years a European celebrity. In 1727, while singing in Bologna, he met Bernacchi, at that time known as the "king of singers." The rivals were matched against each other one night in a grand duo, and Farinelli, freely admitting that the veteran artist had vanquished him, begged some lessons from him. Bernacchi generously accorded these, and took great pains with his young rival. Thus was perfected the talent of Farinelli, who, to use the words of a modern critic, was as "superior to the great singers of his own period as they were to those of more recent times."

After brilliant triumphs at Vienna, Rome, Naples, and Parma, where he surpassed the most formidable rivals and was heaped with riches and honors, he appeared before the Emperor Charles VI. of Germany, a momentous occasion in his art-career. "You have hitherto excited only astonishment and admiration," said the imperial connoisseur, "but you have never touched the heart. It would be easy for you to create emotion, if you would but be more simple and natural." The singer adopted this counsel, and became the most pathetic as he continued to be the most brilliant of singers.

The interest of Farinelli's London career will be augmented for the lovers of music by its connection with the contests carried on between Handel and his rivals, with which we have seen Faustina and Cuzzoni also to have been intimately associated. When Handel went on the Continent to secure artists for the year 1734, some prejudice operated against his negotiation with Farinelli, and the latter took service with Porpora, who had been secured by the Pembroke faction to lead the rival opera. Farinelli's singing turned the scale in favor of Handel's enemies, who had previously hardly been able to keep



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the enterprise on its feet, and had run in debt nineteen thousand pounds. He made his first appearance at the Lincoln's Inn Opera in "Artaserse," one of Hasse's operas. Several of the songs, however, were composed by Riccardo Broschi, the singer's brother, especially for him, and these interpolations illustrated the powers of Farinelli in the most effective manner. In one of these the first note was taken with such delicacy, swelled by minute degrees to such an amazing volume, and afterward diminished in the same manner to a mere point, that it was applauded for full five minutes. Afterward he set off with such brilliance and rapidity of execution that the violins could not keep pace with him. An incident commemorated in Hogarth's "Rake's Progress" occurred at this time, A lady of rank, carried beyond herself by admiration of the great singer, leaned out of her box and exclaimed, "One God and one Farinelli!" The great power of this singer's art is also happily set forth in the following anecdote: He was to appear for the first time with Senesino, another great singer, who of course was jealous of Farinelli's unequalled renown. The former had the part of a fierce tyrant, and Farinelli that of a hero in chains. But in the course of the first song by his rival, Senesino forgot his assumed part altogether. He was so moved and delighted that, in front of an immense audience, he rushed forward, clasped Farinelli in his arms, and burst into tears. Never had there been such a ferment among English patrons of opera as was made by Farinelli's singing. The Prince of Wales gave him a gold snuff-box set with diamonds and rubies, in which were inclosed diamond knee-buckles, and a purse of one hundred guineas. The courtiers and nobles followed in the wake of the Prince, and the costliest offerings were lavished on this spoiled favorite of art. His income during three years in London was five thousand pounds a year, to which must be added quite as much more in gratuities and presents of different kinds. On his return to Italy he built a splendid mansion, which he christened the "English Folly."

Farinelli's Spanish life was the most important episode in his career, if twenty-five years of experience may be called an episode. His purpose in visiting Madrid in 1736 was to spend but a few months; but he arrived in the Spanish capital at a critical moment, and Fate decreed that he should take up a long residence here—a residence marked by circumstances and honors without parallel in the life of any other singer. Philip V. at this time was such a prey to depression that he neglected all the affairs of his kingdom. "When Farinelli arrived, the Queen arranged a concert at which the monarch could hear the great singer without being seen. The effect was remarkable, and Farinelli gained the respect, admiration, and favor of the whole court. When he was asked by the grateful monarch to name his own reward, he answered that his best recompense would

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be to know that the King was again reconciled to performing the active duties of his state. Philip considered that he owed his cure to the powers of Farinelli. The final result was that the singer separated himself from the world of art for ever, and accepted a salary of fifty thousand francs to sing for the King, as David harped for the mad King Saul. Farinelli told Dr. Burney that during ten years he sang four songs to the King every night without any change." When Ferdinand VI., who was also a victim to his father's malady, succeeded to the throne, the singer continued to perform his minstrel cure, and acquired such enormous power and influence that all court favor and office depended on his breath. Though never prime minister, Farinelli's political advice had such weight with Ferdinand, that generals, secretaries, ambassadors, and other high officials consulted with him, and attended his levee, as being the power behind the throne. Farinelli acquired great wealth, but no malicious pen has ever ascribed to him any of the corrupt arts by which royal favorites are wont to accumulate the spoils of office. In his prosperity he never forgot prudence, modesty, and moderation. Hearing one day an old veteran officer complain that the King ignored his thirty years of service while he enriched "a miserable actor," Farinelli secured promotion for the grumbler, and, giving the commission to the abashed soldier, mildly taxed him for calling the King ungrateful. According to another anecdote, he requested an embassy for one of the courtiers. "Do you not know," said the King, "that this grandee is your deadly enemy?" "True," replied Farinelli; "and this is the way I propose to get revenge." Dr. Burney also relates the following anecdote: A tailor, who brought him a splendid court costume, refused any pay but a single song. After long refusal Farinelli's good nature yielded, and he sang to the enraptured man of the needle and shears, not one, but several songs. After concluding he said: "I, too, am proud, and that is the reason perhaps of my advantage over other singers. I have yielded to you; it is but just that you should yield to me." Thereupon he forced on the tailor more than double the price of the clothes.

Farinelli's influence as a politician was always cast on the side of national honor and territorial integrity. When the new King, Charles III., ascended the throne, being even then committed to the Franco-Neapolitan imbroglio, which was such a dark spot in the Spanish history of that time, Farinelli left Spain at the royal suggestion, which amounted to a command. The remaining twenty years of his life he resided in a splendid palace near Bologna, where he devoted his time and attention to patronage of learning and the arts. He collected a noble gallery of paintings from the hands of the principal Italian and Spanish masters. Among them was one representing himself in a group with Metastasio and Faustina Bordoni, for whose greatness as an artist and beauty of character he always expressed the warmest admiration. Though Farinelli was all his life an idol with the women, his appearance was not prepossessing. Dibdin, speaking of him at the age of thirty, says he "was tall as a giant and as thin as a shadow; therefore, if he had grace, it could only be of a sort to be envied by a penguin or a spider."

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To his supreme merit as an artist we have, however, overwhelming testimony. Out of the many enthusiastic descriptions of his singing, that of Mancini, after Porpora the greatest singing-master of the age, and the fellow pupil with Farinelli under Bernacchi, will serve: "His voice was thought a marvel because it was so perfect, so powerful, so sonorous, and so rich in its extent, both in the high and low parts of the register, that its equal has never been heard. He was, moreover, endowed with a creative genius which inspired him with embellishments so new and so astonishing that no one was able to imitate them. The art of taking and keeping the breath so softly and easily that no one could perceive it, began and died with him. The qualities in which he excelled were the evenness of his voice, the art of swelling its sound, the portamento, the union of the registers, a surprising agility, a graceful and pathetic style, and a shake as admirable as it was rare. There was no branch of the art which he did not carry to the highest pitch of perfection.... The successes of his youth did not prevent him from continuing to study, and this great artist applied himself with so much perseverance that he contrived to change in some measure his style, and to acquire another and superior method, when his name was already famous and his fortune brilliant."

### V.

Let us return from the consideration of Faustina's most brilliant contemporary to Hasse and his wife. We have already seen that this great prima donna retired from the stage in 1753, at the age of fifty-two. The life of the distinguished couple during this period is described with much pictorial vividness in a musical novel, published several years since, under the name of "Alcestis," which also gives an excellent idea of German art and music generally. In 1760 Hasse suffered greatly from the bombardment of Dresden by the Prussians, losing among other property all his manuscripts in the destruction of the opera-house—a fact which may partly account for the oblivion into which this once admired composer has passed. The loss was peculiarly unfortunate, for the publication of Hasse's works was then about to commence at the expense of the King. He and his wife removed to Vienna, where they remained till 1775, when they retired to Venice, Faustina's birthplace. Two years before this Dr. Burney visited them at their handsome house in the Landstrasse in Berlin, and found them a humdrum couple—Hasse groaning with the gout, and the once lovely Faustina transformed into a jolly old woman of seventy-two, with two charming daughters. As he approached the house with the Abate Taruffi, Faustina, seeing them, came down to meet them. Says the Doctor: "I was presented to her by my conductor, and found her a short, brown, sensible, lively old lady, who expressed herself much pleased to meet a *cavaliere Inglese*, as she had been honored with great marks of favor in England. Signor Hasse soon entered the room. He is tall and rather large in size, but it is easy to imagine that in his younger days he must have been a robust and fine figure; great gentleness and goodness appear in his countenance and manners."

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Going to see them a second time, the Doctor was received by the whole family with much cordiality. He says Faustina was very intelligent, animated, and curious concerning what was going on in the world. She had a wonderful store of musical reminiscences, and showed remains of the splendid beauty for which her youth was celebrated. But her voice was all gone. Dr. Burney asked her to sing. "Ah! Non posso; ho perduto tutte le mie facoltà." ("Alas! I am no longer able; I have lost all my faculty.") "I was extremely fascinated," said the Doctor, "with the conversation of Signor Hasse. He was easy, communicative, and rational, equally free from pedantry, pride, and prejudice. He spoke ill of no one, but on the contrary did justice to the talents of several composers, among them Porpora, who, though he was his first master, was afterward his greatest rival." Though his fingers were gouty, he played on the piano for his visitor, and his beautiful daughters sang. One was a "sweet soprano," the other a "rich and powerful contralto, fit for any church or theatre in Europe"; both girls "having good shakes," and "such an expression, taste, and steadiness as it is natural to expect in the daughters and scholars of Signor Hasse and Signora Faustina."

There are two pictures of Faustina Bordoni in existence. One is in Hawkins's "History," showing her in youth. Brilliant large black eyes, splendid hair, regular features, and a fascinating sweetness of expression, attest how lovely she must have been in the heyday of her charms. The other represents her as an elderly person, handsomely dressed, with an animated, intelligent countenance. Faustina died in 1793, at the age of ninety-two, and Hasse not long after, at the age of ninety-four.

## CATARINA GABRIELLI.

**The Cardinal and the Daughter of the Cook.—The Young Prima Donna's *Debut* in Lucca.—Dr. Barney's Description of Gabrielli.—Her Caprices, Extravagances, and Meeting with Metastasio.—Her Adventures in Vienna.—Brydone on Gabrielli.—Episodes of her Career in Sicily and Parma.—She sings at the Court of Catharine of Russia.—Sketches of Caffarelli and Paochicrotti.—Gabrielli in London, and her Final Retirement from Art.**

### I.

One of the great dignitaries of the Papal Court during the middle of the eighteenth century was the celebrated Cardinal Gabrielli. He was one day walking in his garden, when a flood of delicious, untutored notes burst on his ear, resolving itself finally into a brilliant *arietta* by Ga-luppi. The pretty little nymph who had poured out these wild-wood notes proved to be the daughter of his favorite cook. Catarina's beauty of person and voice had already excited the hopes of her father, and he frequently took her to the Argentina Theatre, where her quick ear caught all the tunes she heard; but the humble

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cook could not put the child in the way of further instruction and training. When Cardinal Gabrielli heard that enchanting but uncultivated voice, he called the little Catarina and made her sing her whole stock of arias, a mandate she willingly obeyed. He was delighted with her talent, and took on himself the care of her musical education. She was first placed under the charge of Garcia (Lo Spagnoletto), and afterward of Porpora. The Cardinal kept a keen oversight of her instruction, and frequently organized concerts, where her growing talents were shown, to the great delight of the brilliant Roman society. Catarina's training was completed in the conservatory of L'Ospidaletto at Venice, while it was under the direction of Sacchini, who succeeded Galuppi.

"La Cuochettina," as she was called from her father's profession, made her first appearance in Galuppi's "Sofonisba" in Lucca, after five years of severe training. She was beautiful, intelligent, witty, full of liveliness and grace, with an expression full of coquettish charm and *espieglerie*. Her acting was excellent, and her singing already that of a brilliant and finished vocalist. It is not a marvel that the excitable Italian audience received her with the most passionate plaudits of admiration. Her stature was low, but Dr. Burney describes her in the following terms: "There was such grace and dignity in her gestures and deportment as caught every unprejudiced eye; indeed, she filled the stage, and occupied the attention of the spectators so much, that they could look at nothing else while she was in view." No indication of her mean origin betrayed itself in her face or figure, for she carried herself with all the haughty grandeur of a Roman matron. Her voice, though not powerful, was of exquisite quality and wonderful extent, its compass being nearly two octaves and a half, and perfectly equable throughout. Her facility in vocalization was extraordinary, and her execution is described by Dr. Burney as rapid, but never so excessive as to cease to be agreeable; but in slow movements her pathetic tones, as is often the case with performers renowned for "dexterity," were not sufficiently touching.

The young chevaliers of Lucca were wild over the new operatic star; for her talent, beauty, and fascination made her a paragon of attraction, and her capricious whims and coquetries riveted the chains in which she held her admirers. Catarina, however she may have felt pleased at lordly tributes of devotion, and willing to accept substantial proofs of their sincerity, lavished her friendship for the most part on her own comrades, and became specially devoted to the singer Guardagni, whose rare artistic excellence made him a valuable mentor to the young prima donna. Three years after her *debut* her reputation had become national, and we find her singing at Naples in the San Carlo. The aged poet Metastasio, a name so imperishably connected with the development of the Italian opera, became

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one of her bond slaves. Gabrielli was wont to use her admirers for artistic advantage, and she learned certain invaluable lessons in the delivery of recitative and the higher graces of her art from one whose experience and knowledge were infinitely higher and more suggestive than those of a mere singing-master. The courtly poet, the pet of rank and beauty for nearly fifty years, sighed in vain at the feet of this inexorable coquette, and shared his disappointment with a host of other distinguished suitors, who showered costly gifts at the shrine of beauty, and were compelled to content themselves with kissing her hand as a reward.

Metastasio's interest, unchecked by the disdain of the capricious beauty, succeeded in obtaining for her the position of court singer at Vienna, where the Emperor, Francis I., was one of her admirers. She soon created as great a furor among the gallants of the Austrian capital as she had in Italy. Swords were drawn freely in the quarrels which she delighted to foster, and dueling became a mania with those who aspired to her favor. The passions she instigated sometimes took eccentric courses. The French Ambassador, who loved her madly, suspected the Portuguese Minister of being more successful than himself with the lovely Gabrielli. His suspicions being confirmed at one of his visits, he drew his sword in a transport of rage, and all that saved the operatic stage one of its most brilliant lights was the whalebone bodice, which broke the point of the furious Frenchman's rapier. The sight of the bleeding beauty—for she received a slight scratch—brought the diplomat to his senses. Falling on his knees, he poured forth his remorse in passionate self-reproaches, but only received his pardon on the most humiliating terms, namely, that he should present her with the weapon which had so nearly pierced her heart, on which was to be inscribed this memento of the jealous madness of its owner: "*Epee de M-----, qui osa frapper La Gabrielli.*" Only Metastasio's persuasions (for Gabrielli prized his friendship and advice as much as she trifled with him in a different *role*) persuaded her to spare the Frenchman the insufferable ridicule which her retention of the telltale sword would have imposed on one whose rank and station could ill afford to be made the laughing-stock of his times.

The siren's infinite caprices furnished the most interesting *chronique scandaleuse* of Vienna. Brydone in his "Tour" tells us that it was fortunate for humanity that the fair cantatrice had so many faults; for, had she been more perfect, "she must have made dreadful havoc in the world; though, with all her deficiencies," he says, "she was supposed to have achieved more conquests than any one woman breathing." Her caprice was so stubborn, that neither interest, nor threats, nor punishment had the least power over it; she herself declared that she could not command it, but that it for the most part commanded her. The best expedient



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to induce her to sing when she was in a bad humor was to prevail upon her favorite lover to place himself in the principal seat of the pit, or the front of a box, and, if they were on good terms—which was seldom the case, however—she should address her tender airs to him, and exert herself to the utmost. When Brydone was in Sicily, her lover promised to give him an example of his power over her. “He took his seat accordingly; but Gabrielli, probably suspecting the connivance, would take no notice of him; so even this expedient does not always succeed.”

### II.

When Gabrielli left Vienna for Sicily in 1765, she was laden with riches, for her manifold extravagances were generally incurred at the expense of somebody else; and she continued at Palermo the same eccentric, capricious, and flighty conduct which had made her name synonymous with everything reckless and daring in contravening propriety. She treated the highest dignitaries with the same insolence which she displayed toward operatic managers. Even the Viceroy of Sicily, standing in the very place of royalty, was made the victim of wanton impertinence. The Viceroy gave a dinner in honor of La Gabrielli, to which were invited the proudest nobles of the court; and, as she did not appear at the appointed hour, a servant was sent to her apartments. She was found *en deshabelle* dawdling over a book, and affected to have forgotten the viceregal invitation—a studied insult, hardly to be endured. This insolence, however, was overlooked by the representative of royal authority, and it was not till the proud beauty’s caprices caused her to seriously neglect her artistic duties that she felt the weight of his displeasure. When he sent a remonstrance against her singing *sotto voce* on the stage, she said she might be forced to *cry*, but not to *sing*. The exasperated ruler ordered her to prison for twelve days. Her caprice was here shown by giving the costliest entertainments to her fellow prisoners, who were of all classes from debtors to bandits, paying their debts, distributing great sums among the indigent, and singing her most beautiful songs in an enchanting manner. When she was released she was followed by the grateful tears and blessings of those she had so lavishly benefited in jail. This fascinating creature seems all through life to have been good on impulse and bad on principle. Three years after this Gabrielli was singing in Parma, where she made a speedy conquest of the Infante, Don Ferdinand. His boundless wealth condoned the ugliness of his person in the eyes of the singer, and the lavish income he placed at her disposal gratified her boundless extravagances, while it did not prevent her from being gracious to the Infante’s many rivals and would-be successors. Bitter quarrels and recriminations ensued, and the jealous ravings of Catarina’s princely admirer were more than matched by the fierce sarcasms and

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shrill clamor of the beautiful virago. One day Don Ferdinand, justly suspecting her of gross unfaithfulness, assailed her with unusual fury, to which she replied by terming him a *gobbo maladetto* (accursed hunchback). On this the Prince, carried beyond all control, had her imprisoned on some legal pretext, though Gabrielli found proofs of love struggling with his anger in the magnificence of the apartment and luxuriance of the service bestowed on her. But he strove in vain to make his peace. The offended coquette was implacable, and disdained alike his excuses and protestations of devotion. One night she escaped from her prison, scaled the garden-wall, and fled, leaving her weak and disconsolate lover to cool his sighs in tears of unavailing regret.

The court of the Semiramis of the North, Catharine II. of Russia, who strove to expunge the contempt felt for her as a woman by Europe through the imperial munificence with which she played at patronizing art and literature, was the next scene of the fair Italian's triumph. Gabrielli was received with lavish favor, but the Empress frowned when she heard the pecuniary demands of the singer. "Five thousand ducats!" she said, in amazement. "Why, I don't give more than that to one of my field-m Marshals." "Very well," replied the audacious Gabrielli; "your Majesty may get your field-m Marshals to sing for you, then." Catharine, who, however cruel and unscrupulous when need be, was in the main good-natured, laughed at the impertinence, and instead of sending Gabrielli to Siberia consented to her demands, adding special gratuities to the nominal salary. Two countrymen of the beautiful cantatrice, Pai-siello and Cimarosa, were afterward treated with equal honor and consideration by the imperial *dilettante*. Catharine's favor lasted unimpaired for several years, and it only abated when Gabrielli's lust for conquest and the honor of rivalry with a sovereign tempted her to coquet with Prince Po-temkin. An intimation from the court chamberlain that St. Petersburg was too hot for one of her warm southern blood, and that Siberia or some other place at her will would better suit her temperament, sufficed when backed by an imperial endorsement. La Gabrielli returned from Russia, loaded with, diamonds and wealth, for Catharine did not dismiss her without substantial proofs of her magnificence and generosity.

At this period Gabrielli was invited to England; and after considerable haggling with the London manager, and compelling him to employ her favorite of the hour, Signor Manzoletto, as principal tenor, the negotiation was consummated. Gabrielli still preserved all her excellence of voice and charm of execution; but her rare beauty, which had been as great a factor in her success as artistic skill, was on the wane. The English engagement had been made with some reluctance; for the stern and uncompromising temper of the island nation had been widely recognized with exaggerations in Continental Europe. "I should not be mistress of my own will," she said, "and whenever I might have a fancy not to sing, the people would insult, perhaps misuse me. It is better to remain unmolested, were it even in prison." She, however, changed her mind, and her experiences in London were such as to make her regret that she had not stood firm to her first resolution.



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### III.

Among the remarkable male singers of Gabrielli's time was Caffarelli, whom his friends indeed declared to be no less great than Farinelli. Though never closely associated with La Cuoche-tina in her stage triumphs (a fact perhaps fortunate for the cantatrice), he must be regarded as one of the representative artists of the period when she was in the full-blown and insolent prime of her beauty and reputation. Born in 1703, of humble Neapolitan parentage, he became a pupil of Porpora at an early age. The great singing-master is said to have taught him in a peculiar fashion. For five years he permitted him to sing nothing but scales and exercises. In the sixth year Porpora instructed him in declamation, pronunciation, and articulation. Caffarelli, at the end of the sixth year, supposing he had just mastered the rudiments, began to murmur, when he was amazed by Porpora's answer: "Young man, you may now leave me; you are the greatest singer in the world, and you have nothing more to learn from me." Hogarth discredits this story, on the ground that "none but a plodding drudge without a spark of genius could have submitted to a process which would have been too much for the patient endurance even of a Russian serf; or if a single spark had existed at first, it must have been extinguished by so barbarous a treatment." Caffarelli did not rise to the height of his fame rapidly, and, when he went to London to supply the place of Farinelli in 1738, he entirely failed to please the English public, who had gone wild with enthusiasm over his predecessor. Farinelli's retirement from the artistic world about this period removed from Caffarelli's way the only rival who could have snatched from him the laurels he soon acquired as the leading male singer of the age. After Caffarelli's return from England, his engagements in Turin, Genoa, Milan, and Florence were a triumphal progress. At Turin he sang before the Prince and Princess of Sardinia, the latter of whom had been a pupil of Farinelli, as she was a Spanish princess. Caffarelli, on being told that the royal lady had a prejudice in favor of her old master, said haughtily, "To-night she shall hear two Farinellis in one," and exerted his faculties so successfully as to produce acclamations of delight and astonishment. He always seems to have had great jealousy of the fame of Farinelli, and the latter entertained much curiosity about his successor in public esteem. Metastasio, the friend of the retired artist, wrote to him in 1749 from Vienna about Caffarelli's reception: "You will be curious to know how Caffarelli has been received. The wonders related of him by his adherents had excited expectations of something above humanity." After summing up the judgments of the critics who were severe on Caffarelli's faults, that his voice was "false, screaming, and disobedient," that his singing was full of "antique and stale flourishes," that "in his recitative he was an old nun," and that in all that he sang there was "a whimsical tone of lamentation sufficient to sour the gayest allegro," Metastasio says that in his happy moments he could please excessively, but the caprices of his voice and temper made these happy moments very uncertain.

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Caffarelli's arrogant, vain, and turbulent nature seems to have been the principal cause of his troubles. The numerous anecdotes current of him turned mainly on this characteristic, so different from the modesty and reticence of Fari-nelli. Metastasio, in a lively letter to the Princess di Belmonte, describes an amusing fracas at the Viennese Opera-House. The poet of the house, Migliavacca, who was also director of rehearsals, became engaged in altercation with the singer, because the latter neglected attendance. He rehearsed to Caffarelli in bitter language the various terms of reproach and contempt which his enemies throughout Europe had lavished on him. "But the hero of the panegyric, cutting the thread of his own praise, called out to his eulogist, 'Follow me if thou hast courage to a place where there is none to assist thee,' and, moving toward the door, beckoned him to come out. The poet hesitated a moment, then said with a smile: 'Truly, such an antagonist makes me blush; but come along, since it is a Christian act to chastise a madman or a fool,' and advanced to take the field." Suddenly the belligerents drew blades on the very stage itself, and, while the bystanders were expecting to see poetical or vocal blood besprinkle the harpsichords and double basses, the Signora Tesi advanced toward the duelists. "Oh, sovereign power of beauty!" writes Metastasio with sly sarcasm; "the frantic Caffarelli, even in the fiercest paroxysms of his wrath, captivated and appeased by this unexpected tenderness, runs with rapture to meet her, lays his sword at her feet, begs pardon for his errors, and, generously sacrificing to her his vengeance, seals, with a thousand kisses on her hand, his protestations of obedience, respect, and humility. The nymph signifies her forgiveness with a nod, the poet sheathes his sword, the spectators begin to breathe again, and the tumultuous assembly breaks up amid sounds of laughter. In collecting the numbers of the wounded and slain, none was found but the poor copyist, who, in trying to part the combatants, had received a small contusion in the clavícula of the foot from an involuntary kick of the poet's Pegasus."

Once, while Caffarelli was singing at Naples, he was told of the arrival of Gizziello, a possible rival, at Rome. Unable to check his anxiety, he threw himself into a post-chaise and hastened to Rome, arriving in time to hear his young rival sing the *aria d'entrata*. Delighted with Gizziello's singing, and giving vent to his emotion, he cried in a loud voice: "*Bravo, bravissimo, Gizziello! E Caffarelli che te lo dice.*" So saying, he rushed out and posted back to Naples, arriving barely in time to dress for the opera. By invitation of the Dauphin, he went to Paris in 1750, and sang at several concerts, where he pleased and astonished the court by his splendid vocalism. Louis XV. sent him a snuff-box; but Caffarelli, observing its plainness, said disdainfully, showing a drawerful of splendid boxes, that the worst

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was finer than the French King's present. "If he had only sent me his portrait in it," said the vain' artist. "That is only given to ambassadors and princes," was the reply of the King's gentleman. "Well," was the reply, "all the ambassadors and princes in the world would not make one Caffarelli." The King laughed heartily at this, but the Dauphin sent for the singer and presented him with a passport, saying, "It is signed by the King himself—for you a great honor; but lose no time in using it, for it is only good for ten days." Caffarelli left in high dudgeon, saying he had not made his expenses in France.

Mr. Garrick, the great actor, heard Caffarelli in Naples in 1764, when he was turned of sixty, and thus writes to Dr. Burney: "Yesterday we attended the ceremony of making a nun; she was the daughter of a duke, and everything was conducted with great splendor and magnificence. The consecration was performed with great solemnity, and I was very much affected; and, to crown the whole, the principal part was sung by the famous Caffarelli, who, though old, has pleased me more than all the singers I ever heard. He *touched* me, and it is the first time I have been touched since I came to Italy." At this time Caffarelli had accumulated a great fortune, purchased a dukedom, and built a splendid palace at San Dorato, from which he derived his ducal title.

Over the gate he inscribed, with characteristic modesty, this inscription: "*Amphion Thebas, ego domum.*" \* A wit of the period added, "*Ille cum, sine tu.*" \*\* Caffarelli died in 1783, leaving his title and wealth to his nephew, some of whose descendants are still living in enjoyment of the rank earned by the genius of the singer. By some of the critics of his time Caffarelli was judged to be the superior of Farinelli, though the suffrages were generally on the other side. He excelled in slow and pathetic airs as well as in the bravura style; and was unrivaled in the beauty of his voice, and in the perfection of his shake and his chromatic scales, which latter embellishment in quick movements he was the first to introduce.

\* "Amphion built Thebes, I a palace."

\*\* "He with good reason, you without."

## IV.

When Gabrielli was on her way to England in 1765, she sang for a few nights in Venice with the celebrated Pacchierotti, a male soprano singer who took the place of Caffarelli, even as the latter filled that vacated by Farinelli. Gabrielli was inspired by the association to do her utmost, and when she sang her first *aria di bravura*, Pacchierotti gave himself up for lost. The astonishing swiftness, grace, and flexibility of her execution seemed to him beyond comparison; and, tearing his hair in his impetuous

Italian way, he cried in despair, "*Povero me, povero me! Vuesto e un portento!*" ("Unfortunate man that I am, here indeed is a prodigy!") It was

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some time before he could be persuaded to sing; but, when he did, he excited as much admiration in Gabrielli's breast as that fair cantatrice had done in his own. Pac-chierotti is the third in the great triad of the male soprano singers of the eighteenth century, and the luster of his reputation does not shine dimly as compared with the other two. He commenced his musical career at Palermo in 1770, at the age of twenty, and when he went to England in 1778 expectations were raised to the highest pitch by the accounts given of him by Brydone in his "Tour through Sicily and Malta." His first English season was very successful, and he returned again in 1780, to remain for four years and become one of the greatest favorites the London public had ever known, his last appearance being at the great Handel commemoration. The details of Pacchierotti's life are rather scanty, for he was singularly modest and retiring, and shrank from rather than courted public notice. We know more of him from his various critics as an artist than as a man.

"Pacchierotti's voice," says Lord Mount Edgcumbe, who contributed so richly to the literature of music, "was an extensive soprano, full and sweet in the highest degree; his powers of execution were great, but he had far too good taste and good sense to make a display of them where it would have been misapplied, confining it to one bravura song in each opera, conscious that the chief delight of singing and his own supreme excellence lay in touching expression and exquisite pathos. Yet he was so thorough a musician that nothing came amiss to him; every style was to him equally easy, and he could sing at first sight all songs of the most opposite characters, not merely with the facility and correctness which a complete knowledge of music must give, but entering at once into the views of the composer and giving them all the spirit and expression he had designed. Such was his genius in his embellishments and cadences that their variety was inexhaustible.... As an actor, with many disadvantages of person—for he was tall and awkward in his figure, and his features were plain—he was nevertheless forcible and impressive; for he felt warmly, had excellent judgment, and was an enthusiast in his profession. His recitative was inimitably fine, so that even those who did not understand the language could not fail to comprehend from his countenance, voice, and action every sentiment he expressed."

An anecdote illustrating Pacchierotti's pathos is given by the best-informed musical authorities. When Metastasio's "Artaserse" was given at Rome with the music of Bertoni, Pacchierotti performed the part of Arbaces. In one place a touching song is followed by a short instrumental symphony. When Pacchierotti had finished the air, he turned to the orchestra, which remained silent, saying, "What are you about?" The leader, awakened from a trance, answered with much simplicity in a sobbing voice, "We are all crying." Not one of the band had thought of the symphony, but sat with eyes full of tears, gazing at the great singer.

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### V.

Gabrielli's career, which will now be resumed, had been full of romantic adventures, *affaires d'amour*, and curious episodes, and her vanity looked forward to the continuance in England of similar social excitements. She had accepted the London engagement with some scruple and hesitation, but her anticipation of brilliant conquests among the *jeunesse doree* of Britain overcame her fear that she would find audiences less tolerant than those to which she had been accustomed in her imperious course through Europe. But the beautiful Gabrielli was then a little on the wane both in personal loveliness and charm of voice; and, though her fame as a coquette and an artist had preceded her, she met with an indifference that was almost languor. The young Englishmen of the period, though quick to draw blade as any gallants in Europe, did not feel inspired to fight for her smiles, as had been the case with their compeers in the Continental cities, which rang with the scandals, controversies, and duels engendered by her numerous conquests. This sort of social stimulus had become necessary from long use as an ally of professional effort; and, lacking it, Gabrielli became insufferably indolent and careless. She would not take the least trouble to please fastidious London audiences, then as now the most exacting in Europe. She chose to remain sick on occasions which should have drawn forth her finest efforts, and frequently sent her sister Francesca to fill her great parts. One night her manager, mistrusting her excuses of illness, proceeded to her apartments, and found them ablaze with light and filled with a large company of gay and riotous revelers. Of course this condition of affairs could not long be endured. Stung by the slight appreciation of her talents in England, and not choosing to endure the want of patience which made the public grumble when she chose to sing badly or not at all, she quitted England after a very brief stay. Lord Mount Edgcumbe saw her in the opera of "Didone," and avows bluntly that he could see nothing more of her acting than that she took the greatest possible care of her enormous hoop when she sidled out of the flames of Carthage. Dr. Burney, on the other hand, is a more chivalrous critic, or else he was unduly impressed with the lady's charms; for she appeared to him "the most intelligent and best-bred *virtuoso* with whom he had ever conversed, not only on the subject of music, but on every subject concerning which a well-educated female, who had seen the world, might be expected to have information." Furthermore, he extols the precision and accuracy of her execution and intonation, and the thrilling quality of her voice.

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Brydone, who appears to have been fascinated with this siren, has an amusing apology for her carelessness of her duties in England, which he insists was not caprice, but inability to sing. He says: "And this I can readily believe, for that wonderful flexibility of voice, that runs with such rapidity and neatness through the most minute divisions, and produces almost instantaneously so great a variety of modulation, must surely depend on the very nicest tones of the fibers; and if these are in the smallest degree relaxed, or their elasticity diminished, how is it possible that their contractions and expansions can so readily obey the will as to produce these effects? The opening of the glottis which forms the voice is so extremely small, and in every variety of tone its diameter must suffer a sensible change; for the same diameter must ever produce the same tone. So *wonderfully* minute are its contractions and dilatations, that Dr. Kiel, I think, computed that in some voices its opening, not more than the tenth of an inch, is divided into upward of twelve hundred parts, the different sound of every one of which is perceptible to the exact ear. Now, what a nice tension of fibers must this require! I should imagine even the most minute change in the air causes a sensible difference, and that in our foggy climate fibers would be in danger of losing this wonderful sensibility, or, at least, that they would very often be put out of tune. It is not the same case with an ordinary voice, where the variety of divisions run through and the volubility with which they are executed bear no proportion to that of a Gabrielli."

Gabrielli sang in various cities of Italy for several years more, still retaining her hold on the hearts of her countrymen. In 1780 she finally retired from the stage and began to live a regular and orderly life, though still extravagant and lavish in her indulgence both of freaks of luxury and generosity. During her residence at Rome the noblesse of that city held her in high esteem, and her concerts gathered the most distinguished and wealthy people. Her prodigality had considerably reduced her income, and when she retired from her profession it amounted to little more than twenty thousand francs. The state in which Gabrielli had lived suited a princess of the blood rather than an operatic singer. Her traveling retinue included a little army of servants and couriers, and, both at home and at the theatre, she exacted the respect which was rather the due of some royal personage. A Florentine nobleman paid her a visit one day, and tore one of his ruffles by catching in some part of her dress. Gabrielli the next day, to make amends, sent him six bottles of Spanish wine, with the costliest rolls of Flanders lace stuffed into the mouths of the bottles instead of corks. But, if she was extravagant and luxurious, she was also generous; and, in spite of the cruel caprices which had marked her life, she always gave tokens of a naturally kind



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heart. She gave largely to charity, and provided liberally for her parents, as also for her brother's education. Of this brother, who appeared at the Teatro Argentina in Rome as a tenor, but who sang as wretchedly as his sister did exquisitely, an amusing anecdote is narrated. The audience began to hoot and hiss, and yells of "Get out, you raven!" sounded through the house. With great *sang-froid* the unlucky singer said: "You fancy you are mortifying me by hooting me; you are grossly deceived; on the contrary, I applaud your judgment, for I solemnly declare that I never appear on any stage without receiving the same treatment, and sometimes worse."

Gabrielli's closing years were spent at Bologna, where she won the esteem and admiration of all by her charities and steadiness of life, a notable contrast to the license and extravagance of her earlier career. She died in 1796, at the age of sixty-six.

### **SOPHIE ARNOULD.**

**The French Stage as seen by Rousseau.—Intellectual Ferment of the Period.—Sophie Arnould, the Queen of the most Brilliant of Paris Salons.—Her Early Life and Connection with Comte de Lauraguais.—Her Reputation as the Wittiest Woman of the Age.—Art Association with the Great German Composer, Gluck.—The Rivalries and Dissensions of the Period.—Sophie's Rivals and Contemporaries, Madame St. Huberty, the Vestrises Father and Son, Madelaine Guimard.—Opera during the Revolution.—The Closing Days of Sophie Arnould's Life.—Lord Mount Edgcumbe's Opinion of her as an Artist.**

#### **I.**

Rousseau, a man of decidedly musical organization, and who wrote so brilliantly on the subject of the art he loved (but who cared more for music than he did for truth and honor, as he showed by stealing the music of two operas, "Pygmalion" and "Le Devin du Village," and passing it off for his own), has given us some very racy descriptions of French opera in the latter part of the eighteenth century in his "Dictionnaire Musicale," in his "Lettre sur la Musique Francaise," and, above all, in the "Nouvelle Heloise." In the mouth of Saint Preux, the hero of the latter novel, he puts some very animated sketches:

"The opera at Paris passes for the most pompous, the most voluptuous, the most admirable spectacle that human art has ever invented. It is, say its admirers, the most superb monument of the magnificence of Louis XIV. Here you may dispute about anything except music and the opera; on these topics alone it is dangerous not to dissemble. French music, too, is defended by a very vigorous inquisition, and the first





thing indicated is a warning to strangers who visit this country that all foreigners admit there is nothing so fine as the grand opera at Paris. The fact is, discreet people hold their tongues and laugh in their sleeves. It must, however, be conceded that not only all the marvels of nature, but many other marvels much greater, which no one has ever seen, are represented at great cost at this theatre; and certainly Pope must have alluded to it when he describes a stage on which were seen gods, hobgoblins, monsters, kings, shepherds, fairies, fury, joy, fire, a jig, a battle, and a ball.\*...

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\* Addison gives some such description of the French opera in No. 29 of the "Spectator."

Having told you what others say of this brilliant spectacle, I will now tell you what I have seen myself. Imagine an inclosure fifteen feet broad and long in proportion; this inclosure is the theatre. On its two sides are placed at intervals screens, on which are grossly painted the objects which the scene is about to represent. At the back of the inclosure hangs a great curtain painted in like manner, and nearly always pierced and torn, that it may represent at a little distance gulfs on the earth or holes in the sky. Every one who passes behind this stage or touches the curtain produces a sort of earthquake, which has a double effect. The sky is made from certain bluish rags suspended from poles or from cords, as linen may be seen hung out to dry in any washerwoman's yard. The sun (for it is seen here sometimes) is a lighted torch in a lantern. The cars of the gods and goddesses are composed of four rafters, squared and hung on a thick rope in the form of a swing or seesaw; between the rafters is a cross-plank on which the god sits down, and in front hangs a piece of coarse cloth well dirtied, which acts the part of clouds for the magnificent car. One may see toward the bottom of the machine two or three stinking candles, badly snuffed, which, while the great personage dementedly presents himself, swinging in his seesaw, fumigate him with an incense worthy of his dignity. The agitated sea is composed of long lanterns of cloth and blue pasteboard, strung on parallel spits which are turned by little blackguard boys. The thunder is a heavy cart, rolled over an arch, and is not the least agreeable instrument one hears. The flashes of lightning are made of pinches of rosin thrown on a flame, and the thunder is a cracker at the end of a fusee. The theatre is furnished, moreover, with little square trap-doors, through which the demons issue from their cave. When they have to rise into the air, little devils of stuffed brown cloth are substituted, or perhaps live chimney-sweeps, who swing suspended and smothered in rags. The accidents which happen are sometimes tragical, sometimes farcical. When the ropes break, then infernal spirits and immortal deities fall together, laming and sometimes killing each other. Add to all this the monsters which render some scenes very pathetic, such as dragons, lizards, tortoises, and large toads, which promenade the theatre with a menacing air, and display at the opera all the temptations of St. Anthony. Each of these figures is animated by a lout of a Savoyard, who has not even intelligence enough to play the beast." Saint Preux is also made to say of the singers: "One sees actresses nearly in convulsions, tearing yelps and howls violently out of their lungs, closed hands pressed on their breasts, heads thrown back, faces inflamed, veins swollen, and stomach panting. I know not which of the two, eye or ear, is more agreeably

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affected by this display.... For my part, I am certain that people applaud the outcries of an actress at the opera as they would the feats of a tumbler or rope-dancer at a fair.... Imagine this style of singing employed to express the delicate gallantry and tenderness of Quinault. Imagine the Muses, the Graces, the Loves, Venus herself, expressing themselves this way, and judge the effect. As for devils, it might pass, for this music has something infernal in it, and is not ill adapted to such beings.”

From this and similar accounts it will be seen that opera in France during the latter part of the eighteenth century had, notwithstanding Jean Jacques's garrulous sarcasms, advanced a considerable way toward that artificial perfection which characterizes it now. Music was a topic of discussion, which absorbed the interest of the polite world far more than the mutterings in the political horizon, which portended so fierce a convulsion of the social *regime*. Wits, philosophers, courtiers, and fine ladies joined in the acrimonious controversy, first between the adherents of Lulli and Rameau, then between those of Gluck and Piccini. The young gallants of the day were wont to occupy part of the stage itself and criticise the performance of the opera; and often they adjourned from the theatre to the dueling-ground to settle a difficulty too hard for their wits to unravel. The intense interest appertaining to all things connected with music and the theatre noticeable in the French of to-day, was tenfold as eager a century ago. Passionate curiosity, even extending to enthusiasm, with which that worn-out and utterly corrupt society, by some subtle contradiction, threw itself into all questions concerning philosophy, science, literature, and art, found its most characteristic expression in its relation to the music of the stage.

It was at this strange and picturesque period, when everything in politics, society, literature, and art was fermenting for the terrible Hecate's brew which the French world was soon to drink to the dregs, that there appeared on the stage one of the most remarkable figures in its history, a woman of great beauty and brilliancy, as well as an artist of unique genius—Sophie Arnould. Her name is lustrous in French memoirs for the splendor of her wit and conversational talent; and Arsene Houssaye has thought it worthy to preserve her *bon-mots* in a volume of table-talk, called “Arnouldiana,” which will compare with anything of its kind in the French language. For a dozen years prior to the Revolution Sophie Arnould was a queen of society as well as of art; and in her elegant *salon*, which was a museum of art *curios* and bric-a-brac, she held a brilliant court, where men of the highest distinction, both native and foreign, were proud to pay their homage at the shrine of beauty and genius. There might be seen D'Alembert, the learned and scholarly, rough and independent in manner, who deserted the drawing-rooms of the great

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for saloons where he could move at his ease. There, also, Diderot would often delight his circle of admirers by the fluency and richness of his conversation, his friends extolling his disinterestedness and honesty, his enemies whispering about his cunning and selfishness. The novelist Duclos, with his keen power of penetrating human character, would move leisurely through the throng, picking up material for his romances; and Mably would talk politics and drop ill-natured remarks. The learned metaphysician Helvetius, too, was often there, seeking for compliments, his appetite for applause being voracious; so insatiable, indeed, that he even danced one night at the opera. It was said that he was led to study mathematics by seeing a circle of beautiful ladies surrounding the ugly geometrician Maupertuis in the gardens of the Tuileries. Dorat, who wasted his time in writing bad tragedies, and his property in publishing them; the gay, good-hearted Marmontel; Bernard—called by Voltaire *le gentil*—who wrote the libretto of “Castor et Pollux,” esteemed for years a masterpiece of lyric poetry; Rameau, the popular composer, in whose pieces Sophie always appeared; and Francoeur, the leader of the orchestra, were also among her guests. J. J. Rousseau was the great lion, courted and petted by all. When Benjamin Franklin arrived in Paris, where he was received with unbounded hospitality by the most distinguished of French society, he confessed that nowhere did he find such pleasure, such wit, such brilliancy, as in the *salon* of Mile. Arnould. M. Andre de Murville was one of the more noteworthy men of wit who attended her *soirees*, and he became so madly in love with her that he offered her his hand; but she cared very little about him. One day he told her that if he were not in the Academie within thirty years, he would blow out his brains. She looked steadily at him, and then, smiling sarcastically, said, “I thought you had done that long ago.” Poets sang her praises; painters eagerly desired to transfer her exquisite lineaments to canvas. All this flattery intoxicated her. She wished to be classed with Ninon, Lais, and Aspasia, and was proud to be the subject of the verses of Dorat, Bernard, Rulhiere, Marmontel, and Favart. Sophie’s wit never hesitated to break a lance even on those she liked. “What are you thinking of?” she said to Bernard, in one of his abstracted moods. “I was talking to myself,” he replied. “Be careful,” she said archly; “you gossip with a flatterer.” To a physician, whom she met with a gun under his arm, she laughed aloud, “Ah, doctor, you are afraid of your professional resources failing.” Her racy repartees were in every mouth from Paris to Versailles, and she was in all respects a brilliant personage among the intellectual lights of the age.

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In the Rue de Bethisy, Paris, stood a house, the Hotel de Chatillon, from the window of one of whose rooms assassins flung the gory head of the great Admiral de Coligni down to the Duke de Guise on the night of Saint Bartholomew, 1572. In that same room was born, February 14, 1744, Sophie Arnould, the daughter of the proprietor, who had transformed the historic dwelling into a hostelry. She grew up a bright, lively, and beautiful child, and was conscious from an early age of the value of her talents. Anne, as she was then called (for the change to Sophie was made afterward), would say with exultation: "We shall be as rich as princes. A good fairy has given me a talisman to transform everything into gold and diamonds at the sound of my voice."

Accident brought her talent to light. It was then the fashion for ladies, after confessing their sins in Passion Week, to retire for some days to a religious house, there to expiate by fasting the faults and misdemeanors committed during the gayeties of the Carnival. It chanced that when Anne was about twelve years old the Princess of Modena retired to the convent of Val-de-Grace, and in attending vespers heard one voice which, for power and purity, she thought had never been surpassed. Fine voices were at a premium then in France, and the Princess at once decided that she had discovered a treasure. She inquired who was the owner of this exquisite organ, and was informed that it was little Anne Arnould. The Princess sent for the child, who came readily, and was not in the least abashed by the presence of the great lady, but sang like a nightingale and chattered like a magpie. The wit and beauty of the girl charmed the Princess, and she threw a costly necklace about her throat. "Come, my lovely child," said she; "you sing like an angel, and you have more wit than an angel. Your fortune is made." As a result of the praises so loudly chanted by the Princess of Modena, the child was sent for to sing in the King's Chapel, and, in spite of the aversion of Anne's pious mother, who was afraid with good reason of the influences of the dissipated court, she was placed thus in contact with power and royalty. The beautiful Pompadour heard her charming voice, and remarked, with that effusion of sentiment which veneered her cruel selfishness, "Ah! with such a talent, she might become a princess." This opinion of the imperious and all-powerful favorite decided the girl's fate; for it was equivalent to a mandate for her *debut*. The precocious child knew the danger of the path opened for her. To the remonstrances of her mother she said with a shrug of her pretty shoulders: "To go to the opera is to go to the devil. But what matters it? It is my destiny." Poor *Mme.* Arnould scolded, shuddered, and prayed, and ended it, as she thought, by shutting the girl up in a convent. But Louis XV. got wind of this threatened checkmate, and a royal mandate took her out of the convent walls which had threatened to immure her for life. Anne was placed with *Clairon*, the great tragedienne, to learn acting, and with *Mlle.* Fel to learn singing. As a consequence, while she had some rivals in the beauty of her voice, her acting surpassed anything on the operatic stage of that era.

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### II.

When Anne Arnould made her first appearance, she assumed the name of Sophie on account of the softer sound of its syllables. Her *debut*, September 15, 1757, was one of most brilliant success, and in a night Paris was at her feet. Her genius, her beauty, her voice, her magnificent eyes, her incomparable grace and fascinating witchery of manner, were the talk of the city; and the opera was besieged every night she sang. Freron, in speaking of the waiting crowds, said, "I doubt if they would take such trouble to get into paradise." The young and lovely *debutante* accepted the homage of the time, which then as now expressed itself in bouquets, letters, and jewels, without number, with as much nonchalance as if she had been a stage goddess of twenty years' standing.

Hosts of admirers fluttered around this new and brilliant light. *Mme.* Arnould fretted and scolded, and watched her precious charge as well as she could; for when the opera received a singer, neither father nor mother could longer claim her. One of the besieging *roues* said that Sophie walked on roses. "Yes," was the mother's keen retort, "but see to it that you do not plant thorns amid the roses." Sophie's fascinations were the theme of universal talk among the gay and licentious idlers of the court, and heavy bets were made as to who should be the victor in his suit. Among the most distinguished of the court rufflers of the period was the Comte de Lauraguais, noted for his personal beauty, wit, and daring, and for having written some very bad plays, which were instantly damned by the audience. He had run through a great fortune, and the good-humored gayety with which he won money from his friends was only equaled by the nonchalance with which he had squandered his own. He was a member of the Academy of Sciences, and enjoyed lounging in fashionable saloons and behind the scenes at the opera. Lauraguais had the temerity to attempt to carry off the young beauty, but, the enterprise failing, he had recourse to another expedient. One evening, supping with some friends, the conversation turned naturally on the star which had just risen, and there was much jesting over the maternal anxiety of Arnould *mere*. Lauraguais, laughing, instantly offered to lay an immense wager that within fifteen days *Mme.* Arnould would no longer attend Sophie to the opera. The bet was taken, and the next day a handsome but modest-looking young man, professing to be from the country, applied at the Hotel de Chatillon for lodgings. The fascinating tongue of young Duval (for he represented that he was a poet of that name, who hoped to get a play taken by the managers) soon beguiled both mother and daughter, and he began to make love to Sophie under the very maternal eyes. The romantic girl listened with delight to the protestations and vows of the young provincial poet, though she had disdained the flatteries of the troops of court gallants who besieged the opera-house stage when she sang. The *finale* of this pretty pastoral was a moonlight flitting one night. The couple eloped, and the Comte de Lauraguais won his wager that *Mme.* Arnould would not longer accompany her daughter to the opera, and with the wager the most beautiful and fascinating woman of the time.

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Sophie, finding herself freed from all conventional shackles, gave full play to her tastes, both for luxury and intellectual society. Her house, the Hotel Rambouillet, was transformed into a palace, and both at home and in the green-room of the opera she was surrounded by a throng of noblemen, diplomats, soldiers, poets, artists—in a word, all the most brilliant men of Paris, who crowded her receptions and besieged her footsteps. The attentions paid the brilliant Sophie caused terrible fits of jealousy on the part of Lauraguais, and their life for several years, though there appears to have been sincere attachment on both sides, was embittered by quarrels and recriminations. Sophie seems to have been faithful to her relation with Lauraguais, though she never took pains to deprecate his anger or avert his suspicions. Discovering that he was intriguing with an operatic fair one, she contrived that Lauraguais should come on her *tete-a-tete* with a Knight of Malta. To his reproaches she answered, “This gentleman is only fulfilling his vows as Knight of Malta in waging war upon an infidel” (*infidele*). At last she tired of leading such a fretful existence, and took the occasion of the Count’s absence to break the bond. She filled her carriage with all of his valuable gifts to herself—jewelry, laces, and two children—and sent them to his hotel. The message was received by the Countess, who gladly accepted the charge of the little ones, but returned the carriage and its other contents. On Lauraguais’s return he was thrown into the deepest misery by Sophie’s resolve; but, although she was touched by his pleading and reproaches, she remained inflexible. She accepted, however, a pension of two thousand crowns which his generosity settled on her. We are told that the sentimental Countess joined with her husband in urging Sophie, who at first refused to receive Lauraguais’s bounty, to yield, saying that her admiration of the lovely singer made her excuse his fault in being unfaithful to herself, and that the children should be always treated as her own. Such a scene as this would be impossible out of the France of the eighteenth century.

The number of Sophie Arnould’s *bon-mots* is almost legion, and her good nature could rarely resist the temptation of uttering a brilliant epigram or a pungent repartee. Some one showed her a snuff-box, on which were portraits of Sully and the Duke de Choiseul. She said with a wicked smile, “Debit and credit.” A Capuchin monk was reported to have been eaten by wolves. “Poor beasts! hunger must be a dreadful thing,” ejaculated she. A beautiful but silly woman complained to her of the persistency of her lovers. “You have only to open your mouth and speak, to get rid of their importunities,” was the pungent answer. She effectually silenced a coxcomb, who aimed to annoy her by saying, “Oh! wit runs in the street nowadays,” by the retort, “Too fast for fools to catch it, however.” Of Madeleine Guimard, the fascinating dancer, who was exceedingly thin, Sophie said one night, after she had seen her dance a *pas de trois* in which she represented a nymph being contended for by two satyrs, “It made her think of two dogs fighting for a bone.”\*



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\* This *mot* the Paris wits have revived at the expense of *Mlle.* Sara Bernhardt.

One day Voltaire said to her, "Ah! mademoiselle, I am eighty-four years old, and I have committed eighty-four follies" (*sottises*). "A mere trifle," responded Sophie; "I am not yet forty, and I have committed more than a thousand."

For a time Mile. Arnould suffered under a loss of court favor, owing to her having made *Mme.* Du Barry the butt of her pointed sarcasms. A *lettre de cachet* would have been the fate of another, but Sophie was too much of a popular idol to be so summarily treated. She, however, retired for a time from the theatre with a pension of two thousand francs, having already accumulated a splendid fortune. Instantly that it was known she was under a cloud, there were plenty to urge that she never had any voice, and that her only good points were beauty and fine acting. Abbe Galiani, a court parasite, remarked one night, "It's the finest asthma I ever heard."

In 1774 the great composer Gluck, whose genius was destined to have such a profound influence on French music, came to Paris with his "Iphigenie en Aulide," by invitation of the Dauphiness Marie Antoinette, who had formerly been his musical pupil. The stiff and stilted works of Sully and Rameau had thus far ruled the French stage without any competition, except from the Italian operettas performed by the company of Les Bouffons, and the new school of French operatic comedy developed into form by the lively genius of Gretry. When Gluck's magnificent opera, constructed on new art principles, was given to the Paris public, April 19, 1774, it created a deep excitement, and divided critics and connoisseurs into opposing and embittered camps, in which the most distinguished wits, poets, and philosophers ranged themselves, and pelted each other with lampoons, pamphlets, and epigrams, which often left wounds that had to be healed afterward by an application of cold steel. In this contest Sophie Arnould, who had speedily emerged from her retirement, took an active part, for Gluck had selected her to act the part of his heroines. The dramatic intensity and breadth of the German composer's conceptions admirably suited Sophie, whose genius for acting was more marked than her skill in singing. The success of Gluck's "Iphigenie" gave the finishing stroke to the antiquated operas of Rameau, in which the singer had made her reputation, and offered her a nobler vehicle for art-expression. On her association with Gluck's music Sophie Arnould's fame in the history of art now chiefly rests.



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Gluck, like all others, yielded to the magic charm of the beautiful and witty singer, and went so far as to permit rehearsals to be held at her own house. On one occasion the Prince de Hennin, one of the haughtiest of the grand seigneurs of the period, intruded himself, and, finding himself unnoticed, interrupted the rehearsal with the remark, "I believe it is the custom in France to rise when any one enters the room, especially if it be a person of some consideration." Gluck's eyes flashed with rage, as he sprang threateningly to his feet. "The custom in Germany, sir, is to rise only for those whom we esteem!" he said; then turning to Sophie, who had been stopped in the middle of an air, "I perceive, madame, that you are not mistress in your own house. I leave you, and shall never set foot here again." Sophie is credited with having commented on this scene with the remark that it was the only case where she had ever witnessed a personal illustration of AEsop's fable of the lion put to flight by an ass.\*

\* An English wit some years afterward perpetrated the same witticism on the occasion of Edmund Burke's leaving the House of Commons in a rage, because he was interrupted in one of his great speeches by a thick-witted country member.

It is pleasant to know that the Prince de Hennin was obliged to make a humble apology to Gluck, by order of Marie Antoinette.

Sophie Arnould appeared with no less success in Gluck's operas of "Orphee" and "Alceste" than in the first, and rose again to the topmost wave of court favor. When "Orphee" was at rehearsal at the opera-house, it became the fashion of the great court dignitaries and the young chevaliers of the period to attend. Gluck instantly, when he entered the theatre, threw off his coat and wig, and conducted in shirt-sleeves and cotton nightcap. When the rehearsal was over, prince and marquis contended as to who should act the part of *valet de chambre*. The composer at this time was the subject of almost idolatrous admiration, for it was at a later period that the old quarrels were resumed again with even more acrid personalities, and Piccini was imported from Italy by the Du Barry faction to be pitted against the German. Gluck returned from Germany, whither he had gone on a visit, to find the opposition cabal in full force, and the merits of the Italian composer lauded to the skies by the fickle public of Paris. But the former's greatest opera, "Iphigenie en Tauride," was produced, and gave a fatal blow to Piccini's ascendancy, though his own opera on the same subject was afterward given with great care. On the latter occasion Mile. Laguerre, the principal singer, appeared on the stage intoxicated, and was unable to get through the music successfully. "This is not 'Iphigenia in Tauris,'" said witty Sophie Arnould, "but Iphigenia in Champagne." Through some intrigue Gluck was persuaded to substitute Mile. Levasseur for Mile. Arnould in the interpretation of his last great operas; so Sophie, enraged and disheartened, but to the gratification of the myriads of people whom she had offended by her cutting witticisms, which had been showered alike on friends and enemies, retired to private life, and thenceforward rarely appeared on the stage.

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### III.

Interest will be felt in some of Sophie Arnould's more distinguished art contemporaries. Among these, the highest place must be given to *Mme. Antoinette Cecile Saint Huberty, nee Gavel*. Born in Germany of French descent, she made her first appearance in Paris in a small part in Gluck's "Armide." Small, thin, and unprepossessing in person, her power of expression and artistic vocal-ism won more and more on the public, till the retirement of Sophie Arnould and Mile. Levasseur, and the death of Laguerre, left her in undisputed possession of the stage. When Piccini's "Didon," his greatest opera,\* was produced, she sang the part of the *Queen of Carthage*.

\* "Didon," differing widely from the other operas of Piccini, was modeled after the new operatic principles of Gluck, and was a magnificent homage on the part of his old rival to the genius of the German. Indeed, although the adherents of the two musicians waged so fierce a conflict, they themselves were full of respect and admiration for each other. Gluck always warmly expressed his appreciation of Piccini's "felicitous and charming melodies, the clearness of his style, the elegance and truth of his expression." What Piccini's opinion of Gluck was is best shown in his proposition after Gluck's death to raise a subscription, not for the erection of a statue, but for the establishment of an annual concert to take place on the anniversary of Gluck's death, to consist entirely of his compositions—"in order to transmit to posterity the spirit and character of his magnificent works, that they may serve as a model to future artists of the true style of dramatic music."

Marmontel, the poet of the opera, had already said at rehearsal, "She expressed it so well that I imagined myself at the theatre," and Piccini congratulated her on having been largely instrumental in its success. As *Didon* she made one of her greatest successes. "Never," says Grimm, "has there been united acting more captivating, a sensibility more perfect, singing more exquisite, happier by-play, and more noble *abandon*." She was crowned on the stage—an honor hitherto unknown, and since so much abused. The secret of her marvelous gift lay in her extreme sensibility. Others might sing an air better, but no one could give to either airs or recitatives accentuation more pure or more impassioned, action more dramatic, and by-play more eloquent. Some one complimenting her on the vivid truth with which she embodied her part, "I really experience it," she said; "in a death-scene I actually feel as if I were dead."

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It has been said that Talma was the first to discard the absurd costumes of the theatre, but this credit really belongs to *Mme. Saint Huberty*. She studied the Greek and Roman statues, and wore robes in keeping with the antique characters, especially suppressing hoops and powder. This singer remained queen of the French stage until 1790, when she retired. During the time of her art reign she appeared in many of the principal operas of Piccini, Salieri, Sacchini, and Gretry, showing but little less talent for comedy than for tragedy. She retired from public life to become the wife of the Count d'Entraignes. Her tragic fate many years afterward is one of the celebrated political assassinations of the age. Count d'Entraignes at this time was residing at Barnes, England, having recently left the diplomatic service of Russia, in which he had shown himself one of the most dangerous enemies of the Napoleonic government in France. The Count's Piedmontese valet had been bribed by a spy of Fouche, the French Minister of Police, to purloin certain papers. The valet was discovered by his master, and instantly stabbed him, and, as the Countess entered the room a moment afterward, he also pierced her heart with the stiletto reeking with her husband's blood, finishing the shocking tragedy by blowing out his own brains. Thus died, in 1812, one who had been among the most brilliant ornaments of the French stage.

No record of Sophie Arnould's artistic associates is complete without some allusion to the celebrated dancers Gaetan Vestris \* and Auguste, his son. Gaetan was accustomed to say that there were three great men in Europe—Voltaire, Frederick the Great, and himself. In his old age he preserved all his skill, and M. Castel Blaze, who saw him at the Academie fifty years after his *debut* in 1748, declares that he still danced with inimitable grace.

\* *Mme. Vestris*, the last of the family, and the first wife of the English comedian Charles Mathews, was the granddaughter of Gaetan.

It is of Gaetan that the story is told in connection with Gluck, when the opera of "Orphee" was put in rehearsal. The dancer wished for a ballet in the opera.

"Write me the music of a chacone, Monsieur Gluck," said the god of dancing.

"A chacone!" ejaculated the astonished composer; "do you think the Greeks, whose manners we are endeavoring to depict, knew what a chacone was?"

"Did they not?" said Vestris, amazed at the information; then, in a tone of compassion, "How much they are to be pitied!"

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Gaetan retired from the stage at the successful *debut* of Auguste, but appeared again from time to time to show his invulnerability to time. On the occasion of his son's first appearance, the veteran, in full court dress, sword, and ruffles, and hat in hand, stepped to the front by the side of the *debutante*. After a short address to the public on the importance of the choreographic art and his hopes of his son, he turned to Auguste and said: "Now, my son, exhibit your talent. Your father is looking at you." He was accustomed to say: "Auguste is a better dancer than I am; he had Gaetan Vestris for a father, an advantage which nature refused me." "If," said Gaetan, on another occasion, "*le dieu de la danse*" (a title which he had given himself) "touches the ground from time to time, he does so in order not to humiliate his comrades."

\* This boast of Gaetan Vestris seems to have inspired the lines which Moore afterward addressed to a celebrated *danseuse*:

".... You'd swear, When her delicate feet in the dance twinkle round, That her steps are of light, that her home is the air, And she only *par complaisance* touches the ground."

The son inherited the paternal arrogance. To the director of the opera, De Vismes, who, enraged at some want of respect, said to him, "Do you know who I am?" he drawled, "Yes! you are the farmer of my talent." On one occasion Auguste refused to obey the royal mandate, and Gaetan said to him with some reproof in his tones: "What! the Queen of France does her duty by requesting you to dance before the King of Sweden, and you do not do yours! You shall no longer bear my name. I will have no misunderstanding between the house of Vestris and the house of Bourbon; they have hitherto always lived on good terms." It nearly broke Auguste's heart when one day during the French Revolution he was seized by a howling band of *sans culottes* and made to exhibit his finest skill on the top of a barrel before this ragged mob of liberty-loving citizens!

The fascinating sylph, Madeleine Guimard, broke almost as many hearts and inspired as many duels as the charming Sophie Arnould herself. Plain even to ugliness, and excessively thin, her exquisite dancing and splendid eyes made great havoc among her numerous admirers. Lord Byron said that thin women when young reminded him of dried butterflies, when old of spiders. The stage associates of Mile. Guimard called her "L'araignee," and Sophie Arnould christened her "the little silkworm," for the sake of the joke about "*la feuille*." But such spiteful raillery did not prevent her charming men to her feet whom greater beauties had failed to captivate. Houdon the sculptor molded her foot, and the great painters vied for the privilege of decorating the walls of her hotel. When she broke her arm, mass was said in church for her recovery, and she was one of the reigning toasts of Paris. Among

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the numerous *liaisons* of Mile. Guimard, that with the Prince de Soubise is most noted. After this she eloped with a German prince, and the Prince de Soubise pursued them, wounded his rival, killed three of his servants, and brought her back to Paris in triumph. After a great variety of adventures of this nature, she married in 1787 a humble professor of dancing named Desprieux. Lord Mount Edgcumbe saw her in 1789 at the King's Theatre in London. "Among them," he writes, referring to a troupe of new performers, "came the famous Mile. Guimard, then nearly sixty years old, but still full of grace and gentility, and she had never possessed more."

### IV.

When Sophie Arnould retired from the stage, she took a house near the Palais Royal, and extended as brilliant a hospitality as ever. She was as celebrated for her practical jokes as for her witticisms, of which the following freak is a good example: One evening in 1780 she gave a grand supper, to which, among others, she invited M. Barthe, author of "Les Fausses Infidelites," and many similar pieces. He was inflated with vanity, though he was totally ignorant of everything away from the theatre, and was, in fact, one of those individuals who actually seem to court mystification and practical jokes. *Mlle.* Arnould instructed her servant Jeannot, and had him announced pompously under the title of the Chevalier de Medicis, giving M. Barthe to understand that the young man was an illegitimate son of the house of Medici. The pretended nobleman appeared to be treated with respect and distinction by the company, and he spoke to the poet with much affability, professing great admiration for his works. M. Barthe was enchanted. He was in a flutter of gratified vanity, and, to show his delight at the condescension of the chevalier, he proposed to write an epic poem in honor of his house. This farce lasted during the evening. The assembled company were in convulsions of suppressed laughter, which broke out when, at the moment of M. Barthe's most ecstatic admiration and respect for his new patron, Sophie Arnould lifted her glass, and, looking at the chevalier, said, in a clear voice, "Your health, Jeannot!" The sensations of poor M. Barthe may readily be imagined. The incident became the story of the day in all circles, and the unlucky poet could not go anywhere for fear of being tormented about "Jeannot."

At length she withdrew completely from the follies, passions, and cares of the world, and bought an ancient monastic building, formerly belonging to the monks of St. Francis, near Luzarches, eighteen or twenty miles from Paris. This grim residence she decorated luxuriously in its interior, and over the door inscribed the ecclesiastical motto, "Ite missa est." Here she remained during the earlier storms of the Revolution, though she occasionally went to Paris at the risk of her head to gratify her curiosity about the republican management of opera, which presented some very unique features. The reader will be interested in some brief pictures of the revolutionary opera.

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It was directed by four distinguished *sans culottes*—Henriot, Chaumette, Le Rouxand, and Hebert. The nominal director, however, was Francoeur, the same who first brought out Sophie Arnould in Louis XV.'s time. Henriot, Danton, Hebert, and other chiefs of the Revolution would hardly take a turn in the *coulisses* or *foyer* before they would say to some actor or actress: "We are going to your room; see that we are received properly." This of course meant a superb collation; and, after emptying many bottles of the costliest wines, the virtuous republicans would retire without troubling themselves on the score of expense. As this was a nightly occurrence, and the poor actors had no money, the expense fell on the restaurateur, who was compelled to console himself by the reflection that it was in the cause of liberty. Oftentimes the executioner, the dreaded Sanson, who as public official had the right of entree, would stroll in and in a jocular tone emphasize his abilities as a critic by saying to the singers that his opinion on the *execution* of the music ought to be respected.\*

\* So, too, the London hangman one night went into the pit of her Majesty's Theatre to hear Jenny Lind sing, and remarked with a sigh of professional longing, "Ah, what a throat to scrag!"

Operatic kings and queens were suppressed, and the titles of royalty were prohibited both on the stage and in the greenroom. It was necessary, indeed, to use the old monarchical repertoire; but kings were transformed into chiefs; princes and dukes became members of the Convention or representatives of the people; seigneurs became mayors, and substitutes were found for words like "crown," "scepter," "throne," etc. There was one great difficulty to overcome. This was met by placing the scenes of the new operas in Italy, Portugal, etc.—anywhere but in France, where it was indispensable from a political point of view, but impossible from the poetic and musical, to make lovers address each other as *citoyen*, *citoyenne*.

Hebert would frequently display proscriptive lists in the green-room, including the names of many of the actors and other operatic employees, and say, "I shall have to send you all to the guillotine some day, but I have been prevented hitherto by the fact that you have conduced to my amusement." The stratagem which saved them was to get the ferocious Hebert drunk, for he loved wine as well as blood, and steal the fatal document. However, this operatic *dilettante* always appeared with a fresh one next day. One bloodthirsty republican, Lefebvre, who was ambitious for musical fame, insisted on singing first characters. He appeared as *primo tenore*, and was hissed; he then tried his luck as first bass, and was again hissed by his friends the *sans culottes*. Enraged by the *fiasco*, he attributed it to the machinations of a counter-revolution, and nearly persuaded Robespierre to give him a platoon of musketeers to fire on the infamous emissaries of "Pitt and Coburg." Yet, though the Reign of Terror was a fearful time for art and artists, there were sixty-three theatres open, and they were always crowded in spite of war, famine, and the guillotine.



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It was fortunate for Sophie Arnould that her connection with the opera had closed prior to this dreadful period. As stated previously, she remained undisturbed during the early years of the Revolution. Only once a band of *sans culottes* invaded her retreat. To their suspicious questions she answered by assurances of loving the republic devotedly. Her unconsciously satirical smile aroused distrust, and they were about hurrying her off to prison, when she pointed out a bust of Gluck, and inquired if she would keep a bust of Marat if she were not loyal to the republic. This satisfied her intelligent inquisitors, and they retreated, saying, "She is a good *citoyenne*, after all," as they saluted the marble. During this time she was still rich, having thirty thousand livres a year. But misfortunes thickened, and in two years she had lost nearly every franc. Obligated to go to Paris to try to save the wreck of her estate, she found her hosts of friends dissipated like the dew, all guillotined, shot, exiled, or imprisoned.

A gleam of sunshine came, however, in the kindness of Fouche, the Minister of Police, an old lover. One morning the Minister received the message of an unknown lady visitor. On receiving her he instantly recognized the still beautiful and sparkling lineaments of the woman he had once adored. Fouche, touched, heard her story, and by his powerful intercession secured for her a pension of twenty-four hundred livres and handsome apartments in the Hotel D'Angevil-liers. Here she speedily drew around her again the philosophers and fashionables, the poets and the artists of the age; and the Sophie Arnould of the golden days of old seemed resurrected in the vivacity and brilliancy of the talk from which time and misfortune had taken nothing of its pungent salt. In 1803 she died obscurely; and the same year there also passed out of the world two other celebrated women, the great actress Clairon and the singer De Beaumesnil, once Sophie's rival.

Lord Mount Edgcumbe, in his "Musical Reminiscences," speaks of Sophie Arnould, whom he heard in ante-revolutionary days, as a woman of entrancing beauty and very great dramatic genius. This connoisseur tells us too that her voice, though limited in range and not very flexible, was singularly rich, strong, and sweet, fitting her exceptionally for the performance of the simple and noble arias of Gluck, which were rather characterized by elevation and dramatic warmth than florid ornamentation. Her place in art is, therefore, as the finest contemporary interpreter of Wagner's greater predecessor.

## ELIZABETH BILLINGTON AND HER CONTEMPORARIES.

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Elizabeth Weichsel's Runaway Marriage.—*Debut* at Covent Garden.—Lord Mount Edgumbe's Opinion of her Singing.—Her Rivalry with *Mme. Mara*.—Mrs. Billington's Greatness in English Opera.—She sings in Italy in 1794-'99.—Her Great Power on the Italian Stage.—Marriage with Felican.—Reappearance in London in Italian and English Opera.—Sketch of *Mme. Mara's* Early Life.—Her Great Triumphs on the English Stage.—Anecdotes of her Career and her Retirement from England.—Grassini and Napoleon.—The Italian Prima Donna disputes Sovereignty with Mrs. Billington.—Her Qualities as an Artist.—Mrs. Billington's Retirement from the Stage and Declining Years.

### I.

Among the comparatively few great vocalists born in England, the traditions of Mrs. Elizabeth Billington's singing rank her as by far the greatest. Brought into competition with many brilliant artists from other countries, she held her position unshaken by their rivalry. She came of musical stock. Her father, Charles Weichsel, was Saxon by birth, but spent most of his life as an orchestral player in London; and her mother was a charming vocalist of considerable repute. Born in 1770 in the English capital, she was most carefully trained in music from an early age, and her gifts displayed themselves so manifestly as to give assurance of that brilliant future which made her the admiration of her times. Both she and her brother Charles were regarded as prodigies of youthful talent, the latter having attained some distinction on the violin at the age of six, though he failed in after-years, unlike his brilliant sister, to fulfill his juvenile promise. Elizabeth Weichsel when only eleven composed original pieces for the piano, and at the age of fourteen appeared in concert at Oxford. Her career was so long and eventful that we must hurry over its youthful stages. The young cantatrice at the age of fifteen was sought in marriage by Mr. Thomas Billington, who had been her music-master, and, as her father was bitterly opposed to the connection, the enamored couple eloped, and were married at Lambeth Church with great secrecy.

They soon found themselves at their wits' end. With no money, and without the established reputation which commands the attention of managers, Mrs. Billington found that in taking a husband she had assumed a fresh responsibility. Finally she secured an engagement at the Smock Alley Theatre in Dublin, when she appeared in Gluck's opera of "Orpheus and Eurydice," with the well-known tenor Tenducci, whose exquisite singing of the air, "Water parted from the Sea," in the opera of "Artaxerxes," had chiefly contributed to his celebrity. It was *a propos* of this that the well-known Irish street-song of the day was composed:

"Tenducci was a piper's son,  
And he was in love when he was young;  
And all the tunes that he could play  
Was 'Water parted from the Say.'"



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For about a year the young singer played provincial engagements, but it was good training for her. Her powers were becoming matured, and she was learning self-reliance in the bitter school of experience, which more and more assured her of coming triumph. At last she persuaded Lewis, the manager of Covent Garden, to give her a metropolitan hearing. Though her voice at this time had not attained the volume and power of after-years, its qualities were exceptional. Its compass was in the upper notes extraordinary, though in the lower register rather limited. She was well aware of this defect, and tried to remedy it by substituting one octave for another; a license which passed unnoticed by the indiscriminating multitude, while it was easily excused by cultivated ears, being, as one connoisseur remarked, "like the wild luxuriance of poetical imagery, which, though against the cold rules of the critic, constitutes the true value of poetry." She had not the full tones of Banti, but rather resembled those of Allegranti, whom she closely imitated. Her voice, in its very high tones, was something of the quality of a flute or flageolet, or resembled a commixture of the finest sounds of the flute and violin, if such could be imagined. It was then "wild and wandering," but of singular sweetness. "Its agility," says Mount Edgcumbe, "was very great, and everything she sang was executed in the neatest manner and with the utmost precision. Her knowledge of music enabled her to give great variety to her embellishments, which, as her taste was always good, were always judicious." In her cadenzas, however, she was obliged to trust to her memory, for she never could improvise an ornament. Her ear was so delicate that she could instantly detect any instrument out of tune in a large orchestra; and her intonation was perfect. In manner she was "peculiarly bewitching," and her attitudes generally were good, with the exception of an ugly habit of pressing her hands against her bosom when executing difficult passages. Her face and figure were beautiful, and her countenance was full of good humor, though not susceptible of varied expression; indeed, as an actress, she had comparatively little talent, depending chiefly on her voice for producing effect on the stage.

Mrs. Billington's \_\_debut\_\_ in London was on February 13, 1786, in the presence of royalty and a great throng of nobility and fashion, in the character of *Rosetta* in "Love in a Village." Her success was beyond the most sanguine hopes, and her brilliant style, then an innovation in English singing, bewildered the pit and delighted the musical connoisseurs. The leader of the orchestra was so much absorbed in one of her beautiful cadenzas that he forgot to give the chord at its close. So much science, taste, birdlike sweetness, and brilliancy had never before been united in an English singer. So Mrs. Billington assumed undisputed sovereignty in the realm of song, for one night made her famous.

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The managers, who had haggled over the terms of thirteen pounds a week for her first brief engagement of twelve nights, were glad to give her a thousand pounds for the rest of the season. For her second part she chose *Polly Peachum* in "The Beggars' Opera," to show her detractors that she could sing simple English ballad-music with no less taste and effect than the brilliant and ornate style with which she first took the town by storm. Mara, the great German singer, who until then had no rival, was distracted with rage and jealousy, which the sweet-tempered Billington treated with a careless smile. Though her success had been so brilliant, she relaxed no effort in self-improvement, and studied assiduously both vocalism and the piano. Indeed, Salomon, Haydn's impresario, said of her with enthusiasm, "Sar, she sing equally well wid her troat and her fingers." At the close of this season, which was the opening of a great career, Mrs. Billington visited Paris, where she placed herself under the instruction of the composer Sacchini, who greatly aided her by his happy suggestions. To him she confesses herself to have been most indebted for what one of her admirers called "that pointed expression, neatness of execution, and nameless grace by which her performance was so happily distinguished."

Kelly, the Irish actor and singer, who made her acquaintance about this time, said he thought her an angel of beauty and the St. Cecilia of song. Her loveliness enchanted even more by the sweetness and amiability of its expression than by symmetry of feature, and everywhere she was the idol of an adoring public. Even her rivals, embittered by professional jealousy, soon melted in the sunshine of her sweet temper. An amusing example of professional rivalry is related by John Bernard in his "Reminiscences," where Miss George, afterward Lady Oldmixon, managed to cloud the favorite's success by a cunning musical trick. "Mrs. Billington, who was engaged on very high terms for a limited number of nights, made her first appearance on the Dublin stage in the character of *Polly* in 'The Beggars' Opera,' surrounded by her halo of popularity. She was received with acclamations, and sang her songs delightfully; particularly 'Cease your Funning,' which was tumultuously encored. Miss George, who performed the part of *Lucy* (an up-hill singing part), perceiving that she had little chance of dividing the applause with the great magnet of the night, had recourse to the following stratagem: When the dialogue duet in the second act, 'Why, how now, Madam Flirt?' came on, Mrs. Billington having given her verse with exquisite sweetness, Miss George, setting propriety at defiance, sang the whole of her verse an octave higher, her tones having the effect of the high notes of a sweet and brilliant flute. The audience, taken by surprise, bestowed on her such loud applause as almost shook the walls of the theatre, and a unanimous encore was the result."

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Haydn gave this opinion on her in his "Diary" in 1791: "On the 10th of December I went to see the opera of 'The Woodman' (by Shield). It was on the day when the provoking memoir of Mrs. Billington was published. She sang rather timidly, but yet well. She is a great genius. The tenor was Incledon. The common people in the gallery are very troublesome in every theatre, and take lead in uproar. The audience in the pit and boxes have often to clap a long time before they can get a fine part repeated. It was so this evening with the beautiful duet in the third act: nearly a quarter of an hour was spent in contention, but at length the pit and boxes gained the victory, and the duet was repeated. The two actors stood anxiously on the stage all the while." The great composer paid her one of the prettiest compliments she ever received. Reynolds was painting her portrait in the character of St. Cecilia, and one day Haydn called just as it was being finished. Haydn contemplated the picture very attentively, then said suddenly, "But you have made a great mistake." The painter started up aghast. "How! what?" "Why," said Haydn, "you have represented Mrs. Billington listening to the angels; you should have made the angels listening to her!" Mrs. Billington blushed with pleasure. "Oh, you dear man!" cried she, throwing her arms round his neck and kissing him.

## II.

Mrs. Billington seems to have entertained the notion in 1794 of quitting the stage, and went abroad to free herself from the protests and reproaches which she knew the announcement of her purpose would call forth if she remained in England. Accompanied by her husband and brother, she sauntered leisurely through Europe, for her professional exertions had already brought her a comfortable fortune. A trivial accident set her feet again in the path which she had designed to forsake, and which she was destined to adorn with a more brilliant distinction. The party had traveled *incognito*, but on arriving in Naples a babbling servant revealed the identity of the great singer, which speedily became known to Lady Hamilton, Lord Nelson's friend, then domiciled in Naples as the favorite of the royal family. Lady Hamilton insisted on presenting Mrs. Billington to the Queen, and she was persuaded to sing in a private concert before their Majesties, which was swiftly succeeded by an invitation, so urgent as to take the color of command, to sing at the San Carlo. So the English prima donna made her *debut* before the Neapolitans in "Inez di Castro," which had been specially arranged for her by Francesco Bianchi. The fervid Naples audience received her with passionate acclamations, to which she had never been accustomed from the more impassive English. Hitherto her reputation had been mostly identified with English opera; thenceforward she was to be known chiefly as a brilliant exponent of the Italian school of music.

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Paesiello's "Didone," Paer's "Ero e Leandro," and Guglielmi's "Deborah e Sisera" rapidly succeeded, each one confirming afresh the admiration of her hearers, who were all *cognoscenti*, as Italian audiences generally are. It became the vogue to patronize the beautiful cantatrice, and the large English colony, who were led by some of the noblest gentlewomen of England, such as Lady Templeton, Lady Palmerston, Lady Gertrude Villiers, Lady Grandison, and others, made it a matter of national pride to give the singer an enthusiastic support. English influence was all-paramount at the court of Naples, from important political exigencies, and this cooperated with Mrs. Billington's extraordinary merits to raise her to a degree of consideration which had been rarely attained by any singer in that beautiful Italian capital, prone as its people are to indulge in exaggerated admiration of musical celebrities. She sang for nearly two years at the San Carlo, and in 1796 we find her at Bologna before French military audiences, whom Napoleon's Italian victories had brought across the Alps. The conqueror confessed himself vanquished by the lovely Billington, and made her the guest of himself and Josephine, who admired the art no less than she dreaded the beauty of a possible rival.

The English singer passed from city to city of Italy, everywhere arousing the liveliest admiration. Her *debut* in Venice was to be in "Semiramide," written expressly for her by Nasolini, a young composer of great promise. Illness, however, confined her to her bed for six months, in spite of which the impresario paid her salary in full. She recovered, and showed her gratitude by singing without recompense during the fair of the Ascension, when immense throngs flocked to Venice. The *corps diplomatique* presented her on the first night with a jeweled necklace of immense value, as a testimonial of their esteem and pleasure at her recovery.

A singular evidence of the superstition of the Neapolitans was shown on her return to their city, which was then threatened by an eruption of Vesuvius and a dreadful earthquake, the cause of considerable damage. The populace believed that it was a visitation of God in punishment for the permission granted to a heretic Englishwoman to sing at San Carlo. Mrs. Billington's safety was for a time threatened, but her talents and popularity at last triumphed, and she rose higher in public regard than before. Her Neapolitan engagement was terminated very suddenly by the death of her husband, as he was in the act one evening of cloaking her prior to her stepping into her carriage to go to the theatre. A single gasp and a convulsion, and Thomas Billington was dead at his wife's feet. The consternation at this event was mixed with much scandal, and many whispered that he had died from poison or the dagger. It was known that the Neapolitan nobles had paid Mrs. Billington warm attention, and hints of assassination

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were industriously circulated by those gossip-mongers who are always in quest of a fresh social sensation. Mrs. Billington, after remaining for some time in retirement, fled from a scene which was fraught with painful memories, though there is no reason to believe that she deeply lamented the loss of a husband whose only attraction to this brilliant woman was the reflected light of her youth, which invested him with the association of her first girlish love. At all events, the widow succeeded in becoming desperately enamored in Milan, a short six months after, with an officer of the French commissariat, M. Felican. He was a remarkably handsome man, and his strong siege of the lovely Billington soon caused her to surrender at discretion. She declared "she was in love for the first time in her life," and her marriage took place in 1799 without delay. Her raptures, however, came to a swift conclusion; for among M. Felican's favorite methods of displaying marital devotion were beating her, and hurling dishes or other convenient movables at her head when in the least irritated. The novel character of her honeymoon soon became known to a curious and possibly envious public, and the brutal Felican was publicly flogged at the drum-head by order of General Serrurier, within two months of her marriage, for whipping her so cruelly that she could not appear in the opera of the evening.

The tenor, Braham, sang with Mrs. Billington at Milan during this period, in the opera "Il Trionfo de Claria," by Nasolini, and an amusing incident occurred in the rivalry of the two, each to surpass the other in popular estimation. The applause which Braham received at rehearsal enraged Felican, who intrigued till he persuaded the leader to omit the grand aria for the tenor voice, in which Braham's powers were advantageously displayed. This piece of spite and jealousy being noised about, the public openly testified their displeasure, and the next day it was announced by Gherardi, the manager, in the bills, that Braham's scena should be performed; and on the second night of the opera it was received with tumultuous applause. Braham, justly indignant, avenged himself in an ingenious manner, but his wrath descended on an innocent head. Mrs. Billington's embellishments were always elaborately studied, and, when once fixed on, seldom changed. The angry tenor, knowing this, caught her roulades, and on the first opportunity, his air coming first, he coolly appropriated all her fioriture. Poor Mrs. Billington listened in dismay at the wings. She could not improvise ornaments and graces; and, when she came on, the unusual meagerness of her style astonished the audience. She refused, in the next opera, to sing a duet with Braham; but, as she was good-natured, she forgave him, and they always remained excellent friends.

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With that perverse devotion which characterizes the love of so many women, Mrs. Billington clung to her brutal husband in spite of his cruelty and callousness, and she did not separate from him till she feared for her life. Many times he threatened to kill her, and extorted from her by fear all the valuable jewels in her possession, as well as the larger share of the money received from professional exertion. Despairing at last of any change, she fled with great secrecy to England, where she arrived in 1801, after an absence of seven years, during which time her name had become one of the most popular in Europe. There was instantly a battle between Harris and Sheridan, the rival managers, as to which should secure this peerless attraction. She finally signed a contract with her old friend Harris, for three thousand guineas the season from October to April, and the guarantee of a free benefit of five hundred guineas. It was likewise arranged that she should sing for Sheridan at similar terms on alternate nights, as there was a bitter dispute between the managers over the priority of the offer accepted by the prima donna. Her reappearance before an English audience was made in Dr. Arne's "Artaxerxes," which the critics of the day praised as possessing "the beautiful melody of Hasse, the mellifluous richness of Pergolese, the easy flow of Piccini, and the finished cantabile of Sacchini, with his own true and native simplicity." It is not only the criticism of to-day which has concealed the real form and quality of works of merely temporary interest under flowery phrases, that mean nothing.

It was speedily observed how greatly Mrs. Billington's style had improved in her absence. Lord Mount Edgcumbe says she resembled Mara so much that the same observations would apply to both equally well. "Both were excellent musicians, thoroughly skilled in their profession; both had voices of uncommon sweetness and agility, particularly suited to the bravura style, and executed to perfection and with good taste everything they sang. But neither was Italian, and consequently both were deficient in recitative. Neither had much feeling, both were deficient in theatrical talents, and they were absolutely null as actresses; therefore they were more calculated to give pleasure in the concert-room than on the stage." It was noticed that her pronunciation of the English language was not quite free from impurities, arising principally from the introduction of vowels before consonants, a habit probably acquired from the Italian custom. "Her whole style of elocution," observes one writer, "may be described as sweet and persuasive rather than powerful and commanding. It naturally assumed the character of her mind and voice." She was considered the most accomplished singer that had ever been born in England.



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Mrs. Billington displayed her talents in a variety of operatic characters, which taxed her versatility, but did not prove beyond her powers. Both English and Italian operas, serious and comic *roles*, seemed entirely within her scope; and those who admired her as *Mandane* were not less fascinated by her *Rosetta*, when Inledon shared the honors of the evening with herself. In spite of Lord Mount Edgcumbe's somewhat severe judgment as given above, she appears to have pleased by her acting as well as singing, if we can judge from the wide diversity of characters in which she appeared so successfully. We are justified in this, especially from the character of the English opera, of which Mrs. Billington was so brilliant an exponent; for this was rather musical drama than opera, and made strong demands on histrionic faculty. As *Rosetta*, in "Love in a Village," a performance in which Mrs. Billington was peculiarly charming, she drew such throngs that the price of admission was raised for the nights on which it was offered. The witticism of Jekyl, the great barrister, made the town laugh on one of these occasions. Being present with a country friend in the pit, the latter asked him, as Mrs. Billington appeared in the garden-scene, "Is that Rosetta?" The singer's portly form, which had increased largely in bulk during her Italian absence, made the answer peculiarly appropriate: "No, sir, it is not Rosetta, it is Grand Cairo."

Life was running smoothly for Mrs. Billington; never had her popularity reached so high a pitch; never had Fortune favored her with such lavish returns for her professional abilities. One night she was horrified with fear and disgust on returning home to see her brutal husband, Felican, lolling on the sofa. He had been heart-broken at separation from his beloved wife, and could endure it no longer. It was only left for her to bribe him to depart with a large sum of money, which she fortunately could afford. "I never," says Kelly, "saw a woman so much in awe of a man as poor Mrs. Billington was of him whom she had married for love." On the 3d of July, 1802, she sang with *Mme. Mara* at the farewell benefit of that distinguished singer. Both rose to the utmost pitch of their skill, and, in their attempts to surpass each other, the theatre rang with thunders of applause. In our sketches of some of Mrs. Billington's rivals and contemporaries, *Mme. Mara* demands precedence.

### III.

Frederick the Great loved war and music with equal fervor, and possessed talents for the one little inferior to his genius for the other. He played with remarkable skill on the flute, of which instrument he possessed a large collection, and composed original music with both science and facility. This royal connoisseur carried his despotism into his love of art, and ruled with an iron hand over those who catered for the amusement

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of himself and the good people of Berlin. Though the creator of that policy which, in the hands of Bismarck and the modern German nationalists, has wrought such wonderful results, and which has extended itself even to matters of aesthetic culture as a gospel of patriotic bigotry, the great Fritz thoroughly despised everything German except in matters of state, and was completely wedded to the literature of France and the art of Italy. When the talents of a young German vocalist, *Mlle. Schmaeling*, were recommended to him, it was enough for him to hear the report, "She sings like a German," to make him sniff with disdain. "A German singer!" he said; "I should as soon expect to get pleasure from the neighing of my horse." Curiosity, however, at last so far overcame prejudice as to make him send for *Mlle. Schmaeling*, who was enthusiastically praised by many of those whose opinions the King could not ignore, to come to Potsdam and sing for him. Her pride, which was high, had been wounded by the royal criticism, and she carried herself with as much *hauteur* as could go with respect. The King regarded her with a cool stare, without any gesture of salutation, and *Mlle. Schmaeling* amused herself with looking at the pictures. "So you are going to sing me something?" at last said royalty with military abruptness.

The figure of the Prussian King as he sat by the piano was anything but prepossessing. A little, crabbed, spare old man, attired with Spartan simplicity, in a faded blue coat, whose red facings were smudged brown with the Spanish snuff he so liberally took; thin lips, prominent jaws, receding forehead, and eyes of supernatural keenness glaring from under shaggy brows; a battered cocked hat, and a thick cane, which he used as a whip to belabor his horse, his courtiers, or his soldiers as occasion needed, on the table before him—all these made a grim picture.

*Mlle. Schmaeling* answered his curt words with "As your Majesty pleases," and instantly sat down at the piano. As she sang, Frederick's face relaxed, and taking a huge pinch of snuff, he said, "Ha! can you sing at sight?" (then an extraordinary accomplishment). Picking out the most difficult bravura in his collection, he bade her try it, with the remark, "This, to be sure, is but poor stuff, but when well executed sounds pretty enough." The result of the royal examination convinced the King that *Mlle. Schmaeling* had not only a magnificent voice, but was a thorough artist. So the daughter of the poor musician of Cassel, after many years of hard struggle and ill success (for she had sung in almost every German capital), was made Frederick's chief court singer at the age of twenty-two, and the road to fortune was fairly open to her. At the age of four years she had showed such aptitude for music that she quickly learned the violin, though her baby fingers could hardly span the strings. She always retained her predilection for this instrument, and maintained that it was the best guide in learning to sing. "For," said she, "how can you best convey a just notion of slight vibrations in the pitch of a note? By a fixed instrument? No! By the voice? No! But, by sliding the finger on the string, you instantly make the most minute variation visibly as well as audibly perceptible." She owed her success entirely to the charm of her art.



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Elizabeth Schmaeling's personal appearance was far from striking. She was by no means handsome, being short and insignificant, with a rather agreeable, good-natured countenance, the leading feature of which was—terrible defect in a singer—a set of irregular teeth, which projected, in defiance of order, out of their proper places. Her manner, however, was prepossessing, though she was an indifferent actress. But her voice atoned for everything: its compass was from G to E in altissimo, which she ran with the greatest ease and force, the tones being at once powerful and sweet. Both her *portamento di voce* and her volubility were declared to be unrivaled. It was remarked that she seemed to take difficult music from choice, and she could sing fluently at sight—rather a rare accomplishment among vocalists of that day. Nothing taxed her powers. Her execution was easy and neat; her shake was true, open, and liquid; and though she preferred brilliant, effective pieces, her refined taste was well known. “Her voice, clear, sweet, and distinct, was sufficiently powerful,” remarked Lord Mount Edgcumbe afterward, “though rather thin, and its agility and flexibility rendered her a most excellent bravura singer, in which style she was unrivaled.” “Mara’s divisions,” observes another critic, “always seemed to convey a meaning; they were vocal, not instrumental; they had light and shade, and variety of tone.”

Frederick was highly pleased with his musical acquisition, but a more potent monarch than himself soon appeared to disturb his royal complacency. *Mlle.* Schmaeling, placed in a new position of ease and luxury, found time to indulge her natural bent as a woman, and fell in love with a handsome violoncellist, Jean Mara, who was in the service of the King's brother. Mara was a showy, shallow, selfish man, and pushed his suit with vigor, for success meant fortune and a life of luxurious ease. The King forbade the match, so the enamored couple eloped, and, being arrested by the King's guards, they were punished by Fritz with solitary confinement for disobedience. At last the King relented, and sanctioned the marriage which he suspected opposition would only delay, probably fully aware that the lady would soon repent her infatuation. Jean Mara did all in his power to effect this result, for the honeymoon had hardly ended before he began to beat his bride at small provocation with all the energy of a sturdy arm. Poor *Mme.* Mara had a hard life of it thenceforward, but she never ceased to love Mara to the last; and many years afterward, when a friend was severely reprobating his brutality, she said, with a sigh of loving regret, “Ah! but you must confess he was the handsomest man you ever saw.”

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The King frequently interposed to punish Mara for his harshness. On one occasion he gave him a public caning and on another he sent him to a field regiment, noted for the rigid severity of its discipline, to be enrolled as a drummer for three months, accompanying the order with the *mot*, "His propensity for beating shall have the fullest exercise on the drum." A ludicrous sentence of the royal despot was that which consigned him to the tender mercies of the body-guard, with strict orders for his correction. No particular mode of punishment was prescribed, so each soldier inflicted such chastisement as he considered most fitting. They began by rigging him out in an old uniform and a large pair of whiskers, loading him with the heaviest firelock they could find, and forced him to go through the manual exercise for two hours, accompanying their drill with the usual discipline of the cane. They then made him dance and sing for two hours longer, and ended this persecution by compelling the surgeon to take from him a large quantity of blood. In a miserable condition they restored him to his disconsolate wife, who had been essaying all her arts to persuade the officer of the guard to mitigate the poor wretch's punishment.

The King's method of carrying on the opera was characteristic. Performances were free, and commenced precisely at 6 p.m., when, prompt to the minute, the King appeared and took his seat just behind the conductor, where he could see the score, and notice every mistake, either instrumental or vocal. A royal caning often repaid any unlucky artist who made a blunder, much to the gratification of the audience. Such a patron as this, however generous, could not be considered highly desirable; and *Mme. Mara*, whose reputation had become world-wide, longed more and more to accept some of the brilliant offers which came to her from the great capitals of Europe. But Frederick would not let his favorite prima donna go, and the royal passport was necessary for getting beyond the limits of the kingdom. An example of Frederick's method of dealing with his subjects and servants is found in the following incident: The Grand Duke Paul of Russia was visiting Berlin, and on a gala night a grand performance of opera was to be given. *Mme. Mara* had sent an excuse that she was sick, but a laconic notice from her royal patron insisted that she was to get well and sing her best. So the prima donna took to her bed and grew worse and worse. Two hours before the opera commenced, a carriage escorted by eight soldiers drew up in front of the house, and the captain of the guard, unceremoniously entering her room, intimated that she must go to the theatre dead or alive.

"You can not take me," she said with tears of rage; "you see I am in bed."

"That's of little consequence," was the imperturbable response; "we'll take you bed and all."

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Madame's eyes flashed fire, and she stormed with fury; but the obdurate captain could not be moved, and, to avoid the disgrace of being taken by force, she accepted an armistice. "I will go to the theatre," she said, mentally resolving to sing as badly as, with a magnificent voice and irreproachable taste, she could possibly manage. Resolutely she kept to this idea till the curtain was about to descend on the first act, when a thought suddenly seized her. Might she not be ruining herself in giving the Grand Duke of Russia a bad opinion of her powers? In a bravura she burst forth with all her power, distinguishing herself especially by a marvelous shake, which she executed with such wonderful art as to call down thunders of applause.

At last the Maras succeeded in effecting their escape by stratagem. In passing through one city they were stopped by an officer of *gens d'armes*, who demanded the requisite papers. Faltering with dread, yet with quick self-possession, *Mme.* Mara handed him a letter in the royal handwriting. The signature was enough, and the officer did not stop to read the body of the letter, but turned out the guard to honor travelers possessing such signal proofs of the King's favor. They had just gained the gates of Dresden when they found that the Prussian *charge d'affaires* resided in the city. "No one can conceive my agitation and alarm," said *Mme.* Mara, "when, in one of the first streets we entered, we encountered the said *charge d'affaires*, who rode directly up to us. He had been apprised of our arrival, and the chaise was instantly stopped. As to what took place between him and my good man, and how the latter contrived to get out of the scrape, I was totally unconscious. I had fallen into a swoon, from which I did not recover till we had reached our inn." At length they reached the confines of Bohemia, and, for the first time, supped in freedom and security.

The Austrian Empress, Maria Theresa, would have found enough motive in patronizing Mara in the fact that her great Prussian rival had persecuted her; but love of art was a further inducement which drew out her kindest feelings. The singer remained at the Viennese court for two years, and left it for Paris, with autograph letters to the ill-fated Marie Antoinette. She was most cordially welcomed both by court and public, and soon became such a rival to the distinguished Portuguese prima donna, Todi, then in the zenith of her fame, that the devotees of music divided themselves into fierce factions respectively named after the rival queens of song. Mara was honored with the title of *premiere cantatrice de la reine*, and left Paris with regret, to begin her English career under singularly favorable auspices, as she was invited to share a partnership with Linley and Dr. Arnold for the production of oratorios at Drury Lane.

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She was fortunate in making her first appearance in the grand Handel commemoration at Westminster Abbey, given under the patronage of George III., who loved the memory of the great composer. Even in this day of magnificent musical festivals, that Westminster assemblage of musicians would have been a remarkable occasion. The following is an account of it from a contemporary source: "The orchestra was led by the Cramers; the conductors were Joah Bates, Dr. Arnold, and Dupuis. The band consisted of several hundreds of performers. The singers were, in addition to Mine. Mara, Signora Storace, Miss Abrams, Miss Poole (afterward Mrs. Dickons), Rubinelli, Harrison, Bartleman, Sale, Parry, Nor-ris, Kelly, *etc.*; and the chorus, collected from all parts of the kingdom, amounted to hundreds of voices. The Abbey was arranged for the accommodation of the public in a superb and commodious manner, and the tickets of admission were one guinea each. The first performance took place on May 20, 1784; and such was the anxiety to be in time, that ladies and gentlemen had their hair dressed over night, and slept in arm-chairs. The weather being very fine, eager crowds presented themselves at the several doors of the Abbey at nine o'clock, although the door-keepers were not at their posts, and the orchestra was not finished. At ten o'clock the scene became almost terrifying to the visitors, who, being in full dress, were every moment more incommoded and alarmed by the violence of the crowds pressing forward to get near the doors. Several of the ladies screamed; others fainted; and the general dismay increased to such an extent that fatal consequences were anticipated. Some of the more irascible among the gentlemen threatened to burst open the doors; 'a measure,' says Dr. Burney, 'which, if adopted, would probably have cost many of the more feeble and helpless their lives, as they must, in falling, have been thrown down and trampled on by the robust and impatient part of the crowd.' However, except that some went in with 'disheveled hair and torn garments,' no real mischief seems to have been done. The spectacle was gorgeous. The King, Queen, and all the royal family, were ushered to a superb box, opposite the orchestra, by the directors, wearing full court suits, the medal of Handel struck for the occasion, suspended by white-satin rosettes to their breasts, and having white wands in their hands. The body of the cathedral, the galleries, and every corner were crowded with beauty, rank, and fashion, listening with almost devout silence to the grand creations of the great composer, not the faintest token of applause disturbing the impressive ceremony."

The splendid and solemn tones of Mara's voice enraptured every heart, and her style was the theme of universal admiration. A few, however, resisted the charm of her singing. Miss Seward was breakfasting one morning with Mr. Joah Bates, one of the conductors, and delicately flattered his wife's singing of the Handelian music by saying that Mara put too much gold and fringe upon that solemn robe of melody, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." "Do not say gold, ma-dame," answered the tart musician; "it was despicable tinsel."

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At one of these Westminster Abbey performances a striking coincidence occurred. The morning had been threatening a storm; but instantly the grand chorus "Let there be light, and light was over all" commenced, the sun burst forth and gilded every dark nook of the solemn old Abbey with a flood of splendor. On another occasion, while a chorus descriptive of a storm was being sung, a hurricane burst over the Abbey, and the fierce rattling of hailstones, accompanied by peals of thunder, kept time to the grand music of Handel. During the performance of the chorus "The Lord God Omnipotent Reigneth," the audience was so moved that King, Queen, royal family, and all present, rose by a common impulse to their feet—a practice which has been preserved in English audiences to this day during the singing of this mightiest of all musical choruses. *Mme. Mara* gave great offense by remaining seated.

Shortly afterward she sang at a musical festival of Oxford University, whither the report of her supposed bad temper and intractability had preceded her. The gownsmen were as riotous then as now; and as one or two things happened to irritate their lively temper, a row soon became imminent. *Mara* got angry and flung a book at the head of one of the orchestra, when Dr. Chapman, the Vice-Chancellor, arose and said that *Mme. Mara* had conducted herself too ill to be allowed to sing before such an audience. Instantly a wicked wag cried out, "A riot, by permission of the Vice-Chancellor!" A scene of the utmost confusion ensued, and the agitated cantatrice quitted the theatre, amid hisses and yells, in high dudgeon. A deputation of gentlemen waited upon her, and promised that she should do exactly as she pleased if she would only return. She did return, and sang the airs allotted to her, but remained seated as usual while the choruses were being sung. A cry arose of "Turn *Mara* out!" Not comprehending, she smiled, which provoked the audience still more; upon which the Vice-Chancellor said that it was always the rule for every vocalist to join in the choruses. Miss George, one of the singers, explained this to the prima donna, who, staring in bewilderment and vexation, exclaimed, "Oh! me does not know his rules; me vill go home"; which resolution she immediately carried into effect.

This great singer's numerous quarrels and controversies in England were very amusing. Yet, in spite of the personal bitterness growing out of her own irritable temper and professional rivalry, she remained a great artistic favorite with the public. Underneath the asperity and obstinacy of her character there was a vein of deep tenderness and generosity, which she showed in various cases, especially in forwarding the interests of struggling artists. Michael Kelly, the Irish composer, in his "Reminiscences," gives the following instance. He himself, then a young man, had aroused *Mara's* dislike by some inadvertent praise of a rival. Watching his opportunity,

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he brought into the greenroom one night, when she came off the stage fatigued and panting with her efforts, a pot of foaming porter, which she drank with a sigh of deepest pleasure. Touched by the young Irishman's thoughtfulness, she pledged herself to help him whenever the opportunity came, and soon after sang at his benefit. Mara had resolved not to sing again on the lyric stage, and her condescension was a godsend to Kelly, who was then very much out at elbows. Speaking of her proffer, he says: "I was thunderstruck at her kindness and liberality, and thankfully accepted. She fixed on *Mandane* in 'Artaxerxes,' and brought the greatest receipts ever known at that house, as the whole pit, with the exception of two benches, was railed into boxes. So much," he adds sententially, "for a little German proficiency, a little common civility, and a pot of porter."

### IV.

*Mme.* Mara made such a brilliant hit in opera that the public clamor for her continuance on the stage overcame her old resolutions. The opera-house was reopened, and Sir John Gallini, with this popular favorite at the head of his enterprise, had a most prosperous season. Both as a lyric cantatrice and as the matchless singer of oratorio, she was the delight of the public for two years. In 1788 she went to Turin to sing at the Carnival, where it was the custom to open the gala season with a fresh artist, who supplied the place of the departing vocalist, whether a soprano or tenor. Her predecessor, a tenor, was piqued at his dismissal, and tried to prejudice the public against her by representing her as alike-ugly in person and faulty in art. Mara's shrewdness of resource turned the tables on the Italian. On her first appearance her manner was purposely full of *gaucherie*, her costume badly considered and all awry, her singing careless and out of time. The maligner was triumphant, and said to all, "Didn't I say so? See how ugly she is; and as for singing—did you ever hear such a vile jargon of sounds?" On the second night Mara appeared most charmingly dressed, and she sang like an angel—a surprise to the audience which drove the excitable Italians into the most passionate uproar of applause and delight. Mara was crowned on the stage, and was received by the King and Queen with the heartiest kindness and a profusion of costly gifts. A similar reception at Venice tempted her to prolong her Italian tour, but she preferred to return to London, where she sang under Wyatt at the Pantheon, which was transformed into a temporary opera-house. She now sang with Pacchierotti, the successor of Farinelli and Caffarelli, and the last inheritor of their grand large style. "His duettos with Mara were the most perfect pieces of execution I ever heard," said Lord Mount Edgcumbe. One of the most pathetic experiences of Mara's life was her passage through Paris in 1792 on her way to Germany, when she saw her former



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patroness Marie Antoinette, whom she remembered in all the glory of her youth, popularity, and loveliness, seated in an open chariot, pale, wan, and grief-stricken, surrounded by a guard of troopers with drawn swords and hooted at by a mob of howling *sans-culottes*. Better far to be a mimic queen than to be hurled from the most radiant and splendid place in European royalty, to be the scorn and plaything of the ragged ruffians of Paris, and to finish with the guillotine in the Place de la Greve! About this time she was freed from the *bete noire* of her life, her drunken worthless husband, who agreed to trouble her no more if she would settle an annuity on him. Thenceforward they never met, though she always spoke of him with affection.

Harris, of the Theatre Royal of Dublin, engaged Mara to sing in English opera in 1797. Despite the fact that her English was so faulty, that her person was unprepossessing, and that the part was associated with some of the most beautiful and accomplished singers on the stage, her performance of *Polly Peachum* in the "Beggars' Opera" was a masterpiece of delicious simplicity and archness. The perfection of her art vanquished all obstacles, and she was acknowledged the equal of Mrs. Crouch, and even of the resplendent Billington, in the part. Dr. Arnold records that, in spite of the dancing and violent action of the *role*, her tones were as free, smooth, and perfect as if she had been standing in the orchestra. Mrs. Billington, who was just to her professional rivals, said she regarded Mara's execution as superior to her own in genuine effect, though not in compass and complication. If the rapid vocalization of a singer was praised, Mara would significantly ask, "Can she sing six plain notes?"

As time passed, *Mme.* Mara's voice began to decline, and in 1802 she took advantage of an annoying controversy to bid farewell to the English public; for the artist who could sing solemn music with such thrilling effect had the temper of a shrew, though it was easily placated. Mrs. Billington generously offered her services to assist at her farewell concert; and Mara, bursting into tears, threw her arms about the neck of the greatest of her professional rivals. She did not sing again in England till 1820. Speaking of this event, Kelly says, "It was truly grievous to see such transcendent talents as she once possessed so sunk, so fallen. I used every effort in my power to prevent her committing herself, but in vain."

"When the incomparable *Mme.* Mara took leave of me on her return to the Continent," says Dr. Kitchener, "I could not help expressing my regret that she had not taken my advice to publish those songs of Handel (her matchless performance of which gained her that undisputed preeminence which she enjoyed), with the embellishments, *etc.*, with which she enriched them. This inimitable singer replied, 'Indeed, my good friend, you attribute

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my success to a very different source than the real one. It was not what I did, but the manner in which I did it. I could sing six simple notes and produce every effect I could wish; another singer may sing those very same notes with very different effect. I am sure it was to my expression of the words that I owe everything. People have often said to me, "Madame Mara, why do you not introduce more pretty things, and passages, and graces in your singing?" I say, "These pretty things are very pretty, to be sure, but the proper expression of the words and the music is a great deal better." This and her extraordinary industry were the secrets of her undisputed sovereignty. She told me that when she was encored in a song, which she very often was, on her return home she seldom retired to rest without first inventing a new cadence for the next performance of it. Here is an example for young singers!"

*Mme.* Mara continued to sing for many years in different cities of Europe, though the recollections and traditions of her marvelous prime were more attractive than the then active powers of her voice. But her consummate art never deserted her, in spite of the fact that her voice became more and more a wreck. She appeared in public occasionally till her seventy-second year, when she retired to Cassel, her birthplace, where she died in 1833, at the age of eighty.

### V.

Another of Mrs. Billington's most brilliant rivals and contemporaries was the lovely Giuseppa Grassini, a wayward, indolent, fascinating beauty, who had taken France and Italy by storm before she attempted to subdue the more obdurate and phlegmatic Britons. The daughter of a small farmer in Lombardy, the charm of her voice and appearance induced General Belgioso to pay the cost of her musical training, and at the age of nineteen she sprang into popularity at a bound with her *debut* at La Scala in 1794. In spite of the fact that she was associated with two of the greatest Italian singers of the time—Crescentini, one of the last of the male sopranos, and Marchesi—she became the cynosure of public admiration. She was surrounded by homage and flattery sufficient to have turned a more sedate temperament and wiser head than her own, and her name became mixed with some of the most piquant scandals of the period.

In spite of ignorance, indolence, and a caprice which she never attempted to control, Grassini was an exquisite artist; and, though dull and shallow intellectually in all matters apart from her profession, she was a most beautiful and fascinating woman. She mastered all the graces of her art, but could never give an intelligent reason for what she did. Her voice, originally a soprano, became under training a contralto of delicious quality, as well as of great volume and power, though not remarkable for extent. She excelled in the *cantabile* style, and rarely attempted ornament, though what she did was always in perfect taste and proportion. Her dramatic instincts were remarkable, and as



an interpreter of both heroic and the softer passions she speedily acquired a European reputation. Her figure was tall and commanding, her head noble, her hair and eyes of the deepest black, and her whole appearance a singular union of grace and majesty.

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After the battle of Marengo, the presence of the youthful conqueror of Italy at Milan inspired that capital with a spasm of extraordinary gayety. The finest singers in Italy gathered to do honor to the rising sun of Napoleon's greatness. The French general was fascinated by the irresistible attractions of the prima donna, and asked for an introduction. Grassini's coquetry did not let the occasion slip. Las Cases has given a sketch of the interview, in which he tells us she reminded Napoleon that she "had made her *debut* precisely during the early achievements of the General of the Army of Italy." "I was then," said she, "in the full luster of my beauty and talent. I fascinated every eye and inflamed every heart. The young general alone was insensible to my charms, and yet he alone was the object of my wishes. What caprice—what singularity! When I possessed some value, when all Italy was at my feet, and I heroically disdained its admiration for one glance from you, I was unable to obtain it; and now, how strange an alteration! You condescend to notice me now when I am not worth the trouble, and am no longer worthy of you." Las Cases has not proved himself the most veracious of chroniclers in more important matters, and we may be permitted to doubt the truth of this speech as coming from the mouth of a woman extraordinarily beautiful and not less vain. But at all events Grassini accompanied the French general to Paris, ambitious to play the *role* of Cleopatra to this modern Caesar. Josephine's jealousy and dislike proved an obstacle difficult to meet, and this, in connection with the fact that the French opera did not prove suited to her style, made her first residence in Paris a short one, in spite of the brilliant success of her concerts. One of these was the crowning feature of the grand *fete* given at the Invalides Church in honor of the battle of Marengo; and as Grassini sang before the bronzed veterans of the Italian campaign she seemed inspired. Circumstances, however, obliged her to leave France, laden with magnificent presents from Napoleon.

In November, 1801, the Italian prima donna was in Berlin, where she announced concerts which seem never to have taken place. In 1802 she returned to France, and Napoleon made her directress of the Opera in 1804. At first Josephine had permitted her to appear at her private concerts at the Tuileries, but she did not detest the beautiful singer less cordially than heretofore. It was whispered that the cantatrice did in reality seek to attract the attention of Napoleon, and that she turned her eyes fixedly toward the throne of the Dictator.

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"I hear, madame, that our Grassini is a favorite with the great Napoleon," said Count Sommaglia to Josephine one morning. "Yes," answered the irate wife of the First Consul, hardly-able to disguise her spite, "the ridiculous vanity of the creature amuses us amazingly. Since she has been made directress of the Italian Opera, there is more intriguing going on among these gentry than there is with the diplomats: in the midst of a serious conversation, she will break out into a horse-laugh, throw herself on a sofa, and, fancying herself Semiramis on the throne of Nineveh, burst forth in a great style with 'Son Regina, e son amata!'" ("I am a queen, and I am beloved!") "One day," says Fouché, "Bonaparte observed that, considering my acknowledged ability, he was astonished I did not perform my functions better—that there were several things of which I was ignorant. 'Yes,' replied I, 'there certainly are things of which I was ignorant, but which I now know well enough. For instance, a little man, muffled in a gray cloak, and accompanied by a single servant, often steals out on a dark evening from a secret door of the Tuileries, enters a closed carriage, and drives off to Signora G-----. This little man is yourself, and yet this fanciful songstress jilts you continually for Rode the fiddler.' The Consul answered not a word; he turned his back, rang, and immediately withdrew."

In 1804 Grassini was engaged to sing in London alternately with Mrs. Billington. At her first benefit she sang in conjunction with the English *diva* in Winter's new opera, "Il Ratto di Proserpina," Billington as *Ceres*, and Grassini as *Proserpina*. The respective voices of the two singers were admirably fitted for the music of the *roles*, each exquisite of its sort and inspired by the ambition of rivalry. The deep tones of the one combined with the bird-like notes of the other to produce a most thrilling effect. Lord Mount Edgcumbe, who had a prejudice for *bravura* singing, said: "No doubt the deaf would have been charmed with Grassini, but the blind must have been delighted with Mrs. Billington": a malicious comment on the Italian singer, which this distinguished amateur, when in a less cynical mood, revoked by cordial admiration of Grassini's remarkable gifts both as vocalist and actress. Many interesting anecdotes are told of this singer while in London, one of which, related by Kelly, then stage-manager, illustrates the difficulties of operatic management. Mrs. Billington was too sick to sing on one of her own nights, and Grassini was implored to take her place. But she obstinately refused to make the change, until the cunning Irishman resorted to a trick. He called on her in the morning, and began talking carelessly on the subject. "My dear Grassini," said he, in an off-hand way, "as manager I ought to prevail upon you to perform; but as a performer myself, I enter entirely into your feelings, and think you perfectly right not to sing

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out of your turn. The Saturday is yours; but what I say to you I trust you will not repeat to Mr. Goold, as it might be of serious injury to me.” “Depend upon it, my dear Kelly,” answered Grassini, “I will not; I look upon you, by what you have just said, to be my sincere friend.” As he was leaving the room, he turned, as with a sudden thought. “To be sure, it is rather unlucky you do not sing to-night, for this morning a message came from the Lord Chamberlain’s office to announce the Queen’s intention to come *incognita*, accompanied by the princesses, purposely to see you perform; and a large *grillee* is actually ordered to be prepared for them, where they can perfectly see and hear without being seen by the audience; but I’ll step myself to the Lord Chamberlain’s office, say that you are confined to your bed, and express your mortification at disappointing the royal party.” “Stop, Kelly,” cried the cantatrice, all in a flutter; “what you now say alters the case. If her Majesty Queen Charlotte wishes to see ‘La Vergine del Sole,’ and to hear me, I am bound to obey her Majesty’s commands. Go to Goold and say I *will* sing.” “When I went into her dressing-room after the first act,” says Kelly, “her Majesty not having arrived, Grassini, suspicious that I had made up a trick to cajole her, taxed me with it; and when I confessed, she took it good-naturedly and laughed at her own credulity.” The popularity of Grassini in London remained unabated during several seasons; and when she reengaged for the French opera, in 1808, it was to the great regret of musical London. Talma was a warm admirer of her dramatic genius, and he used to say that no other actress, not even Mars, Darval, or Duchesnois, possessed so expressive and mutable a face. The Grecian outline of her face, her beautiful forehead, rich black hair and eyebrows, superb dark eyes, “now flashing with tragedy’s fiery passions, then softly languishing with love,” and finally “that astonishing *ensemble* of perfections which Nature had collected in her as if to review all her gifts in one woman—all these qualities together exercised on the spectator such a charm as none could resist. Pasta herself might have looked on and learned, when Grassini had to portray either indignation, grief, anger, or despair.”

Her performance in “Romeo e Giulietta” was so fine that Napoleon sprang to his feet, forgetting his marble coldness, and shouted like a school-boy, while Talma’s eyes streamed with tears; for, as the latter afterward confessed, he had never before been so deeply touched. Napoleon sent her a check for twenty thousand francs as a testimonial of his admiration, and to Crescentini he sent the order of the Iron Cross. Many years after, in St. Helena, the dethroned Caesar alluded to this as an illustration of his policy. “In conformity with my system,” observed he, “of amalgamating all kinds of merit, and of rendering one and the same reward universal,

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I had an idea of presenting the Cross of the Legion of Honor to Talma; but I refrained from doing this, in consideration of our capricious manners and absurd prejudices. I wished to make a first experiment in an affair that was out of date and unimportant, and I accordingly gave the Iron Crown to Crescentini. The decoration was foreign, and so was the individual on whom it was conferred. This circumstance was less likely to attract public notice or to render my conduct the subject of discussion; at worst, it could only give rise to a few malicious jokes. Such," continued the Emperor, "is the influence of public opinion. I distributed scepters at will, and thousands readily bowed beneath their sway; and yet I could not give away a ribbon without the chance of incurring disapprobation, for I believe my experiment with regard to Crescentini proved unsuccessful." "It did, sire," observed some one present. "The circumstance occasioned a great outcry in Paris; it drew forth a general anathema in all the drawing-rooms of the metropolis, and afforded full scope for the expression of malignant feeling. However, at one of the evening parties of the Faubourg St. Germain, a *bon mot* had the effect of completely stemming the current of indignation. A pompous orator was holding forth in an eloquent strain on the subject of the honor that had been conferred on Crescentini. He declared it to be a disgrace, a horror, a perfect profanation, and inquired by what right Crescentini was entitled to such a distinction. *Mme. Grassini*, who was present, rose majestically from her chair, with a theatrical tone and gesture exclaiming, 'Et sa blessure, monsieur?' This produced a general burst of laughter, amid which Grassini sat down, embarrassed by her own success."

*Mme. Grassini* remained on the stage till about 1823 when, having lost the beauty of her voice, she retired to private life with a comfortable fortune, spending her last years in Paris. She died in 1850, in her eighty-fifth year, preserving her beauty and freshness in a marvelous degree. The effect of Grassini's singing on people of refined taste was even greater than the impression made on regular musicians. Thomas De Quincey speaks of her in his "Autobiographical Sketches" as having a voice delightful beyond all that he had ever heard. Sir Charles Bell thought it was "only Grassini who conveyed the idea of the united power of music and action. She did not act only without being ridiculous, but with an effect equal to Mrs. Siddons. The 'O Dio' of Mrs. Billington was a bar of music, but in the strange, almost unnatural voice of Grassini, it went to the soul." Elsewhere he speaks of "her dignity, truth, and affecting simplicity."

## VI.

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About the time of Mara's departure from England Mrs. Billington was wonderfully popular. No fashionable concert was complete without her, and the constant demand for her services enabled her to fix her own price. Her income averaged fifteen thousand pounds a year, and at one time she was reckoned as worth nearly one hundred thousand pounds. She spent her large means with a judicious liberality, and the greatest people in the land were glad to be her guests. She settled a liberal annuity on her father. Having no children, she adopted two, one the daughter of an old friend named Madocks, who afterward became her principal legatee. Her hospitality crowded her house with the most brilliant men in art, literature, and politics; and it was said that the stranger who would see all the great people of the London world brought together should get a card to one of Billington's receptions. Her affability and kindness sometimes got her into scrapes. An eminent barrister who was at her house one night gave her some advice on a legal matter, and sent in a bill for services amounting to three hundred pounds. Mrs. Billington paid it promptly, but the lawyer ceased to be her guest. As a hostess she was said to have been irresistibly charming, alike from her personal beauty and the witchery of her manners.

Her kindness and good nature in dealing with her sister artists Avere proverbial. When Grassini, who at first was unpopular in England, was in despair as to how she should make an impression, Mrs. Billington proposed to sing with her in Winter's opera of "Il Ratto di Proserpina," from which time dated the success of the Italian singer. Toward Mara she had exerted similar good will, ignoring all professional jealousies. Miss Parke, a concert-singer, was once angry because Billington's name was in bigger type. The latter ordered her name to be printed in the smallest letters used; "and much Miss Parke gained by her corpulent type," says the narrator. Lord Mount Edgcumbe tells us that the operas in which she specially excelled were "La Clemenza di Scipione," composed for her by John Christian Bach; Paesiello's "Elfrida"; "Armida," "Castore e Polluce," and others by Winter; and Mozart's "Clemenza di Tito." For her farewell benefit, when she quitted the stage, March 30, 1806, she selected the last-named opera, which had never been given in England, and existed only in manuscript form. The Prince of Wales had the only copy, and she played through the whole score on the pianoforte at rehearsal, to give the orchestra an idea of the music. The final performance was immensely successful, and the departing *diva* sang so splendidly as to prove that it was not on account of failing powers that she withdrew from professional life. It is true that Mrs. Billington continued to appear frequently in concert for three years longer, but her dramatic career was ended. A curious instance of woman's infatuation was Mrs. Billington's longing to

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be reunited to her brutal husband; and so in 1817 she invited him to join her in England. Felican was too glad to gain fresh control over the victim of his conjugal tyranny, and persuaded her to leave England for a permanent residence in Italy. Mrs. Billington realized all her property, and with her jewels and plate, of which she possessed a great quantity, departed for the land of song, taking with her Miss Madocks. She paid a bitter penalty for her revived tenderness toward Felican, for the ruffian subjected her to such treatment that she died from the effects of it, August 25, 1818. In such an ignoble fashion one of the most brilliant and beautiful women in the history of song departed from this life.

### ANGELICA CATALANI.

The Girlhood of Catalani.—She makes her *Debut* in Florence.—Description of her Marvelous Vocalism.—The Romance of Love and Marriage.—Her Preference for the Concert Stage.—She meets Napoleon in Paris.—Her Escape from France and Appearance in London.—Opinions of Lord Mount Edgcumbe and other Critics.—Anecdotes of herself and Husband.—The Great Prima Donna's Character.—Her Gradual Divergence from Good Taste in singing.—*Bon Mots* of the Wits of the Day.—The Opera-house Riot.—Her Husband's Avarice.—Grand Concert Tour through Europe.—She meets Goethe.—Her Return to England and Brilliant Reception.—She sings with the Tenor Braham.—John Braham's Artistic Career.—The Davides.—Catalani's Last English Appearance, and the Opinions of Critics.—Her Retirement and Death.

About the year 1790 the convent of Santa Lucia at Gubbio, in the duchy of Urbino, was the subject of a queer kind of scandal. Complaint was made to the bishop that one of the novices sang with such extraordinary brilliancy and beauty of voice that throngs gathered to the chapel from miles around, and that the religious services were transformed into a sort of theatrical entertainment" so entranced were all hearers by the charm of the singing, and so forgetful of the religious purport of these occasions in the fascination of the music. His Reverence ordered the lady abbess to abate the scandal; so the young Angelica Catalani was no longer permitted to sing alone, but only in concert with the other novices. Her voice at the age of twelve, when she began to sing, already possessed a volume, compass, and sweetness which made her a phenomenon. The young girl, who had been destined for conventual life, studied so hard that she became ill, and her father, a magistrate of Sinigaglia, was obliged to take her home. Signor Catalani was a man of bigoted piety, and it was with great difficulty that he could be induced to forego the plan which he had arranged for Angelica's future. The idea of her going on the stage was repulsive to him, and only his straitened circumstances wrung from him a reluctant consent that she should abandon the thought of the convent and become a singer. From



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a teacher and composer of some reputation the young girl received preliminary instruction for two years, and from the hands of this master passed into those of the celebrated Marchesi, who had succeeded Porpora as chief of the teaching *maestri*. This virtuoso had himself been a distinguished singer, and his finishing lessons placed Angelica in a position to rank with the most brilliant vocalists of the age. It was somewhat unfortunate that she did not learn under Marchesi, who taught her when her voice was in the most plastic condition, to control that profuse luxuriance of vocalization which was alike the greatest glory and greatest defect in her art.

While studying, Angelica went to hear a celebrated cantatrice of the day, and wept at the vanishing strains. "Alas!" she said with sorrowing *naivete*. "I shall never be able to sing like that." The kind prima donna heard the lamentation and asked her to sing; whereupon she said, "Be reassured, my child; in a few years you will surpass me, and I shall weep at your superiority." At the age of sixteen she succeeded in getting an engagement at La Fenice in Venice to sing in Mayer's opera of "Lodoiska" during the Carnival season. Carus, the director, accepted her in despair at the very last moment on account of the sudden death of his prima donna. What were his surprise and delight in finding that the *debutante* was the loveliest who had come forward for years, and the possessor of an almost unparalleled voice. Of tall and majestic presence, a dazzling complexion, large beautiful blue eyes, and features of ideal symmetry, she was one to entrance the eye as well as the ear. Her face was so flexible as to express each shade of feeling from grave to gay with equal facility; and indeed all the personal characteristics of this extraordinary woman were such as Nature could only have bestowed in her most lavish mood. Her voice was a soprano of the purest quality, embracing a compass of nearly three octaves, from G to F, and so powerful that no band could overwhelm its tones, which thrilled through every fiber of the hearer. Full, rich, and magnificent beyond any other voice ever heard, "it bore no resemblance," said one writer, "to any instrument, except we could imagine the tone of musical glasses to be magnified in volume to the same gradation of power." She could ascend at will—though she was ignorant of the rules of art—from the smallest perceptible sound to the loudest and most magnificent crescendo, exactly as she pleased. One of her favorite caprices of ornament was to imitate the swell and fall of a bell, making her tones sweep through the air with the most delicious undulation, and, using her voice at pleasure, she would shower her graces in an absolutely wasteful profusion. Her greatest defect was that, while the ear was bewildered with the beauty and tremendous power of her voice, the feelings were untouched: she never touched the heart. She could not, like Mara, thrill, nor,



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like Billington, captivate her hearers by a birdlike softness and brilliancy; she simply astonished. "She was a florid singer, and nothing but a florid singer, whether grave or airy, in the church, orchestra, or upon the stage." With a prodigious volume and richness of tone, and a marvelous rapidity of vocalization, she could execute brilliantly the most florid notation, leaving her audience in breathless amazement; but her intonation was very uncertain. However, this did not trouble her much.

In the season of 1798 she sang at Leghorn with Crivelli, Marchesi, and Mrs. Billington, and thence she made a triumphal tour through Italy. From the first she had met with an unequaled success. Her full, powerful, clear tones, her delivery so pure and true, her instinctive execution of the most difficult music, carried all before her. Without much art or method, that superb voice, capable by nature of all the things which the most of even gifted singers are obliged to learn by hard work and long experience, was sufficient for the most daring feats. The Prince Regent of Portugal, attracted by her fame, engaged her, with Crescentini and *Mme. Gafforini*, for the Italian opera at Lisbon, where she arrived in the year 1804.

The romance of Catalani's life connects itself, not with those escapades which furnish the most piquant tidbits for the gossip-monger, but with her marriage, which occurred at Lisbon. Throughout her long career no breath of scandal touched the character of this extraordinary artist. Her private and domestic life was as exemplary as her public career was dazzling. One night, as Angelica was singing on the stage, her eyes met those of a handsome man in full French uniform, and especially distinguished by the diamond aigrette in his cap, who sat in full sight in one of the boxes. When she went off the stage she found the military stranger in the greenroom, waiting for an introduction. This was M. de Vallebregue, captain in the Eighth Hussars and *attache* of the French embassy, who in after years received his highest recognition of distinction as the husband of the chief of living singers. They were both in the full flush of youth and beauty, and they fell passionately in love with each other at first sight. When the lover asked Signor Catalani's consent, the latter frowned on the scheme, for the golden harvest was too rich to be yielded up lightly for the asking. He coldly refused, and bade the suitor think of his love as hopeless, though he found no objection to M. Vallebregue personally. Poor Angelica was thoroughly wretched, and day after day pined for her young soldier-lover, who had been forbidden the house by the father. For several days she was in such dejection that she could not sing, and the romance became the talk of Lisbon. One day an anonymous letter was received by Papa Catalani charging M. Vallebregue with being a proscribed man, who had committed some mysterious crime vaguely hinted at. Armed with

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this, her father sought to reason Angelica out of her passion; but she clung to her lover with more eagerness, and was rewarded, to her great joy, by learning that the crime was only having fought a duel with and severely wounded his superior officer—an offense against discipline, which had been punished by temporary relief from military duty and a pleasant exile to Lisbon. The young beauty wept, sighed, pouted, and could be persuaded to sing only with much difficulty. All day long she said with deep mournfulness, “*Ma che bel ufficiale*” and pined with genuine heart-sickness. At last Vallebregue smuggled a letter to his discouraged mistress, in which he said in ardent words that no one had a right to separate them, and urged her to lend all her energies to her professional work, so that, being a favorite at court, she might induce the Prince to intercede in the matter. Angelica tried in vain to get an interview with the Prince, and found that he was at his country villa twenty miles away. Her accustomed energy was equal to the difficult. Calling a coach, she drove out to the royal villa. Trembling with emotion and fatigue, she threw herself at the feet of the good-natured Prince, whom she found in the garden, and told her story as soon as her timidity could find words. He could hardly resist the temptation to badinage which the lively Angelica had hitherto been so ready to meet with brilliant repartee, but the anxious girl could only weep and plead. It was such a genuine love romance that the Prince’s heart was touched, and, after some argument and advice to return to her father, he yielded and gave his sanction to the match. He accompanied the now radiant Angelica back to Lisbon, and in an hour’s time a ceremony in the court chapel made her Madame de Vallebregue, in presence of General Lannes, the French envoy, and himself. Signor Catalani was enraged at the turn which things had taken, but he could only acquiesce in the inevitable, especially as his daughter and her husband settled on him a country estate in Italy and a comfortable annuity for life.

*Mme.* Catalani returned to Italy with a reputation which made her name the first in everybody’s mouth. Yet at this time her appearance on the dramatic stage always occasioned a feeling of pain, her excessive timidity and nervousness made her action spasmodic, and deprived her of that easy dignity which must be united with passion and sentiment to produce a good artistic personation. It was in concert that her grand voice at this period shone at its best. Her intimate friends were wont to say that it was as disagreeable and agitating for her to sing in opera, as it was delightful in the concert-room; for here she poured forth her notes with such a genuine ecstasy in her own performance as that which seems to thrill the skylark or the nightingale. Though the circumstances of her marriage were of such a romantic kind, and she seems to have been deeply attached to her husband through

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life, M. Valle-bregue appears to have been a stupid, ignorant soldier, and, as is common with those who make similar matrimonial speculations, to have had no eyes beyond helping his talented wife to make all the money possible and spend it with the utmost freedom afterward. *Mme. Catalani* made a brief visit to Paris in the spring of 1806, sang twice at St. Cloud, and gave three public concerts, each of which produced twenty-four thousand francs, the price being doubled for these occasions.

Napoleon was always anxious to make Paris the center of European art, and to assemble within its borders all the attractions of the civilized world. He spared no temptation to induce the Italian cantatrice to remain. When she attended his commands at the Tuileries she trembled like a leaf before the stern tyrant, under whose gracious demeanor she detected the workings of an unbending purpose. "Où allez vous, madame?" said he, smilingly. "To London, sire," was the reply. "Remain in Paris. I will pay you well, and your talents will be appreciated. You shall receive a hundred thousand francs per annum, and two months for *conge*. So that is settled. Adieu, madame." Such was the brusque and imperious interview, which seemed to fix the fate of the artist. But *Mme. Catalani*, anxious to get to London, to which she looked as a rich harvest-field, and regarding the grim Napoleon as the foe of the legitimate King, was determined not to stay. "When at Paris I was denied a passport," she afterward said; "however, I got introduced to Talleyrand, and, by the aid of a handful of gold, I was put into a government boat, and ordered to lie down to avoid being shot; and wonderful to relate, I got over in safety, with my little boy seven months old."

## II.

*Catalani* had already signed a contract with Goold and Taylor, the managers of the King's Theatre, Haymarket, at a salary of two thousand pounds a month and her expenses, besides various other emoluments. At the time of her arrival there was no competitor for the public favor, Grassini and Mrs. Billington having both retired from the stage a short time previously. Lord Mount Edgcumbe tells us: "The great and far-famed *Catalani* supplied the place of both, and for many years reigned alone; for she would bear no rival, nor any singer sufficiently good to divide the applause. It is well known," he says, "that her voice is of a most uncommon quality; and capable of bearing exertions almost superhuman. Her throat seems endowed (as is remarked by medical men) with a power of expansion and muscular motion by no means usual; and when she throws out all her voice to the utmost, it has a volume and strength quite surprising; while its agility in divisions running up and down the scale in semi-tones, and its compass in jumping over two octaves at once, are equally astonishing. It were to be wished that she was less lavish in the

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display of these wonderful powers, and sought to please more than to surprise; but her taste is vicious, her excessive love of ornament spoiling every simple air, and her greatest delight being in songs of a bold and spirited character, where much is left to her discretion or indiscretion, without being confined by the accompaniment, but in which she can indulge in *ad libitum* passages with a luxuriance and redundancy no other singer ever possessed, or if possessing ever practiced, and which she carries to a fantastical excess.”

Her London *debut* was on the 15th of December, 1806, in Portogallo’s opera of “La Semi-ramide,” composed for the occasion. The music of this work was of the most ephemeral nature, but Catalani’s magnificent singing and acting gave it a heroic dignity. She lavished all the resources of her art on it. In one passage she dropped a double octave, and finally sealed her reputation “by running up and down the chromatic scale for the first time in the recollection of opera-goers.... It was then new, although it has since been repeated to satiety, and even noted down as an *obbligato* division by Rossini, Meyerbeer, and others. Rounds of applause rewarded this daring exhibition of bad taste.” She had one peculiar effect, which it is said has never been equaled. This was an undulating tone like that of a musical glass, the vibrating note being higher than the highest note on the pianoforte. “She appeared to make a sort of preparation previous to its utterance, and never approached it by the regular scale. It began with an inconceivably fine tone, which gradually swelled both in volume and power, till it made the ears vibrate and the heart thrill. It particularly resembled the highest note of the nightingale, that is reiterated each time more intensely, and which with a sort of ventriloquism seems scarcely to proceed from the same bird that a moment before poured his delicate warblings at an interval so disjointed.”

There are many racy anecdotes related of Catalani’s London career, to which the stupid, avaricious, but good-natured character of M. Vallebregue lent much of their flavor. Speaking of Mrs. Salmon’s singing, he said with vehemence, “Mrs. Salmon, sare, she is as that,” extending the little finger of his left hand and placing his thumb at the root of it; “but ma femme! Voila! she is that”—stretching out his whole arm at full length and touching the shoulder-joint with the other. His stupidity extended to an utter ignorance of music, which he only prized as the means of gaining the large sums which his extravagance craved. His wife once complained of the piano, saying, “I can not possibly sing to that piano; I shall crack my voice: the piano is absurdly high.” “Do not fret, my dear,” interposed the husband, soothingly; “it shall be lowered before evening: I will attend to it myself.” Evening came, and the house was crowded; but, to the consternation of the cantatrice, the pianoforte was as high as ever. She sang, but the strain was excessive and painful; and she went behind the scenes in a very bad humor. “Really, my dear,” said her lord, “I can not conceive of the piano being too high; I had the carpenter in with his saw, and made him take six inches off each leg in my presence!”

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When she made her engagement for the second season, M. Vallebrogue demanded such exorbitant terms that the manager tore his hair with vexation, saying that such a salary to one singer would actually disable him from employing any other artists of talent. "Talent!" repeated the husband; "have you not *Mme. Catalani*? What would you have? If you want an opera company, my wife with four or five puppets is quite sufficient." So, during the season of 1808, Catalani actually was the whole company, the other performers being literally puppets. She appeared chiefly in operas composed expressly for her, in which the part for the prima donna was carefully adapted to the display of her various powers. In "*Semiramide*" particularly she made an extraordinary impression, as it afforded room for the finest tragic action; and the music, trivial as it was, gave full scope for the extraordinary perfection of her voice. She also appeared in comic operas, and in Paesiello's "*La Frascatana*" particularly delighted the public by the graceful lightness and gayety of her comedy. But in them as in tragedies she stood alone and furnished the sole attraction. Her astonishing dexterity seemed rather the result of the natural aptitude of genius than of study and labor, and her most brilliant ornaments more the fanciful improvisations of the moment than the roulades of the composer. Of her elocution in singing it is said: "She was articulate, forcible, and powerful; occasionally light, pleasing, and playful, but never awfully grand or tenderly touching to the degree that the art may be carried." Her marvelous strains seemed to distant auditors poured forth with the fluent ease of a bird; but those who were near saw that her efforts were so great as to "call into full and violent action the muscular powers of the head, throat, and chest." In the execution of rapid passages the under jaw was in a continual state of agitation, "in a manner, too, generally thought incompatible with the production of pure tone from the chest, and inconsistent with a legitimate execution. This extreme motion was also visible during the shake, which Catalani used sparingly, however, and with little effect."

In spite of the reputation for rapacity which the avarice and arrogance of her husband helped to create, Catalani won golden opinions by her sweet temper, liberality, and benevolence. Her purse-strings were always opened to relieve want or encourage struggling merit. Her gayety and light-heartedness were proverbial. It is recorded that at Bangor once she heard for the first time the strains of a Welsh harp, the player being a poor blind itinerant. The music sounding in the kitchen of the inn filled the world-renowned singer with an almost infantile glee, and, rushing in among the pots and pans, she danced as madly as if she had been bitten by the tarantula, till, all panting and breathless, she threw the harper two guineas, and said she had never heard anything

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which gave her more delight. The claims on her purse kept pace with the enormous gains which seemed to increase from year to year. To her large charities and her extravagant habits of living, her husband added the heavy losses to which his passion for the gaming table led him. It was said in after years that *Mme. Catalani* should have been worth not less than half a million sterling, so immense had been her gains. Mr. Waters, in a pamphlet published in 1807, says that her receipts from all sources for that year had been nearly seventeen thousand pounds. She frequently was paid two hundred pounds for singing "Rule Britannia," a song in which she became celebrated; and one thousand pounds was the usual *honorarium* given for her services at a festival.

*Mme. Catalani*, in addition to her operatic performances, frequently sang at the Ancient Concerts and in oratorio; but she lacked the devotional pathos and tenderness which had given Mara and Mrs. Billington their power in sacred music. Yet she possessed strong religious sentiments, and always prayed before entering a theatre. Her somewhat ostentatious piety provoked the following scandalous anecdote: She was observed reading a prayer from her missal prior to going before the audience one night, and some one, taking the book from the attendant, found it to be a copy of *Metastasio*. This story is probably apocryphal, however, like many of the most amusing incidents related of artists and authors. Certain it is that *Catalani* never shone in oratorio, or even in the rendering of dramatic pathos; but in bold and brilliant music the world has probably never seen her peer. To some the immense volume of her voice was not pleasant. Queen Charlotte criticised it by wishing for a little cotton to put in her ears. Some wit, being asked if he would go to York to hear her, replied he could hear better where he was. "Whenever I hear such an outrageous display of execution," said Lord Mount Edgcumbe, in his "Musical Reminiscences," "I never fail to recollect and cordially join in the opinion of a late noble statesman, more famous for his wit than for his love of music, who, hearing a remark on the extreme difficulty of some performance, observed that he wished it was impossible." It was this same nobleman, Lord North, who perpetrated the following *mot*: Being asked why he did not subscribe to the Ancient Concerts, and reminded that his brother, the Bishop of Winchester, had done so, he said, "Oh, if I was as deaf as the good Bishop, I would subscribe too."

During the period of her operatic career in England, *Catalani* illustrated the works of a wide variety of composers, both serious and comic; for her dramatic talents were equal to both, and there was no music which she did not master as if by inspiration, though she was such a bad reader that to learn a part perfectly she was obliged to hear it played on the piano. It was with great unwillingness that she essayed the



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music of Mozart, however, who had just become a great favorite in England. The strict time, the severe form, and the importance of the accompaniments were not suited to her splendid and luxuriant style, which disdained all trammels and rules. Yet she was the first singer who introduced “Le Nozze di Figaro” to the English stage. Besides *Susanna* in “Le Nozze,” she appeared as *Vitellia* in “La Clemenza di Tito,” a serious *role*; and both in acting and singing these interpretations were praised by the most intelligent connoisseurs—who had previously attacked the vicious redundancy of her style severely—as nearly matchless. Arch and piquant as the waiting-woman, lofty, impassioned, and haughty as the patrician dame of old Rome, she rendered each as if her sole talent were in the one direction. Tremmazani, a delightful tenor, who had just arrived in England, and possessed a voice of that rich, touching Cremona tone so rare even in Italy, it may be remarked in passing, refused the part of Count Almaviva as lacking sufficient importance, and because he regarded it as beneath his dignity to appear in comic opera.

### III.

The year 1813 was the last season of Catalani’s regular engagement on the operatic stage. She continued to sing in “Tito” and “Figaro,” but her principal pleasure was in the most extravagant and bizarre show-pieces, such, for example, as variations composed for the violin on popular airs like “God save the King,” “Rule Britannia,” “Cease your Funning.” She carried her departure from the true limits of art to such an outrageous degree as to draw on her head the severest reprobation of all good judges, though the public listened to her wonderful execution with unbounded delight and astonishment. Toward the latter part of the season an extraordinary riot took place in consequence of Catalani’s failure to appear two successive evenings. The managers were in arrears, and the *diva* by the advice of her husband adopted this plan to force payment. There were mutterings of the thunder on the first non-appearance; but when on the following night Catalani was still absent, the storm broke. The opera which had been substituted was half finished when the clamor drowned all the artistic noise behind the footlights. A military guard who had been called in to protect the stage from invasion were overpowered by a throng of gentlemen who leaped on from the auditorium, many of them men of high rank, and the guns and bayonets wrested from the soldiers’ hands. Bloodshed seemed imminent; and had it not been for the moderation of the soldiers, who permitted themselves to be disarmed rather than fire, the result would have been very serious. The chandeliers and mirrors were all broken into a thousand pieces, and the musical instruments hurled around in the wildest confusion. Fiddles, flutes, horns, drums, swords, bayonets, muskets, operatic costumes, and stage properties generally were hurled



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in a heap on the stage. The gentlemen Mohocks, who signalized themselves on this occasion, did damage to the amount of nearly one thousand pounds, though it is said they made it up to the manager afterward by subscription. The theatre was closed for a week; and when it reopened, so great was the magnificent Italian's power over the audience that, though they came prepared to condemn, they received her with the loudest demonstration of applause. But still such conduct toward audiences, if followed up, could not but beget dissatisfaction and wrangling, and the growing impatience of her managers as well as the more judicious public could not be mistaken.

In spite of the fact that several brilliant singers were in England, and of the desire of the public that the splendid talents of Catalani should be appropriately supported, her jealousy and her exorbitant claims prevented such a desirable combination. She offered to buy the theatre and thus become sole proprietor, sole manager, and sole performer; but, of course, the proposition was refused, luckily for the enraged cantatrice, who would certainly have paid dearly for her experiment.

Catalani on closing her English engagement proceeded to Paris. She had been known as an ardent friend of the Bourbon exiles, and so, during the occupation of Paris by the Allies in 1814, she found herself in great favor. After the Hundred Days had passed and the royal house seemed to be firmly seated, she received a government subvention of one hundred and sixty thousand francs and the privilege of the Opera. Catalani's passion for absorbing everything within the radius of her own vanity and her jealousy of rivals operated against her success in Paris, as they had injured her in London; and she was obliged to yield up her privilege in the course of three years, with the additional loss of five hundred thousand francs of her own private fortune, and the loss of good will on the part of the Paris public.

Her grand concert tour through Europe, undertaken with the purpose of repairing her losses, was one of the most interesting portions of her life. Everywhere she was received with abounding enthusiasm, and the concerts were so thronged that there was rarely ever standing-room. She sang in nearly every important city on the Continent, was the object of the most flattering attention everywhere, and was loaded down with the costliest presents, jewels, medals, and testimonials, everywhere. Sovereigns vied with each other in showing their admiration by gorgeous offerings, and her arrival in a city was looked on as a gala-day. In the midst, however, of these the most trying circumstances in which a beautiful and captivating woman could be placed, surrounded by temptation and flattery, her course was marked by undeviating propriety, and not the faintest breath tarnished her fair fame. Such an idol of popular admiration would be sure to exhibit an overweening vanity. When in Hamburg in 1819, M. Schevenke, a great musician, criticised her vocal feats with severity. *Mme.* Catalani shrugged her beautiful shoulders and called him "an impious man." "For," said she, "when God has

given to a mortal so extraordinary a talent as I possess, people ought to applaud and honor it as a miracle; it is profane to depreciate the gifts of Heaven.”

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It was during this tour that she met the poet Goethe at the court of Weimar, where she was made an honored guest, as she had been treated everywhere in royal and princely circles. At a court dinner-party where she was present, the great German poet was as usual the cynosure of the company. His imperial and splendid presence and world-wide fame marked him out from all others. Catalani was struck by the appearance of this modern Olympian god, and asked who he was. To a mind innocent of all culture except such as touched her art merely, the name "Goethe" conveyed but little significance. "Pray, on what instrument does he play?" "He is no performer, madame—he is the renowned author of 'Werter.'" "Oh yes, yes, I remember," she said; then turning to the venerable poet, she addressed him in her vivacious manner. "Ah! sir, what an admirer I am of 'Werter!'" Flattered by her evident sincerity and ardor, the poet bowed profoundly. "I never," continued she, in the same lively strain, "I never read anything half so laughable in all my life. What a capital farce it is, sir!" The poet, astounded, could scarcely believe the evidence of his ears. "'The Sorrows of Werter' a farce!" he murmured faintly. "Oh yes, never was anything so exquisitely ridiculous," rejoined Catalani, with a ringing burst of laughter. It turned out that she had been talking all the while of a ridiculous parody of "Werter" which had been performed at one of the vaudeville theatres of Paris, in which the sentimentality of Goethe's tale had been most savagely ridiculed. We can fancy what Goethe's mortification was, and how the fair *diva's* credit was impaired at the court of Weimar by her ignorance of the illustrious poet and of the novel whose fame had rung through all Europe.

*Mme.* Catalani returned to England in 1821, and found herself the subject of an enthusiasm little less than that which had greeted her in her earlier prime. Her concert tour extended through all the cities of the British kingdom. In this tour she was supported by the great tenor Braham, as remarkable a singer in some respects as Catalani herself, and probably the most finished artist of English birth who ever ornamented the lyric stage. Braham had been brilliantly associated with the lyric triumphs of Mara, Billington, and Grassini, and had been welcomed in Italy itself as one of the finest singers in the world. When Catalani's dramatic career in England commenced Braham had supported her, though her jealousy soon rid her of so brilliant a competitor for the public plaudits. Braham's part in Catalani's English concert tour was a very important one, and some cynical wags professed to believe that as many went to hear the great tenor as to listen to Catalani.

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The electrical effect of her singing was very well shown at one of these concerts. She introduced a song, "Delia Superba Roma," declamatory in its nature, written for her by Marquis Sampieri. The younger Linley, brother-in-law of Sheridan, who was playing in the orchestra, was so moved that he forgot his own part, and on receiving a severe whispered rebuke from the singer fainted away in his place. *Mme. Catalani* returned again on finishing her English engagement to Russia, where she realized fifteen thousand guineas in four months. Concert-rooms were too small to hold her audiences, and she was obliged to use the great hall of the Public Exchange, which would hold more than four thousand people. At her last concert the Emperor and Empress loaded her with costly gifts, among them being a girdle of magnificent diamonds.

### IV.

The career of John Braham must always be of interest to those who love the traditions of English music. The associate and contemporary of a host of distinguished singers, and himself not least, his connection with the musical life of Catalani would seem to make some brief sketch of the greatest of English tenor-singers singularly fitting in this place. He was born in London in 1773, of Jewish parentage, his real name being Abrams, and was so wretchedly poor that he sold pencils on the street to get a scanty living. Leoni, an Italian teacher of repute, discovered by accident that he had a fine voice, and took the friendless lad under his tutelage. He appeared at the age of thirteen at the Covent Garden Theatre, the song "The Soldier tired of War's Alarms" being the first he sang in public. One of the papers spoke of him as a youthful prodigy, saying, "He promises fair to attain every perfection, possessing every requisite necessary to form a good singer." Braham at one time lost his voice utterly, and his prospect seemed a gloomy one, as his master Leoni also died about the same time. He now found a generous patron in Abraham Goldsmith, however, and became a professor of the piano, for which instrument he developed remarkable talent.

An Italian master named Rauzzini seems to have been of great service to Braham when he was about twenty years of age, and under him he fitted himself for the Italian stage, and secured an opening under Storace, father of the brilliant Nancy Storace, at Drury Lane. His success was so marked that the following season found him reengaged and his professional life well opened to him. Braham's ambition, however, would not permit him to rest on his laurels, or rest contented with the artistic fitness already acquired. He determined to find in Italy that finishing culture which then as now made that country the Mecca of artists anxious to perfect their education. He visited Florence, Genoa, Milan, Naples, and Rome, studying under the most famous masters. Not content with his training in executive music, Braham studied composition and counterpoint under Isola, and laid the foundation for the knowledge which afterward gave him a place among notable English composers as well as singers.

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While in England Braham had shown proofs of a transcendent talent. His singing both in oratorio and opera was of such a stamp as to place him in the van with the most accomplished Italian singers. With the added finish of method which he gained by his Italian studies, he made a most favorable impression in the various cities when he sang in Italy, and his name was freely quoted as being one of the very greatest living singers. The elder Davide, whose reputation at that time had no equal, even Crescentini being placed second to him, said on hearing him sing, "There are only two singers in the world, I and the Englishman." Braham had one great advantage over his rivals in this, that his knowledge of the science of music in all its most abstruse difficulties was thorough. Skillful adept as he was in all the refinements of executive technique, his profound musical grasp and insight made all difficulties of interpretation perfect child's-play. Our readers will recall an illustration of Braham's readiness and quickness of resource in the anecdote of him told in connection with Mrs. Billington's life.

Refusing the most flattering offers from Italian impressarii, who were eager to retain him for a while in Italy, Braham returned to England in 1801, and for the most part during a number of years devoted himself to English opera. Though he had approved himself a brilliant master in the Italian school, his taste and talents also peculiarly fitted him—like Sims Reeves, who seems to have taken Braham for a model—for the simple and affecting ballad-music with which English opera is so characteristically marked. His only appearances in Italian opera in England after his return were in the seasons of 1804, 1805, 1800, and 1816. These seasons were marked by the performance of the fine operas of Winter, of some of the masterpieces of Cimarosa, and by the first introduction into England of the music of Mozart, the "Clemenza di Tito," in which Mrs. Billington and Braham appeared, having been the earliest acquaintance of the English public with the greatest of the German operatic composers. The production of this opera was at the suggestion of George IV., then Prince of Wales, who had a manuscript score of the work, with instrumental parts, sent to him as a gift by the great Haydn several years before, as a memorial of the kindness shown by the Prince to the composer of the "Creation," when in London conducting the celebrated Salaman symphonic concerts. The characters of *Vittellia* and *Cesto* were splendidly performed by the two singers; but the Italian part of the company did not perform the difficult and exacting music *con amore*, neither were the audiences of that day trained up to the appreciation of the glorious music of Mozart which has obtained since that time.

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Braham's career as a singer of English opera is that with which his glory in art is chiefly associated. His first appearance was in a somewhat feeble work called the "Chains of the Heart," and this was succeeded by the "Cabinet," a production in which Braham composed all the music of his own part, both solo and the concerted portions in which he had to appear—a custom which he continued for a number of years. Seldom has music been more popular than that in which Braham appeared, for he knew how to suit all the subtle qualities of his own voice. Among the more celebrated operas in which he appeared, now unknown except by tradition, may be mentioned "Family Quarrels," "Thirty Thousand," "English Fleet," "Out of Place," "False Alarms," "Kars, or Love in a Desert," and "Devil's Bridge." As Braham grew older he attained a prodigious reputation, never before equaled in England. In theatre, concert-room, and church he had scarcely a rival; and whether in singing a simple ballad, in oratorio, or in the grandest dramatic music, the largeness and nobility of his style were matched by a voice which in its prime was almost peerless. His compass extended over nineteen notes, and his falsetto from D to A was so perfect that it was difficult to tell where the natural voice ended. When Weber composed his opera "Oberon" for the English stage in 1826, Braham was the original *Sir Huon*.

Braham had made a large fortune by his genius and industry, the copyright on the many beautiful ballads and songs which he contributed to the musical treasures of the language amounting alone to a handsome competence. But, following the example of so many great artists, he aspired to be manager also. In conjunction with Yates, in 1831 he purchased the Colosseum in Regent's Park for forty thousand pounds, and five years afterward he spent twenty-six thousand pounds in building the St. James's theatre. These speculations were unfortunate, and Braham found himself compelled to renew his professional exertions at a period when musical artists generally think of retiring from the stage. He made a concert and operatic tour in America in 1840, and it was while playing with him in "Guy Manner-ing" that Charlotte Cushman, who then performed singing parts, conceived the remarkable *role of Meg Merrilies*, which she made one of the most picturesque and vivid memories of the stage. Francis Wemyss, in his "Theatrical Biography," refers to Braham's appearance at the National Theatre, Philadelphia: "Who that heard 'Jephthah's Rash Vow' could ever forget the volume of voice which issued from that diminutive frame, or the ecstasy with which 'Waft her, angels, through the skies' thrilled every nerve of the attentive listener? He ought to have visited the United States twenty years sooner, or not have risked his reputation by coming at all. Like Incledon, he was only heard by Americans when his powers of voice were so impaired as to leave them to conjecture what he had been, and mourn the wreck that all had once admired." Such an impression as this seems to have been common with the American public—an experience afterward in recent years repeated in the last visit of the once great Mario.

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In private life Braham was much admired, and was always received in the most conservative and fastidious circles. As a man of culture, a humorist, and a raconteur, he was the life of society; and he will be remembered as the composer who has left more popular songs, duets, *etc.*, than almost any other English musician. He died in 1856, after living to see his daughter Lady Waldegrave, and one of the most brilliant leaders of London high life.

The Davides, father and son, also belonged to the Catalani period, the elder having sung with her in Italy, and the younger in after years both in opera and concert. Giacomo Davide, the elder, whose prime was between 1770 and 1800, was pronounced by Lord Mount Edgumbe the first tenor of his time, possessing a powerful and well-toned voice, great execution as well as knowledge of music, and an excellent style of singing. His son Giovanni, who became better known than himself, was his pupil. Though singing with a faulty method, Giovanni Davide had a voice of such magnificent compass and quality as to produce with it the most electrical effects. M. Edouard Bertin gives an interesting account of him in a letter from Venice dated 1823: "Davide excites among the dilettanti of this town an enthusiasm and delight which can hardly be conceived without having been witnessed. He is a singer of the new school, full of mannerism, affectation, and display, abusing like Martin his magnificent voice with its prodigious compass (three octaves comprised between four B flats). He crushes the principal motive of an air beneath the luxuriance of his ornamentation, which has no other merit than that of a difficulty conquered. But he is also a singer full of warmth, verve, expression, energy, and musical sentiment. Alone he can fill up and give life to a scene: it is impossible for another singer to carry away an audience as he does, and when he will only be simple he is admirable. He is the Rossini of song. He is the greatest singer I ever heard. Doubtless the way in which Garcia\* plays and sings the part of *Otello* is preferable, taking it all together, to that of Davide; it is pure, more severe, more constantly dramatic; but with all his faults Davide produces more effect, a great deal more effect. There is something in him, I can not say what, which, even when he is ridiculous, entrances attention. He never leaves you cold, and when he does not move he astonishes you. In a word, before hearing him, I did not know what the power of singing really was. The enthusiasm he excites is without limit."

\* The father of *Mlle.* Mulibran and Viardot-Garcia.

This remarkable singer died in St. Petersburg in 1851, being then manager of an Imperial Opera in that city of enthusiastic music-lovers.

## V.



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In 1824 *Mme. Catalani* again filled an engagement in England, making her reappearance in Mayer's comic *pasticcio*, "Il Fanatico per la Mu-sica," the airs of which had been expressly selected for the display of her vocal *tours de force*. Crowded audiences again welcomed her whom absence had made an idol dearer than ever, and her transcendent power as a singer seemed to have rise even beyond the old pitch in her electrical *bravura* style of execution. Yet some critics thought they detected tokens of the destroying hand of time. One critic spoke of the "fragrance" of her tone as having evaporated. Another compared her voice to a pianoforte the hammers of which had grown hard by use. In her appearance she had become even more beautiful than ever, with some slight accession of *embonpoint*, and was conceded to be the handsomest woman in Europe. For a while her popularity was unbounded among all classes, and probably no singer that ever lived rode on a higher wave of public adoration. But the critics began to be very much dissatisfied with the vicious uses to which she put her magnificent voice. In Paris the wags had called her *l'instrument Catalani*. In London they said her style had become a caricature of its former grandeur, so exaggerated and affected had it grown.

"When she begins one of the interminable roulades up the scale," says a writer in "Knight's Quarterly Magazine," "she gradually raises her body, which she had before stooped to almost a level with the ground, until, having won her way with a quivering lip and chattering chin to the very topmost note, she tosses back her head and all its nodding feathers with an air of triumph; then suddenly falls to a note two octaves and a half lower with incredible aplomb, and smiles like a victorious Amazon over a conquered enemy." A throng of flatterers joined in encouraging her in all her defects. "No sooner does Catalani quit the orchestra," says the same writer, "than she is beset by a host of foreign sycophants, who load her with exaggerated praise. I was present at a scene of this kind in the refreshment-room at Bath, and heard reiterated on all sides, 'Ah! madame, la derniere fois toujours la meilleure!' Thus is poor *Mme. Catalani* led to strive to excel herself every time she sings, until she exposes herself to the ridicule most probably of those very flatterers; for I have heard that on the Continent she is mimicked by a man dressed in female attire, who represents, by extravagant terms and gestures, *Mme. Catalani surpassing herself*." Occasionally, however, she showed that her genius had not forsaken her. Her singing of Luther's Hymn is thus described by an appreciative listener: "She admits in this grandly simple composition no ornament whatever but a pure shake at the conclusion. The majesty of her sustained tones, so rich, so ample as not only to fill but overflow the cathedral where I heard her, the solemnity of her manner, and the

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St. Cecilia-like expression of her raised eyes and rapt countenance, produced a thrilling effect through the united medium of sight and hearing. Whoever has heard Catalani sing this, accompanied by Schmidt on the trumpet, has heard the utmost that music can do. Then in the succeeding chorus, when the same awful words, 'The trumpet sounds; the graves restore the dead which they contained before,' are repeated by the whole choral strength, her voice, piercing through the clang of instruments and the burst of other voices, is heard as distinctly as if it were alone! During the encore I found my way to the top of a tower on the outside of the cathedral, and could still distinguish her wonderful voice."

A charming incident is told of *Mme. Catalani* while in Brighton. Captain Montague, cruising off that port, invited her and some other ladies to a *fete* on his ship, and the ladies were escorted on board by the Captain in a boat manned by twenty men. The prima donna suddenly burst forth with her pet song, "Rule Britannia," singing with electrical fire and the full power of her magnificent voice. The tars dropped their oars, and tears rolled down their weatherbeaten cheeks, while the Captain said: "You see, madame, the effect this favorite air has on these brave men when sung by the finest voice in the world. I have been in many victorious battles, but never felt an excitement equal to this."

*Mme. Catalani* retired from the stage in 1831. Young and brilliant rivals, such as Pasta and Son-ta, were rising to contest her sovereignty, and for several years the critics had been dropping pretty plain hints that it would be the most judicious and dignified course. She settled on a magnificent estate near Lake Como, where she lived with her two eldest children—a son and daughter—the younger son being absent on military duty in the French army. This latter afterward became an equerry to Napoleon III., and the other children occupied positions of rank and honor. *Mme. Catalani* founded a school of gratuitous instruction for young girls near her beautiful villa, and exacted that all who graduated from this school should adopt her own name. One, Signora Masilli-Catalani, became quite an eminent singer. Mrs. Trollope tells us something of Catalani's latter days as she visited her in Italy: "Nothing could be more amiable than the reception she gave us." She expressed a great admiration and love for the English. Her beauty was little injured. "Her eyes and teeth are still magnificent," says Mrs. Trollope, "and I am told that, when seen in evening full dress by candlelight, no stranger can see her for the first time without inquiring who that charming-looking woman is." Mrs. Trollope hinted to Mlle. de Valle-breque that she would like to hear her mother sing; and in a moment *Mme. Catalani* was at the piano, smiling at the whispered request from her daughter. "I know not what it was she sang, but scarcely

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had she permitted her voice to swell into one of those bravura passages, of which her execution was so very peculiar and so perfectly unequaled, than I felt as if some magic process was being performed upon me, which took me back again to something—I know not what to call it—which I had neither heard nor felt for nearly twenty years. Involuntarily, unconsciously, my eyes filled with tears, and I felt as much embarrassed as a young lady of fifteen might be who suddenly found herself in the act of betraying emotions which she was far indeed from wishing to display.” William Gardiner visited *Mme. Catalani* in 1846. “I was surprised at the vigor of *Mme. Catalani*,” he says, “and how little she was altered since I saw her at Derby in 1828. I paid her a compliment upon her good looks. ‘Ah!’ said she, ‘I am growing old and ugly.’ I would not allow it. ‘Why, man,’ she said, ‘I’m sixty-six!’ She has lost none of that commanding expression which gave her such dignity on the stage. She is without a wrinkle, and appears to be no more than forty. Her breadth of chest is still remarkable; it was this which endowed her with the finest voice that ever sang. Her speaking voice and dramatic air are still charming, and not in the least impaired.”

About the year 1848 Catalani and her family left Italy for fear of the cholera, which was then raging, and sought refuge in Paris. While residing there she heard Jenny Lind. One morning, a few days after, the servant announced a strange visitor, who would not give her name. On being ushered in, the timid stranger, who showed a plain but pleasant face, knelt at her feet and said falteringly, “I am Jenny Lind, madame—I am come to ask your blessing.” A few days afterward Catalani was stricken with the cholera, which she so much dreaded, and died on June 12th, at the age of sixty-nine.

It is not a marvel that the public was captivated with Catalani. She had every splendid gift that Nature could lavish—surpassing physical beauty, a matchless voice, energy of spirit, sweetness of temper, and warm affections. Her whole private life was marked by the utmost purity and propriety, and she was the soul of generosity and unselfishness. The many business troubles in which she was involved were caused by her husband’s rapacity and narrowness of judgment, and not by her own disposition to take advantage of the necessities of her managers—a charge her enemies at one time brought against her.

Her unrivaled endowments (for that taken all in all they were unrivaled is now pretty well acknowledged) ought to have raised her much higher in rank as an artist. Her education even as a singer was extremely superficial, and she became an object of universal admiration without ever knowing anything about music. As she advanced in her career, her whole ambition seemed to be narrowed down to surprising the world by displays of vocal power. As long as these displays would dazzle and astonish, it made little

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difference how absurd and unmeaning they were. Had she assiduously cultivated the dramatic part of her profession, such were the powers of her voice, her sense of the beautiful, her histrionic passion and energy, her charms of person, that she might have been the greatest lyric artist that ever lived. Many of the songs she selected as vehicles of display were unsuitable to a female voice. For instance, she would take the martial song for a bass voice, "Non piu Andrai," in "Figaro," and overpower by the force and volume of her organ all the brass instruments of the orchestra. A craving for such sort of admiration from unthinking crowds turned her aside from the true path of her art, where she might have reached the top peak of greatness, and has handed down her memory a shining beacon rather than as a model to her successors.

### GIUDITTA PASTA.

**Greatness of Genius overcoming Disqualification.—The Characteristic Lesson of Pasta's Life.—Her First Appearance and Failure.—Pasta returns to Italy and devotes herself to Study.—Her First Great Successes in 1819.—Characteristics of her Voice and Singing.—Chorley's Review of the Impressions made on him by Pasta.—She makes her Triumphant *Debut* in Paris.—Talma on Pasta's Acting.—Her Performances of "Giulietta" and "Tancredi."—Medea, Pasta's Grandest Impersonation, is given to the World.—Description of the Performance.—Enthusiasm of the Critics and the Public.—Introduction of Pasta to the English Public in Rossini's "Otello."—The Impression made in England.—Recognized as the Greatest Dramatic Prima Donna in the World.—Glances at the Salient Facts of her English Career.—The Performance of "Il Crociato in Egitto."—She plays the Male Role in "Otello."—Rivalry with Malibran and Sontag.—The Founder of a New School of Singing.—Pasta creates the Leading Roles in Bellini's "Sonnambula" and "Norma" and Donizetti's "Anna Bolena."—Decadence and Retirement.**

#### I.

As an artist who could transform natural faults into the rarest beauties, who could make the world forgive the presence of other deficiencies which could not thus be glorified by the presence of genius, thought, and truth—as one who engraved deeper impressions on the memory of her hearers than any other even in an age of great singers—Mme. Pasta must be placed in the very front rank of art. The way by which this gifted woman arrived at her throne was long and toilsome. Nature had denied her the ninety-nine requisites of the singer (according to the old Italian adage). Her voice at the origin was limited, husky, and weak, without charm, without flexibility. Though her countenance spoke, its features were cast in a coarse mold. Her figure was ungraceful, her movements were awkward. No candidate for musical sovereignty ever presented

herself with what must have appeared a more meager catalogue of pretensions at the outset of her career. What she became let our sketch reveal.

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She was the daughter of a Jewish family named Negri, born at Saronno, near Milan, in the year 1798. The records of her childhood are slight, and beyond the fact that she received her first musical lessons at the Cathedral of Como and her latter training at the Milan Conservatory, and that she essayed her feeble wings at second-rate Italian theatres in subordinate parts for the first year, there is but little of significance to relate. In 1816 she sang in the train of the haughty and peerless Catalani at the Favart in Paris, but did not succeed in attracting attention. But it happened that Ayrton, of the King's Theatre, London, heard her sing at the house of Paer, the composer, and liked her well enough to engage herself and husband at a moderate salary. When Pasta's glimmering little light first shone in London, Fodor and Camporese were in the full blaze of their reputation—both brilliant singers, but destined to pale into insignificance afterward before the intense splendor of Pasta's perfected genius. One of the notices of the opening performance at the King's Theatre, when *Mme.* Camporese sang the leading *role* of Cimarosa's "Penelope," followed up a lavish eulogium on the prima donna with the contemptuous remark, "Two subordinate singers named Pasta and Mari came forward in the characters of *Telamuco* and *Arsi-noe*, but their musical talent does not require minute delineation." There is every reason to believe that Pasta was openly flouted both by the critics and the members of her own profession during her first London experience, but a magnificent revenge was in store for her. Among the parts she sang at this chrysalis period were *Cherubino* in the "Nozze di Figaro," *Servilia* in "La Clemenza di Tito," and the *role* of the pretended shrew in Ferrari's "Il Shaglio Fortunato." *Mme.* Pasta found herself at the end of the season a dire failure. But she had the searching self-insight which stamps the highest forms of genius, and she determined to correct her faults, and develop her great but latent powers. Suddenly she disappeared from the view of the operatic world, and buried herself in a retired Italian city, where she studied with intelligent and tireless zeal under M. Scappa, a *maestro* noted for his power of kindling the material of genius. Occasionally she tested herself in public. An English nobleman who heard her casually at this time said: "Other singers find themselves endowed with a voice and leave everything to chance. This woman leaves nothing to chance, and her success is therefore certain." She subjected herself to a course of severe and incessant study to subdue her voice. To equalize it was impossible. There was a portion of the scale which differed from the rest in quality, and remained to the last "under a veil," to use the Italian term. Some of her notes were always out of time, especially at the beginning of a performance, until the vocalizing machinery became warmed and mellowed by passion and

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excitement. Out of these uncouth and rebellious materials she had to compose her instrument, and then to give it flexibility. Chor-ley, in speaking of these difficulties, says: "The volubility and brilliancy, when acquired, gained a character of their own from the resisting peculiarities of her organ. There were a breadth, an expressiveness in her *roulades*, an evenness and solidity in her shake, which imparted to every passage a significance beyond the reach of more spontaneous singers." But, after all, the true secret of her greatness was in the intellect and imagination which lay behind the voice, and made every tone quiver with dramatic sensibility.

The lyric Siddons of her age was now on the verge of making her real *debut*. When she reappeared in Venice, in 1819, she made a great impression, which was strengthened by her subsequent performances in Rome, Milan, and Trieste, during that and the following year. The fastidious Parisians recognized her power in the autumn of 1821, when she sang at the Theatre Italien; and at Verona, during the Congress of 1822, she was received with tremendous enthusiasm. She returned to Paris the same year, and in the opera of "Romeo e Giulietta" she exhibited such power, both in singing and acting, as to call from the French critics the most extravagant terms of praise. *Mme. Pasta* was then laying the foundation of one of the most dazzling reputations ever gained by prima donna. By sheer industry she had extended the range of her voice to two octaves and a half—from A above the bass clef note to C flat, and even to D in alt. Her tones had become rich and sweet, except when she attempted to force them beyond their limits; her intonation was, however, never quite perfect, being occasionally a little flat. Her singing was pure and totally divested of all spurious finery; she added little to what was set down by the composer, and that little was not only in good taste, but had a great deal of originality to recommend it. She possessed deep feeling and correct judgment. Her shake was most beautiful; Signor Pacini's well-known cavatina, "Il soave e bel contento"—the peculiar feature of which consisted in the solidity and power of a sudden shake, contrasted with the detached staccato of the first bar—was written for *Mme. Pasta*. Some of her notes were sharp almost to harshness, but this defect with the greatness of genius she overcame, and even converted into a beauty; for in passages of profound passion her guttural tones were thrilling. The irregularity of her lower notes, governed thus by a perfect taste and musical tact, aided to a great extent in giving that depth of expression which was one of the principal charms of her singing; indeed, these lower tones were peculiarly suited for the utterance of vehement passion, producing an extraordinary effect by the splendid and unexpected contrast which they enabled her to give to the sweetness of the upper tones, causing a kind of musical discordance indescribably pathetic and melancholy. Her accents were so plaintive, so penetrating, so profoundly tragical, that no one could resist their influence.



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Her genius as a tragedienne surpassed her talent as a singer. When on the stage she was no longer Pasta, but Tancredi, Romeo, Desdemona, Medea, or Semiramide. Ebers tells us in his "Seven Years of the King's Theatre": "Nothing could have been more free from trick or affectation than Pasta's performance. There is no perceptible effort to resemble a character she plays; on the contrary, she enters the stage the character itself; transposed into the situation, excited by the hopes and fears, breathing the life and spirit of the being she represents." *Mme.* Pasta was a slow reader, but she had in perfection the sense for the measurement and proportion of time, a most essential musical quality. This gave her an instinctive feeling for propriety, which no lessons could teach; that due recognition of accent and phrase, that absence of flurry and exaggeration, such as makes the discourse and behavior of some people memorable, apart from the value of matter and occasion; that intelligent composure, without coldness, which impresses and reassures those who see and hear. A quotation from a distinguished critic already cited gives a vivid idea of Pasta's influence on the most cold and fastidious judges:

"The greatest grace of all, depth and reality of expression, was possessed by this remarkable artist as few (I suspect) before her—as none whom I have since admired—have possessed it. The best of her audience were held in thrall, without being able to analyze what made up the spell, what produced the effect, so soon as she opened her lips. Her recitative, from the moment she entered, was riveting by its truth. People accustomed to object to the conventionalities of opera (just as loudly as if all drama was not conventional too), forgave the singing and the strange language for the sake of the direct and dignified appeal made by her declamation. *Mme.* Pasta never changed her readings, her effects, her ornaments. What was to her true, when once arrived at, remained true for ever. To arrive at what stood with her for truth, she labored, made experiments, rejected with an elaborate care, the result of which, in one meaner or more meager, must have been monotony. But the impression made on me was that of being always subdued and surprised for the first time. Though I knew what was coming, when the passion broke out, or when the phrase was sung, it seemed as if they were something new, electrical, immediate. The effect to me is at present, in the moment of writing, as the impression made by the first sight of the sea, by the first snow mountain, by any of those first emotions which never entirely pass away. These things are utterly different from the fanaticism of a *laudator temporis acti*."

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When Talma heard her declaim, at the time of her earliest celebrity in Paris, he said: "Here is a woman of whom I can still learn. One turn of her beautiful head, one glance of her eye, one light motion of her hand, is, with her, sufficient to express a passion. She can raise the soul of the spectator to the highest pitch of astonishment and delight by one tone of her voice. 'O Dio!' as it comes from her breast, swelling over her lips, is of indescribable effect." Poetical and enthusiastic by temperament, the crowning excellence of her art was a grand simplicity. There was a sublimity in her expressions of vehement passion which was the result of measured force, energy which was never wasted, exalted pathos that never overshot the limits of art. Vigorous without violence, graceful without artifice, she was always greatest when the greatest emergency taxed her powers.

Pasta's second great part at the Theatre Italien was in Rossini's "Tancredi," an impersonation which was one of the most enchanting and finished of her lighter *roles*. "She looked resplendent in the casque and cuirass of the Red Cross Knight. No one could ever sing the part of *Tancredi* like Mine. Pasta: her pure taste enabled her to add grace to the original composition by elegant and irreproachable ornaments. 'Di tanti palpiti' had been first presented to the Parisians by *Mme. Fodor*, who covered it with rich and brilliant embroidery, and gave it what an English critic, Lord Mount Edgcumbe, afterward termed its country-dance-like character. Mine. Pasta, on the contrary, infused into this air its true color and expression, and the effect was ravishing."

"Tancredi" was quickly followed by "Otello," and the impassioned spirit, energy, delicacy, and tenderness with which Pasta infused the character of *Desdemona* furnished the theme for the most lavish praises on the part of the critics. It was especially in the last act that her acting electrified her audiences. Her transition from hope to terror, from supplication to scorn, culminating in the vehement outburst "*sono innocente*," her last frenzied looks, when, blinded by her disheveled hair and bewildered with her conflicting emotions, she seems to seek fruitlessly the means of flight, were awful. The varied resources of the great art of tragedy were consummately drawn forth by her *Desdemona*, in this opera, though she was yet to astonish the world with that impersonation imperishably linked with her name in the history of art. "Elisabetta" and "Mose in Egitto" were also revived for her, and she filled the leading characters in both with *eclat*.

## II.

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In January, 1824, *Mme.* Pasta gave to the world what by all concurrent accounts must have been the grandest lyric impersonation in the records of art, the character of *Medea* in Simon May-er's opera. This masterpiece was composed musically and dramatically by the artist herself on the weak foundation of a wretched play and correct but commonplace music. In a more literal and truthful sense than that in which the term is so often travestied by operatic singers, the part was *created* by Pasta, reconstructed in form and meaning, as well as inspired by a matchless executive genius. In the language of one writer, whose enthusiasm seems not to have been excessive: "It was a triumph of histrionic art, and afforded every opportunity for the display of all the resources of her genius—the varied powers which had been called forth and combined in *Medea*, the passionate tenderness of *Romeo*, the spirit and animation of *Tancredi*, the majesty of *Semi-ramide*, the mournful beauty of *Nina*, the dignity and sweetness of *Desdemona*. It is difficult to conceive a character more highly dramatic or more intensely impassioned than that of *Medea*; and in the successive scenes Pasta appeared as if torn by the conflict of contending passions, until at last her anguish rose to sublimity. The conflict of human affection and supernatural power, the tenderness of the wife, the agonies of the mother, and the rage of the woman scorned, were portrayed with a truth, a power, a grandeur of effect unequaled before or since by any actress or singer. Every attitude, each movement and look, became a study for a painter; for in the storm of furious passion the grace and beauty of her gestures were never marred by extravagance. Indeed, her impersonation of *Medea* was one of the finest illustrations of classic grandeur the stage has ever presented. In the scene where *Medea* murders her children, the acting of Pasta rose to the sublime. Her self-abandonment, her horror at the contemplation of the deed she is about to perpetrate, the irrepressible affection which comes welling up in her breast, were pictured with a magnificent power, yet with such natural pathos, that the agony of the distracted mother was never lost sight of in the fury of the priestess. Folding her arms across her bosom, she contracted her form, as, cowering, she shrunk from the approach of her children; then grief, love, despair, rage, madness, alternately wrung her heart, until at last her soul seemed appalled at the crime she contemplated. Starting forward, she pursued the innocent creatures, while the audience involuntarily closed their eyes and recoiled before the harrowing spectacle, which almost elicited a stifled cry of horror. But her fine genius invested the character with that classic dignity and beauty which, as in the Niobe group, veils the excess of human agony in the drapery of ideal art."

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Chorley, whose warmth of admiration is always tempered by accurate art-knowledge and the keenest insight, recurs in later years to Pas-ta's *Medea* in these eloquent words: "The air of quiet concentrated vengeance, seeming to fill every fiber of her frame—as though deadly poison were flowing through her veins—with which she stood alone wrapped in her scarlet mantle, as the bridal procession of *Jason* and *Creusa* swept by, is never to be forgotten. It must have been hard for those on the stage with her to pass that draped statue with folded arms—that countenance lit up with awful fire, but as still as death and inexorable as doom. Where again has ever been seen an exhibition of art grander than her *Medea*'s struggle with herself ere she consents to murder her children?—than her hiding the dagger with its fell purpose in her bosom under the strings of her distracted hair?—than of her steps to and fro as of one drunken with frenzy—torn with the agonies of natural pity, yet still resolved on her awful triumph? These memories are so many possessions to those who have seen them so long as reason shall last; and their reality is all the more assured to me because I have not yet fallen into the old man's habit of denying or doubting new sensations." The Paris public, it need not be said, even more susceptible to the charm of great acting than that of great singing, were in a frenzy of admiration over this wonderful new picture added to the portrait-gallery of art. In this performance Pasta had the advantage of absorbing the whole interest of the opera; in her other great Parisian successes she was obliged to share the admiration of the public with the tenor Garcia (Malibran's father), the barytone Bordogni, and Levasseur the basso, next to Lablache the greatest of his artistic kind.

A story is told of a distinguished critic that he persuaded himself that, with such power of portraying *Medea*'s emotions, Pasta must possess *Medea*'s features. Having been told that the features of the Colchian sorceress had been found in the ruins of Herculaneum cut on an antique gem, his fantastic enthusiasm so overcame his judgment that he took a journey to Italy expressly to inspect this visionary cameo, which, it need not be said, existed only in the imagination of a practical joker.

In 1824 Pasta made her first English appearance at the King's Theatre, at which was engaged an extraordinary assemblage of talent, Mesdames Colbran-Rossini, Catalani, Konzi di Begnis, "Vestris, Caradori, and Pasta. The great tragedienne made her first appearance in *Desdemona*, and, as all Europe was ringing with her fame, the curiosity to see and hear her was almost unparalleled. Long before the beginning of the opera the house was packed with an intensely expectant throng. For an English audience, idolizing the memory of Shakespeare, even Rossini's fine music, conducted by that great composer himself, could hardly under ordinary circumstances

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condone the insult offered to a species of literary religion by the wretched stuff pitchforked together and called a libretto. But the genius of Pasta made them forget even this, and London bowed at her feet with as devout a recognition as that offered by the more fickle Parisians. Her chaste and noble style, untortured by meretricious ornament, excited the deepest admiration. Count Stendhal, the biographer of Rossini, seems to have heard her for the first time at London, and writes of her in the following fashion:

“Moderate in the use of embellishments, *Mme.* Pasta never employs them but to heighten the force of the expression; and, what is more, her embellishments last only just so long as they are found to be useful.” In this respect her manner formed a very strong contrast with that of the generality of Italian singers at the time, who were more desirous of creating astonishment than of giving pleasure. It was not from any lack of technical knowledge and vocal skill that *Mme.* Pasta avoided extravagant ornamentation, for in many of the concerted pieces—in which she chiefly shone—her execution united clearness and rapidity. “*Mme.* Pasta is certainly less exuberant in point of ornament, and more expressive in point of majesty and simplicity,” observed one critic, “than any of the first-class singers who have visited England for a long period.... She is also a mistress of art,” continues the same writer, “and, being limited by nature, she makes no extravagant use of her powers, but employs them with the tact and judgment that can proceed only from an extraordinary mind. This constitutes her highest praise; for never did intellect and industry become such perfect substitutes for organic superiority. Notwithstanding her fine vein of imagination and the beauty of her execution, she cultivates high and deep passions, and is never so great as in the adaptation of art to the purest purposes of expression.”

The production of “*Tancredi*” and of Zingarelli’s “*Romeo e Giulietta*” followed as the vehicles of Pasta’s genius for the pleasure of the English public, and the season was closed with “*Semiramide*,” in which her regal majesty seemed to embody the ideal conception of the Assyrian queen. The scene in the first act where the specter of her murdered consort appears she made so thrilling and impressive that some of the older opera-goers compared it to the wonderful acting of Garrick in the “ghost-scene” of “*Hamlet*”; and those when she learns that *Arsace* is her son, and when she falls by his hand before the tomb of *Ninus*, were recounted in after-years as among the most startling memories of a lifetime. During her London season *Mme.* Pasta went much into society, and her exalted fame, united with her amiable manners, made her everywhere sought after. Immense sums were paid her at private concerts, and her subscription concerts at Almack’s were the rage of the town. Her operatic salary of L14,000 was nearly doubled by her income from other sources.

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### III.

The following year the management of the King's Theatre again endeavored to secure Pasta, who had returned to Paris. Before she would finally consent she stipulated that the new manager should pay her all the arrears of salary left unsettled by his predecessor, for, in spite of its artistic excellence, the late season had not proved a pecuniary success. After much negotiation the difficulty was arranged, and *Mme.* Pasta, binding herself to fill her Parisian engagements at the close of her leave of absence, received her *conge* for England. Her reappearance in "Otello" was greeted with fervid applause, and it was decided that her singing had gained in finish and beauty, while her acting was as powerful as before. It was during this season that Pasta first sang with Malibran. Ronzi di Begnis had lost her voice, Caradori had seceded in a pet, and the manager in despair tried the trembling and inexperienced daughter of the great Spanish tenor to fill up the gap. She was a failure, as Pasta had been at first in England, but time was to bring her a glorious recompense, as it had done to her elder rival. For the next two years Pasta sang alternately in London and Paris, and her popularity on the lyric stage exceeded that of any of the contemporary singers, for Catalini, whose genius turned in another direction, seemed to care only for the concert room. But some disagreement with Rossini caused her to leave Paris and spend a year in Italy. During this time her English reputation stood at its highest point. No one had ever appeared on the English stage who commanded such exalted artistic respect and admiration. Ebers tells us, speaking of her last engagement before going to Italy: "At no period of Pasta's career had she been more fashionable. She had literally worked her way up to eminence, and, having attained the height, she stood on it firm and secure; no performer has owed less to caprice or fashion; her reputation has been earned, and, what is more, deserved."

On her reappearance in London in 1827 Pasta was engaged for twenty-three nights at a salary of 3,000 guineas, with a free benefit, which yielded her 1,500 guineas more. Her opening performance was that of *Desdemona*, in which *Mme.* Malibran also appeared during the same season, thus affording the critics an opportunity for comparison. It was admitted that the younger diva had the advantage in vocalization and execution, but that Pasta's conception was incontestably superior, and her reading of the part characterized by far greater nobility and grandeur. The novelty of the season was Signor Coccia's opera of "Maria Stuarda," in which Pasta created the part of the beautiful Scottish queen. Her interpretation possessed an "impassioned dignity, with an eloquence of voice, of look, and of action which defies description and challenges the severest criticism." It was a piece of acting which great natural genius, extensive powers of observation, peculiar sensibility of feeling, and those acquirements of art which are the results of sedulous study, combined to make perfect. It is said that *Mme.* Pasta felt this part so intensely that, when summoned before the audience at the close, tears could be seen rolling down her cheeks, and her form to tremble with the scarcely-subsiding swell of agitation.



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During a short Dublin engagement the same year the following incident occurred, showing how passionate were her sensibilities in real life as well as on the stage: One day, while walking with some friends, a ragged child about three years of age approached and asked charity for her blind mother in such artless and touching accents that the prima donna burst into tears and put into the child's hands all the money she had. Her friends began extolling her charity and the goodness of her heart. "I will not accept your compliments," said she, wiping the tears from her eyes. "This child demanded charity in a sublime manner. I have seen, at one glance, all the miseries of the mother, the wretchedness of their home, the want of clothing, the cold which they suffer. I should indeed be a great actress if at any time I could find a gesture expressing profound misery with such truth."

Pasta's next remarkable impersonation was that of *Armando* in "Il Crociato in Egitto," written by Meyerbeer for Signor Velluti, the last of the race of male sopranos. She had already performed it in Paris, and been overwhelmed with abuse by Velluti's partisans, who were enraged to see their favorite's strong part taken from him by one so much superior in genius, however inferior in mere executive vocalism. Velluti had disfigured his performance by introducing a perfect cascade of roulades and *fiorituri*, but Pasta's delivery of the music, while inspired by her great tragic sensibility, was marked by such breadth and fidelity that many thought they heard the music for the first time. A ludicrous story is told of the first performance in London. Pasta had flown to her dressing-room at the end of one of the scenes to change her costume, but the audience demanding a repetition of the trio with *Mme. Caradori* and *Mile. Brambilla*, Pasta was obliged to appear, amid shouts of laughter, half Crusader, half Mameluke.

On the occasion of her benefit the same season, the opera being "Otello," *Mme. Pasta* essayed the daring experiment of singing and playing the *role* of the Moor, *Mile. Sontag* singing *Desdemona*. Though the transposition of the music from a tenor to a mezzo-soprano voice injured the effect of the concerted pieces, the passionate acting redeemed the innovation. In the last act, where she, as *Otello*, seized *Desdemona* and dragged her by the hair to the bed that she might stab her, the effect was one of such tragic horror that many left the theatre. She thus united the most cultivated vocal excellence with dramatic genius of unequaled power. "*Mme. Pasta*," said a clever writer, "is in fact the founder of a new school, and after her the possession of vocal talent alone is insufficient to secure high favor, or to excite the same degree of interest for any length of time. Even in Italy, where the mixture of dramatic with musical science was long neglected, and not appreciated for want of persons equally gifted



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with both attainments, *Mme.* Pasta has exhibited to her countrymen the beauty of a school too long neglected, in such a manner that they will no longer admit the notion of lyric tragedy being properly spoken without dramatic as well as vocal qualifications in its representative." The presence of Malibran and Sontag during this season inspired Pasta to almost superhuman efforts to maintain her threatened supremacy. In her efforts to surpass these brilliant young rivals in all respects, she laid herself open to criticism by departing somewhat from the severe and classic school of delivery which had always distinguished her, and overloading her singing with ornament.

Honors were showered on Pasta in different parts of Europe. She was made first court singer in 1829 by the Emperor of Austria, and presented by him with a superb diadem of rubies and diamonds. At Bologna, where she performed in twelve of the Rossinian operas under the *baton* of the composer himself, a medal was struck in her honor by the Societa del Casino, and all the different cities of her native land vied in doing honor to the greatest of lyric tragediennes. At Milan in 1830 she sang with Rubini, Galli, *Mme.* Pisaroni, Lablache, and David. Donizetti at this time wrote the opera of "Anna Bolena," with the special view of suiting the dominant qualities of Pasta, Rubini, and Galli. The following season Pasta sang at Milan, at a salary of 40,000 francs for twenty representations, and was obliged to divide the admiration of the public with Malibran, who was rapidly rising to the brilliant rank which she afterward held against all comers. Vincenzo Bellini now wrote for Pasta his charming opera of "La Sonnambula," and it was produced with Rubini, Mariano, and *Mme.* Tacconi in the cast. Pasta and Rubini surpassed themselves in the splendor of their performance. "Emulating each other in wishing to display the merits of the opera, they were both equally successful," said a critic of the day, "and those who participated in the delight of hearing them will never forget the magic effect of their execution. But exquisite as were, undoubtedly, *Mme.* Pasta's vocal exertions, her histrionic powers, if possible, surpassed them. It would be difficult for those who have seen her represent, in Donizetti's excellent opera, the unfortunate *Amina*, with a grandeur and a dignity above all praise, to conceive that she could so change (if the expression may be allowed) her nature as to enact the part of a simple country girl. But she has proved her powers to be unrivaled; she personates a simple rustic as easily as she identifies herself with *Medea*, *Semiramide*, *Tancredi*, and *Anna Bolena*."

## IV.

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After an absence of three years *Mme. Pasta* returned to England, and her opening performance of *Medea* was aided by the talents of Rubini, Lablache, and Fanny Ayton. Rubini performed the character of *Egeus*, and the duets between the king of tenors and Pasta were so remarkable in a musical sense as to rival the dramatic impression made by her great acting. She was no exception to the rule that very great tragic actors are rarely devoid of a strong comic individuality. In Erreco's "*Prova d'un Opera Seria*," an opera caricaturing the rehearsals of a serious opera at the house of the prima donna and at the theatre, her performance was so arch, whimsical, playful, and capricious, that its drollery kept the audience in a roar of laughter, while Lablache, as "the composer," seconded her humor by that talent for comedy which Ronconi alone has ever approached. Lablache also appeared with Pasta in "*Anna Bolena*," and the great basso, mighty in bulk, mighty in voice, and mighty in genius, fairly startled the public by his extraordinary resemblance to Holbein's portrait of Henry VIII.

After singing a farewell engagement in Paris, *Mme. Pasta* went to Milan to enjoy the last great triumph of her life in 1832 at La Scala.

She was supported by an admirable company, among whom were Donizetti the tenor and Giulia Grisi, then youthful and inexperienced, but giving promise of what she became in her splendid prime of beauty and genius. Bellini had written for these artists the opera of "*Norma*," and the first performance was directed by the composer himself. Pasta's singing and acting alone made the work successful, for at the outset it was not warmly liked by the public. Several years afterward in London she also saved the work from becoming a *fiasco*, the singular fact being that "*Norma*," now one of the great standard works of the lyric stage, took a number of years to establish itself firmly in critical and popular estimation.

We have now reached a period of Pasta's life where its chronicle becomes painful. It is never pleasant to watch the details of the decadence which comes to almost all art-careers. Her warmest admirers could not deny that Pasta was losing her voice. Her consummate art shone undimmed, but her vocal powers, especially in respect of intonation, displayed the signs of wear. For several years, indeed, she sang in Paris, Italy, and London with great *éclat*, but the indescribable luster of her singing had lost its bloom and freshness. She continued to receive Continental honors, and in 1840, after a splendid season in St. Petersburg, she was dismissed by the Czar with magnificent presents. In Berlin, about this time, she was received with the deepest interest and commiseration, for she lost nearly all her entire fortune by the failure of Engmuller, a banker of Vienna. She filled a long engagement in Berlin, which was generously patronized by the public, not merely out of admiration of the talents of the artist, but with the wish of repairing in some small measure her great losses. After 1841 Pasta retired from the stage, spending her winters at Milan, her summers at Lake Como, and devoting herself to training pupils in the higher walks of the lyric art.

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We can not better close this sketch than by giving an account of one of the very last public appearances of her life, when she allowed herself to be seduced into giving a concert in London for the benefit of the Italian cause. *Mme.* Pasta had long since dismissed all the belongings of the stage, and her voice, which at its best had required ceaseless watching and study, had been given up by her. Even her person had lost all that stately dignity and queenliness which had made her stage appearance so remarkable. It was altogether a painful and disastrous occasion. There were artists present who then for the first time were to get their impression of a great singer, prepared of course to believe that that reputation had been exaggerated. Among these was Rachel, who sat enjoying the humiliation of decayed grandeur with a cynical and bitter sneer on her face, drawing the attention of the theatre by her exhibition of satirical malevolence.

Malibran's great sister, *Mme.* Pauline Viardot, was also present, watching with the quick, sympathetic response of a noble heart every turn of the singer's voice and action. Hoarse, broken, and destroyed as was the voice, her grand style spoke to the sensibilities of the great artist. The opera was "Anna Bolena," and from time to time the old spirit and fire burned in her tones and gestures. In the final mad scene Pasta rallied into something like her former grandeur of acting; and in the last song with its roulades and its scales of shakes ascending by a semitone, this consummate vocalist and tragedienne, able to combine form with meaning—dramatic grasp and insight with such musical display as enter into the lyric art—was indicated at least to the apprehension of the younger artist. "You are right!" was *Mme.* Viardot's quick and heartfelt response to a friend by her side, while her eyes streamed with tears—"you are right. It is like the 'Cenacolo' of Leonardo da Vinci at Milan, a wreck of a picture, but the picture is the greatest picture in the world."

## HENRIETTA SONTAG.

**The Greatest German Singer of the Century.—Her Characteristics as an Artist.—Her Childhood and Early Training.—Her Early Appearances in Weimar, Berlin, and Leipsic,—She becomes the Idol of the Public.—Her Charms as a Woman and Romantic Incidents of her Youth.—Becomes affianced to Count Rossi.—Prejudice against her in Paris, and her Victory over the Public Hostility.—She becomes the Pet of Aristocratic Salons.—Rivalry with Malibran.—Her *Debut* in London, where she is welcomed with Great Enthusiasm.—Returns to Paris.—Anecdotes of her Career in the French Capital.—She becomes reconciled with Malibran in London.—Her Secret Marriage with Count Rossi.—She retires from the Stage as the Wife of an Ambassador.—Return to her Profession after Eighteen Years of Absence.—The Wonderful Success of her Youth renewed.—Her American Tour,—Attacked with Cholera in Mexico and dies.**

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### I.

The career of Henrietta Sontag, born at Coblenz on the Rhine in 1805, the child of actors, was so picturesque in its chances and changes that had she not been a beautiful and fascinating woman and the greatest German singer of the century, the vicissitudes of her life would have furnished rich material for a romance. Nature gave her a pure soprano voice of rare and delicate quality united with incomparable sweetness. Essentially a singer and not a declamatory artist, the sentiment of grace was carried to such a height in her art, that it became equivalent to the more robust passion and force which distinguished some of her great contemporaries. As years perfected her excellence into its mellow prime, emotion and warmth animated her art work. But at the outset Mile. Sontag did little more than look lovely and pour forth such a flood of silvery and delicious notes, that the Italians called her the "nightingale of the North." The fanatical enthusiasm of the German youth ran into wild excesses, and we hear of a party of university students drinking her health at a joyous supper in champagne out of one of her satin shoes stolen for the purpose.

When Mile. Sontag commenced her brilliant career the taste of operatic amateurs was excessively fastidious. Nearly all outside of Germany shared Frederick the Great's prejudice against German singers. Yet when she appeared in Paris, in spite of hostile anticipation, in spite of her reserve, timidity, and coldness on the histrionic side of her art, she soon made good her place by the side of such remarkable artists as *Mme. Pasta* and *Maria Malibran*. She never transformed herself into an impassioned tragedienne, but through the spell of great personal attraction, of an exquisite voice, and of exceptional sensibility, taste, and propriety in her art methods, she advanced herself to a high place in public favor.

Her parents designed Henrietta for their own profession, and in her eighth year her voice had acquired such steadiness that she sang minor parts at the theatre. A distinguished traveler relates having heard her sing the grand aria of the *Queen of the Night* in the "Zauberflöte" at this age, "her arms hanging beside her and her eye following the flight of a butterfly, while her voice, pure, penetrating, and of angelic tone, flowed as unconsciously as a limpid rill from the mountain-side." The year after this Henrietta lost her father, and she went to Prague with her mother, where she played children's parts under Weber, then *chef d'orchestre*. When she had attained the proper age she was admitted to the Prague Conservatory, and spent four years studying vocalization, the piano, and the elements of harmony. An accident gave the young singer the chance for a *debut* in the sudden illness of the prima donna, who was cast to sing the part of the *Princesse de Navarre* in Boieldieu's "Jean de

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Paris." The little vocalist of fifteen had to wear heels four inches high, but she sang none the less well, and the audience seemed to feel that they had heard a prodigy. She also took the part of the heroine in Paer's opera of "Sargino," and her brilliant success decided her career, as she was invited to take a position in the Viennese Opera. Here she met the brilliant *Mme. Fodor*, then singing an engagement in the Austrian capital. So great was this distinguished singer's admiration of the young girl's talents that she said, "Had I her voice I should hold the whole world at my feet."

*Mlle. Sontag* had the advantage at this period of singing with great artists who took much interest in her career and gave her valuable hints and help. Singing alternately in German and English opera, and always an ardent student of music, she learned to unite all the brilliancy of the Italian style and method to the solidity of the German school. The beautiful young cantatrice was beset with ardent admirers, not the least important being the English Ambassador Earl Clan William. He followed her to theatre, to convents, church, and seemed like her shadow. *Sontag* in German means Sunday; so the Viennese wits, then as now as wicked and satirical as those of Paris, nicknamed the nobleman Earl Montag, as Monday always follows Sunday. It was during this Vienna engagement that Weber wrote the opera of "Euryanthe," and designed the principal part for *Sontag*. But the public failed to fancy it, and called it "L'Ennuyante." The serious part of her art life commenced at Leipsic in 1824, where she interpreted the "Freischutz" and "Euryanthe," then in the flush of newness, and made a reputation that passed the bounds of Germany, though foreign critics discredited the reports of her excellence till they heard her.

"Henrietta's voice was a pure soprano, reaching perhaps from A or B to D in alt, and, though uniform in its quality, it was a little reedy in the lower notes, but its flexibility was marvelous: in the high octave, from F to C in alt, her notes rang out like the tones of a silver bell. The clearness of her notes, the precision of her intonation, the fertility of her invention, and the facility of her execution, were displayed in brilliant flights and lavish fioriture; her rare flexibility being a natural gift, cultivated by taste and incessant study. It was to the example of *Mme. Fodor* that *Mlle. Sontag* was indebted for the blooming of those dormant qualities which had till then remained undeveloped. The ease with which she sang was perfectly captivating; and the neatness and elegance of her enunciation combined with the sweetness and brilliancy of her voice and her perfect intonation to render her execution faultless, and its effect ravishing. She appeared to sing with the volubility of a bird, and to experience the pleasure she imparted." To use the language of a critic of that day: "All passages are alike to her, but she has appropriated some that were

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hitherto believed to belong to instruments—to the piano-forte and the violin, for instance. Arpeggios and chromatic scales, passages ascending and descending, she executed in the same manner that the ablest performers on these instruments execute them. There were the firmness and the neatness that appertain to the piano-forte, while she would go through a scale *staccato* with the precision of the bow. Her great art, however, lay in rendering whatever she did pleasing. The ear was never disturbed by a harsh note. The velocity of her passages was sometimes uncontrollable, for it has been observed that in a division, say, of four groups of quadruplets, she would execute the first in exact time, the second and third would increase in rapidity so much that in the fourth she was compelled to decrease the speed perceptibly, in order to give the band the means of recovering the time she had gained.”

Mile. Sontag was of middle height, beautifully formed, and had a face beaming with sensibility, delicacy, and modesty. Beautiful light-brown hair, large blue eyes, finely molded mouth, and perfect teeth completed an *ensemble* little short of bewitching. Her elegant figure and the delicacy of her features were matched by hands and feet of such exquisite proportions that sculptors besought the privilege of modeling them, and poets raved about them in their verses. Artlessness and *naivete* were joined with such fine breeding of manner that it seemed as if the blue blood of centuries must have coursed in her veins instead of the blood of obscure actors, whose only honor was to have given to the world one of the paragons of song. Sontag never aspired to the higher walks of lyric tragedy, as she knew her own limitation, but in light and elegant comedy, the *Mosinas* and *Susannas*, she has never been excelled, whether as actress or singer. It was said of her that she could render with equal skill the works of Rossini, Mozart, Weber, and Spohr, uniting the originality of her own people with the artistic method and facility of the French and Italian schools. From Leipsic Mile. Sontag went to Berlin, where the demonstrations of delight which greeted her singing rose to fever-heat as the performances continued. Expressions of rapture greeted her on the streets; even the rigid etiquette of the Prussian court gave way to receive the low-born singer as a royal guest, an honor which all the aristocratic houses were prompt to emulate. It was at Berlin that Sontag made the acquaintance of Count Rossi, a Piedmontese nobleman attached to the Sardinian Legation. An ardent attachment sprang up between them, and they became affianced.



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Not content with her supremacy at home, she sighed for other worlds to conquer, and after two years at Berlin she obtained leave of absence with great difficulty, and went to Paris. French connoisseurs laughed at the idea of this German barbarian—for some of the critics were rude enough to use this harsh term—becoming the rival of Pasta, Cinti, and Fodor, and the idea of her singing Rossini's music seemed purely preposterous. On the 15th of June, 1826, she made her bow to the French public. The victory was partly won by the shy, blushing beauty of the young German, who seemed the very incarnation of maidenly modesty and innocence, and when she had finished her first song thunders of applause shook the house. Her execution of Rode's variations surpassed even that of Catalani, and "La Petite Allemande" became an instant favorite. Twenty-three succeeding concerts made Henrietta Sontag an idol of the Paris public, which she continued to be during her art career. She also appeared with brilliant distinction in opera, the principal ones being "Il Barbiere," "La Donna del Lago," and "L'Italiani in Alghieri." Her benefit-night was marked by a demonstration on the part of her admirers, and she was crowned on the stage.

### II.

The beautiful singer became a great pet of the Parisian aristocracy, and was welcomed in the highest circles, not simply as an artist, but as a woman. She was honored with a state dinner at the Prussian Ambassador's, and the most distinguished people were eager to be presented to her. At the house of Talleyrand, having been introduced to the Duchess von Lothringen, that haughty dame said, "I would not desire that my daughter were other than you." It was almost unheard of that a German cantatrice without social antecedents should be sedulously courted by the most brilliant women of rank and fashion, and her presence sought as an ornament at the most exclusive *salons*. It was at this time that Catalani met her and declared, "*Elle est la premiere de son genre, mais son genre n'est pas le premier*," and a celebrated flute-player on her being introduced to him by a musical professor was accosted with the words, "*Ecco il tuo rivale*."

In Paris, as was the case afterward in London, the most romantic stories were in circulation about the adoration lavished on her by princes and bankers, artists and musicians. The most exalted personages were supposed to be sighing for her love, and it was reported that no singer had ever had so many offers of marriage from people of high rank and consideration. Indeed, it was well known that about the same time Charles de Beriot, the great violinist, and a nobleman of almost princely birth, laid their hearts and hands at her feet. Mile. Sontag, it need not be said, was true to her promise to Count Rossi, and refused all the flattering overtures made her by her admirers. A singular link connects the careers of Sontag and



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Malibran personally as well as musically. It was during the early melancholy and suffering of De Beriot at Sontag's rejection of his love that he first met Malibran. His profound dejection aroused her sympathy, and she exerted herself to soothe him and rouse him from his state of languor and lassitude. The result can easily be fancied. De Beriot's heart recovered from the shock, and was kindled into a fresh flame by the consolations of the beautiful and gifted Spanish singer, whence ensued a connection which was consummated in marriage as soon as Malibran was able to break the unfortunate tie into which she had been inveigled in America.

The Parisian managers offered the most extravagant terms to keep the new favorite of the public, but her heart and duty alike prompted her to return to Berlin. On the route, at the different towns where she sang, she was received with brilliant demonstrations of admiration and respect, and it was said at the time that her return journey on this occasion was such a triumphal march as has rarely been vouchsafed to an artist, touching in the spontaneity of its enthusiasm as it was brilliant and impressive in its forms. Berlin welcomed her with great warmth, and, though Cata-lani herself was among the singers at the theatre, Sontag fully shared her glory in the German estimation. The King made her first singer at his chapel, at a yearly salary of twenty-four thousand francs, and rich gifts were showered on her by her hosts of wealthy and ardent admirers.

She sang again in Paris in 1828, appearing in "La Cenerentola" as a novelty, though the music had to be transposed for her. Malibran was singing the same season, and a bitter rivalry sprang up between the blonde and serene German beauty and the brilliant Spanish brunette. It was whispered afterward, by those who knew Malibran well, that she never forgave Henrietta Sontag for having been the first to be beloved by De Beriot. The voices of the two singers differed as much as their persons. The one was distinguished for exquisite sweetness and quality of tone, and perfection of execution, for a polished and graceful correctness which never did anything alien to good taste and made finish of form compensate for lack of fire. The other's splendid voice was marred by irregularity and unevenness, but possessed a passionate warmth in its notes which stirred the hearts of the hearers. Full of extraordinary expedients, an audience was always dazzled by some unexpected beauties of Malibran's performance, and her original and daring conceptions gave her work a unique character which set her apart from her contemporaries. The Parisian public took pleasure in fomenting the dispute between the rival queens of song, and each one was spurred to the utmost by the hot discord which raged between them.

On April 16th of the same year Mile. Sontag made her first appearance before the London public in the character of *Mosina* in Rossini's "Il Barbiere," a part peculiarly suited to the grace of her style and the *timbre* of her voice. One of her biographers thus sketches the expectations and impressions of the London public:

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“Since Mrs. Billington, never had such high promise been made, or so much expectation excited: her talents had been exaggerated by report, and her beauty and charms extolled as matchless; she was declared to possess all the qualities of every singer in perfection, and as an actress to be the very personification of grace and power. Stories of the romantic attachments of foreign princes and English lords were afloat in all directions; she was going to be married to a personage of the loftiest rank—to a German prince—to an ambassador; she was pursued by the ardent love of men of fashion. Among other stories in circulation was one of a duel between two imaginary rival candidates for a ticket of admission to her performance; but the most affecting and trustworthy story was that of an early attachment between the beautiful Henrietta and a young student of good family, which was broken off in consequence of his passion for gambling.

“Mile. Sontag, before she appeared at the opera, sang at the houses of Prince Esterhazy and the Duke of Devonshire. An immense crowd assembled in front of the theatre on the evening of her *debut* at the opera. The crush was dreadful; and when at length the half-stifled crowd managed to find seats, ‘shoes were held up in all directions to be owned.’ The audience waited in breathless suspense for the rising of the curtain; and when the fair cantatrice appeared, the excited throng could scarcely realize that the simple English-looking girl before them was the celebrated Sontag. On recovering from their astonishment, they applauded her warmly, and her lightness, brilliancy, volubility, and graceful manner made her at once popular. Her style was more florid than that of any other singer in Europe, not even excepting Catalani, whom she excelled in fluency, though not in volume; and it was decided that she resembled Fodor more than any other singer—which was natural, as she had in early life imitated that cantatrice. Her taste was so cultivated that the redundancy of ornament, especially the obligato passages which the part of *Rosina* presents, never, in her hands, appeared overcharged; and she sang the cavatina ‘Una voce poco fa’ in a style as new as it was exquisitely tasteful. ‘Two passages, introduced by her in this air, executed in a *staccato* manner, could not have been surpassed in perfection by the spirited bow of the finest violin-player.’ In the lesson-scene she gave Rode’s variations, and her execution of the second variation in arpeggios was pronounced infinitely superior to Catalani’s.

“At first the *cognoscenti* were haunted by a fear that Sontag would permit herself to degenerate, like Catalani, into a mere imitator of instrumental performers, and endeavor to astonish instead of pleasing the public by executing such things as Rode’s variations. But it was soon observed that, while indulging in almost unlimited, luxuriance of embellishment in singing Rossini’s music, she showed herself

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a good musician, and never fell into the fault, common with florid singers, of introducing ornaments at variance with the spirit of the air or the harmony of the accomplishments. In singing the music of Mozart or Weber, she paid the utmost deference to the text, restraining the exuberance of her fancy, and confining herself within the limits set by the composer. Her success was tested by a most substantial proof of her popularity—her benefit produced the enormous sum of three thousand pounds.”

Laurent, the manager of the Theatre Italien, succeeded in making a contract by which Sontag was to sing in Paris for fifty thousand francs a year, with a *conge* of three months. It was at this period that she commenced seriously to study tragic characters, and, though she at first failed in making a strong impression on her audiences, her assiduous attention to sentiment and passion wrought such fruits as to prove how far study and good taste may create the effect of something like inspiration, even on the part of an artist so cool and placid as the great German cantatrice. Her efforts were stimulated by the rivalry of Mali-bran, and this contest was the absorbing theme of discussion in the Paris salons and journals. It reached such a height that the two singers refused to meet each other socially, and on the stage when they sang together their jealousy and dislike showed itself in the most undisguised fashion. Among the incidents related of this interesting operatic episode, the following are specially worthy of mention: An Italian connoisseur, who had never heard Sontag, and who firmly believed that no German could sing, was induced to go one night by a friend to a performance in which she appeared. After listening five minutes he started up hastily in act to go. “Stay,” urged his friend; “you will be convinced presently.” “I know it,” replied the Italian, “and therefore I go.”

One evening, at the termination of the performance, the two rivals were called out, and a number of wreaths and bouquets were flung on the stage. Malibran stooped and picked up one of the coronals, supposing it designed for her, when a stern voice cried out: “Rendez-la; ce n’est pas pour vous!” “I would not deprive *Mlle.* Sontag of a single wreath,” said the haughty Spaniard in a loud voice which could be heard everywhere through the listening house. “I would sooner bestow one on her!”

This quarrel was afterward made up between them when they were engaged together in London the following year, 1828. This reconciliation was brought about by M. Fetis, who had accompanied them from Paris. He proposed to them that they should sing for one of the pieces at a concert in which they were both engaged, the *duo* of *Semiramide* and *Arsace*, in Rossini’s opera. For the first time in London their voices were heard together. Each outdid herself in the desire to excel, and the exquisite fusion of the two voices, so different in tone and

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character, was so fine that the hearts of the rivals melted toward each other, and they professed mutual friendship. The London public got the benefit of this amity, for the manager of the King's Theatre was able to produce operas in which they sang together, among them being "Semiramide," "Don Giovanni," "Nozze di Figaro," and "Romeo e Giulietta"—Malibran playing the hero in the latter opera. The following year Sontag also sang with Malibran in London, her greatest success being in *Carolina*, the principal character of Cimarosa's "Il Matrimonio Segreto."

Mile. Sontag was now for the first time assailed by the voice of calumny. Her union with Count Rossi, consummated more than a year before, had been kept secret on account of the dislike of his family to the match. Born in Corsica, Count Rossi was a near relative of the family of Napoleon Bonaparte, and his sister was the Princess de Salm. His relations were opposed to his marriage with one whom they considered a plebeian, though she had been ennobled by the Prussian King, under the name of Von Lauenstein, with a full patent and all the formalities observed on such occasions. Mile. Sontag determined to make a farewell tour through Europe, and retire from the stage. She paid her adieux to her public in the different great cities of Europe—London, Paris, Berlin, St. Petersburg, Moscow, Warsaw, Leipsic, *etc.*—with incredible success, and the sums she realized are said to have been enormous. On returning from Russia she gave a concert at Hamburg; and it was here that she took the occasion at a great banquet given her by a wealthy merchant to make the public and formal announcement of her marriage to Count Rossi. It was remarked that during this farewell concert tour her powers, far from having declined, seemed to have gained in compass, brilliancy, and expression.

Countess Rossi first lived at the Hague, and then for a short time at Frankfort. Here she took precedence of all the ladies of the diplomatic corps, her husband being Minister Plenipotentiary to the Germanic Diet. In Berlin she was a familiar guest of the royal family, and sang duets and trios with the princes and princesses. She devoted her leisure hours to the study of composition, and at the houses of Prince Esterhazy and Prince Metternich, in 1841, at Vienna, she executed a cantata of her own for soprano and chorus with most brilliant success. The Empress herself invited the Countess to repeat it at her own palace with all the imperial family for listeners. Thus courted and flattered, possessed of ample wealth and rank, idolized by her friends and respected by the great world, Henrietta Sontag passed nearly twenty swift, happy years at the different European capitals to which her husband was successively accredited.

### III.

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Countess Rossi was never entirely forgotten in her brilliant retirement. Her story, gossips said, was intended to be shadowed forth “with a difference” in “L’Ambassadrice” of Scribe and Auber, written for *Mme. Cinti Damoreau*, whose voice resembled that of Sontag. Travelers, who got glimpses of the august life wherein she lived, brought home tales of her popularity, of her beauty not faded but only mellowed by time, and of her lovely voice, which she had watched and cultivated in her titled leisure. It can be fancied, then, what a thrill of interest and surprise ran through the London public when it was announced in 1848 that the Countess Rossi, owing to family circumstances, was about to resume her profession. A small, luxuriantly bound book in green and gold, devoted to her former and more recent history, was put on sale in London, and circulated like wildfire. The situation in London was peculiar. Jenny Lind had created a furor in that city almost unparalleled in its musical history, and to announce that the “Swedish nightingale” was not the greatest singer that ever lived or ever could live, before a company of her admirers, was sufficient to invite personal assault. *Mlle. Lind* had just departed for America. It was an adventure little short of desperate for a singer to emerge from a retirement of a score of years and measure her musical and dramatic accomplishments against those of a predecessor whose tantalizing disappearance from the stage had rendered her on so many grounds more than ever the object of fanatical worship.

The political storm of 1848 had swept away the fortune of Countess Rossi, and when she announced her intention of returning to the stage, the director of Her Majesty’s Theatre was prompt to make her an offer of seventeen thousand pounds for the season. She had not been idle or careless during the time when the *Grisis*, the *Persianis*, and the *Linds* were delighting the world with the magic of their art. She had assiduously kept up the culture of her delicious voice, and stepped again before the foot-lights with all the ease, steadiness, and *aplomb* of one who had never suffered an interregnum in her lyric reign. She came back to the stage under new and trying musical conditions, to an orchestra far stronger than that to which her youth had been accustomed, to a new world of operas. The intrepidity and industry with which she met these difficulties are deserving of the greatest respect. Not merely did she go through the entire range of her old parts, *Susanna*, *Mosina*, *Desdemona*, *Donna Anna*, etc., but she presented herself in a number of new works which did not exist at her farewell to the stage—Bellini’s “*Sonnambula*,” Donizetti’s “*Linda*,” “*La Figlia del Reggimento*,” “*Don Pasquale*,” “*Le Tre Nozze*” of Alary, and Ilalevy’s “*La Tempesta*”; indeed, in the latter two creating the principal *roles*. Her former companions had disappeared. Malibran had been dead for thirteen years, *Mme. Pisaroni* had also

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departed from the earthly scene, and a galaxy of new stars were glittering in the musical horizon. Giulia Grisi, Clara Novello, Pauline Viardot, Fanny Per-siani, Jenny Lind, Maretta Alboni, Nantier Didier, Sophie Cruvelli, Catherine Hayes, Louisa Pyne, Duprez, Mario, Ronconi, and others—all these had arisen since the day she had left the art world as Countess Rossi. Only the joyous and warmhearted Lablache was left of her old comrades to welcome her back to the scene of her old triumphs.

Her reappearance as *Linda*, on July 7, 1849, was the occasion of a cordial and sympathetic reception on the part of a very brilliant and distinguished audience. The first notes of the “polacca” were sufficient to show that the great artist was in her true place again, and that the mature woman had lost but little of the artistic fascinations of the gifted girl. Of course, time had robbed her of one or two upper notes, but the skill, grace, and precision with which she utilized every atom of her power, the incomparable steadiness and finish with which she wrought out the composer’s intentions, the marvelous flexibility of her execution, she retained in all their pristine excellence. The loss of youthful freshness was atoned for by the deeper passion and feeling which in an indefinable way permeated all her efforts, and gave them a dramatic glow lacking in earlier days. She was rapturously greeted as a dear friend come back in the later sunny days. In “La Figlia del Reggimento,” which Jenny Lind had brought to England and made her own peculiar property, *Mme. Sontag* was adjudged to be by far the greater, both vocally and dramatically. As a singer of Mozart’s music she was incomparably superior to all. Her taste, steadiness, suavity, and solid knowledge suited a style very difficult for a southern singer to acquire. Chorley repeated the musical opinion of his time in saying: “The easy, equable flow demanded by Mozart’s compositions, so melodious, so wondrously sustained, so sentimental (dare I say so rarely impassioned?); that assertion of individuality which distinguishes a singer from a machine when dealing with singers’ music; that charm which belongs to a keen appreciation of elegance, but which can only be perfected when Nature has been genial, have never been so perfectly combined (in my experience) as in her.” If Sontag did not possess the highest genius of the lyric artist, she had un-equaled grace and sense of artistic propriety, and with that grace an untiring desire and energy in giving her very best to the public on all occasions when she appeared. Her constancy and loyalty to her audience were moral qualities which wonderfully enhanced her value and charm as a singer.



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During this season *Mme. Sontag* appeared in her favorite character of *Rosina*, with Lablache and Gardoni; she also performed *Amina* and *Desdemona*. Had it not been that the attention of the public was absorbed by “the Swedish Nightingale” and the “glorious Alboni,” *Mme. Sontag* would have renewed the triumphs of 1828. The next season she sang again at Her Majesty’s Theatre as *Norina*, *Elvira* (“*I Puritani*”), *Zerlina*, and *Maria* (in “*La Figlia del Reggimento*”). The chief novelty was “*La Tempesta*,” written by Scribe, and composed by Halevy expressly for Her Majesty’s Theatre, the drama having been translated into Italian from the French original. It was got up with extraordinary splendor, and had a considerable run. *Mme. Sontag* sang charmingly in the character of *Miranda*; but the greatest effect was created by Lablache’s magnificent impersonation of *Caliban*. No small share of the success of the piece was due to the famous danseuse Carlotta Grisi, who seemed to take the most appropriate part ever designed for ballerina when she undertook to represent *Ariel*.

At the close of the season of 1850 *Mme. Sontag* went to Paris with Mr. Lumley, who took the Theatre Italien, and she was warmly welcomed by her French audiences. “Even amid the loud applause with which the crowd greeted her appearance on the stage,” says a French writer, “it was easy to distinguish the respect which was entertained for the virtuous lady, the devoted wife and mother.”

Before her acceptance of the offer to go to America, in 1852, she appeared in successive engagements at London, Vienna, and Berlin, where her reception was of the most satisfying nature both to the artist and the woman. On her arrival in New York, on September 19th, she commenced a series of concerts with Salvi and Signo-ra Blangini. At New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and the larger cities of the South, she quickly established herself as one of the greatest favorites who had ever sung in this country, in spite of the fact that people had hardly recovered from the Lind mania which had swept the country like wildfire, a fact apt to provoke petulant comparisons. Her pecuniary returns from her American tour were very great, and she was enabled to buy a chateau and domain in Germany, a home which she was unfortunately destined never to enjoy.

In New Orleans, in 1854, she entered into an engagement with M. Masson, director of opera in the city of Mexico, to sing for a fixed period of two months, with the privilege of three months longer. This was the closing appearance in opera, as she contemplated, for the task of reinstating her family fortunes was almost done. Fate fulfilled her expectations with a malign sarcasm; for while her agent, M. Ullman, was absent in Europe gathering a company, *Mme. Sontag* was seized with cholera and died in a few hours, on June 17, 1854. Such was the lamentable end of



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one of the noblest women that ever adorned the lyric stage. Her funeral was a magnificent one, in presence of a great concourse of people, including the diplomatic corps. The service was celebrated by the orchestras of the two Italian theatres; the nuns of St. Francis sang the cantata; the prayer to the Virgin was intoned by the German Philharmonic Society, who also sang Lindpainter's chorus, "Ne m'oubliez pa "; and the leading Mexican poet, M. Pantaleon Tovar, declaimed a beautiful tribute in sonorous Spanish verse. The body was taken to Germany and buried in the abbey of Makenstern, in Lausitz.

THE END.