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Title: Life of Henriette Sontag, Countess de Rossi

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Release date: May 30, 2012 [EBook #39861]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Chuck Greif and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net> (This book was produced from scanned images of public domain material from the Google Print project.)

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LIFE OF HENRIETTE SONTAG, COUNTESS DE ROSSI ***

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THE LIFE OF
HENRIETTE SONTAG,
COUNTESS DE ROSSI.



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1852

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Published by STRINGER & TOWNSEND, 222 Broadway, N. Y.



HENRIETTE SONTAG, COUNTESS DE ROSSI.

LIFE

OF

HENRIETTE SONTAG,

COUNTESS DE ROSSI.

WITH
INTERESTING SKETCHES

BY

SCUDO, HECTOR BERLIOZ, LOUIS BOERNE, ADOLPHE ADAM,
MARIE AYCARD, JULIE DE MARGUERITTE, PRINCE
PUCKLER-MUSKAU, AND THEOPHILE GAUTIER.



NEW YORK:
STRINGER & TOWNSEND, 222 BROADWAY.

—
1852.

ENTERED, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1852, by
STRINGER AND TOWNSEND,
in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the Southern District of New York.

*B. CRAIGHEAD, Printer and Stereotyper,
53 Vesey Street.*

CONTENTS.

LIFE OF THE COUNTESS DE ROSSI,		5
PEN AND INK PORTRAIT, BY	<i>Marie Aycard,</i>	37
HENRIETTE SONTAG, BY	<i>M. Scudo,</i>	39
HENRIETTE SONTAG IN FRANCFORT, BY	<i>Louis Boerne,</i>	46
PAST AND PRESENT, BY	<i>Theophile Gautier,</i>	51
HOW SONTAG SINGS, BY	<i>Hector Berlioz,</i>	53
THE PRIMA DONNA AND THE COUNTESS, BY	" "	53
IS IT THE MOTHER OR THE DAUGHTER? BY	<i>Adolphe Adam,</i>	57
SOUVENIR OF THE OPERA, BY	<i>Julie de Marguerittes,</i>	59
SONTAG AND THE EMPEROR OF RUSSIA, BY	<i>Prince Puckler-Muskau,</i>	64

MEMOIR OF THE COUNTESS DE ROSSI.

WHETHER in rapid memoir or in ponderous biography, the life-sketcher or the chronicler must always fain behold the object before him as a model endowed not only with surpassing moral and physical beauties, but with that individuality of genius, and that peculiar destiny, which separate the few from the crowd. To the readers remains the duty of acting as those did who were wont to attend the triumphs of Roman conquerors, and urge the deduction of their mistakes and misdeeds—or, as the "Satanic advocate" in the process of canonization in the Pope's court, show how much more of a sinner than of a saint was the mortal about to pass into the heaven of human invention. Although, thus, well aware of how much our trifling office here is prone to exaggeration, we feel that there is no fear of transgressing in the present case, and that the readers will rather feel how much below than above the truth we remain.

The Countess Rossi is as clearly fitted to be the heroine of a memoir of real life, as she is of being the heroine of a lyrical drama on the fictive scene. Those who will read this sketch will, we think, behold in her all the characteristics of a special and elevated nature—one marked amongst mankind, framed for its admiration and for its model. We have the striking attributes of a special nature manifest and effulgent even in infancy; we see them defying the obstacles of fortune, and constantly rising in power. We behold them in their utmost effulgence—first on the stage, and next in the highest regions of society, and, ultimately, tried by adversity. From beginning to end, the power and the effulgence remain ever the same, fitted for all positions: wherever it is placed, it continues unsullied

and undiminished.

Having set forth our claims to the attention of those to whom we address ourselves, we shall now rapidly trace the outline of the singularly eventful career of Countess Rossi. The interest its moving incidents, so singularly varied, have always inspired, are now increased tenfold by new features, totally unparalleled in the history of the lyrical stage. To behold this distinguished lady return to the stage, after enjoying undisturbed for many years, and in the most exalted rank, the love and esteem of the greatest personages of Europe, is a truly singular and affecting event; but to behold her return, after this lapse of time, with all her powers not only unimpaired, but improved by taste, study, and observation, is an event without an example. If, to take the exact measure of this phenomenon by comparison, we turn to the very few who were her contemporaries on the stage, what do we behold? If asked how so extraordinary a fact happens to exist, those who have had the good fortune to know the Countess Rossi will readily explain it. The first reason and first cause are, that this lady possesses a remarkably well regulated mind—gentle in all things, ever resigned, and possessed of unruffled patience; and her feelings, controlled by the most virtuous sense of right, have never been agitated by those passions which most of all beset stages and courts, and are the most insidious and dangerous assailants of those who are the constant objects of adoration.

To these might be added other aiding causes, but of no little potency. For the sake of brevity, we shall only mention two: the first is, that the Countess Rossi's voice is a pure and perfect soprano, of the highest register, from the first settlement of her voices—it is "to the manner born." Thus she has never been compelled to superadd to her studies of vocal science those efforts by which most of the greatest vocalists have been obliged to transmute their contralto or mezzo soprano tones, to polish their guttural or husky tones, and—almost all of them—extend artificially their register. On the other hand, during her long secession from the stage, the love of musical art has always remained predominant, and its science been constantly cultivated, without the necessity of taxing her powers, without the exhausting exertions of other singers; whilst her style of singing is that of the high classical Italian school, the only one that nurses the voice, whilst it displays all its melodic power. Had not the Countess Rossi yielded up the German school—had she not resorted to the Italian school to modify her singing—as her great countryman Mozart did, to modify the form his inspirations assumed—her voice would no doubt have been injured, and she would have lost that marvellous power of overflowing richness of embellishment, requiring purity of tone, agility, and elegance, in which she is unquestionably unrivalled.

HENRIETTE SONTAG was born of a respectable family of artists, of limited means, at Coblenz, Kingdom of Prussia. The old saying of the poet, "*nascitur, non fit*," is singularly applicable to this great vocalist. The strong bent for music which pointed out her ultimate vocation, was observable as early as five years of age. At seven years of age, betwixt her exquisite beauty and her exquisite voice, she was known far and wide in her neighborhood. To gratify the nobility of the district, the authorities of the town, or their friendly neighbors, it was the practice of Henriette Sontag's mother to place her child on the table, and bid her sing.

A distinguished traveller, who afterwards beheld her in all the effulgence of her triumphs, relates having seen her sing in this manner the grand aria of "The Queen of Night," in the *Zauberflöte*—her arms hanging beside her, her eye following a fly on the window, or a butterfly sporting on the flowers without—her voice, so pure, so penetrating, and of angelic tone, flowing as unconsciously, as effortless, and as sportive as a limpid rill from the mountain side.

The circle of her fame spread gradually wider and wider, and the *Impresarii* of Germany were not long in awakening to the importance of securing the assistance of the infant wonder. The consequence was, that at eleven years of age she appeared at Darmstadt, in a part written purposely for her, entitled, *The Little Daughter of the Danube*. In spite of her extraordinary success at Darmstadt, her wise and conscientious parents, knowing the fate of infant prodigies when their natural powers are allowed an untutored growth under the artificial warmth of injudicious admiration and the heat of theatres, withdrew the young *prima donna* from the first scene of her successes, and conveyed her to a very distant spot, the Conservatoire of Prague.

At the Conservatoire of Prague, the little maiden and her relatives did not cease to be tempted by managers or *Impresarii*. First attracted by her beauty, they were soon astonished by her aptitude. She successively won the prize of every class of this great school of music, until she earned the highest position; and, placed at the head of the school, she became one of the marvels of the city.

Scarce three years had elapsed since her matriculation at the Conservatoire, and she had hardly attained the age of fourteen, when she saved the fortunes of that great Imperial Opera of Prague, associated with so many glorious memories of music, and which would be immortalized by the fact alone of having been the stage where the *Clemenza di Tito* and the *Marriage of Figaro* were first produced by Mozart. The favorite *prima donna* of this noble theatre was suddenly taken ill, and so seriously, that there was little hope left of her reappearing for some time. The manager, in despair, and at a loss which way to turn, could think of no other resource to retain his audiences than the appearance of the young prodigy of the Conservatoire—little Henriette Sontag. Such was her proficiency in her art, that her parents no longer saw the same danger in allowing their offspring to tread the fictive scene.

If nothing were wanting in courage, natural gifts of voice, and intellectual power on the part of the child, as regards the height of her person there was a *mancomento* of several inches. As the French proverb says, "*le temps corrige cela*," but, in the meantime, the stage-manager, a learned Hellenist, was not oblivious of the means by which the Greeks gave altitudes to their scenic heroes and heroines, and the little *prima donna*, to whom was assigned for her *début* the part of the heroine in a translation of the favorite French opera, *Jean de Paris*, was supplied with enormous cork heels. There was a time, at the court of Louis XV., when an inch and a half of red heel was the distinctive characteristic of a marquis, or of a lady of sufficient quality to be allowed to sit in the presence of royalty. On the occasion of the *début* of Henriette Sontag, four inches of vermilion-colored cork foreshadowed the rank of the little lady, destined to become one of the most absolute mimic queens of the lyrical world, and afterwards a real and much respected countess. When the singer who enacted the pompous seneschal in the opera of *Jean de Paris* came forward, and announced, "It is no less a personage than the Princess of Navarre whose arrival I announce!" the applause and laughter were universal. When the little prodigy appeared on her cork pedestal, the house was filled with cheers and acclamations. As the business of the stage proceeded, the auditors found that there was no longer any indulgence necessary on the score of age, but that there were claims on their admiration for a voice which, for its purity, its peculiar flute-like tone, and its agility, has never been surpassed. The celebrated tenor, Gerstener, who enacted *Jean de Paris*, that night sang better than ever, finding that he had to cope with the attraction of a new melodic power. Many nights successively did she thus sing the Princess of Navarre with increasing success to

crowded houses. Her next part was one far more difficult—that of the heroine in Paer's fine opera, *Sargin*.

The capital of Bohemia was not destined long to retain its chief ornament. Long before the conclusion of the season, the Imperial Court had heard of her extraordinary success, and Henriette Sontag was summoned to Vienna, where she appeared, the very next season, at the German Opera.

In our times we have "Kings of Railways" and "Colossuses of Roads," indebted to good luck for their success. At the time Henriette Sontag *debuted* at Vienna there existed in Italy also *millionaire Impresarii*, only indebted for pre-eminence to the favors of chance. That curious original, Barbaja, the lessee at the same time of the largest German and Italian Theatres, was born under the luckiest of stars. Since his day, his successors in Italy, having found talent becoming daily rarer, have watched every young talent as it rose, taken possession of it, and worked them until the death of their voices, before they had a chance of the maturation of their powers, in singing operas of composers, who strive to conceal their sterility under noise and exaggerations both dramatic and instrumental. In our days, to be a successful lessee, you must be possessed of indefatigable genius, as well as industry; Barbaja, on the contrary, found musical genius of all kinds at his command to speculate upon. Not only were there Catalanis, Pastas, Malibrans, Garcias, Donzellis, Rubinis, Lablaches, &c., in ample number, but all the operas that Paër, Winter, Paesiello, Cimarosa, and Mozart had written, were fresh in the lyrical *répertoire*, and composers of equal merit were living, and could be monopolized for money. In the Villa Barbaja, the palace the fortunate *impresario* had built for himself on the Possilipo, at Naples, you may, half way up the hill, on the third story, see the room where, in the dog-days, Rossini wrote his *Otello*, standing at a desk, in the costume of terrestrial paradise, with a Chucharro boy fanning him behind with the back torn from a large music-book. When managers had such slaves responding to their behests, like the genius to the lamp of Aladdin, they might easily live and rule like sultans, with a Mahomet's paradise upon earth. Thus it was with Barbaja. With the assistance of the great alchymist Rossini, who turned so readily "notes into gold," he thought he knew and mostly had secured all the talent available to his theatre that existed in Europe. In those days not only a northern *cantatrice* was not dreamt of, but it was thought that the South alone could produce a great singer for the Italian lyrical stage.

When he arrived at Vienna, such was, however, the report of the fame of young Sontag, that the great sybarite of the day condescended at last to visit the German opera, even at the sacrifice of having his ears, accustomed to the melodious "*lingua Toscana*," torn by the guttural discordance of the Teutonic tongue. On hearing Henriette Sontag sing, Barbaja was overcome with astonishment. To this feeling succeeded dismay, when, having immediately applied to her parents, he found in them a polite but most unquestionable abhorrence for the Italian stage, which they were afraid would lead their daughter to the land of moral laxity, of *Cicisbei* and *Patiti*, of

"Pasteboard triumph, and the cavalcade,
Processions formed for piety and love,
A mistress and a saint in every grove."

In vain he tempted them with an *El Dorado* in perspective—the conscientious Germans would not concede, at first, a single iota of his wishes. The world, to whom she has imparted so much pure enjoyment,—and, fortunately, will now impart so much more in time to come—was near never hearing the great vocalist sing in an euphonious language, in that which made her fame universal, and led her to visit England and France.

At last, however, after repeated efforts, some concession was made, although Barbaja's fate was like that of the hero of the classical poet—the gods vouchsafed but half his prayer. Henriette Sontag was allowed to appear at the Italian Opera at Vienna. But she alone, of all the great singers of those days, never visited Italy. Many an evening the good-natured Neapolitan *Impresario*, a still greater epicure in gastronomy than in music, after enjoying a dinner such as Lucullus was wont to degustate nearly on the same spot, as he walked on his Palace terrace and looked down across the inlet to San Carlo, would grow moody when he thought of what he lost by the rooted aversion of Sontag's parents; and then he would anathematize the *Maledetti Tedeschi*, the born enemies of his country, with an energy, if not with a poetry, worthy of the patriotic *Filicaja*—for they, like all the other invaders of Italy, "never gave her anything but blows and slavery, and always took away everything they could, not leaving even an Iron Crown, or a funeral urn to preserve the ashes of past greatness."

The important change for the musical world at large was, however, effected. The next season Henriette Sontag was engaged to sing in Italian at Vienna, and removed to the Carinthia, having for her colleagues vocalists of such a calibre, that one of them, "*il buon Rubini*," has never been surpassed; whilst all those who have enjoyed the talents of the other, Lablache, feel that not only he has never been, but cannot imagine that he ever will be equalled.

Amongst the company at the Carinthia, there was another exquisite artist, who was destined, as a model of style, to exert a great influence on the career of Sontag, who has now risen so much higher in the world's estimation than her fair predecessor has ever attained, eminent as she was. As soon as the young Sontag, the most conscientious of artists (no slight portion of her success being due to her severity of judgment on herself), had heard Madame Fodor, a new light broke upon her; with tears in her eyes she threw her arms round her mother's neck, conjured her to take her home, and give her a piano. Her wish accomplished, she sat at her piano, working night and day at improving herself, and never leaving her home but when there was a rehearsal for Fodor, when she would hide herself in a corner of the house, and her ears would drink up with enthusiasm every note that dropped from the great *prima donna*, who has left a memory still enduring with the old *habitués* of Her Majesty's Theatre. Madame Fodor, on the other hand, hearing the young inexperienced *prima donna* sing for the first time, exclaimed, "Had I her voice, I should hold the whole world at my feet!"

The Prussian *dilettanti* employed every means to bring Henriette Sontag to their capital. At the end of the Italian Opera season at Vienna, she was persuaded to come to Berlin, to support by her attraction the Koenigstadt Theatre, just opened. There she was joined by distinguished German lyrists, such as Jäger, Wächter, Sager, and Spitzeder. She was obliged to sing the translations of the operas of Rossini and of the French *répertoire*, then all the fashion at Berlin. Her success, however, was immense. Every seat in the house was taken, in anticipation, long before the days of performance; and we remember well, being there at the time, that the foreigners of rank who arrived in Berlin, finding it impossible to purchase a seat at any price, were obliged to apply to Count de Bruhl, the minister of the "*Menus plaisirs du roi*," to obtain an obscure seat at the back of the Court, or of the diplomatic box.

M. de Talleyrand used to boast, as one of the brightest diplomatic tricks of his tricky career, that in the settlement of limits of respective dominions at the Congress of Vienna, he had procured that Ferney should be

included in the area of France, which made Voltaire a Frenchman *post mortem*. On the same principle, the Prussians having recently secured, at the same Congress, the forced allegiance of Sontag's birth-place, Coblenz, added to the admiration which she commanded wherever she went, a feeling of pride at her being their countrywoman. Hence their enthusiasm knew no bounds.

The love as well as admiration excited by Mdlle. Sontag during her residence at Berlin, gave rise to many singular incidents. Not allowed to approach the object of their idolatry, her adorers had recourse to the most eccentric expedients to express their devotion. It is related that a young man of rank was so desperately enamored of her, as to resort to the romantic expedient of hiring himself as a servant in her family, to have the pleasure of constantly seeing her; nor was the truth suspected by the object of his adoration, or any one else, until the gentleman's own relations discovered him, and removed him from the vicinity of the attraction.

That wise and excellent monarch, the late King of Prussia, heartily joined in the enthusiasm of his subjects; and that he entertained as much esteem as admiration for Madlle. Sontag will be proved in the most signal manner by a circumstance we shall have presently to relate.

Whilst at the Berlin theatre, overtures were made to Mdlle. Sontag from the Italian Opera in Paris—then belonging to the Crown, and under the control of Vicomte Sosthene de la Rochefoucault, who for many years ruled, under the Restoration, the theatres of France, and endeavored, with rather dubious success, to apply the "Maxims" of his witty ancestor to the government of stage affairs. As M. Sosthene had for negotiator in this treaty the great Rossini, who had made Mdlle. Sontag's acquaintance in Vienna, his wishes, amongst the offers made from all quarters, prevailed. Madlle. Sontag made her first appearance in Paris at the beginning of the season. She arrived in Paris at the close of the year 1827, after a triumphal "Progress" through Holland and the Rhenane provinces, in which she gathered abundantly both those crowns which are supposed always to be made of laurel, as well as those which bear the effigies of monarchs. Paris was then the centre of taste and the metropolis of art—the occupation of the whole population the enjoyment of pleasures or the ministering to its desires and caprices. Madlle. Sontag's voice and beauty produced a *furor*—each note produced a murmur or an acclamation. No feature of hers escaped a sonnet, from her eyebrow to her pretty foot. The ugliest women thought they became handsome by imitating her costume; and venders of articles of luxury and fancy goods found no easier way of getting rid of their wares than by stamping them with her name or with her supposed resemblance.

In this, her first engagement at Paris, she made her *début* in Desdemona. She also performed with great success La Donna del Lago, Cenerentola, and other first characters in the first operas of the day. The Italian Opera season ended, she was eagerly engaged for the next season, and her support secured. She then returned to her engagement at Berlin,—once more at the Koenigstadt Theatre. Here she was destined to receive, in a very novel form, the greatest compliment she had as yet met with. The Berlinese, who justly deemed her the brightest living ornament of their capital, and considered her as a Prussian, and thus, for two reasons, their property, were indignant that she had left Berlin for Paris, and still more, that she had taken another engagement, and intended to leave them once more. When she appeared for the first time after her return, in the *Italiana in Algeri*, from all parts of the house there was an explosion of hisses and groans, interspersed with exclamations—"What a shame to leave us!" "Give up your engagement with the hateful French!" "Promise—swear you will remain with us!" &c., &c. The alarm of the manager and of the vocalists engaged in the *Italiana* was boundless. The jealous husband of the *libretto*, the favored *cicisbeo*, even the erotic sultan and his janissaries fled from the theatre, whilst for twenty minutes the fair vocalist remained alone on the stage, mute and immovable as the statue of some nymph in a garden abiding the pelting of a storm. Vain were the efforts of the audience:—

"Speret—sudet multum, frustra que laboret,"

they could extract no concession from the goddess of their idolatry; their courage to persecute her further failed them; and they determined to enjoy the present moment,—"*adviene que pourra!*" From that night unto the end of the season, the applause and enthusiasm of the audiences of the Koenigstadt knew no bounds when the singer they had at first regaled with their fiercest sibillations was on the stage.

Madlle. Sontag returned to Paris for the season. The Italian Opera was then fallen under the rule of M. Laurent. There she found Malibran in the plenitude of her fame and glory. The theatrical gossips, and the Parisian *gobemouches*, either hoped or expected—all of them predicted—that a war was about to arise betwixt the two stars now forced to move in the same orbit—a war which would eclipse the encounters of Juno and Venus in the days of Paris and the siege of Troy. For once the Greeks of Paris, and the Trojans of the Salle Favart, were disappointed. It is little to be doubted that the gentle and affectionate nature of Madlle. Sontag, and the generosity which characterized at all times the impetuous Malibran, would, under any circumstances, have united the two great vocalists—and of this supposition the more than probability is established by the fact that all other *cantatrici*, of equal pretensions, have never failed to be severed by jealousy the moment they have met on the same stage. But long before Madlle. Sontag's arrival in Paris the second time, she had become acquainted with Malibran. Those amongst our readers who have lived in Paris when it was a centre of society, instead of a centre of revolution, cannot fail to have heard, at least, of the Countess Merlin. This Havanese lady, a gifted practical *dilettante*, with Countess de Sparre (Madlle. Naldi) and her countryman Orfila (no less distinguished as a vocalist than as Dean of the Faculty of Medicine of Paris, and the greatest of toxicologists), were wont to give concerts which were thronged by all the *Melomanes* of the French capital. Madame Merlin thus naturally became the "*arbiter elegantiarum*" of Paris, at least as far as regarded musical taste, and her house the rendezvous of all who aspired to fame on the lyrical stage. Here Madlle. Sontag was frequently invited on her first arrival in Paris. On one occasion, the Countess introduced to her a fair Spaniard, a *protégé* of hers just arrived from New York. This artist, who had spent some years performing in the inglorious theatres of the New World, was afterwards the celebrated Malibran. Madame Merlin begged Madlle. Sontag to encourage her friend, who, she assured her, had the greatest gifts of voice, by singing with her the duet in *Tancredi*. Madlle. Sontag cheerfully consented. So astonished, delighted, and overcome were the two fair vocalists at their respective talents, that at the close of the duet, they threw themselves into one another's arms, and from that day began their friendship.

Still the theatrical scandal-mongers did not hesitate for a moment to declare that the two queens of the lyrical stage were devoured by mutual envy and jealousy, and they thought there could not be a doubt of it, from a circumstance which occurred the night Madlle. Sontag sang the *Barbière* for the first time since her return. Rossini

came in the interval betwixt the acts to tell the Rosina of the night, at that moment surrounded by a crowd of admirers, that he had left Malibran in tears in her box, in despair at ever attaining such a purity of tone and such a perfection of execution as she had displayed. This was a sincere tribute of admiration, and not of envy, on the part of that lamented vocalist; whose real character, being impressed with the eccentricity which too often besets genius, few could understand, and whose warmth of heart and imagination made her too often the victim of cold-blooded worldliness.

The truth is, that on her arrival in Paris, Malibran received her fair colleague with open arms. Their meeting produced friendly emulation, instead of hostile pique and rivalry, and the two incomparable singers agreed to perform, in turn, the same operas. Thus did they enact, on alternate nights, *Desdemona*, *Rosina*, *Cenerentola*, &c., whilst they performed together such operas as *Tancredi*, &c. This was the most glorious—the culminating epoch of the *Italiens* in Paris. On one occasion, *Don Giovanni* was given; Madlle. Sontag performing Donna Anna (perhaps the greatest of her triumphs); Malibran, Zerlina; and Heinfetter, Elvira. On this, one of the coldest nights on record, amongst the most stirring, elbowing their way from without, in the rush of the eager aspirants to seats in the house, were observed at the same time, Rossini, Cherubini, Paër, Meyerbeer, and Auber! Well might the journals of the day observe, that no better criterion was needed of the merits of the performers. No doubt each great *maestro* went there revolving in his mind how such voices might be turned to account in his next composition; for then even the authors of *Masaniello* and the *Philtre*, of *Il Crociato* and *Robert le Diable*, had not adopted that style of overwrought harmony, of clamorous choral, and of deafening instrumental combination, from which all pure voices of such quality shrink—despairing to find melodic phrases to be uttered without contention with ophicleides and double-drum.

Such was the sisterly love and confidence which existed betwixt the two marvellous vocalists, then engaged at the *Italiens*, and which is so powerfully recorded in the letters of the lamented Malibran, that the latter was, for a time, in 1828, the only depository of Sontag's secret, that amongst the crowd of sighing and adoring swains who followed her respectfully at a distance, tendering their offers of marriage, there was one on whom she had bestowed her heart, and was about to bestow her hand.

The fortunate object of Madlle. Sontag's choice—and time has proved how well-founded was her judgment—was a member of the diplomatic body then accredited at the Court of the Tuileries. Count de Rossi, although then a very young man, was already, at that critical period of political affairs, *Conseiller d'Ambassade* of the Sardinian mission—a sufficient proof of his mental powers. He had the good looks, the elegant manners, the tastes, and the gifts of conversation which distinguish the travelled man and the real *homme de qualité*—qualities which no adversity can diminish. Fearing the prejudices of his noble relatives and of his royal master, until they could be assuaged, it was determined to conceal the wedding for the time being. It consequently was solemnized with all due form, but in secret, with only two or three intimate friends as witnesses.

A highly interesting circumstance attended this marriage—one perhaps unparalleled.

The late kind-hearted King of Prussia, apprised of the intended marriage, was desirous on the one hand to show his estimation of his fair subject, and on the other to prepare for the prejudices and obstacles this marriage would meet with on the part of the Sardinian Cabinet. Unsolicited, he spontaneously bestowed on Madlle. Sontag, before her marriage, a Patent of Nobility, with every necessary details of Coat of Arms, &c., together with a title, and the name of De Launstein. So singular a circumstance cannot be contemplated without the deepest interest. It appears to us to do as much credit to the feelings of the lamented Sovereign, as it did honor to the character of Madlle. Sontag.

But now the time was arrived when the Countess de Rossi must leave Paris once more. The regret was universal; by this time she had endeared herself to every one that approached her.

If at Paris Madlle. Sontag was admired by the public at large for her talents and her beauty, her gentle and amiable character and her generosity in private life gained her the esteem of all circles of society. One *trait*, amongst many, may be cited, which adds glory to her character as a woman as well as an artist.

The parents of Madlle. Sontag were, as we have stated, artists, with very limited means. This she never forgot; and her short experience of adversity in her earliest years was sufficient to awaken every sentiment of charity. She was known by all the exiled Germans whom adversity had driven from their native land to seek charity and sympathy in France. One cold night, on leaving the theatre, after a performance of *Don Giovanni*, Donna Anna, still full of emotion, observed on the step of a door, as she passed, three young girls near their mother, singing *lieders* of their Fatherland. Madlle. Sontag recognised the poor mother, who was weeping: she was scarcely thirty years old. She recollected that she had seen her at the theatre at Darmstadt, when she herself had been taken there in the arms of her parents. The *Cantatrice* approached the group with trembling steps, and in a voice deeply moved by emotion, asked the mother where she lived—procured an answer—dropped a gold coin—hurried to her carriage, and drove off.

On the same evening, a servant, attired in splendid livery, knocked at the door of a garret of a house in the Fauxbourg du Temple. "Who is there?" was asked by a voice, weakened by poverty and want. "A friend, who brings you good news," was the immediate reply. The door opened. "Here is a letter which I have been requested to deliver to you," said the lacquey. "Read it." The letter was thus couched:—

"On presenting yourself to-morrow at No. 17 Chaussée d'Antin, at Mr. M. B., the banker, you will find a sum of three thousand francs, which I beg you to accept. Return to Darmstadt with your three daughters, whose education I will look after."

"Pray tell me the name of the saviour of myself and children?" "I cannot," was the reply of the messenger; "at Darmstadt only will it be known to you."

The beggar dressed her children in their best attire, and the following morning took the road to Germany. For seven years she regularly received a pension, which enabled her to give her daughters a good education. One of them entered the Conservatoire of Berlin, and has now become one of the most brilliant stars of the German stage. Her name we of course must refrain from mentioning. Only within the last two years has the poor wanderer of those days discovered the secret author of a deed of such noble charity.

This is but one instance of the many acts of signal charity of the Countess Rossi recorded by the German writers, from whom we have borrowed largely for the uses of this trifling sketch.

It will now be asked, what had the Direction of Her Majesty's Theatre in London been doing during the several years that the great capitals of the Continent had been enjoying the marvellous gifts of Countess Rossi? The fact is, that as regards distant things, no great foresight or vigilance could be expected from those who formerly directed this institution. The engagement of Madlle. Sontag was too far-fetched an effort: whilst she was at Vienna or Berlin, affairs at home absorbing too much of the time and attention of the unfortunate lessee for the time being. Her Majesty's Theatre—specially established by royalty, and the chief amusement of the successive sovereigns and their illustrious guests—liberally supported by the greatest aristocracy in the world—for thirty years presented the most disorderly and disgraceful aspect which ever characterized any theatre of such pretensions. Instead of being governed by general principles of equity, and with a view to general results, it was alternately subjected to the caprice of a coterie, or to the passions of an artist. The stage was looked upon as a resort of gallantry, enlivened by the envies, jealousies, and battles of the *prima donna*; and the audience part of the theatre, where the greatest personages of the land habitually appeared, headed by Royalty itself, was frequently turned into a bear-garden, for uncouth exhibitions of temper and unseemly rows. Needless to add what was the fate of the successive lessees—at one moment compelled to live under the foot of a favorite dancer, at another to be at the beck and call of an imperious *prima donna*; to pay them whatever they asked, and sacrifice to them whoever or whatever they pleased—"Stet pro ratione voluntas!" was ever the order of the day. Not astonishing, that whoever took the helm—a great and liberal nobleman, like the Earl of Middlesex and other personages, whose mishaps Horace Walpole has so wittily portrayed—a sublime composer, like Handel—a rich banker, like Chambers—a librarian—an Italian *impresario*, or a clever actor—let the theatre be governed by a single individual, or by a committee—ruin was sure to ensue. To seek a *prima donna* of German extraction at Berlin, might, at some moment, when an Italian "*assolutissima*" was reigning, have been considered as high treason, and exposed the perpetrator to the highest punishment her admirers could inflict. However, when Madlle. Sontag came to the *Italiens* in Paris, the lessee might venture, without risk of such dire punishment, to wish to vary and increase the amusement of the public and his own receipts. Mr. Ebers, who has recorded with unanswerable data the absurd caprices and consequent losses of which, under this system, he was for seven years the victim, was then the lessee of Her Majesty's Theatre. Mr. Ebers was naturally anxious to make an engagement with a lady, the renown of whose talents and beauty was the constant theme of conversation amongst the travelled *dilettanti*. He wrote to her, and offered her an immense sum, but she felt compelled to decline, owing to her engagements on the continent.

Of course, when it was ascertained that Madlle. Sontag could not come, the subscribers, and the public generally, were filled with a headlong desire to behold her. On the principle of *omne ignotum pro magnifico*, their imaginations were excited in the extreme; for, the "children of a larger growth," like their juniors in petticoats, never cry violently but after what is taken from them, or is beyond their reach. Well we remember how every one inveighed against the want of liberality, or of diplomacy, of the unfortunate lessee—who, after all, had only committed one error, that of allowing the negotiation to be known before he was certain it would succeed. He was, consequently, soon compelled to make another appeal to Madlle. Sontag, and offer that, if she would come, he would pay indemnity for her engagement. But Madlle. Sontag indignantly repudiated the idea of breaking any contract accepted by her.

The successors of Mr. Ebers, Laurent and Laporte, were destined to reap the benefit of these applications. The queens of the lyrical stage, like the heroes and heroines of Shakespeare, come on with tenfold effect when alarums and flourishes are previously sounded. These negotiations had awakened and raised the expectations of the whole musical world of the English metropolis, and, for once, their imaginations were not destined in any respect to be disappointed in the contemplation of the reality. The Duke of Devonshire, for so many years the liberal and tasteful patron of every kind of art, was the first to make society enjoy the talents of the wonderful artist.

Her *début* took place at a concert at Devonshire-house, in the Easter week. Such was her reputation, not only for musical genius, but for beauty, elegance, and fascination of every kind, that the crowds of eager spectators in the streets equalled the throng of nobility, rank, and fashion under the roof of the great *dilettante* and patron of art, the Duke of Devonshire. A few days afterwards, she made her first appearance at her Majesty's Theatre, when she more than realized the high expectations which had been raised. Most of the great *prime donne* of our times have been compelled, in soprano parts, to compensate by their genius and science for the want of compass in their voices—as, for example, in the case of Pasta, whose natural voice was a rugged mezzo-soprano; and of Malibran, who was a real contralto. In Madame Sontag, the public found a real soprano, "to the manner born," enabling her to perform with certainty of tone, and with exquisite ease, purity, and delicacy, the most intricate passages and original embellishments, whether in full tone or *mezzo voce*. When she first appeared in *Rosina*, she revelled and luxuriated in roulades, arpeggios, and fanciful divisions; and, subsequently, in *Donna Anna*, she proved that she could sing in the chastest classical style, and produce the same effect by pure sentiment and expression, as she had done before by fioriture and staccato passages.

Any further account of the performances of Madlle. Sontag at this period would be supererogatory, that portion of her career being known to our readers either from personal observation or from report. She found herself again with Malibran, and we quote the following anecdote to give another proof of the good understanding which prevailed between Madame de Rossi and Malibran. One day Malibran accidentally met the great tenor, Donzelli, and from his countenance she guessed he was in huge dudgeon at some theatrical affair. "What is the matter with you?" said Malibran. "It is near the end of the season," answered the great tenor, "and I have not been able to fix on an attractive opera for my benefit." "Have you thought of nothing?" "Yes." "Well, what is it?" "I had thought of the *Matrimonio*, but Pisaroni says she is quite ugly enough without playing Fidalma; and then you would not be included in the cast, and I don't know what opera to choose in which you would not have the second part to Madlle. Sontag's first—that would not please you, and I'm in despair." "Well," said Malibran, "to please you, and to show you I would play any part with dear Sontag, I'll play Fidalma." "What, old Fidalma? You are joking!" "No, I'm not; and to prove that I'm in earnest, announce it this very day." Donzelli, scarce believing his own good luck, announced the opera. Malibran, dressed in most exquisite caricature, was admirable in this part, and to her we owe the subsequent appearance of great *prime donne* in the part. The only performer beneath expectation in this opera was the great tenor himself; accustomed to parts of sublime energy, he roared like a sucking dove.

From England the Countess Rossi went to Prussia. After having sung the usual time at Berlin, she repaired to Warsaw. In the Polish capital she was overtaken by a revolution—source of so many sanguinary conflicts in that unfortunate kingdom. However, this convulsion, so unfortunate for others, only led Madame de Rossi to new and increased triumphs. She removed to St. Petersburg; and there her singing produced unparalleled effect and the most

lasting impression. The Emperor and Empress, from that moment, conceived for her the greatest partiality, and she was the object of even more than that delicate, as well as generous liberality, for which the court of the Czar is so justly renowned.

In the mean time, the Count de Rossi had been compelled to separate momentarily from his lady. The aspect of affairs in Belgium demanded that a young and active diplomatist should immediately be dispatched to the court of the King of the Netherlands. The Sardinian Cabinet chose Count Rossi for this office, and he received orders in 1829 immediately to repair to Brussels. There he was still in 1830, when the revolution broke out—in truly lyrical style—after a performance of *Masaniello*! From Brussels, like the other members of the diplomatic body accredited at this Court, he went to the Hague, the residence of the King of Holland, still considered as the legitimate King of Belgium as well as Holland, until Talleyrand and his confederates in the Hollando-Belgian Conference said, like the quack doctor in Molière, "*nous avons changé tout cela*."

Here began a new phase in the life of the Countess Rossi. The King of Sardinia, cognizant of all the amiable qualities, as well as virtues, which fitted the great vocalist for the most exalted sphere of society, at last authorized the Count Rossi openly to announce his marriage. Madame de Rossi, at St. Petersburg, bid adieu to the stage: and, arriving at the Hague, the Count Rossi presented her to the whole diplomatic body assembled and to the Court. If there had existed the slightest hesitation as to the cordiality with which so bright a character should be received, the first sight, and the first moments spent with Madame de Rossi convinced the most stilted and hypercritical personages that, in her, they beheld one destined to adorn every position in life in which she might be placed, and who, fortunately for them, was about to bring them, whether in their official *réunions*, or in the private intimacy of life, a great accession of pleasure. Madame de Rossi dropped as naturally into her position, amidst the votaries of court and politics, as she had done into her parts on the stage, with this difference, that here nothing was studied, not even the words she uttered, but she found herself in the natural element of one whose mind and tastes were plainly created for the enjoyment of everything that is tasteful, refined, and truthful. If her reception at first was most kindly courteous, in a very short time it was friendly in the extreme, and she became the idol of the society of the Hague. Nothing could exceed the delight with which the young Countess dropped into the calm mode of life of the small town of the Hague, far removed from the contentions and excitement of operatic life, but also from the turmoils of politics, and the agitations of the great capitals of Europe. Unlike so many other denizens of the stage, in her privacy there never was observed in the manners of Madame de Rossi the slightest trace of her habitual avocations. At the Hague, whether in the intercourse of the courtly personages, or in the calm enjoyment of beautiful scenery and rural diversions, no thought but of the present appeared ever to intrude upon the memory of one, since her earliest years, accustomed to sway the audiences of every capital, as if it were with the wand of an enchanter—the crowds alternately hushed to dead silence—a moment later excited to the loudest and most enthusiastic applause. But from the moment that Madame de Rossi left the stage, up to the hour when she was compelled to return to it, she ever appeared, like Thomson's Patroness—only

—"*fitted or to shine in Courts
With unaffected grace, or walk the plain
With innocence and meditation joined
In soft assemblage.*"

The Dutch, who dearly love their household gods, are devoted to their language and their country, and religiously cherish the thoughts and habits of their ancestors. Although liberal and cordial in other respects, they do not readily admit foreigners into their privacy. Many an alien, misunderstanding the reason of their exclusion from Dutch society, has left Holland in huge dudgeon, muttering, as Voltaire did, "Canards! Canaux! Canaille!" Under the influence of Madame de Rossi, all these barriers dissolved, and, alone, amongst the foreigners resident at the Hague, she was sought after by the Dutch ladies and their burly consorts, and, up to the hour of her departure, lived in their intimate native circle.

In 1835, the Sardinian cabinet, to reward Count Rossi for his good services, appointed him Envoy and Minister Plenipotentiary to the Confederation of the Rhine, at Frankfort. Here the reputation of Madame Rossi for beauty, goodness, and talent had preceded her. The great diplomatic functionaries at Frankfort hastened to celebrate her arrival with *réunions*, dinners, and balls. During her residence at Frankfort, her life glided away cheerfully and rapidly amidst general esteem and domestic happiness.

The only event which signalized her residence at Frankfort was a noble act of charity. The overflowing of the Danube had produced desolation at Pesth and Buda, and appeals had been made to all parts of Germany, and particularly to the rich town of Frankfort, the commercial as well as the political capital of the German confederation. Madame de Rossi, amongst other distinguished persons, was appealed to. She at once responded to the calls on her charity, and assembling all the *amateur* musicians and singers, so numerous in every German capital, she gave an oratorio with their assistance, at which she, of course, herself sung, in the cathedral, the Dom, at Frankfort. The receipts of this truly religious concert were even beyond all expectation in amount. The Prince Metternich addressed to the Countess Rossi an autograph letter, thanking her for this great act of charity to the Austrian emperor's subjects.

Whether the rumor was founded, we know not, but it may, perhaps, be remembered, that towards the end of 1837, it was reported in the newspapers that a coolness, arising from an accidental circumstance, had arisen betwixt the Czar and the King of Sardinia. However this may be, what is certain is, that that momentary cloud had blown over very shortly afterwards; for the Sardinian cabinet had resolved to send to St. Petersburg a diplomatic representative of a higher grade, and furnished with ampler means of discharging one of the most agreeable duties of diplomacy, and that which often contributes as much as negotiation towards a good understanding—namely, hospitality. The Sardinian cabinet deemed that the nomination of Count Rossi might be agreeable to the Czar; and that this opinion was well founded was immediately proved, for the Court of St. Petersburg being consulted, according to usage, the Emperor of Russia condescended to express himself in the most flattering terms both towards M. and Madame de Rossi. The Czar has always maintained, and, moreover, proved practically, his opinion, that the essence of the art of reigning, like that of the art of eloquence, consists in action; habitually with his Majesty, the deed immediately follows the word.

On the arrival of M. and Madame de Rossi at St. Petersburg, their reception on the part of the Emperor and

Empress was marked by every circumstance which could be most gratifying to their feelings; and for three years that they continued to reside in the imperial capital, they enjoyed unalloyed happiness in a position of special favor.

Shortly after they arrived, that most amiable and august Princess, the Emperor's Consort, became very solicitous to avail herself of Madame de Rossi's admirable gifts at some concerts of sacred music, which her Majesty was desirous to give at the Winter Palace, and likewise in some operatic performances, with the assistance of the amateurs and *dilettanti* of her Court. Madame de Rossi was naturally most anxious to gratify the august lady, as much beloved as she is deeply respected by all, and to whom she bore special gratitude. But that the wife of his representative should never sing in public in any form, was the special injunction of the king of Sardinia, when he consented to the official acknowledgment of Madame de Rossi's marriage, and the latter did not even dare to apply on the subject to head-quarters. Count Nesselrode, the chancellor of the Russian empire, whose ruling occupations and predilections, apart from diplomacy, are the culture of music and that of flowers—the former with enthusiasm—undertook the treaty, and entered into the negotiation with as much zeal as if the question was the cession of a new province to the away of the Czar. The King of Sardinia was too much of a *chevalier* not to feel he could refuse nothing to such a negotiator, when the question was to oblige so peerless a lady as the Empress. The whole Court was on the tip-toe of expectation—the delay had added fuel to the general eagerness. Led by Madame de Rossi, the performances at the Emperor's palace formed an epoch in the enjoyments of the Court. This may be easily accounted for. For here Madame de Rossi enacted chosen portions of operas, of which her reading is, in a mere dramatic point of view, the most deeply affecting. The more exalted the auditory, the more fully are its delicate traits understood. The conception is natural, at the same time as refined in the extreme. Not employing any of those outbursts, dramatic over-coloring, and *jeux de ficelle*, to which most of the lyrical actresses are addicted, there is a continuity and unity, a "oneness," in the elaboration of her parts, which renders the illusion complete, provided the spectator's education be proportioned to the performance. A few years since, Italian singers, ever the models, were the most listless and inanimate of actors; now most of these vocalists, having undergone revolutionary and foreign influence, have gone to the other extreme—their predecessors acted like telegraphs—they, like windmills. Madame de Rossi gives the utmost value to the feeling of the part, without forgetting that the first duty is to give also utmost value to each note, and avoiding the gusty utterance, the spasmodic gesture, and clap-traps "*ad captandum vulgus*," her marvellous tones are evolved in all their purity, beauty of modulation, and all-surpassing agility. The spectators do not suffer from the contemplation of those efforts, and that suffusion of the face, that straining of the nerves, blood-vessels, and muscles of the throat, which have degraded tragedy to melo-drama, and which would make one believe the audience had come to behold an execution, not a poetical performance. Such a style, we repeat, as that of Madame de Rossi, is essentially made for the enjoyment of select audiences, such as she found at St. Petersburg, within the precincts of the palace. The impression made was immense, and the effects lasting. To this cause is universally attributed the establishment on a noble scale of the Italian Opera at St. Petersburg, now become, in consequence of revolutions, which have destroyed elsewhere all art and refined industry, the chief resource of Italian artists in the winter. Such was the remembrance of the enjoyment, and such was the void left by the departure of Madame de Rossi, that Rubini was summoned to St. Petersburg with a company of his own choosing, and at an outlay no other sovereign but the Czar could have borne.

The Russians of every class possess an ear for music; their performances in chorus, their extraordinary *morceaux d'ensemble* of single noted wind instruments, sufficiently prove this assertion. Amongst the higher classes art is a passion; and with such gifts as she possesses, Countess Rossi naturally became the object of the utmost enthusiastic admiration. In the summer season, when St. Petersburg is abandoned, parties were made at country seats, purposely to secure her presence. It was at a princely residence in the country, that the witty author of the popular "Letters from the Baltic," met Countess Rossi, charming and attractive as in the first burst of her popularity.

The following extracts from this gifted lady's account of her meeting with Madame de Rossi, during a *villegiatura* at Revel, will be read with interest:—

"And now let me revert more particularly to one of the fairest ornaments, both in mind and person, which our party possesses, whose never-clouded name is such favorite property with the public as to justify me in naming it—I mean the Countess Rossi. The advantages which her peculiar experience and knowledge of society have afforded her, added to the happiest *naturel* that ever fell to human portion, render her exquisite voice and talent, both still in undiminished perfection, by no means her chief attraction in society. Madame Rossi could afford to lose her voice to-morrow, and would be equally sought. True to her nation, she has combined all the *Liebenswürdigkeit* of a German with the witchery of every other land. Madame Rossi's biography is one of great interest and instruction, and it is to be hoped will one day appear before the public. It is not generally known that she was ennobled by the King of Prussia, under the title of Mademoiselle de Launstein; and since absolute will, it seems, can bestow the past as well as present and future, with seven *Ahnern*, or forefathers—'or eight,' said the Countess, laughing, 'but I can't quite remember;' and though never disowning the popular name of Sontag, yet, in respect for the donor, her visiting cards when she appears in Prussia are always printed *née de Launstein*. We were greatly privileged in the enjoyment of her rich and flexible notes in our private circle, and under her auspices an amateur concert was now proposed for the benefit of the poor in Revel.

"The rehearsals were merry meetings, and when our own bawling was over Madame Rossi went through her songs as scrupulously as the rest. I shall never forget the impression she excited one evening. We were all united in the great ball-room at the Governor's castle in Revel, which was partially illuminated for the occasion, and, having wound up our last noisy '*Firmament*,' we all retreated to distant parts of the *salle*, leaving the Countess to rehearse the celebrated *Scena* from the *Freischütz* with the instrumental parts. She was seated in the midst, and completely hidden by the figures and desks around her. And now arose a strain of melody and expression which thrills every nerve to recall;—the interest and pathos creeping gradually on through every division of this most noble and passionate of songs,—the gloomy light,—the invisible songstress,—all combining to increase the effect, till the feeling became almost too intense to bear. And then the horn in the distance, and the husky voice of suppressed agony whilst doubt possessed her soul, chilled the blood in our veins, and her final burst, '*Er ist's, Er ist's*,' was one of agony to her audience. Tears, real tears, ran down cheeks, both fair and rough, who knew not and cared not that they were there; and not until the excitement had subsided did I feel that my wrist had been clenched in so convulsive a grasp by my neighbor as to retain marks long after the siren had ceased. I have heard Schröder and Malibran, both grand and true in this composition, but neither searched the depths of its passionate tones, and with it the hearts of the audience, so completely as the matchless Madame Rossi."

Three years thus happily spent, in 1842, Count Rossi obtained leave of absence to visit his family, then residing at Vienna, and the Countess accompanied her husband. Those who visited Vienna before the late revolution, cannot forget the state of society which prevailed in the Austrian capital, the chief abode of taste and pleasure in that quarter of the globe. The circles of society were defined as rigorously and irrevocably as the boundaries of the little principalities on a German map, and with this difference that there was no debatable land. Amidst the nobility itself resident at Vienna, there was an exclusive circle formed, whose exclusiveness was two-fold, being in the ratio not only of rank, but of fashion. This circle, consisting of those who were once the great feudal lords of the overgrown empire, of the mediatised princes, of the nobles who had the highest rank and the greatest power, with a sprinkling of those who had the greatest talent to amuse society—there was formed a *crème de la crème*—a social oligarchy of exclusiveness, without example in any other capital. Over this Olympus of gods and demi-gods, the Prince Metternich, the greatest diplomatist of the age of Napoleon, and a functionary with all the reality, although without the title of imperial rule, together with his handsome and witty consort, ruled supreme. The frost-work, which excluded so many persons of the highest pretensions, whether travellers or residents, at once dissolved under the gentle influence of Madame de Rossi, as soon as she arrived in Vienna. In the sanctuary of princes and princesses, in the innermost *penetralia* of the most mysterious rites of fashion, Madame de Rossi spent the time of her short residence in Vienna, delighting those assemblies she visited by occasional snatches of song, and giving *matinées musicales* with amateurs, which were thronged by the highest personages. By her amiability, her talents, and virtues, she laid at Vienna the foundation of more than one enduring friendship.

Prussia having become the *punctum saliens* of diplomacy in the Northern world, the Sardinian Cabinet removed Count Rossi, as its representative, to Berlin, in 1843. At this *dilettante* Court, where she was considered in the light of a countrywoman, and one of the boasts of the "Faderland," and in that capital, where, a few years before, she had exacted so often unbounded enthusiasm, Madame de Rossi was received with the warmest welcome. The Berliners contemplated her noble bearing in her new position with the deepest interest.

From the Court she experienced the highest favor. The present King of Prussia is a great lover of music. It is true that, like almost every German *melomane* of the present day, he mistakes entirely the natural boundaries which essentially separate and distinguish from each other the different species of music; he places on the stage music only fitted for cathedrals, where religious fervor upholds and vivifies the ponderous form of massive harmony; and he does not discern that dramatic lyrical music should speak directly to the feelings through the words, the inspiration always melodical, the ruling themes and dramatic objects ever distinct, and not overlaid by science nor drowned by noise, and thus adapted to the enjoyment of the mass of educated men, and not made alone for the few adepts and pedantic lovers of abstruse lore. Still is the Prussian monarch a devoted lover of music; and in his *répertoire* he occasionally admits the older composers, those whose strains, like Mozart's and Glück's, required no reasoning, no scientific study, to be felt, but were at once comprehended, and charmed the ear and touched the heart. In the execution of these works, in the private circle of the King and Queen, Madame de Rossi was an immense acquisition. Happy were those who could obtain an entrance into the royal precincts when the *Iphigénie en Aulide* of Glück was sung. Nothing can exceed the effect of the noble strains of Piccini's conqueror when interpreted by our great vocalist.

In Berlin, the home of the Countess Rossi was habitually the resort of every personage exalted in rank, as well as of the *famosi* of science, art, and literature, such as Humboldt, Mendelssohn, Meyerbeer, &c. The Princess of Prussia, who holds so distinguished a position, by her tastes and her virtues, amongst the princesses of the Continent, honored Madame de Rossi with the most affectionate regard, whilst that illustrious *melomane* and excellent prince, the Grand Duke of Mecklenburgh Strelitz, finding so much goodness united with so much talent, treated her almost as a daughter—the Count and Countess passing three months every season at Strelitz.

No traveller distinguished by rank, or illustrious in art or literature, passed through the Prussian capital, without visiting the *salons* of the Countess Rossi.

The King of Bavaria, who had heard so much reported of the talents and virtues of Madame de Rossi, visited Berlin in 1846. To gratify his desire to behold and hear her, the Princess of Prussia assembled at her house a *réunion* of the *élite* of society, and specially invited Madame de Rossi. The King felt deeply the charm of her looks, her manners, and conversation, whilst her singing wound him up to poetical enthusiasm. Under its effect, he wrote the following stanzas, which created an immense sensation at the time. They possess, apart their object, the intrinsic attraction of the highest poetry; but, unfortunately, the language is scarcely translatable, and still less can we do justice in prose to the peculiar German spirit with which the poem is fraught:—

I.

Hoch hat dich der Herr gesegnet,
 Gab dir des Gesanges Macht!
 Glücklich welcher dir begegnet
 In des Zweifels banger Nacht.

II.

Deiner Stimme Silber Laute
 Treffen Süß des Hörers Ohr
 Dem, der ihnen sich vertraute
 Offnest du des Himmels Thor.

III.

Ans der Cherubinen Chöre
 Nahmst, du Hohe, deinen Sang;
 Seinen Engel Giaubt zu hören
 Jeder wohl zu dem er drang.

IV.

Aus der reinsten Seele Tiefe
Tönt ein solches Lied allein;
Ist's als wenn der Herr uns rief
Heilig so wie *Er* zu Seyn.

V.

Wenn auch einst dein Lied verklungen
Bleibt sein Segen ewig doch,
Da's in uns den Feind bezwungen
Auferlegt der Liebe Joch.

VI.

Wenn ins Reich der Harmonien
Holde, du zurückgekehrt
Wenn der Kraft die dir verliehen
Keinen Erdschranke wehrt.

VII.

Dann wirst in den Engel Schaaren
Singen du an Gottes Thron;
Selig wirst du es erfahren,
Was des Sängers höchster Lohn.

.....

I.

High was the boon of Heaven, when he gave thee
the mastery of Song. Happy is he that hears it
and ascends to its source in the dreadful Night of Doubts.

II.

For the Argentine sounds of thy voice softly stealing
on the hearer's senses, to him that confides
in them open the portals of Heaven.

III.

Of the choirs sublime of the Cherubim
thou hast borrowed thy strains;
and as he listens, each auditor thinks
it is the voice of his Guardian Angel that speaks.

IV.

Only from the depth of the purest
of hearts can such tones arise;
it is as if Heaven summoned
us to partake of its own thoughts.

V.

If some day your voice resound no more,
the blessing will be resumed; and, wrapped in eternity,
it will have destroyed in us the enemy,
and we will remain subject to a power of love and charity.

VI.

For through thy beautiful lips Heaven speaks to its children,
and thy voice brings us news from those realms above,
which are the asylum of all.

VII.

When thou shalt have returned to the Kingdom of Harmonies,
and no mortal coil shall restrain thy power;
then, amidst the angelic choir, thou shalt sing to the throne supreme,
and blessed! thou shalt receive the highest reward of terrestrial singer!

We have traced here but very imperfectly what we have observed ourselves, heard from travellers, or collected from the many journals and reviews of Germany. What we have recorded is but a very small portion of the sum of constant happiness, of constant triumph, which attended Madame de Rossi since she left the theatrical career. But at last came the fatal year 1848, when a political eruption, unprecedented for magnitude and extent, fell upon the

whole fabric of human happiness on the Continent, as unforeseen and as destructive as the volcanic outburst which, in a past age, buried Pompeii. Madame de Rossi's fortune, when the revolution broke out at Berlin, was placed partly with bankers, partly in commercial securities; commerce ceased, public credit was shaken, and private credit lost, and with the latter the fortune of Madame de Rossi. Shortly afterwards followed the events in Sardinia, in its turn deeply affecting the fortunes of her husband, and threatening the Count Rossi with the loss of that office which he had so long and so honorably held. On the first news of the losses experienced by Madame de Rossi, knowing how perfectly she had preserved her voice, the Direction of Her Majesty's Theatre made, in the most delicate manner that could be devised, ample offers to the unfortunate lady, in case she should deem it necessary to return to the scene of her former triumphs. The Count and Countess Rossi did not contemplate then the necessity of so great a sacrifice. Later offers of unlimited temptation were made by other parties, and emissaries sent to Berlin secretly to treat with the great vocalist of the golden age of the opera. But they were at once refused. As events assumed a darker complexion, Madame de Rossi, the most affectionate of mothers, grew more and more anxious for her children, and used every endeavor to prevail on her noble husband to sacrifice the privileges and prejudices of rank, and the sweets of high office, to the future welfare of their children. An artist of European fame, who not only commands admiration by his talents, his conversational powers, his elegant and amiable manners, and his noble and elevated character—M. Thalberg, happened some months since to be in Berlin, and he is said to have seconded Madame de Rossi's efforts to persuade her husband. Communications were resumed with the Direction of Her Majesty's Theatre, although still in a problematical and conditional form, and the Count Rossi repaired to Turin to endeavor to release himself from his duties. After some delay, the Count obtained permission from his sovereign to retire for a time from his career. When it was known later at Turin what was the cause of his retirement, and that it was definitive, letters were written, by order of the sovereign, in the highest degree cordial and flattering, both to M. and Madame de Rossi. From Turin the Count returned to Berlin; there Mr. Lumley had suddenly arrived—every arrangement was made, and a week after he had left Berlin, the Count and Countess Rossi arrived in London in a manner totally unforeseen. In a week more she appeared on the stage, and although, unlike other great singers, she had not, owing to the necessity of secrecy, been preceded by those announcements which habitually long beforehand herald forth a *prima donna*, and work upon public expectation, her reception was one never surpassed in enthusiasm.

When the circumstances in which Madame Sontag has once more appeared on the horizon with undiminished glory are considered, a feeling of something more than admiration takes possession of the observer. To behold beings, of which there are not one in so many millions, whose existence has scarcely been thought of, come in a critical hour, interpose their power, uphold a noble establishment, and at once defeat all the workings of intrigue, envy, and ingratitude, partakes of that providential character of events to which all others are secondary. This is the second time that such an interposition has occurred as regards the greatest theatrical institution of the country. If there existed in reality such a random power as *chance*, such events could scarcely be reckoned amongst its casualties.

If there could be any one so devoid of love for what is really good and really great, as not to be inspired by interest in the eventful life we have so very superficially sketched, they need only to repair to the theatre where our heroine appears, for them to change their disposition. Nothing ever could resist, off the stage or on it, the sterling merit either of Countess Rossi, or of Madame Sontag.

SKETCHES OF THE COUNTESS DE ROSSI,

BY VARIOUS CELEBRATED WRITERS.

PEN AND INK PORTRAIT

OF

HENRIETTE SONTAG,

BY

MARIE AYCARD.

Two centuries ago, under the dominion of a great king, when intellect and wit were the daily pastimes—at that brilliant period when gallantry was a habit and politeness a duty—there was a charming fashion; which was to reproduce in writing, the description of the character, person, and talents of those who had any claim to celebrity. This fashion of pen-and-ink portraits, consecrated by La Rochefoucauld, who sketched his own—by Madame Lafayette, who sketched that of her illustrious friend—has disappeared with the great names, the great sayings, and the great doings of those days, when toil and money-getting were not the only objects of life.

Occupied, however, Madam, like all other people, as I am, I shall find time to trace, with a rapid and truthful pen, those eminent qualities which all admire in you. Endowed with beauty which attracts, grace which fascinates, you also possess *esprit* and native refinement, without which every other quality loses its charm. You have a marvellous talent—how shall I describe this! How can we explain by what natural refinement, by what intellectual labor, you have made it at once so grand and so touching! That ineffable voice, which goes directly to the heart, and

dwells for ever in the memory of those who hear it—those ever-changing shades of expression—those bold and brilliant embellishments created by good taste, softened by grace, and made inimitable by art—you possess all. Oh, music of the spheres, of which we dream but never hear!—you alone have revealed it, for you alone possess that touching language, at once radiant and heart-thrilling, yet penetrating, like all real beauty, like that divine essence whence you emanate. When you appear on the scene, which you instantly transform into a brilliant saloon, one would think he had been admitted by special favor to one of those courtly representations given to indulge the caprice of some great princess desirous of obtaining those numerous wreaths you know so well how to wear.

How much admiration have you not excited in the different parts you have filled, with equal inspiration and science! How have eyes and ears both been charmed at the "Daughter of the Regiment"—a creation understood and interpreted by yourself alone!—where, in spite of yourself, the harmony of your gestures, the grace of your movements, give to the whole character a mysterious poetry, which infects the very air around you! With what inimitable art you represent that inimitable *Rosina*, at once so innocent and so cunning, committing with such reckless grace those little sins which make youth so happy, and revealing at the same time the woman who attracts us by the qualities we love and the faults we adore. Ah, whether you express either joy or sorrow, you charm equally—like those privileged natures, you can feel everything, because you can understand everything. You are merciful and charitable—misfortune has never applied to you in vain—never has the cry of the sufferer been listened to by you without reply. Succoring the one, consoling the other, you give to misfortune at once your heart and your gold. Benevolent, obliging, and generous, all those who come to you are received with a gracious modesty which spares them many pangs. You have so much memory for what is required of you—you forget so soon what you give—you appear so happy to oblige—that you seem to be indebted to those whom you serve. Artist and accomplished woman, you possess the two endowments so rare in this world—immense talent and unlimited appreciation. Heaven has given you two nobilities—that of ancestry and that of the soul.

I have nothing more to say—except that I am seeking in vain for an expression to portray so admirable a character. This is your portrait, Madam—and I leave the world to determine whether it is correct.

HENRIETTE SONTAG

(COUNTESS DE ROSSI)

BY MR. SCUDO,^[A]

(*Member of the Institut Français.*)

AMONG the rare consolations which have lately been vouchsafed to the devotees of music, is the reappearance upon the world's stage of a celebrated artist who had been its ornament. Mademoiselle Sontag, after having enchanted Europe by the beauty of her voice, by her marvellous vocalization, and the charms of her person, suddenly disappeared from the eyes of her numerous admirers, and hid the splendor of an incontestable and painfully acquired reputation under the veil of matrimony. Mademoiselle Sontag became Madame de Rossi. She exchanged a diadem for the coronet of a countess, and the graceful Muse became a humble ambassadress. A political revolution, which overturned society, was necessary to restore to us the eminent vocalist whom we have so much admired. Madame de Rossi, who, most happily for our enjoyment, has lost her embassy and a part of her fortune, as we are assured, has again become Mademoiselle Sontag. After having astonished the fashionable world of London, which received her during the past winter with great distinction, Mademoiselle Sontag has determined to present herself also, after a silence of twenty years, before that Parisian public whose discriminating acclamations formed then the most brilliant portion of her fame. We have heard her at six concerts which she has given at the Conservatoire; but before expressing our appreciation of a talent yet so admirable, we may be permitted, perhaps, to speak briefly of the youth of this celebrated woman, who has been so tried by destiny.

[A] Scudo was a pupil of the great Choron, an intimate of Rossini, and has had the entrée of all the most distinguished musical circles on the continent for the past thirty years. He is a prominent contributor to the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, the *Revue de Paris*, and the *Revue Independant*, from one of which publications this article is taken.—*Note of the Translator.*

Henriette Sontag was born at Coblenz in Prussia, of one of those families of German comedians of which Goethe has given us such a poetic description in his *Wilhelm Meister*. Coming to the light like the halcyon, upon the crests of stormy waves, she early knew the vicissitudes and trials of an artist's life. At the age of six years she made her first appearance at Darmstadt in *Das Donauweibchen* (The Daughter of the Danube), an opera very popular in Germany, where, in the character of *Salomé*, she won admiration for her childish grace and just intonation. Three years afterwards, having lost her father, Henriette Sontag went to Prague with her mother, where she played children's parts, under the direction of Weber, who was then director of the orchestra of the theatre. Her precocious success obtained for her, by singular favor, permission to enter the Academy of Music of that City, although she had not yet reached the age required by its rules. There, for four years she studied vocal music, the piano-forte, and the elements of vocalization. An indisposition of the *prima donna* of the theatre gave her the opportunity to appear for the first time in a part of some importance, that of the *Princess of Navarre* in Boildieu's opera, *John of Paris*. She was then fifteen. The flexibility of her voice, her budding charms which announced her future beauty, the agitation which stirred her heart and filled it with mysterious presentiments, secured for her a success which augured well for the future of her professional life. From Prague, Henriette Sontag went to Vienna, where she met Madame Mainville-Fodor, whose example and good counsels developed the rich gifts which she had received from nature. Singing alternately German and Italian opera, she was able to prove her powers in these two strongly contrasting languages, and to choose with deliberation between the dazzling caprices of Italian music and the sober and profound accents of the new German school. An engagement having been offered her, to sing in German opera, at the theatre of Leipzig,

she went to that city, the centre of the philosophical and literary discussion, and acquired a great reputation by the manner in which she interpreted Weber's *Der Freyschutz* and *Euryanthe*.

The admirers of the genius of this great composer were chiefly the young men of the Universities, and all those ardent and generous spirits who wished to disenthral Germany from foreign rule, as well in the realm of fancy as in that of politics; they sounded with enthusiasm the praises of Mademoiselle Sontag, whose name was known throughout Germany as that of a virtuoso of the first order, born to renew the marvels of Mara. It was at Leipzig that Mara, that famous German singer of the close of the eighteenth century, was educated under the care of the venerable Professor Hiller. It was vouchsafed to M'lle Sontag to dedicate a magnificent organ and a vocalization almost unknown on that side of the Rhine, to the performance of the vigorous and profound music of Weber, Beethoven, Spohr, and all those new German composers who, severing all alliance with foreign scepticism, had given freedom to the national genius. Overwhelmed with homage, celebrated by all the brilliant men of the day, the students singing her praises, and followed by the *hourras* of the German press, Mademoiselle Sontag was called to Berlin, where she appeared with immense success at the theatre of Koenigstadt. It was at Berlin, it will be remembered, that *Der Freyschutz* was represented for the first time. It was at Berlin, a protestant and rationalistic city, the centre of an intellectual and political movement which sought to concentrate within itself the life of Germany, at the expense of Catholic Vienna, in which reigned the spirit of tradition, sensuality, the gaiety and the light melodies of Italy; it was at Berlin, we say, that the new school of dramatic music founded by Weber, had taken foothold. Mademoiselle Sontag was received with enthusiasm as an inspired interpreter of the national music. The Hegelian philosophers found in her a subject for their learned commentaries, and they recognised in her limpid and sonorous voice "*the subjective blended with the objective in an absolute unity.*" The old King of Prussia received her at court with parental kindness. It was there that diplomacy had occasion to make approaches to M'lle Sontag, and to effect a breach in the heart of the muse.

Availing herself of a leave of absence which had been granted her, M'lle Sontag came finally to Paris, and appeared at the Italian Theatre on the fifteenth of June, 1826, in the part of *Rosina* in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*. Her success was brilliant, especially in Rode's variations, which she introduced in the second act during the singing lesson. This success she at once confirmed and increased in *La Donna del Lago* and *L'Italiana in Algieri*; many passages of which, written for a contralto voice, she was obliged to transpose. Upon her return to Berlin she was received with redoubled manifestations of interest. She remained in this city until the close of the year 1826; when, abandoning Germany, and the school which had formed her in the very sanctuary of its nationality, she fixed herself at Paris. M'lle Sontag first appeared in the character of *Desdemona* in the opera *Otello*, on the second of January, 1828. She was one of that constellation of admirable virtuosos who at that epoch charmed Paris and London; and among whom Madame Pasta, Mad. Pisaroni, Mad. Malibran, and M'lle Sontag shone as stars of the first magnitude.

Between the last two vocalists, so different in their styles, there was declared one of those fruitful rivalries of which Hoffman has given us so dramatic a picture. This rivalry was pushed so far between the imperious Juno and the blonde Venus that they could not remain together in the same room. Upon the stage, when they sang in the same opera, which happened in *Don Giovanni* or *Semiramide*, their stupendous jealousy manifested itself by malicious cadenzas and rockets of sound which inflamed their hearers. Now it was the Trojans burst all bonds, and now the Greeks. The parterre rose and fell like the waves of the sea under the touch of the divinities of Olympus. At last, one day Mad. Malibran and M'lle Sontag having to sing a duett at a princely mansion, the fusion of two voices so different in quality and in the character of their expression, produced so grand an effect that the success of the two great vocalists worked their reconciliation. From that moment a calm rested *sul mare infido*.

Even in the midst of such successes and festivals of art, a black spot shows itself upon the horizon: diplomacy labored secretly to work confusion—its protocols became menacing, and it was suddenly announced that M'lle Sontag was about to quit the stage to devote herself to more serious duties. For a year past she had been secretly married to a Count de Rossi, who was no longer willing to share his happiness with the world. M'lle Sontag took leave of the Parisian public at a performance for the benefit of the poor, which was given at the opera, in January of 1830. Upon her return to Berlin, her friends and numerous admirers won her consent to give a few representations, and she quitted the stage definitively two months before the revolution of July. But before entering upon the new path of life which she had chosen, and before laying aside the brilliant renown which had been so justly acquired, M'lle Sontag went a journey to Russia, giving at Warsaw, Moscow, St. Petersburg, and afterwards at Hamburg and other principal cities of Germany, concerts equally brilliant and profitable.

It was after this journey that, under the name of the Countess de Rossi, following the fortunes of her husband, she passed successively many years at Brussels, the Hague, Frankfort, and Berlin, heard only in those assemblies of the distinguished societies of Europe which the revolution of February has shaken to its very foundations.

Mademoiselle Sontag possesses a soprano voice of unusual compass, of great equality, and of a marvellous flexibility. From the middle *Do* to that in *alt*, this voice has the sweet ring of a silver bell, and never need we fear either a doubtful intonation or an ill-balanced phrase in her wonderful displays of vocalization. This rare flexibility of organ is the result of incessant labor, judiciously directed to the development of the munificent gifts of nature. Until her arrival at Vienna, where she had opportunity to hear the great virtuosos of Italy, M'lle Sontag had been guided only by her own happy instincts, and the tastes, more or less cultivated, of the public before whom she sang. It is to the counsels of Madame Maineville-Fodor, and yet more to the example which the admirable talent of this exquisite singer set daily before her, that M'lle Sontag owes the expanding of those native powers which till then had rested, folded as it were, within their bud. The contest with such rivals as Mad. Pisaroni and Mad. Malibran—those heroic combats which she had to sustain upon the stages of Vienna, Paris, and London—accomplished for her talent that degree of full and satisfying maturity which has made M'lle Sontag one of the most brilliant singers of Europe.

Amid the dazzling vocal displays of all kinds which M'lle Sontag pours forth every evening before her admirers, attention is chiefly claimed by the limpidity of her chromatic scales and the brilliance of her trills which scintillate like rubies lying on velvet. Each note of these long descending flights stands out as if it alone was struck and is linked to the following note by a delicate and imperceptible transition; and all these marvels are accomplished with perfect grace, and without ever distorting the countenance by the least appearance of effort. The charming face of M'lle Sontag, the clearness and sweetness of her lovely eyes, her elegant outlines, and her figure lithe and slender as the stem of a young poplar, finish the picture and complete the enchantment.

M'lle Sontag has essayed all styles. Born in Germany at the commencement of this tumultuous era, she was

developed by the vigorous and powerful music of the new German school, and achieved her first success in the masterpieces of Weber. At Paris she attempted successively the characters of *Desdemona*, *Semiramide*, and that of *Donna Anna* in the *chef d'œuvre* of Mozart. In spite of the enthusiasm which she seems to have excited in her countrymen by the manner in which she was enabled to render the dramatic inspiration of Weber—an enthusiasm the echo of which is found in the works of Louis Boerne—in spite of the brilliant endowments which she displayed in the character of *Desdemona*, and above all in that of *Donna Anna*, which was forced upon her almost by the jealousy of Mad. Malibran—it is in light music and in the placid style that M'lle Sontag finds her true superiority. The music of *Rosina* in *Il Barbière de Seviglia*, that of *Ninetta* in *La Gazza Ladra*, of *Amenaide* in *Tancredi*, and *Elena* in *La Donna del Lago*, have afforded her the fields for her greatest success.

The cry of pathos never escapes from those delicate lips on whose gently parted loveliness grace sits smiling; bursts of passion never distort the classic contour of that visage, or crimson the satin-like surface of that white and polished skin. No; in that elegant form, which flits before the eager eye like an airy cloud, nature never rouses the magnificent tempests of passion. This is the reason why Mademoiselle Sontag consented to bow her lovely head under the yoke of matrimony, and to descend from a throne to which she had been elevated by the omnipotence of talent, to become the Countess de Rossi. Who knows if, after all, bitter regrets did not follow to disturb the repose which she had promised herself? Who can tell if the ambadress, in the midst of her sombre grandeur, has not turned a regretful glance upon those bright years of her youth, when a whole nation of admirers crowned her with roses and perennial wreaths? Have not Auber and Scribe, in their pretty opera *L'Ambassadrice*, given us the story of Mademoiselle Sontag transformed into the Countess de Rossi?

Madame Sontag's voice is well preserved. If its lower notes have lost a little of their fulness and freedom, as is always the case with soprano voices, the upper notes still retain their roundness and their charm. Her powers are hardly less exquisite than when she was twenty years old; her execution has lost nothing of that marvellous flexibility which was then its characteristic; and, with the slightest awakening of the imagination, we recognise to-day in Madame Sontag the finish, the charm, the placid and serene expression which have distinguished her among the eminent vocalists who have astonished Europe in the last half century. Received with distinction by audiences of the highest fashion, who were drawn together by the rumor of her greatness and her misfortune, she has sung with great success many selections from her former *répertoire*. Among these none have attracted more attention than Rode's Variations, a sort of musical tapestry, brought into fashion by Mad. Catalani, and upon which Mad. Sontag has embroidered the most intricate and charming arabesques. An ascending scale launched out at lightning speed and flashing upon the ear like a ribbon of fire, has excited the liveliest transports.

The celebrated vocalists of the nineteenth century may be divided into three groups, very diverse from each other. In one we find those who have shone by the expression of strong passion, and by elevation of style, such as Mad. Pisoni, Mad. Pasta, and Mad. Malibran; in another, those wonderful syrens who exhale in a merry peal of radiant laughter, such as Marcolini, Mad. Persiani, and many others. It is between these two extreme groups that we place Mad. Maineville-Fodor and Mad. Sontag, who have possessed all the seductions of a rich and graceful vocalization, without exhibiting either the transports of passion or the spontaneous outpourings of gaiety. Accordingly, they have flourished long, for they have never undergone those paroxysms which break and consume a feeble woman as a diamond is devoured in the crucible of the chemist. We delight to bring Mad. Sontag before our mind's eye decked in a white robe, listening to harmless thoughts, moving placidly through a leafy vista, and in her bosom a cluster of Forget-me-not.

HENRIETTE SONTAG IN FRANKFORT.

BY

LOUIS BOERNE.

ONE of the most brilliant and influential names in German literature, for the last quarter of a century, is Louis Börne, a man whose genius, at once tender and sarcastic, and whose innate love for political freedom, were fitly refined and adorned by the most severe and delicate taste in art. In one of his happiest chapters, he describes a visit to his native city of Frankfort, made by Madame Sontag, who was then turning the heads of all Germany,—as she has done again within the past year. As this charming and accomplished artist is soon to appear in America, we know of no better means of satisfying the curiosity of our readers as to what they may expect from her, than by translating this article by so eminent and trustworthy a critic as Börne. It is as follows:

"A year ago Henriette Sontag, the gracious Muse of Melody, appeared at Weimar, and it seemed as if they all went crazy. Like pious priests and worshippers of stars, they celebrated her advent as that of some great and glorious constellation, with music of harps and cymbals, in the quaintest Spanish, Moorish, languishing, twilight strains, with hyacinthine perfumes and incense. Instead of simply saying, 'M'lle Sontag has supped with M. von Goethe,' they sang, 'The King of Poets has cherished the Wondrous Child with food and drink!' Since then I have gone mad at the foolish people, whose heads were turned in a night; before that, they had used the flame of Prometheus to boil their potatoes with, and now they had swallowed the fire itself; they had been used to conceal their moderate capacity for enjoyment under hard and bitter husks, but now, of a sudden, they began to grow sweet, and soft, and uncertain, and shining as jelly.

"I had the bitterest sayings in my mind, and meant to print them all. But it is well for me that I reflected and did it not. How people would have mocked at the inflexible Rhadamanthus when at last, pen and all, he became the vassal of a girl!

"In truth, since I have myself heard the enchantress, I am bewitched like the others, and no longer know what I say. But as in the twilight of a dream I remember, that before my soul's transmigration I was of the opinion that we Germans, who are so hard to rouse to enthusiasm, who begin to be intoxicated when others are getting over the headache,—it was my opinion that we ought not to yield up our virgin hearts to the first charming apparition. For

though beautiful, it is not unfading; though delightful, it does no solid good. I remember I held it to be thoughtless extravagance. But now I think otherwise, and I say: It is lovely; let us enjoy the moment, and why refuse to enjoy it? why sacrifice it to the future? Who knows how long it will be before we are again permitted thus loudly to utter our admiration and pay our homage to a divinity of our own free choice, and not imposed on us by accident? And now I desire to praise this enchantress, who has transformed an entire nation; but where shall I find the words? Even the endless array of mere paper words that we have created in Frankfort since our senses were taken from us, even these are exhausted. One might offer a prize of a hundred ducats for the invention of a new adjective, never before employed, and nobody could gain the prize.

"They have called her the lovely, the incomparable, the heavenly, the adorable, the celestial maiden, the darling Henriette, the gracious child, the heroine of song, the daughter of the gods, the dear songstress, the Pearl of the German Opera. To all these epithets, I say, Yes, with all my heart. Even the severest judges have given their verdict; her charming person, her playing, her singing can be compared to everything that is lovely, for such a union of all these gifts of Nature and Art was never found in any other singer. To this, also, I assent, though the rareness of this union did not delude me; for with all my efforts, I could not see and hear her at the same time, and I had to think of her points of excellence one by one, together, in order to arrive at the sum of her worth. But of one thing I am certain, and that is that what could raise the whole of a German work-day city into such a festal excitement, without the command of either the almanac or the police, must be something admirable, something beautiful. To praise our songstress then, let me speak of the excitement she has produced, for such universal intoxication, even if not to the credit of the drinker, is to the glory of the wine.

"With a little variation, Henriette Sontag could say with Cæsar: 'I came, they saw, I conquered.' But triumph went before her, and the battle was only a game for the celebration of the victory.

"The first compliment paid to her in subjugated Frankfort was the announcement in the published list of arrivals, 'M'lle Sontag, Singer to his Majesty the King of Prussia, with her suite and attendants.' Princely personages travel 'with suite and attendants,' and by attributing the same to M'lle Sontag, she was raised to the very steps of the throne; and without rebellion, no higher honor could have been paid her.

"To this first compliment the last she received here was perfectly suited. The landlord at whose house she was lodged for a fortnight, at her departure refused all compensation, and thereby renewed and ennobled the old hotel of the Roman Emperor into a Prytaneum, where, in the name of the Fatherland, famous Germans are entertained. Between these two compliments extend a countless wilderness of others. Even the Jews experienced a slight dizziness, and when at the Exchange you heard them speak of Eighths and Quarters, you were doubtful whether they meant musical beats or per cents. The price of tickets to the theatre was doubled, a thing unheard of, for we Frankforters, rich as we are, regard every unusual expense as intolerable. Spectators poured along in vast crowds, not merely the inhabitants of the town, not merely the people of the neighboring cities; but from a distance, from Cologne and Hanover, came flocks of strangers. It was like the Olympian games. An Englishman, who could not get a place in the boxes, wanted to take the entire parquette, and when told it was impossible, gave loud vent to his astonishment at this strange Continental scrupulosity. A young man came on foot from Wiesbaden, a distance of sixteen miles, and arrived just as the house was opened; with great difficulty he procured a seat, but was good enough to give it up to a wearied lady; he stood up, fainted before the performance began, and, as there was no place for him to fall, he was carried lifeless in the fainting-fit, from hand to hand, to the door; he recovered just as the curtain fell on the last act, and walked back to Wiesbaden the same night. An inhabitant of the city was so exhausted by the closeness and the heat, that he had to go home, and died the same evening. We have heard of other injuries and maladies, and of persons who were obliged to keep their beds for many days. Through the whole time, the *Intelligencer* was filled with advertisements of lost chains, rings, bracelets, veils, and other articles which ladies lose in a crowd. On the first day of Sontag's appearance, I went to the optician's to get my opera glass, which had been left to be repaired, and he had to look for it among fifty others, left there for the same purpose. There was a universal arming of the eyes of the entire masculine gender in Frankfort, and under the gleam of the new chandelier, hundreds of glasses, directed at a weak girl, offered a terribly warlike aspect. But never was artillery so poorly served, for it was the unskilful artillerists who were injured and not the enemy.

"The house was opened two hours earlier than usual, but long before that, the great square in front was crowded and jammed with people. Expectation was raised to its highest apex; the excitement was intense and keen. Until I experienced the reality it seemed impossible that such extravagant anticipations could be satisfied. But all who were there confessed that M'lle Sontag far exceeded all they had looked for. And in such a case, where the appearance and the reality belong together, and are one and the same thing, what room was there for deception and illusion? A magical, indescribable grace accompanies all the movements of this singer, and we are in doubt whether to regard her acting or her singing as the lovely ornament of a perfect beauty. In comic parts she always preserves that womanly tact, which is so easily violated on the boards, and in serious ones a dignity which is at once touching and commanding. On that first night we forgot the senseless text of Rossini's *Otello*, we saw and heard the Desdemona of Shakspeare. In a simple ballad which speaks to the heart she is admirable, as in the most ornate Cavatina, which delights the ears. We saw old men weeping—something which no trick of artificiality, though never so unequalled and incomparable, could produce. Her low notes, her wonderful trills, runs, and cadenzas, resemble the charming, childlike ornaments on a Gothic edifice, which serve to moderate the solemnity of lofty arches and pillars, to combine the joy of the heavens with the joy of the earth, but never violate or degrade that solemnity. The inspiration produced by Henriette Sontag as Desdemona, resembles the Greek fire that could not be extinguished, and— and— But let me cling to the rock of cool reflection and save myself. Perhaps it was the whirlpool that carried me away, perhaps it was not a mere figure of speech, when I said; 'I know not what I say.' If this be the case, if I have experienced a human weakness, why then I will not alive yield myself to mocking pity, but will mingle with my shipwrecked companions in misfortune. All the critics and poets here and in Darmstadt have gone crazy also, and have done nothing but declaim, sing, and rave about Sontag. What poems, what fables, what flights of fancy! All Olympus was mustered into the service, and the children, grey-beards, and veterans of mythology had to come up and pay their tribute. Critical old women made declarations of passion to the songstress, and bloodless reviewers glowed with life in her praise. I am dizzy; I have seen Germans drunk, not with wine, but with enthusiasm. There has been no end to the prose and still less to the verse, expressive of their boundless delight. All seasons, all times, all emotions, all forms of expression, have been evoked to pay her honor. But I must end, lest I provoke some reader to exclaim:

PAST AND PRESENT.

BY

THEOPHILE GAUTIER.

SONTAG! A thousand delightful memories are associated with that name;—memories which it is ever pleasant to recall. Years, years ago we heard her delicious voice, and its beauty never left us. We were present at the few last performances of Sontag before she retired from a world that almost worshipped her, to the joys and honors of private life. We heard her, and we thought that nature had never before endowed a human soul with such exquisite musical organization, or a voice in which heart and melody were so beautifully and intimately blended. We were young then, and our admiration of the beautiful in art was, perhaps, stronger than our judgment; for, in youth, enthusiasm is but rarely under the control of reason; and in good truth the beauty of Mademoiselle Henriette Sontag was something so *spirituelle*, seemingly, to us, so far elevated above common mortality, that reason was the slave of sensation—a double entrancement of the eye and the ear.

The last part that we saw her in was *Agathe* in *Der Freyschutz*. Her singing of the *Grand Aria* was something perfectly unique, different in conception and execution from any artiste who had preceded her in that celebrated *scena*. It was a combination of purity and innocence, with earnest and holy love. The conception was full of dramatic force, and the execution was nature without exaggeration or counterfeit. In the *Andante*, which is a prayer for the safety of her lover, her impassioned, but innocent heartfelt earnestness, was as though a seraph was pleading for an erring mortal. We have seen nor heard anything like it since: it will be to us a life-long memory of delight.

We remember well how loud, indignant, and regretful were the universal exclamations at the presumption of any one man appropriating to himself one in whom the whole civilized world held so dear an interest. But the fiat had gone forth; Love pleaded and Hymen sanctioned the engagement; the world looked on wonderingly, scarcely realizing the extent of the loss. The star that but yesterday beamed in all its radiant effulgence, had suddenly set, and would appear no more. And so Sontag disappeared; a blaze of glory circling that young brow, o'er which scarce twenty summers had set their seal. She disappeared, and by and by a new star arose, and the many worshipped, and the past was, if not forgotten, but rarely remembered.

From time to time, however, the court gossips and the telltales of fashionable life vouchsafed us slight glimpses of the private life of the Countess Rossi—the peerless Sontag. Beloved and admired in that high circle to which her husband's position had called her, it was a theme of general remark with what modest womanly dignity she ornamented the society in which she moved. That same truthful earnestness which, aided by her supernatural gifts, rendered her the idol of the stage, secured her the love and esteem of all who met her in private life.

After many years of undimmed happiness and prosperity, changes take place, and by one of those extraordinary freaks of fortune by which the highest and the lowest reverse their positions, we find the Countess Rossi—the Sontag of our youth—compelled to have recourse to that profession of which she had been so immaculate an ornament, to retrieve a broken fortune and re-erect the altars of her home. No false scruples troubled her; she had a duty to perform, and she set herself with bold and hopeful spirit to the work. How entirely she has succeeded, her career for the two past years bears witness. A few more years of labor and her noble exertions will have procured for her a second large fortune.

And how has time worked upon Sontag? To our mind it has but matured her glorious powers, and added to her loveliness a charm, which is doubled by our interest in and our sympathy for her present position.

Her voice has still that exquisite purity and *spirituelle* quality which make it a perfect luxury to listen. We have heard louder voices, but never one that fell so soothingly upon the heart—nor one that left us so perfectly satisfied while longing eagerly for more. She was always a thorough and conscientious *artiste*, and she has not changed. To describe her powers minutely would occupy too much space, but they are all summed up in one short sentence. Sontag *sings!*

HOW SONTAG SINGS.

BY

HECTOR BERLIOZ.

IN these days, when music has become one of the *necessities* of civilized life, each party and each clique has its own particular favorite, and denies even common justice to those artists, who are not members of that *camaraderie* which Mr. Scribe has so cleverly portrayed in his witty play. In that respect Madame Sontag has been extremely fortunate; criticism has handled her more tenderly, and she had to suffer less than any other singer from the venom of party spirit, from the simple reason, that she united all the qualities—although not in an equal degree—all like to find in an artist: sweetness never surpassed, agility almost fabulous, expression, and the most perfect intonation. On she carols, higher and higher, like a lark at "heaven's gate," so soft, so clear, so wonderfully distinct that, like the silver bell from the altar, it is heard through the pealing organ. But her principal merit, in our eyes, is the absence of 'rant'—the substitute of genius—in any shape whatever. She always SINGS, and does not depend on mere strength of lungs—erroneously called "power." She never strains her delicate organ—that sweet instrument so susceptible of every shade of expression. How fortunate for our young singers that, like the nuns in Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable*,

she left the tomb of the seven ancestors, bestowed by the King of Prussia upon the Countess de Rossi, to teach them the wide difference between singing and screaming, and to show how we all, during the last ten years, have been listening to and adoring *false* prophets.

THE

PRIMA DONNA AND THE COUNTESS.

OF all the artists there is none who so appeals to our hearts and our imaginations as Henriette Sontag. Her romantic history, her recent and great misfortunes, her far-famed beauty, her supreme talent, and her untarnished reputation, make her certainly one of the most remarkable women of the present century. Madame Sontag has had, as it were, two lives; twice she has achieved—what so few are ever destined to achieve at all—fame and fortune. When a mere girl, at eighteen, when others of her age are just entering on the world and existence, Henriette Sontag had already acquired European fame, seen the noblest and richest of many lands at her feet, refused even a royal hand offered for her acceptance, and, true to woman's nature, bestowed herself and her fortune (already considerable) where she had given her heart. The Count Rossi, one of the *attachés* of the Sardinian embassy, in every way merited this preference, and many years of uninterrupted happiness, during which time he became the representative of Sardinia at various courts, giving to the prima donna the rank of Ambadress, which was never more gracefully filled, have justified her choice. What Henriette Sontag was when she first appeared, cannot be better described than by an extract from a work of Travels to St. Petersburg, by the celebrated Dr. Granville, which, at the time, was translated into French and German, and extracted into all the public papers. Dr. Granville, an Italian by birth, and an accomplished musician, was in every way qualified to judge of a musical talent, and time has proved the correctness of his criticism.

"* * * The orchestra (such an orchestra, composed of *premiers talens* all playing as one) began the overture to Winter's 'Interrupted Sacrifice,' *Das Unterbrechene-Orperfest*, and even though waiting in feverish excitement for the appearance of that wonderful girl (for she is no more) all had come to see, it was impossible not to be carried away by the exquisite manner in which this orchestra (perhaps the finest in the world) executed this fine composition. At length *Mirrha* entered; the star, the comet, the attraction, the Henriette Sontag, of whom sonnet-writers, poets, newspaper compilers, prose composers, travellers, had raved so much, stood before us. She is slender, rather *petite* and *mignonne*. Her countenance, like that of Canova's nymphs, belongs more to the ideal than to mortal reality. I should say that her hands are the prettiest things I ever saw, if her feet were not prettier still. She is faultless as to teeth, which the sweetest smile, for ever playing round her mouth, sets off at every warble in all their glory. Her *chevelure*, between auburn and blonde, is magnificent; and, to conclude with the essential part, the quality of her voice is beyond measure pleasing, and she possesses remarkable facility. M'lle Sontag's voice is a soprano of a sonorous, sweet, and clear *timbre*. She can reach the E above the lines without screaming. The flexibility of her organ has seduced her into that peculiar style of singing, which made Madame Catalani, for some few years, the musical wonder of Europe. It is this quality of voice, united to the personal gifts so profusely lavished by nature on one of her favorite daughters, that brought M'lle Sontag forward as a miracle, on the German stage, and at once, and without any premonitory step, made her a prima donna at the age of sixteen. But the first station at the opera cannot be had on such easy terms. The time necessary for acquiring declamation, expression, and pathos, has been spent by this prodigy in receiving unbounded applause for this one dazzling gift of nature, a flexible and brilliant voice, rendered irresistible by great personal beauty. The part of *Mirrha* is suited to Henriette Sontag in all but the last two scenes, where she is required to represent acute feeling and distress of mind. Her unalterably sweet and girlish face is ever the same, and the extent of the expression of her large, beautiful blue eyes consists in lowering them with the bashfulness of one of Carlo Dolce's madonnas, or raising them with the tenderness of a Cleopatra. The part of Rosina, in the *Barbière*, is one which exquisitely suits both the voice and person of M'lle Sontag. Never was there so fascinating a Rosina.

"Her *sostenuto* is firm, clear, and sonorous; the silver tone of her voice unsurpassed; her method excellent. She is daring, and launches at all hazards into a sea of flourishes, the result of which is always successful, particularly as she concludes them, by darting towards the audience one of those glances which have called down in Berlin, as they will in Paris and London, thunders of applause."

Thus was Henriette Sontag, during the first period of her fame. From Berlin she came to London, where enthusiasm reached a height hitherto unknown, because it included, as well as admiration, respect for the virtues and conduct of the loveliest woman who had ever trod on the stage. Then she went to Paris, and Paris set its seal upon her artistic reputation, classing her with all who had hitherto stood at the head of artistic celebrity. Yet she had powerful competitors to contend with, for she sang with Malibran and Pisoni. Here it was her marriage (which she had been compelled to keep secret till the end of her engagement) was declared. Certainly few men have been so envied as Count Rossi, when he was known to be the husband of the world's idol. Society, which was as much attached to the woman as to the artist, seemed to think it an injustice, and felt for the first time inclined to quarrel with the actions of her it had proclaimed faultless in both mind and person. Scribe founded the libretto of the Ambadress on this marriage, but he little thought he should be prophetic in the catastrophe he put to his opera, as he has been; for Henriette Sontag, like the Henriette in the play, *has* returned to the stage.

The Countess Rossi, though she had no taste for the publicity of the stage, having gone uncorrupted and unscathed through all its glittering temptations, had an innate enthusiasm for her art. The young Countess, therefore, cultivated it as assiduously as the young prima donna; and in Frankfort and in Berlin, where she principally resided, in St. Petersburg, which she visited, her saloon was the resort of all that was renowned in the artistic world. That wondrous voice sang on as admirably as before, following all the progress of musical science, and knowing all the *répertoire* of the best masters, as their compositions appeared before the world. Her silvery tones

now resounded in the halls of palaces; and, instead of a public, she had kings and princes for her guests. Yet she was the same simple-minded and unaffected woman, with a mind pure as in infancy, and a heart beating only with good and tender emotions. Often during these years did she sing for public charities, and her name was sure, as in former days, to fill the coffers of the institution for which she sang.

But this bright destiny, which seemed placed beyond the reach of change, and which time seemed to have consolidated, was, during the revolution of 1848, from circumstances of an entirely private nature, completely destroyed.

Then, with her sweet temper unruffled, her calm, pure mind, undisturbed, the mother and the wife remembered the early days of the prima donna, and how that voice and those talents had achieved fortune and honor. The instant her determination was whispered, all the theatres of Europe were open to her. She chose the Queen's Theatre, in London, and Lumley offered her £7,000 sterling for the season. This she accepted; and once more, she stepped on to those boards, where, twenty years previously, she had stood, in all the freshness of her youth, but in the full maturity of her talent. To say how the house welcomed her would be impossible. It greeted her with shouts, with the waving of handkerchiefs, with tears—for she had many friends, who remembered her hospitality in her high estate. It rose to receive her. She stood before them, gentle, unassuming, as in former years, but lovelier, far lovelier. So youthful was she when she left the stage, that she had not attained her full stature; she had grown considerably now, her form was rounded with the full grace of womanhood. There were the same matchless arms and hands, the proverbially beautiful foot. That countenance had still the purity of outline of former years; but a life, however happy, will, in a high and sensitive nature, leave a thoughtful and pensive look upon the features.

Her beauty had gained what is almost a substitute for beauty—expression. The wavy ringlets which had floated in clouds around her girlish face were now braided over that deep, intellectual brow, on which no evil passion or sordid calculation had ever set one wrinkle. Those who had, in youth, witnessed her first appearance, looked at each other's careworn features with astonishment, and asked if that fair creature were not the daughter of the one enshrined in their memories. But the voice, like which none had ever since been heard, soon proclaimed that it was *the* Henriette Sontag. Yet that voice had gained in power, in expression, and in tone. What could the happy girl of former days, whose short life had been a series of triumphs, do but carol, like the lark, at the gates of Heaven? For *her* sin, sorrow, shame, misfortune, were undreamed of. But since, the woman had shuddered at crime, felt and shared sorrow, often consoled shame, was now assailed by misfortune. Now feeling, passion, and deep pathos hallowed every note, inspired each gesture. The Henriette Sontag had outlived her fame, and Madame Rossi Sontag, in her place, was recognised by perhaps the most critical, because the most travelled audience in the world, as the very greatest artist, both as an actress and a singer, ever heard or known.

IS IT THE MOTHER, OR THE DAUGHTER?

IN 1850, when Madame Sontag reappeared as a vocalist in Paris, after a silence of twenty years, Adolphe Adam, the composer of "*Le Postillon de Lonjumeau*" and other popular music, wrote and published the following pleasant notice of her, in one of the Paris journals. It will be observed that it refers to Mr. Lumley, the once flourishing, but now broken-down Operatic manager.

I thought proper to attack the privilege which has been granted to Mr. Lumley—but since it has been granted, I will say no more about it, but proceed to examine the merits of the artists whom Mr. Lumley has brought us. I have said that Lumley was clever and energetic—cleverer, perhaps, than you thought him. He is a better manager than you would suspect. For the last month, we have been fancying he was going to let us hear the Countess Rossi. I too believed it—but to-day I am convinced he has taken us all in. No! The young girl, whom I heard last Tuesday at the Conservatoire, is not, cannot be, the Countess Rossi. Ten years ago, at St. Petersburg, I had the honor of both seeing and hearing the Countess Rossi. In that lady I perfectly recognised the *cantatrice* whom I had formerly admired and applauded at the Theatre Italien. But the *cantatrice* whom I heard the other night cannot be the same. In the first place, she is much younger, more beautiful than the other, and has a great deal more talent. Now these are three qualities which would diminish, rather than increase, in the space of twenty years—unless we dated from the cradles of the prima donnas; and certainly the *cantatrice*, whom in 1830 we idolized in the *Barbiere* and the *Cenerentola*, was already some years removed from infancy.

Here is the true history of all this mystery. The Countess Rossi has, as it is reported, lost her fortune; but she is still rich in the possession of a daughter—a lovely girl, the very counterpart of her mother—as lovely and as graceful—German by her complexion and waving golden hair; Italian by her voice; French by her inimitable grace and distinction. This charming young girl, notwithstanding the high rank to which she was born—notwithstanding her brilliant education—did not hesitate for an instant to sacrifice herself for her family. She went to Lumley, and entreated him to engage her at his theatre. Imagine her sorrow, when he refused her! Mr. Lumley judiciously thought that, though talent might be hereditary in this family, name and reputation were not. Now what a manager cares most for, is a name—a name which fills at once his house and his money-drawers, and enables him to give (and pay) high salaries.

Overpowered by this unexpected refusal, the young girl sank into a chair—when suddenly, the face of the manager was illumined by a brilliant idea. "All may yet be well, my dear Mademoiselle—we can reconcile every thing. We will at once come to my own relief and that of your mother. I cannot engage *you*, but I will engage your mother; and I will give her two hundred thousand francs (\$40,000) for the first season."

"But, sir," said the young girl, "my mother is now Countess Rossi. It is twenty-two years since she left the stage; and how do we know whether she still possesses the talents which made her once so celebrated?"

"As we cannot tell that, Mademoiselle, we will not ask her either to sing or to appear on the stage. Nominally, I will engage Madame Henriette Sontag; but it is you who will sing in her place."

The affair was at once arranged. All was signed and agreed upon, amidst tears of tenderness and admiration in

which Mr. Lumley, though he was a manager, could not help joining. The Countess Rossi consented to the strictest retirement during the engagement of her daughter—or rather her own. The parties were bound to secrecy by the most solemn oaths; and this secret has been so well kept that no one has suspected the substitution. My instincts, aided by memory, have enabled me to penetrate this mystery, which I shall perhaps be blamed for revealing. But I confess that I am not a little proud of having found it out. And then I really felt it a matter of conscience not to reveal to the world such an unexampled and unheard of instance of filial devotion.

On her entrance at the *Conservatoire*, Mademoiselle Sontag imitated so well the manners and grace of her mother—her refinement and her elegance—that the illusion was complete. It was the same smile—the same winning courtesy to the public—the same undulating figure. Her very music books, like those of her mother, were bound in rich crimson velvet. Everybody, excepting myself, was taken in—and, like every one, I too applauded—to the utter destruction of my gloves; and I should certainly have split the skin of my hands as well, had it not been much more solid than kid.

The moment Mademoiselle Sontag began to sing, all doubt—if there ever had been any, that I had really guessed the secret—vanished. It was the same purity of voice—the same charm of style and execution, which I had so much applauded, and which still echoed both in my ears and in my heart. But the voice of *this* Sontag had more power, more firmness, more body. The higher notes are just as soft and just as clear—but they have more roundness; and the middle register is infinitely better. In a word, this artist unites the qualities of youth and freshness to all the talents of the experienced and finished artist. *Rode's variations* were a series of vocal wonders. It was impossible to imagine that art or talent could reach so high; and after all, I think we must set it down to one of those prodigies which nature alone can create.

SOUVENIRS OF THE OPERA IN EUROPE.

BY

JULIE DE MARGUERITTES.

C H A P. I.

THE opera was *Cenerentola*; the overture, chorus, introduction, &c., all were impatiently listened to. At length the scene opened and revealed *Cenerentola* by her kitchen fire. She lays down her bellows, she advances; even in that assemblage of beauty she was the most beautiful. Her dress is simply a grey merino with a black velvet ribbon round the waist. She is exactly the height of the Medicean Venus, what the moderns call the middle height: her figure, though slight, has the full proportion of womanhood: her skin glows with the soft tint of the China rose; her arms and hands are faultless; her ankle, revealed by the short petticoat, that of the "Danatrice;" the foot, one for which the glass slipper would be too large. Who can describe her face? the soft, pouting lips of infancy, the delicate features, the large melting blue eye, the finely turned oval face, enshrined in a cloud of golden curls. So lovely was she that the audience appeared to forget that she was to do anything more than allow herself to be looked at. But she comes towards the footlights with the modest self-possession of an innocent child. "*Una oltà c'era un rè*," first reveals the sweet tone of her voice. From the first note to the last it is unmistakably a soprano. Her execution, as she advanced into the difficulties of the music, was perfectly supernatural; it resembled an instrument—no bird—but it was the perfection of the loveliest of all instruments, the human voice. With the purity of a silver bell, she reached to the E above the lines; it was perfectly equal, both in the upper and middle registers; it was sweet, soft, and expressive in all its tones. When the public recovered from the first effect, they were obliged to acknowledge that it was wonderful, pleasing, and charming, like the fair creature before them, moving gracefully through her part as she would have done in a drawing-room. *Cencrentola* (like the *Barbière*) is an opera which is sung by sopranos and by contraltos; it was originally written for Emilia Bonini, a contralto, who quietly made her fortune in Italy, unknown to Parisian or Londonian fame. It bears transposition without injury, though it contains great difficulties of execution. Madame Albertazzi, an English woman of great beauty, who acquired great celebrity and died very young, was the first who ventured to appear in it after Sontag.

The enthusiasm for Sontag increased every night. Her gentle, unassuming manners, her youth—she was but twenty, and looked eighteen—her surprising beauty, the maidenly reserve of her conduct, brought to her feet the homage of all London; the princess's robe was more than once offered her for acceptance; a royal widower, allied with the English throne, though a countryman of her own and now a king, offered his hand at the risk of immense sacrifices; but she was never coquettish—never prudish—never vain, and never swerved from her allegiance to the one whose name she now bears, and to whom she was secretly engaged before coming to England. She went everywhere with her merry little sister, and her stately *dame de compagnie*; stepped from the stage to the saloons of Devonshire House, where, amongst the most courted and honored guests, she waltzed with the joyousness of a German girl; but none ever presumed to pollute her ear with an impure word. There was at this time in London another remarkable cantatrice, the most wonderful contralto who had ever been heard since the days of Banti, of whom none but Italians ever heard, and whom they have now forgotten. Her style and voice were considered without equal; but nature had disdained to complete her work. Pisoni was little, crooked, awkward, and united in her features and complexion every species of ugliness—but all this was forgotten when from that large ungraceful mouth issued low mellifluous notes producing on her hearers the thrilling effect of a sudden burst from an organ in a still moonlight cathedral. At one morning concert, at the close of the season, Pisoni, Malibran, and Sontag sang the trio (from Meyerbeer's *Crociato*) "*Giovinetto cavalier*;" and never was such music heard since.

SONTAG AND MALIBRAN

AT

EPSOM RACES.

BY

JULIE DE MARGUERITTE.

C H A P. II.

SOME years ago an open carriage with four thorough-bred horses, mounted by postillions in black velvet jackets and silver-tasseled caps, was waiting at the door of a small, neat house in London, at the corner of Regent and Argyle streets. The sun was shining brilliantly, and though it was not later than ten o'clock in the morning, brilliant equipages were continually dashing through the street. The horses of the carriage which was waiting, tossed their heads and pawed the ground impatiently, as the other horses galloped by; the postillions repeated to each other the names of the owners as each equipage passed. Two gentlemen in the very plainest morning costume, passed up and down the pavement, looking anxiously each time they went by the open door into the small passage of the house. "Can anything have detained her?" said one of the gentlemen with a strong foreign accent. "We shall be late," said his companion with the purest English accent, looking at his watch. "Warrender and Burghersh!" shouted the groom on the leader to the groom on the wheeler, as an equipage as well appointed as their own new past them. "They are going for Malibran," said the foreigner, "we shall be last." "Coming out!" shouted the footman, opening the carriage door, while his fellow servant let down the steps, and escorted by a large and remarkably ugly man, of most courtly bearing, three ladies issued from the house. One was the Countess C—, the two others were Henriette and Nina Sontag. The Chevalier de Benkhausen, the Russian Chargé d'Affaires, followed the ladies into the carriage, the two other gentlemen mounted the box, the postillions tightened the reins, the footmen shouting "All right!" got on the dicky, and off sped the carriage at full speed. They were going to Epsom, and this was the Derby day. In a few minutes, as they went down Conduit street into Bond street, they passed a carriage in which were one lady and three gentlemen. The lady was Marie Malibran; her companions—Lord Burghersh, Sir George Warrender, and Charles de Beriot. Men, grooms, and postillions shouted as they went by, and Malibran impetuously threw herself forward to see into the carriage; but the object of her curiosity was quietly talking to Lady C—, so that all she saw was the back of a very pretty satin bonnet with a blonde veil, and the outside of Nina Sontag's white parasol. Malibran threw herself pettishly back and pulled the fingers of her glove—how she longed to see the rival who had landed but two days before, and for whom all London was already raving! The two carriages continued their race until the crowd separated them, enveloping all in one cloud of dust. For hours later the Countess of C—'s carriage was the scene of the delicious scrambling which is the principal pleasure of Epsom, for those who are not members of the turf; the attentive footmen supplying clean glasses, fresh bottles of champagne, and saucers of Gunter's ice creams to all from a fourgon which had preceded them. There was literally a dense crowd round this carriage, each in turn taking his place on the steps and leaning on the open door. Lady C— proclaimed almost every name in the English peerage, in the diplomatic corps, in the artistic and political world, as she introduced in succession every new comer to her distinguished guest. The Chevalier de Benkhausen, well known as a wit and a "bon vivant," absorbed all the good things, though saying brilliant ones at the same time. Lord C— had descended from the box and stood on the other side, occasionally exchanging salutations with his friends, but without allowing his hand to quit the door of the carriage on the side nearest Sontag, on which he stood, and many eyes were ready to seize that envied position, but he maintained it in right of a previous acquaintance in Berlin, with the beautiful *prima donna*. Nina Sontag, who was a pretty girl of fifteen, kept eating, drinking, bowing, and talking, but took particular care to hand up wings of chicken and glasses of champagne to the very handsome foreigner, who still retained his place on the box, having apparently taken literally the scene before him, and fancying that it was really his duty to look at the race, which every one else seemed to have forgotten. Nobody knew much about him; he had come from Berlin (which accounted for his intimacy with Nina), was a new attaché of the Sardinian embassy, and had been introduced to Lady C— by M. de Benkhausen as le Comte Rossi. Suddenly the crowd round the carriage gave way on each side before a tall fine man and a slight girlish woman enveloped in a large black lace mantilla, and wearing a simple Leghorn bonnet. M. de Benkhausen, on perceiving her, sprang from the carriage, took her hand, and assisted her into his place, saying, "Mademoiselle, j'ai l'honneur de vous presenter Madame Malibran." They gazed one instant at each other, another instant and their hands were clasped, and a tear glistened in the eye of the daughter of the South, who was passion's essence, whilst a deeper tint mantled the cheek of the more reserved German. Nina's laugh abruptly stopped, even the phlegmatic Count Rossi turned quickly round, and Lord C— reverently took off his hat. But few words were exchanged, and then they parted, Malibran taking the arm of De Beriot, and being followed by as numerous a train as the one they left behind. Thus for the first time met the two greatest musical geniuses of the age. Two nights after was the eventful night. The King's Theatre, as it was then called, presented the most beautiful sight it is possible to imagine. Fashion for once had forgotten itself, and every box, which on ordinary nights it is voted vulgar to fill, was occupied by four or five ladies in full dress, a dress which it is the peculiar prerogative of English women to become, better than any other women in the world.

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AND THE

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