A Visit to Mozart's Sister

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The flower that's like thy face, pale primrose; nor
 The azur'd harebell, like thy veins; no, nor
 The leaf of eglantine, whom, not to slander,
 Outsweeten'd not thy breath: the ruddock would,
 With charitable bill, . . .
 . . . bring thee all this;
 Yea, and furr'd moss besides, when flowers are none,
 To winter-ground thy corse?"

But it may be that the disproportion between the best possible offering and its object has stayed the else willing hand? Even if so, it shall not stay mine. Fortified by classic precedent, I do my best to sweeten Mozart's sad grave with fairest flowers, and turn away from the spot as one leaves a solemn temple, "all reverence and fear."

A VISIT TO MOZART'S SISTER.*

MR. AND MRS. NOVELLO, in the year 1829, took a pleasant journey together to Germany, for the fulfilment of a no less pleasant purpose. This was the presentation of a sum of money to Mozart's sister, Madame Sonnenberg; which sum had been subscribed by some musical admirers of the great composer, who had heard with deep sympathy and concern that she was then in poor health and poorer means. These gentlemen intrusted their friend and brother-subscriber (indeed, he was the original proposer of the subscription, and undertook all its contingent expenses himself), Vincent Novello, with the execution of what they knew would be a most welcome commission to him—the conveyance of this contribution to Mozart's sister; and in the summer season husband and wife set out for Salzburg. An extract from Vincent Novello's own diary, kept during this remarkable journey, will best describe the circumstances of an event interesting to all lovers of Mozart: "Monday, July 15th.—A still more delightful day, if possible, than yesterday. Mozart's son came to me at about

11 to conduct us to his Aunt Sonnenberg. After a little chat we accompanied him to her house, which was within a few yards of where we resided. It seems that she had passed a very restless and sleepless night for fear we should not come to see her, and had repeatedly expressed her regret that we had not been admitted when we first called. On entering the room, the sister of Mozart was reclining placidly in bed—but blind, feeble, nearly speechless. Her nephew kindly explained to her who we were, and she seemed to derive much gratification from the intelligence we conveyed to her. During the whole time, I held her poor thin hand in mine. She appeared particularly pleased that the little present we had brought her should have arrived on her own Saint's day (St. Ann, the 26th of the month). Her own birthday is on the 30th, on which day she will have completed her seventy-eighth year. Her voice is nearly extinct, and she appears to be fast approaching 'that bourne from whence no traveller returns.' Her face, though much changed by illness and drawn by age, still bears a strong resemblance to the portraits that have been engraved of her; but it was difficult to believe that the helpless

MOZART.

FROM THE UNFINISHED PICTURE BY HIS BROTHER-IN-LAW, LANGE,
 PAINTED IN JULY, 1781.

(From a photograph of the original now in the Mozart Museum at Salzburg.)

and languid figure which was extended before us was formerly the little girl represented as standing by the side of her brother and singing to his accompaniment. Near the bed was the original painting of which Madame Nissen has a small copy, and which has been engraved in the Biography, representing Mozart and his sister playing a duet on the pianoforte, the likeness of Mozart's mother in a frame, and the father leaning on the pianoforte with a violin in his hand. In the adjoining apartment, over the sofa, was the print which his son told me was generally considered the best likeness after that in Madame Nissen's possession, in which opinion he himself coincided.* Around the room was

* From "The Life and Labours of Vincent Novello." By his daughter, Mary Cowden Clarke.

* This, in its simple brown frame, was afterwards presented by Mozart's son to Vincent Novello.

hung a very numerous collection of portraits of the greatest painters, amongst whom I particularly noticed those of Vandyck and Rembrandt. In another part of the room was a miniature of herself; another of her son (who had some resemblance to Leigh Hunt); and another likeness in miniature of Mozart. In the middle of the room stood the instrument on which she had often played duets with her brother. It was a kind of clavichord, with black keys for the naturals and white ones for the sharps, like our old English cathedral organs. The compass was from—

and it had evidently been constructed before the additional keys were invented. The tone was soft, and some of the bass notes, especially those of the lowest octaves—

were of a good quality. At the time it was made it was doubtless considered an excellent instrument. You may be sure that I touched the keys which had been pressed by Mozart's fingers with great interest. Mozart's son also played a few chords upon it with evident pleasure. The key he chose was that of C minor, and what he did, though short, was quite sufficient to show the accomplished musician. On the desk were two pieces of music, the last which Mozart's sister had ever played before she took to her bed, six months ago. They were 'O cara Armonia,' from her brother's opera of the 'Zauberflöte,' and the Minuet in his 'Don Giovanni'; this to me was a most touching proof of her continued sisterly attachment to him to the last, and of her tasteful partiality for his inimitable productions. About two days before we arrived she had desired to be carried from her bed and placed at the instrument. On trying to play she found that although she could still execute a few passages with her *right* hand, yet with her *left* hand she could no longer press down the keys, and it was but too evident that her powers on that side were entirely gone.

"On leaving this estimable and interesting lady both Mary and myself could not refrain from kissing her weak and emaciated hand with tender respect, convinced as we were that we should never again behold her. I fear that she cannot continue much longer in her present exhausted state; but whenever that hour arrives which no one living can ultimately avoid, I can only hope that it will not be attended with the least suffering, and that she will calmly cease to breathe as if she were

merely sinking into a tranquil sleep. I was particularly charmed by the respectful and kind cordiality with which Mozart's son behaved to her, calling her repeatedly, 'Meine liebe Tante,' and exerting himself to the utmost to ascertain and fulfil all her wishes."

"I ONLY wish I could impress on every friend of music, and on great men in particular, the same depth of musical sympathy and profound appreciation of Mozart's inimitable music that I myself feel and enjoy; then nations would vie with each other to possess such a jewel within their frontiers. Prague ought to strive to retain this precious man, but also to remunerate him; for without this the history of a great genius is sad indeed, and gives very little encouragement to posterity to further exertions, and it is on this account that so many promising geniuses are ruined. It enrages me to think that the unparalleled Mozart is not yet engaged by some imperial or royal court. Forgive my excitement, but I love the man so dearly."—HAYDN.

"MOZART is wonderful for the endless variety and undeviating grace of his inventions. Yet his wife said of him that he was a still better dancer than musician. In a soul so full of harmony, kindness towards others was to be looked for, and it was found. When a child he would go about asking people whether they loved him. When he was a great musician a man in distress accosted him one day in the street, and, as the composer had no money to give him, he bade him wait a little while he went into a coffee-house, where he wrote a beautiful Minuet extempore, and, sending the poor man with it to the music-seller's, made him a present of the proceeds. This is the way that great musicians are made. Their sensibility is their genius."—LEIGH HUNT.

"THERE ARE in history certain men who appear destined to mark, in their sphere, the point above which no man can go. Such was Phidias in sculpture and Molière in comedy. Mozart was one of these men. 'Don Giovanni' is a summit."—GOUNOD.

MOZART'S burial is recorded in the register of St. Stephen's, Vienna, in the following terms: "December 6, 1791. The Herr Wolfgang Amade Mozart, chapel-master, imperial and royal composer, living in the little Kaiserhaus, No. 970, Rauhensteingasse, died of brain fever at the age of thirty-six. Buried in the cemetery of St. Marx—3rd class; eight florins, fifty-six kreutzers.—Hearse, three florins."

"POSTERITY will not see such talent as his for the next hundred years."—HAYDN.