

WIT OF COMPOSERS.

ANECDOTES WHICH SHOW THE PECULIARITIES OF THE MASTERS.

They Were Not Generally Amiable Critics of Each Other—Comments That Were Usually Caustic and Frequently Brutal. Rossini's Witticisms.

Never surely was composer more witty than the master who gave us an immortal setting of "William Tell." Rossini's whimsicality extended even to his birthday. Having been born in leap year, on Feb. 29, he had, of course, a birthday only once in four years, and when he was 72 he facetiously invited his friends to celebrate his eighteenth birthday. Some of the best specimens of his wit were shown in connection with brother composers. "You know," he said one day, speaking to a friend—"you know what pretty dance tunes Auber has always written"—Auber being as likely to write dance tunes as Rossini was to write a sermon. The maestro seldom went to the opera or to any place of amusement, but he could not resist the temptation of hearing one of Wagner's works. It was "Tannhauser." Afterward, when asked to give his opinion of the opera, he said: "It is too important and too elaborate a work to be judged after a single hearing, but so far as I am concerned, I shall not give it a second."

Upon amateurs he was especially severe. A few days after Meyerbeer's death a young admirer of his called upon the composer of "William Tell" with an elegy which he had written in honor of his idol. "Well," said Rossini, after hearing the composition played over, "if you really want my honest opinion, I think it would have been better if you had died and Meyerbeer had written an elegy." Sometimes the amateurs would endeavor to bribe him into a compliment by sending him a little present. The ruse, however, was seldom effectual. A budding composer once accompanied his new composition with a stillton, hoping, of course, to have a letter praising the work. The letter came, but all it said was: "Thanks. I like the cheese very much."

Rossini's witticisms indeed bubbled forth at all times and under all circumstances. On one occasion a gentleman called upon him to enlist his aid in procuring for him an engagement at the opera. He was a drummer, and had taken the precaution to bring his instrument. Rossini said he would hear him "play," and it was decided that he should show off in the orchestra to "Semiramis." The very first bar of the overture contains a tremolo for the drum, and when this had been performed, the player remarked: "Now I have a rest of 78 bars; these, of course, I will skip." This was too good a chance to be lost. "Oh, no," said the composer; "by all means count the 78 bars. I particularly wish to hear those."

Some of these anecdotes of Rossini remind us that composers, as a rule, have not figured amiable as critics of each other. Handel swore that Gluck knew no more about counterpoint than his cook; Weber pronounced Beethoven a madman, and Haydn said of a brother musician that "he played the fiddle like a hog." Liszt was particularly severe upon fellow artists. Some one was once playing to him a composition he evidently did not care for. "What is that?" he asked. "It is Beethoven's 'Maid of Orleans' sonata," was the reply. "Ah," said the virtuoso, "what a pity that the original manuscript did not meet with the same fate as Joan!" In this connection a good story is told of the late Victor Masse. He was informed one day that a rival composer took every opportunity of declaring that his (Masse's) music was execrable. "He maintains I have no talent," said Masse; "I always declare he is better than I. We both know we lie." But perhaps better than this was the opinion of Wagner expressed by Offenbach. Wagner had just published his "Rienzi," and off went a copy to Offenbach, with a request that he would say what he thought of it. Now Offenbach had previously read some of Wagner's poems and had made full of them, a circumstance well known to Wagner. After some three weeks the score of "Rienzi" was returned to its composer with a slip on which was written, "Dear Wagner, your music is trash; stick to poetry." This of course enraged Wagner greatly, and some months later he was out with one of his celebrated brochures denouncing the Jews. It was a fine opportunity for revenge—Offenbach being an Israelite—and the brochure was in the hands of Offenbach in no time. Two days elapsed, and Wagner had the pamphlet back. When he opened it, this is what he found written on the front page: "Dear Wagner, your brochure is not; stick to music."

Haydn was a great admirer of the fair sex, and some of his prettiest things were said about women. One specimen must suffice. The celebrated Mrs. Billington was a great friend of his, and Sir Joshua Reynolds had painted her portrait. Haydn went to see the picture when it was finished. "Yes," he said to the artist, "it is very good. But you have made one mistake. You have painted Mrs. Billington listening to the angels, whereas the angels should be listening to her."

Berlioz, the eminent French composer, had a caustic wit. He could not endure Bach, and he used to call Handel "a big hog," a "musician of the stomach." For this he was paid out by Mendelssohn, who declared that after touching a score of Berlioz's and hot water were necessary. Berlioz, however, had his musical hero, and that hero was Beethoven. Touch Beethoven irreverently and his ire was kindled. There is a certain passage for the double bass in one of the master's scores which was at one time believed to be almost impossible of execution. Now Habeneck conducted a performance of this work in Paris, and gave the passage in question to the cellos. Berlioz, who was present, met Habeneck soon after, and asked him when he meant to give the passage as Beethoven intended it to be given. "Never as long as I live," said Habeneck. "Well, we'll wait," replied Berlioz. "Don't let it be long."

Speaking of Beethoven, that master's humor was rather of the grim kind, resembling more the satire of Carlyle than anything else. The composer's brother had a little property of his own, and was very proud of it. One day he called on Beethoven and left a card inscribed, "Johann Van Beethoven, land proprietor." Next day he had it returned to him, written on the back, "L. Van Beethoven, brain proprietor."—Chambers' Journal.

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A SURPRISED SHARK.

A HINDOO WITH A ROPE PROVED TOO MUCH FOR HIM.

A Swimming Contest In Which The Man Surprised The Fish—A Thrilling Scene, Upon Which An Immense Throng of People Looked With Varying Emotions.

"Talk about your shark hunters in the south Pacific islands," remarked the old traveler, "but I remember seeing an encounter with one of those long-toothed gentry that for cool nerve beat anything I ever read about. "I was leading around Calcutta one day, late in the autumn, waiting for the evening train up to the city of Hughli, when I heard a tremendous shouting coming from the direction of the river Hughli, which is practically one of the mouths of the Ganges. Trotting over to the shore as fast as a white man ever traveled in India, I saw a huge commotion. Natives were hurrying away from the bank as if in terror and then running back as if their curiosity had overcome their greatest fears. The river was full of boats. The occupants of the larger ones were screaming with excitement, while those in the small ones were shrieking and jabbering with a considerable amount of fear. "I soon discovered that the fuss had been created by a large shark which had come up with the tide and had ventured a little farther than it was customary for sharks to do. His dorsal fin was cutting the water here and there, and when occasionally he turned on his back and sent his nose and grinning teeth above the water, groans and screams of horror went up in all directions. His shark-ship was evidently out for supper and was casting longing glances at the succulent Hindoo babies, of whom a considerable number were in sight. "In the midst of all the hubbub a tall, lank Hindoo stepped out upon the roof of a kind of houseboat and in a short speech announced that he would catch the shark. "Instantly a dead hush fell upon the multitude. The Hindoo stood erect. He was perfectly naked save for a little garment at the loins, which our Texas cowboys call a 'gee string.' He was armed only with a long rope like a lariat, which he held behind his back with his left hand. "Presently Mr. Shark came to the surface about eight yards from the boat

and immediately the Hindoo plunged overboard. "A chorus of groans and exclamations went up, in the midst of which the Hindoo reappeared, swimming with his right hand. Man and shark faced each other, and I fancied that I saw a pleased expression in the monster's eye, as such is to say, 'Well, this is civil, to say the least.' "The shark evidently thought he had a 'cinch' on the situation, for he swam leisurely toward the Hindoo, turned slowly upon his back and opened his mouth. The mouth closed with a snap and the people screamed, but the Hindoo had dived, and presently he appeared again on the off side of the shark, smiling and still carrying his rope. "The big fish looked surprised and then made another gentle dab at the Hindoo. The result was the same, and Mr. Hindoo came up fresh for the third round. "Then the shark began to grow angry and made a vicious run at the Hindoo, and again he missed. The people on shore and in the boats began to feel confidence in the human champion, and their groans were changed to applause. Every time the man made a point against the fish these heathens would send up a rousing cheer. "Well, by this time the thing was getting exciting. I never saw such swimming before, and I never will again. The man was a regular water snake. He dodged, twisted, dove and jumped like an eel. The fish made charge after charge. Once his fin grazed the Hindoo's arm, and the water was colored with blood. The man's stock went down a point, but it soon rose again, when the crowd began to see that the fish simply wasn't in it. The man was beating him at his own game. You see, the fish could only go in one direction—straight ahead like an arrow—while the man turned and doubled like a fox. "Well, by and by the exertion and excitement told on the monster. He got rattled, churned the river into foam, and then became quiet again. At this moment the Hindoo faced him again. It was the last round. "The shark charged languidly. The man waited, lying in the water until the great mouth was open to seize him. Then, with a convulsive backward leap, he straightened his body and sank, feet downward, like a plummet of lead. "The shark settled down over him, lashing the water into a lather foam. They seemed to be grappling with each other. The crowd groaned and screamed, and then became silent. "For the space of what seemed many minutes the people watched the surface of the water until even the bubbles had disappeared and all was quiet. "Lost! Lost! screamed a priest, and the mob re-echoed the cry and began to beat their breasts like a lot of madmen. Then suddenly in the middle of it all the Hindoo reappeared, 30 yards up the stream. Both hands were above his head, and he was screaming, 'Tan, tan, tan!' He had slipped the noose of his lariat around the shark's tail and drawn it taut, and he held the free end in his hand. "In an instant it was ashore, and a score of Hindoos were drawing at it. It took them half an hour to get Mr. Shark ashore, for he pulled like a locomotive, but they finally managed it. "He proved to be nine feet long and sold for a sum which enabled his captor to live in comfort for nearly half a year."—Philadelphia Telegraph.

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EGGS OF COMMERCE.

The Big Business Done in the International Trading in Them.

There is a standard joke in the variety theaters, so often told that it has come to have a familiar sound to the ears of patrons, concerning a remark made by a city man who heard that eggs had gone down to a cent apiece. "I don't see how the hens can do it for the price." Notwithstanding the reduction in the price of eggs, and the almost unlimited supply of them in all countries that have developed their agricultural resources, it is a fact that the trade in eggs, their exportation from one country to another, has become a large item of international commerce, as some recent figures show. The case of Denmark is in point. Denmark's trade in eggs with foreign countries, chiefly with England and Scotland, has grown enormously. Twenty years ago the annual Danish export of eggs was 600,000; now it is reckoned at 110,000,000. In the same period the importation of eggs into England has increased tenfold, but only a part of the whole number comes from Denmark, the two other egg exporting countries from which England draws its supplies being Holland and France. France exports to other countries 600,000,000 eggs in a year and Italy exports 600,000,000 eggs in a year, chiefly to Austria and Germany.

The dairymen of the United States depend chiefly on the enormous home market, and they have rivals in the export of American eggs in the Canadians, Canada ranking next to France and Italy and ahead of Denmark and Holland as an egg exporting country. Canada exports to other countries 300,000,000 eggs in a year. For the fiscal year of 1895 the treasury figures give as the total exports of American eggs to foreign countries 151,000 dozen, which is equivalent to 1,812,000 eggs. In the fiscal year 1896, however, the total exportations of American eggs increased to 328,000 dozen, or 3,936,000 eggs, a little more than twice as much.

It is a somewhat curious fact, that the weight of eggs is materially larger in northern than in southern climates. Canadian eggs, for instance, are heavier than those shipped from the United States, and eggs in the northern states of this country are heavier than those from the south.—New York Sun.

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