

THE HISTORY OF THE VIOLIN.

A London critic thus glances at this subject, *a-propos* to a new work bearing the above title:

Of all musical instruments the violin is the only one that has not undergone continued and progressive improvement. Even the more ancient instruments, such as the harp, the flute, and the organ, have been subject to constant alterations and modifications down to the present time, the early types of these instruments having about the same relations to their present successors as the aboriginal hut to the modern villa. The violin, however, has remained in almost the same state for nearly three centuries, and appears little likely to be subject to the changes which have affected all other instruments—its symmetrical form and perfect adaptation to its purpose seeming to defy all innovations, whether of capricious taste or inventive skill. Certainly the art of violin making has rather retrograded than advanced since the days of the great Cremona makers, the Amati's, Stradivari, and the Guarnerius family, who produced those masterpieces which remain still the despair of modern instrument makers. That age has some influence in perfecting the tone of violins and other instruments of that family there can be no doubt, but that much more is due to the superior skill of the great makers of old is also unquestionable, else why the vast superiority of the instruments made by these exceptional artists over the works of contemporary makers? Care in the selection of the finest wood, accurate proportion and well-ordered symmetry in the shape, and a perfect balance in the thickness of the corresponding portions of the instrument; all these, with other points of extreme nicety which escaped less skillful mechanists, have contributed to make up that perfection of tone and beauty of appearance which render the best Italian instruments of the seventeenth and early part of the eighteenth centuries unapproachable by modern imitators. The closest copies of these models, and the attempt to anticipate the effects of age by baking the wood and constant action of the bow on the strings by mechanical agency, have not succeeded in equalling the Cremona violin.

In many respects the violin is the most important of all instruments. Although not so independent as the organ or the pianoforte, nor so capable in itself of rendering a transcript of any music of combination; on the other hand it is the only instrument that, like the human voice, possesses the power of intonation. Moreover, the direct agency of the fingers on the strings, without the intervention of mechanical appliances, added to the sustained sound produced by the action of the bow, give to the violin a susceptibility to the feeling and passion of the player that no other instrument possesses. Then, again, the violin and its relatives, the viola, the violoncello, and the contra-basso, form the groundwork of the orchestra—the centre of the musical picture to which the wind instruments contribute little more than the lights and shades and accessories.

The colloquial terms "fiddle" and "fiddler" seem to have been in very early use, being met with in the old poets even before Chaucer; and as the "fiddle" was formerly the chief instrument of itinerant performers at merry-makings, and "fiddlers" were frequently included among the humble retainers of the great and wealthy, the term was very frequently used as a reproach, implying low habits and servitude. Thus, in the "Taming of the Shrew," Hortensio is made to complain of being called "rascal fiddler, and twangling Jack, with twenty such vile terms." Even to the present day, "fiddle" and "fiddler" are almost unconsciously associated with something trifling and small, and convey an impression rather of street minstrelsy than of that refinement and importance which properly attach to the violin and its modern cultivation. To apply the term "fiddler," therefore (as is still sometimes done), to a skillful and intelligent performer on the violin is a solecism in taste and manners.

The origin of the violin, like all remote origins, is difficult to trace with any certainty. Its earliest type is doubtless to be found in instruments of the lyre or lute species, the strings of which were pinched by the fingers or struck by the plectrum. The date of the introduction of the bow, which gives its speciality to the violin, is variously stated. In the tenth and eleventh centuries (and probably even earlier) a rude kind of bow was used with the old rote or crwth (crowth); these instruments being among the precursors of the violin. The book before us gives various theories and authorities on this subject, and the authors are disposed to attribute the introduction of the bow to this country. The nearest ancient approach to the modern violin and bow is to be found in a figure painted on the roof of the Petersborough Cathedral, considered to be of the date of about 1191. Judging by the representation of this which is given in the book, both instrument and bow bear a very close resemblance to the present form. The viol, which is played on by a crowned figure, has curved sides, four strings, and two sound holes; so that there are all the essentials, in a somewhat more clumsy shape, of the violin of the present day. It appears to have been after the thirteenth century that the violin began to approach its perfection, which, however, it probably did not fully attain much before the sixteenth century, during which period the great Cremona makers arose and apparently relished all the structural capabilities of the instrument. So precious

have the best preserved specimens of this school become, that three hundred guineas and upwards have been known to be given for a fine Cremona, the original intrinsic value of materials being scarcely as many pence. But, as with many other works of art (for these old makers were artists rather than mechanists), the cheapest materials may be moulded into the costliest productions. A fine Italian violin, with its beautiful outline, graceful proportions, and brilliant varnish, has a fascination for amateurs scarcely surpassed by any other art passion. To this class, and to all who take an interest in the subject, the volume before us offers much valuable information. The historical and antiquarian portion has been carefully and laboriously compiled; while, with some occasional irrelevancies, the practical portion of the subject is well treated. There are many illustrations representing ancient instruments, and full details of the principal makers of various periods and countries, and the volume is calculated to be a useful addition to the musical library.

SHAKSPEARE'S BIRTHDAY.

The twenty-third of April next will be the three hundredth anniversary of the Birthday of Shakspeare. Preparations for its celebration are being made in England; but the prospect of a suitable commemoration of the great event, in Shakspeare's own country, is not, at present hopeful. Will the day be celebrated here? Will actors, and men of letters, and artists, of all descriptions, unite in honouring the most wonderful Genius ever sent down from heaven? Will there be no assemblage of the Arts, to pay homage to their Master? Will not the American Republic, even though convulsed with civil strife, hold out hands of sympathy with all the world, in reverence for the illustrious memory of the world's poet? Something sure y might be done—here, in the metropolis of the Western world. Literature and the Stage might combine, in the publication of some memorial book, or the inauguration of a marble statue of Shakspeare, or at least in a banquet. Performances of Shakspearean plays might be given, on that day, at all the theatres, and the money thus earned—increased by contributions from other sources—might be used to build a monument to the Poet, or, perhaps, to endow a school for the education of actors. There are many practicable methods of testifying our sense of obligation to Shakspeare, our admiration for his genius, our tender and reverent care for his memory. In any case, one duty is imperative upon the dramatic profession. Shakspeare, and only Shakspeare, should be presented on the stage, throughout this country, on the night of the coming Twenty-third of April.

Does any one ask wherefore the present generations of Americans should honor the name of Shakspeare? Not for his sake, certainly! His dust—the handful of it that may now remain—rests in peace beneath the little church at Stratford: his tomb is the shrine of loving pilgrimage; "his soul is with the saints, we trust;" his memory is immortal, in true hearts; and his works will probably outlive all the nations now existing upon the earth. In his own time, serene, upon a mountain pinnacle of intellectual sublimity, it is not likely that he coveted human homage; and that, which Life regarded with indifference, is not now needed to "soothe the dull, cold ear of Death." But, if not for his sake, it is for their own, that Americans should honor the name of Shakspeare. For us, as for all mankind, he has summoned from the vast realms of imagination, and from the shadowy domain of the past, forms of light and of darkness, of beauty, sublimity, grandeur, horror, that dwell now in all the temples of the mind, that stimulate, and exalt, and, at the same time, satisfy our ideals. For us, as for all mankind he has lifted the veil, and unrolled, as it were, the panorama of the Universe. For us, his hand swept the strings of a lyre, that breathes through all time, entrancing music. For us he has interpreted and justified Wisdom and Beauty, directing and cheering us along the difficult pathway of life, that leads, through labor and sin and suffering, to the feet of the Divine Master. For our own sake, then, we ought to commemorate in some fitting manner, the three hundredth anniversary of the Birthday of Shakspeare.

These words are not written for persons, who regard the drama as a mere vehicle of idle recreation. Such a judgment may indeed, be in some sense justified by reference to the present general condition of the stage. But such was not in Shakspeare's mind the position of the drama. He wrote for the intellect and the heart, and his genius wrought with potent allies—with imagination, fancy, thought, humour, pathos, wit, sentiment, sense, philosophy, learning, religion, truth. He did not write plays, as now-a-days they are written, to suit a company of players; nor did he aim, as modern dramatists do, to achieve the proud triumph of shocking the nervous system. To him, the drama was not a speculation—it was one of the worthiest and noblest instruments, whereby Art promotes the civilization of mankind. Let us be thankful that the world has never been, and is not now, utterly destitute of men and women, appreciative of Shakspeare, entertaining similar exalted views of the character and usefulness of the drama, and laboring to make it, to the utmost degree, beneficial to society.—N. Y. Albion.

—There are so many disbursing officers in Washington that Government has deemed it prudent to close the gambling houses temporarily. Significant.

LIFE IN AFRICA.

Captain Speke, in his new volume descriptive of his explorations in Africa, gives the following curious details of his experience in that country:

I was to give the King a royal salute as the drums would not beat. He then came into my tent, and I motioned him to take my chair, which, after he sat down upon it, I was very sorry for, as he stained the seat all black with the running color of one of the new barsati cloths he had got from me, which, to improve its appearance, he had saturated with stinking butter, and had tied it round his loins. A fine-looking man of about 30, he wore the butt end of a large sea shell, cut in a circle, and tied on his forehead, for a coronet, and sundry small saltiana antelope horns, stuffed with magic powder, to keep off the evil eye. His attendants all fawned on him, and snapped their fingers whenever he sneezed. * * * My guns, clothes, and everything were then inspected, and begged for in the most importunate manner.

My bull's-eye lantern he coveted so much, I had to pretend exceeding anger to stop his further importunities. He then began again begging for lucifers, which charmed him so intensely I thought I should never get rid of him. He would have one box of them. I swore I could not part with them. He continued to beg and I to resist. I offered a knife instead, but this he would not have, because the lucifers would be so valuable for his magical observances. On went the storm, till at last I drove him off with a pair of my slippers, which he had stuck his feet into without my leave. I then refused to take his bullock because he had annoyed me.

AN AFRICAN BEAUTY.

After a long and amusing conversation with Rumanika in the morning, I called on one of his sister-in-law, married to an elder brother who was born before Dagara ascended the throne. She was another of those wonders of obesity, unable to stand excepting on all fours. I was desirous to obtain a good view of her, and actually to measure her, and induced her to give me facilities for doing so, by offering in return to show her a bit of my naked legs and arms. The bait took as I wished it, and after getting her to wriggle into the middle of the hut, I did as I promised, and then took her dimensions. Round arm, 1 ft. 11 in.; chest, 4 ft. 4 in.; thigh, 2 ft. 7 in.; calf, 1 ft. 8 in.; height, 5 ft. 8. All of these are exact except the height, and I believe I could have obtained this more accurately if I could have had her laid on the floor. Not knowing what difficulties I should have to contend with in such a piece of engineering, I tried to get her height by raising her up. This, after infinite exertions on the part of us both, was accomplished, when she sank down again, fainting, for her blood had rushed into her head. Meanwhile, the daughter, a lass of sixteen, sat stark-naked before us, sucking at a milk-pot, on which the father kept her at work by holding a rod in his hand, for as fattening is the first duty of fashionable female life, it must be duly enforced by the rod if necessary. I got up a bit of flirtation with missy, and induced her to rise and shake hands with me. Her features were lovely, but her body was as round as a ball.

A STATE RECEPTION.

In the most polite manner, the officers in waiting begged me to be seated on my iron stool, which I had brought with me, whilst others hurried in to announce my arrival. But for a few minutes only was I kept in suspense, when a band of music, the musicians wearing on their backs long haired goat skins, passed me, dancing as they went along, like bears in a fair, and playing on reed instruments worked over with pretty beads in various patterns, from which depended leopard cat-skins—the time being regulated by the beating of long hand-drums. The mighty King was now reported to be sitting on his throne in the state hut of the third tier. I advanced, hat in hand, with my guard of honor following, formed in "open ranks," who in their turn, were followed by the bearers carrying presents. I did not walk straight up to him as if to shake hands, but I went outside the ranks of a three-sided square of squatting Wakungu all habited in skins, mostly cow-skins; some few of whom had, in addition, leopard-cat skirts girt round the waist, the sign of royal blood. Here I was desired to halt, and sit in the glaring sun; so I donned my hat, mounted my umbrella, a phenomenon which set them all a wondering and laughing, ordered the guard to close ranks, and sat gazing at the novel spectacle. * * * I now longed to open conversation, but knew not the language, and no one near me dared speak, or even lift his head from fear of being accused of eyeing the women, so the King and myself sat staring at one another for full an hour—I mute, but he pointing and remarking with those around him on the novelty of my guard and general appearance, and even requiring to see my hat lifted, the umbrella shut and opened, and the guards face about and show off their red-cloaks—for such wonders had never been seen in Uganda. Then, finding the day waning, he sent Maula on an embassy to ask me if I had seen him; and on receiving my reply, "Yes, for full one hour," I was glad to find him rise, spear in hand, lead his dog, and walk unceremoniously away through the enclosure into the fourth tier of huts; for this being a pure levee day, no business was transacted.

THE QUEEN ON A SPREE.

The Queen and her ministers then plunged

into pombe and became uproarious, laughing with all their might and main. Small bugu cups were not enough to keep up the excitement of the time, so a large wooden trough was placed before the Queen and filled with liquor. If any was spilt, the Wakungu instantly fought over it, dabbing their noses on the ground, or rubbing it with their hands, that not one atom of the Queen's favor might be lost; for everything must be adored that comes from royalty, whether by design or accident. The Queen put her head to the trough and drank like a pig from it, and was followed by her ministers. The band, by order, then struck up a tune called the Milele, playing on a dozen reeds, ornamented with beads and cow-tips, and five drums of various tones and sizes, keeping time. The musicians dancing with zest, were led by four band-masters, also dancing, but with their backs turned to the company to show off their long, shaggy, goat-skin jackets, sometimes upright, at other times bending and on their heels like the horn-pipe dancers of western countries. The Queen and councillors all became uproarious. The Queen began to sing, and the councillors to join in chorus; then all sang and all drank, and drank and sang, till, in their heated excitement, they turned the palace into a pandemonium; still there was not noise enough, so the band and drums were called again, and tomfool—for Uganda, like the old European monarchies, always keeps a jester—was made to sing in the gruff, hoarse, unnatural voice which he ever effects to maintain his character, and furnished with pombe when his throat was dry.

THE LAY-PREACHER.

"And this also we wish, even your perfection."

As the mother bends over the cradle of her child, exulting in its beauty and in the promise of its future, if she be a wise as well as loving woman, what thought takes precedence of all others? Is it not that her little one may grow into perfection? That through all life's trials and temptations its soul may walk clear of stain, and go home to its Father in heaven, more beautiful, even, than it came from His hands?

If this yearning be more than the emotion of the moment, it will prompt her to shed upon that spirit only the purest influences, to cast around it the light of a good example, to encourage it by gentleness and forbearance to perfect frankness, to watch the unfolding of capacities that are infinite for good or evil; and never to weary in her God-appointed task.

O, what a world might this become, if women were true to their work, if with the name of mother were blended in the child's thoughts firmness tempered with gentleness, truth open as the day, patience that never wearies, bearing testimony at all times to a love, not without expression in words, but showing itself deeper than words can portray. What a veil of sanctity were this falling upon the head of wayward childhood, what a restraint when temptation in a thousand forms assails the untried heart.

But how often in the place of this are manifested impatience and fretfulness, and how often is deceit used to smooth over a present difficulty! Positive falsehoods are sometimes resorted to, but not long is the clear mind of childhood thus betrayed. One exposure, and a poison is instilled into that innocent soul that may work its ruin. If the parent can do this how readily the child slips into the fatal error, shielding itself behind the pernicious precedent.

Think of this, you to whom are committed these unsullied souls, and who wish, whatever your practice may be, that they arrive unto perfection. Set not this standard for them, however, unless resolved to lead the way, for all know but two well how much more potent is example than precept.

If the parent be not truthful how can she speak of truth's solemn obligations upon her child? If she yield to bursts of passion or the temptation to fretfulness and impatience, how is she to teach self-restraint to the little being at her knee? If she forget God in her daily life and conversation how can she hope her child will remember Him?

Must not the parent become what she would wish her child to be when the little one no longer lies upon her bosom or clings to her protecting hand? She must lead the way in which she would have her child to tread.

We all wish for those we love, moral and spiritual elevation, with perfection for the end and aim. We know not where to limit virtue short of that, nor would we have the standard lowered, for Christ himself proposed it to our exertion, thus affording to our limitless faculties a limitless field. We cannot set it lower if we would without violating the sanctity of His commands, and who that has commenced the work of moral regeneration does not thank Him for the privilege of aspiring so high?

Let no one underrate the importance of a timely word to him whose feet are fain to go astray. Gently and lovingly be that warning word expressed, but let no one fear to utter it if actuated by holy love and fear. It may seem like water spilled on sand, but it may find a seed of good waiting only for the refreshing drop to waken into life, and that good plant may grow till it displace the evil, who shall tell?

At all events it is a holy work thus to blend precept with example, and lead the way into perfection; and the sweet consciousness of having done so will soften the bitterest pangs of mortal sorrow, brighten the darkest hours, soothe the sharpest pain and make life a perpetual thanksgiving and oblation.—[N. E. Farmer. H. J. L.]