

THE "FIDELIO" OF BEETHOVEN.

From Appleton's Journal.

The year 1804 was drawing to a close. Beethoven, in the full vigor of youth, had already produced his oratorio "Christ on the Mount of Olives," when the Baron of Braun, the new director of the Imperial Theatre at Vienna, proposed to him to write an opera, convinced, as he said, that the great qualities of which he had exhibited a proof in instrumental music, would not fail to reveal themselves in the dramatic style.

It has always been a question of thought with me how Beethoven, with his genius, eccentric and impatient, wandering in his flight, like the eagle, could ever have been inspired by such a poor outline, by an anecdote merely suited to suggest a subject for a true melodrama of the olden time.

Perhaps one ought to suppose that he took it as a gift for which it was without a moment's reflection, the chef d'œuvre of the poet, who gave it to him.

As a general thing the great masters, the men of genius, rarely exercise much care in the choice of their subjects. They take what is given, and make the best out of it.

However, Beethoven threw himself into the work with ardor and *con amore*, so that, toward the close of 1805, he succeeded in finishing the score.

Then began the true embarrassments, the real difficulties. When it became necessary to produce the work, singers were not to be found. La Milder only, charged with the role of Leonora, showed herself worthy of her part; add to this, the war then impending between Austria and France, and you have an idea of the unfavorable circumstances under which *Fidelio* was brought out.

The opera of Beethoven appeared upon the stage on the 20th of November, but without the least hope of success. The public was averse to that music which, notwithstanding the obstacles we have mentioned, had the great misfortune to pretend to be in advance of its time.

After three successive representations the great work was suddenly suspended, and was not brought out again until the 29th of March, 1806. Although the order of the piece was materially changed, and the action was reduced from two acts, still the public failed to appreciate it, and, after a final attempt, on the 10th of April, the *chef d'œuvre* was finally deposited in the library of the theatre, there to sleep the sleep of the Pharaohs.

Eight years passed by, but no one seemed to trouble himself about *Fidelio*, until an unforeseen occasion rescued the score of Beethoven from its secular oblivion—for such it seemed to be.

Its reproduction, as was generally supposed, called out notable changes, to which the great master applied himself with greater energy. The work was altered from its very foundation, the dialogue was rewritten, and the whole drama improved as much as possible.

The second act, which used to transpire wholly within a dungeon, now terminated on a great day under the sun's light—a dramatic circumstance which, although not very important in itself, gave place to the magnificent entrance of the finale, which did not exist in the first sketch. The air of Leonora, in the first act, was likewise a new feature, as well as the sublime exordium, which every one admires so much at the present day, and, of the ancient portion, only the last sentence remains.

"O du, für den ich alles trug!" (O thou, for whom I all deceive!) But let us allow the conductor of Beethoven to speak of the great composer.

Figaro once remarked that, "in a loved object, all is dear." We all like to listen even to the most minute circumstances which attach themselves to the infancy of a *chef d'œuvre*; and the details, whose merit of exactitude one would not wish to question, since it is the poet himself of Beethoven who repeats them, will naturally find place here.

"Beethoven strenuously wished to have an air in the beginning of the second act for his character of 'Florestan.' But I obstinately opposed this caprice of the musician. To make a poor captive, debilitated by long fasting and privations, an unfortunate man dying of hunger, sing a *cavatina* di bravura, seemed a very great difficulty to my mind, not to say insupportable. We disputed the subject a long time. Finally, seeing that he was unwilling to yield, I contrived the means of freeing myself from the affair as wisely as possible, and choose for a text to my words that kind of prophetic madness which people who are about to die exhibit—that supreme light which life throws out at the moment of dissolution.

"What wild and quivering air finds entrance here? What divine ray illumines my tomb? An angel hovers near me in the vapors of the rose, a consoling angel, with the features of Leonora; it hastens me on to liberty, and to the Heavenly Kingdom!"

"What happened on this occasion will never leave my mind. Beethoven came to my house in the evening, about 7 o'clock. After we had conversed for some time on one subject and another, he inquired for his song. I gave him my manuscript; he read it, adjourned into a chamber, grumbling in a hollow voice, as was his custom when about to sing, and then sat down by the piano. Very often had my wife begged of him to play for her, but in vain.

"This time he placed the text in the stand, and began, with his usual movement, some wonderful fantasia, in the midst of which he appeared to recall his air. The hours passed by; Beethoven continued to improvise.

"We wished him to sup with us, but it was impossible to interrupt him. At last he arose, embraced me with affection, and returned home without having eaten with us. The following day his air was written.

"In the latter part of May, so soon as my work was accomplished, I sent the manuscript to Beethoven, and two days thereafter I received from him these lines, which I treasure as a precious token of the little service which I was able to render him:—

"I have read with deep interest the admirable modifications which you have introduced into my opera. It remains for me only to dignify these ruins by a fallen chalet. Your friend, BEETHOVEN."

"However, Beethoven advanced but slowly with his work, and when I wrote to entreat him to yield to the wishes of the beneficiaries, who had already begun to fear lest they should

not be able to profit in season, here are the words in which he replied to me:—

"This opera causes me every anxiety in the world. To tell the truth, I am dissatisfied. There is not one portion which I would not wish to revise, in order to patch up my dissatisfaction of to-day by some shadow of satisfaction. It is a very different thing from having to do with reflection or inspiration."

"About the middle of April the repetitions began; the representation was promised for the 23d of May. On the very day of the general repetition the new overture (which remains to-day) was still in the head of the great master, in *limbo patrum*. On the morning of the day of the representation, the orchestra was assembled; Beethoven had not yet arrived. After waiting fully an hour, and losing patience, I went to his house, determined to bring him in, either voluntarily or by force, dead or alive. I found Beethoven sound asleep under a covering of musical leaves, which were scattered about, both on his bed and on the floor of his chamber.

"Upon a table near by was a glass of wine in which a biscuit was soaking. I remarked the candle entirely consumed. Beethoven had spent the night in labor. From that moment it was necessary to give up the new symphony, which, notwithstanding the diligence of the master, was found to be too late for execution, and to be satisfied at that time with his overture of 'Prometheus.'"

"Every one knows what took place that evening. The crowd was immense; the opera was pronounced a marvel. Beethoven, in front of his desk, conducted the orchestra and the singers with that earnest conviction, that genial fire, which he brought to everything of his art. More than once his enthusiasm led him astray, so that there was great risk in following him, from seeing him throw himself without the measure. Happily the Kapellmeister Umlauf restrained him by look and deed, and thus checked the disastrous influence which the eccentric inspiration of the great man might have exercised upon the chosen and the orchestra. An immense success this time greeted the *chef d'œuvre*, and a seventh representation was given for the benefit of Beethoven, on the 18th of July. Beethoven wrote on this occasion a second air for Leonora, and some verses for the jailer."

In this opera Beethoven recalled the phenomena of the heart, its mysterious sorrows, its throbbings, its infinite discouragements. Pathos predominates in *Fidelio*—a pathos gloomy and sad in the very midst of darkness and a dungeon; from beginning to end the music stifles you by force of its being true. No fancy can lessen between

whiles the vigorous austerity; no breath from heaven, no warming ray of light, there penetrates; you find night but tears and sighs. But at the last the day appears, the heart gives vent to joy and happiness, a joy of Beethoven, sudden, spontaneous, deafening; you pass without transition from the cry of anguish to the song of deliverance, from imprisoned sobs to the outburst of an intoxication which cannot restrain itself. Your ear, accustomed to the shades of meaning so nicely arranged by the school of Mozart, almost stiffens against the abrupt event which, either by force or voluntarily, leads you on, not without making you experience at times something of that dazzling which a man feels who from the obscurity of a dungeon finds himself suddenly under the full sun.

One cannot call that portion which terminates the score of Beethoven a final. The final, such as the great masters of the stage interpret and understand, and Mozart in particular, in the *Nights of Figaro* and *Don Juan*, keeps up the action by invisible means, and forms with the piece an integral and necessary part; but in this work what do you see? A sublime peroration, a magnificent hymn of graceful action, which incites the audience to unbounded enthusiasm, but has not an absolute connection with the whole piece, and would in a concert-room, if detached from the score, appear no less a work one and complete.

I would compare the final of *Fidelio* to the epilogue in the heavens, which Goethe has placed at the end of his poem of "Faust," to that glory which unfolds itself and sheds its light after the consummation of things. We notice in the hymn of Beethoven, just as in the phantasmagoria of Goethe, a grand view of conclusion, a splendid offset to the main work. But really it is not a final any more than the sublime dialogue between "Leonora" and the jailer occupied in digging the grave of the prisoner is a duet. The instrumental forms rule in a manner as despotically in *Fidelio* as in all the *chefs-d'œuvre* which Beethoven has ever composed. The opera is a symphony, but what a noble and dramatic symphony!

There is in the personage of "Fidelio," aside from vocal difficulties almost insurmountable, some species of feeling of pantomime, of physiognomy, which always reader it impossible for the stage to attain to the ideal of the creation of Beethoven, and such is the character of the score that oftentimes it is found more practicable to play rather than sing it. One cannot imagine what incredible efforts, what excessive pain, a *virtuosus* is obliged to undergo in rendering the passages written for the violin or the hautboy, passages where the musician did not for a single instant condescend to take into consideration the resources of the human voice, and which it is necessary to sing despite the fury of the overwhelming gust of instruments.

I wonder how many voices are injured and ruined forever before one voice succeeds in surmounting such difficulties, and ends by killing itself by perilous practices?

GEORGE LOWELL AUSTIN.

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REAL ESTATE AT AUCTION.

NOTICE—BY VIRTUE AND IN EXECUTION of the powers contained in a Mortgage executed by THE CENTRAL PASSENGER RAILWAY COMPANY of the city of Philadelphia, bearing date of eighth of April, 1863, and recorded in the office for recording deeds and mortgages for the city and county of Philadelphia, in Mortgage Book A. C. H. No. 25, page 485, etc., the undersigned Trustees named in said Mortgage

will sell at PUBLIC AUCTION, at the MERCHANTS' EXCHANGE, in the city of Philadelphia, by MESSRS. THOMAS & SONS, AUCTIONEERS, at 12 o'clock M., on TUESDAY, the fourteenth day of February, A. D. 1871, the property described in and conveyed by the said Mortgage, to wit:—

No. 1. All those two contiguous lots or pieces of ground, with the buildings and improvements thereon erected, situated on the east side of Broad street, in the city of Philadelphia, one of them beginning at the southeast corner of the southeast corner of the said Broad street and Coates street; thence extending eastward to the southeast corner of the said Broad street and Coates street; thence southward to the southeast corner of the said Broad street and Coates street; thence westward to the southeast corner of the said Broad street and Coates street; thence northward to the southeast corner of the said Broad street and Coates street; thence eastward to the southeast corner of the said Broad street and Coates street; thence southward to the southeast corner of the said Broad street and Coates street; thence westward to the southeast corner of the said Broad street and Coates street; thence northward to the southeast corner of the said Broad street and Coates street; thence eastward to the southeast corner of the said Broad street and Coates street; 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