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Author(s): G. A. Macfarren

Source: *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, Vol. 16, No. 364 (Jun. 1, 1873), pp. 103-106

Published by: [Musical Times Publications Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3352508>

Accessed: 08-11-2015 23:40 UTC

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THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing-Class Circular.

JUNE 1, 1873.

THE "THEODORA" OF HANDEL.

By G. A. MACFARREN.

THE riddle of public success never appeared more insoluble than in the case of Handel's Oratorio of "Theodora." The merit of the work is great, even when referred to that highest standard—the other works of the composer; and in comparison with the productions of other artists, it stands very high indeed, if not pre-eminent. Yet it was unacknowledged when it was first brought out; it was rarely given during the author's life, and, from being unperformed for more than a century, it has passed into almost entire forgetfulness, its very name being only preserved in lists of Handel's compositions, and itself being only represented in general knowledge by the airs "Angels, ever bright and fair," and "Lord, to Thee each night and day," and the choruses "He saw the lovely youth," and "Venus, laughing from the skies." The first of these is in the repertory of every soprano singer, public and private; the next is less, but not much less known; the two last were not unfrequently heard at the Ancient Concerts, and "He saw the lovely youth," was given with good effect at the Handel Festival, in 1868, at the Crystal Palace; but still the popularity of these excerpts has not as yet induced inquiry into the character and quality of the work whence they are drawn. One would think—for the thought would be dear to all who honoured genius, and felt that lasting esteem was its just tribute—that the authorship of any one work of art which held universal reverence, should secure an interest as universal in whatever might issue from the same source, and that to have written the "Messiah" ought to certify the immediate success and enduring popularity of every thing to which the same hand gave form, the same spirit gave life. One would think this, but that the delightful image is shattered by the inexorable facts cast at it by history, and one is compelled to own that the greatest artistic worth, and even the dull world's admission of this, give no indemnity from the disregard of kindred excellence wrought by the same power. The moral is a sad one, but it has too many illustrations to admit of dispute, and the long oblivion in which "Theodora" has lain, is one of the most striking.

This oratorio was the last work but one that Handel produced, it having been followed, after nearly two years, by "Jephtha," and preceded in the year before its composition by "Solomon," and "Susannah." According to his custom, the author dated the beginning and the end of the MS., and these records show that he entered upon his task on the 28th of June, and completed it on the 31st of July, 1749; this being the middle of his sixty-fifth year. As in other instances with him, the amazingly brief period of labour followed a long period of inactivity, and it was succeeded by one yet longer. It is curious to note that Handel's habit was to rest from composition for a period of from eight to ten months, during which no traces are to be found of his having written anything, not the smallest trifles, and then to set himself to work, and within the average term of a month or two, to write as many oratorios, which, from the evidence of the manuscripts, may be believed to have been truly extemporized upon the paper, or in other words, called into existence without any pre-consideration. The dates of the works just named exemplify this habit, which gives as great cause for admiration of the master's prodigious rapidity, as for wonder at his long reticence.

"Theodora" was first performed at Covent Garden Theatre, on Friday, March 16, 1750. It was repeated on the 21st, and again on the 23rd, but not afterwards until March 5th, 1755. Subsequently to its republication, at the close of 1860, for the German Handel Society, it was performed at Cologne, under the direction of Dr. Ferdinand Hiller, with a German version of the text, when it excited much interest. It was privately given, in the original language, at the residence of an amateur lady, Miss Frith, in

Wimpole Street, London, May 2, 1865, when it was conducted by Sir Sterndale Bennett. Other than on these occasions, the oratorio seems never to have been performed between Handel's time and the present.

The work, as often happens with non-successes, was a great favourite of its composer. It is related that, having been asked "If he did not consider the grand chorus in the 'Messiah' (probably the 'Hallelujah') his best production," he replied that "He thought the Chorus 'He saw the lovely youth,' far beyond it." He was nettled at its non-attraction, and enforced his invitation of a friend to its performance, by saying that "the music would sound well, for the theatre was sure to be empty." In like manner, on being told that a city gentleman intended to buy up all the boxes for the third representation, Handel exclaimed, "He is a fool then, for the Jews will not come to it as they did to 'Judas Maccabæus,' because it is a Christian story, and the ladies will not, because it is a virtuous one." Much as the failure seems to have sharpened his wits, these pleasantries betoken spleen more than good humour, and there is too much ground to regret the artist's mortification at the miscarriage of some of his brightest conceptions.

The "Biographia Dramatica," but no other authority, ascribes the libretto of "Theodora" to Thomas Morell, D.D., Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries, the author of "Judas Maccabæus," and of "Jephtha." In style it resembles those inflated works, having occasional strong expressions which stand out well in the many repetitions that occur in Handel's settings, having no distinctive personifications, and abounding in the metrical peculiarities which seem to have been the special aim of its time, but which in previous ages seem always to have separated poets, or writers who would be thought so, from ballad writers, and thus to have established a different order of literature for book verses from song verses. The preface of the first edition of the book of words (of which Dr. Rimbault possesses one of the extremely rare copies) declares it to be founded on a tale entitled "The Martyrdom of Theodora and Didimus," by Robert Boyle, the philosopher, which was written in his youth, but not printed until 1687, four years before his death; it refers the derivation of the libretto also to a French tragedy, the name of which, and of its author, however, are not given.

The argument of the oratorio runs thus:—Valens, the President of Antioch, proclaims a feast in honour of the birthday of Diocletian, fixing the period of the action at somewhere about the year 303, when the Emperor had his triumph in Rome. Theodora, a lady descended from King Antiochus, is a pious Christian, and by the President's mandate is required with her companions in faith to join in the sacrifice to Venus, refusing which act of profanation, she is cast into prison. Didimus, a Roman officer, has been converted by Theodora to the true belief, and is her ardent lover. By connivance of his friend and superior officer, Septimius, he obtains access to her in her cell, and prevails on her to change dresses with him, and thus disguised to escape. Didimus is then condemned to death for this act of dereliction, and Theodora in turn offers herself as a victim, in hopes to save him; but the two are steadfast in their creed as faithful to each other, refuse to participate in the rites of the false gods of the Heathens, and are borne away therefore to execution together. In Butler's "Lives of the Saints," 1756 (seven years after the composition of the oratorio), the narrative is circumstantially related, agreeing in all points with the above, save that Alexandria, instead of Antioch, is assigned as the scene of the events, that 304 is given as their date, and that Eustratius Proculus (not Valens) is stated to have been the name of the Prefect; moreover, Didimus is shown to have been a stranger to Theodora, who was actuated by respect for her heroic virtue, not by personal love. The learned writer quotes St. Ambrose as authority for the incidents, but admits that this contemporary refers their occurrence to Antioch.

This story is of a more domestic or at least personal nature than those of other oratorios by Handel, and it gives scope for the display of different artistic qualities, than could be exercised in those productions. The power of delineating and distinguishing individual characters, which is one of the most important branches of the dramatic art, was possessed

in a very high degree by our composer—witness the living personification of Polyphemus as relieved against the shepherds and shepherdesses, the strongly opposed expression in the demands of the two mothers who claim the child from Solomon, and the marked distinction and gradual development of all the characters in “Jephtha.” The poetical as much as dramatic power is happily brought to bear upon the work under consideration, wherein each of the five personages and the two choruses of Heathens and Christians has each a characteristic speciality that separates the music from that belonging to all the others.

The title-role of the drama is in several respects the most important, one of which is that more music is assigned to it than to either of the others, the character of Theodora having six Airs, besides two Duets with Didimus, and one with her friend and confidant, Irene. She is represented as fervently devout, with implicit faith in the tenets of the Christians, and in the God of their adoration, and with perfect resignation to the sufferings drawn upon her by her fidelity. Her earthly passion is not evinced in the course of the action, for even her voluntary immolation in order to rescue Didimus, is rather in the spirit of a martyr than of a lover, showing indeed that she cannot hold her life at the cost of his, but that she rejoices in death for the truth's sake. Except the widely favourite Air, “Angels, ever bright and fair,” whose simple beauty as much as its popularity ought to have saved the entire oratorio from its long obscurity, all the music of this part is in minor keys. In spite of the current fiction that minority of 3rds and 6ths bespeaks sadness, melancholy is by no means the chiefly prevalent tone of the music, or of the person. She is pensive, she is earnest, she is firm, but she is totally untinged by the black sickness that would give a morbid air to her self devotion, and a sentimentality to her religious feeling. The form, immeasurably tedious in our age, of the repetition, *Da Capo*, of a long Air after its second part, seems to have almost worn itself out when this oratorio was written; for, not only in the Airs of Theodora but in those too of the other characters, it is, save in a few instances, abandoned throughout the work, and the music gains vitality, and its intensity of expression is far increased by the effective adoption of the conciser design. Theodora's first Air, “Fond, flatt'ring world, adieu!” wherein she dedicates herself to the seclusion of conventual life, is a particular example of the advantageous departure from the old formalism: its powerful declamation would become cold and lifeless, were the song to be recommenced after its impressive climax and rehearsed for a second time, and its effect of natural impulse would degenerate into artificial routine. It is curious to observe in this piece the anticipation of a principal phrase in one of the Choruses in “Jephtha,” set to the words, “Whatever is, is right;” but it would be vanity to assume that either passage bore any reflective allusion, purposed or accidental, to the other. “Angels, ever bright and fair” is too well known to need a comment; Theodora sings it when the decree is announced to her that she must worship the false sensual goddess, and she pours forth in it her deprecation to the purest of beings for protection from the revolting doom. “O that I on wings could rise,” is linked by the intervening Recitative, and the instrumental Interlude to the preceding Air, “With darkness deep,” so as to constitute one continuous scene out of the four separate pieces. The first Air pictures horror indeed at the impending fate and at the shame it involves, but this horror is softened by pious resignation; the second Air expresses hope if not of deliverance from her doom, certainly of fortitude to bear it; and the strain, which, in her trance, the victim of erroneous zeal for the expiring religion supposes to be music of heavenly choirs revealed for her encouragement, is what a waking and sensitive hearer might well believe to be divine. This last is a nearer approach, than is often to be found in the music of its period, to Mozart's beautiful principle of orchestration which materially distinguishes the modern from the ancient in the tonal art; the absence of all the heavy bass instruments from the score, and the employment of the delicate, pure, innocent tone of the then rarely used flute upon notes of sweetest expression, give to it a sound that realises our

conception of what may be seraphic. Theodora's prayer for death, “The pilgrim's home,” is an unelaborated melody of two repeated strains; it is lovely and tender to a marvel even for Handel, whose capability of tenderness is proved again and again. The Duet of Theodora and Didimus, “To thee, thou glorious son of worth,” is exquisitely persuasive; the musical artist felt the situation more keenly and truthfully than did the literary, and he shows the wishes rather than the words of the lover to be so irresistible, that the doomed virgin is compelled to break her prison by their passionate behest. The Air, “When sunk in anguish,” when she has rejoined her companions, though far from meritless, is the least interesting portion of Theodora's music. Her Duet with Irene, “Whither, princess, do you fly?” when she has resolved to surrender herself rather than let her lover pay with life for her freedom, represents gentle but invincible firmness. Lastly, the Duet “Thither let our hearts,” which is a consequence, if not a continuation, of the sweetly beautiful Air of Didimus, “Streams of pleasure ever flowing,” paints the happy and loving tranquillity with which martyrs await the doom that is to translate them out of worldly cares into the joys of heaven.

The part of Irene, written for a mezzo-soprano, ranging upwards to F sharp and to B below, is quite unlike in character to that of the heroine, being generally cheerful and more animated while less intense, and resembling it only in its quality of beauty. In the Air reviling prosperity, “Bane of virtue,” there is plainly a reminiscence of the always prominent accompanying phrase in “What though I trace,” in the oratorio of the preceding year, “Solomon;” and an equal likeness to the same is to be found in the Air of Didimus, “Streams of pleasure.” How strangely is a musician sometimes haunted by a recollection that will—there is, indeed, as one must think, a will in such things—inweave itself in his passing thoughts! Lucky he, if the recollection be of his own idea. “As with rosy steps the morn,” is one of the prettiest, simplest, and most winning songs of its composer. The Air “Lord, to Thee each night and day” is well known to be lovely; and the remarkable change of character in the second part, “Though convulsive rocks the ground,” admirably relieves and thus enhances the devotional spirit of what precedes and follows.

The music of Didimus has also a character entirely its own. It is impassioned always, once heroic, and tenderly affectionate in every other instance. It is for a female voice ranging about a tone lower than that required for Irene. It is interesting to observe in the Air sung over the sleeping Theodora in prison, “Sweet rose and lily,” a compromise between the then antiquated and now obsolete *Da Capo* form and the modern progressive plan which includes an allusion to the opening theme of a song; like signs appear in other places, such as “Rejoice greatly” in the “Messiah,” of our composer's prospective insight of the pliability of design, and hence we trace in him an example which musicians were slow to follow, but by which latest times have infinitely profited. A coincidence, less fortunate in its prototype than those with “Solomon” and in its archetype, than that with “Jephtha” which have been cited, is very evident between the charming Air “Sweet rose and lily,” and one by Giovanni Battista Bononcini (brother of that Marco Antonio who is famous for having slighted Handel in Berlin and opposed him in London, and for having owned a Madrigal which proved to be the composition of Lotti), “Per la gloria d'adorarvi,” in the opera of “Griselda,” the performance of which, at Drury Lane Theatre, the author came to London to direct, prior to Handel's first visit to this country. Such coincidences are worth remark, if only for the consolation of lesser artists than Handel, who may have the accident to alight upon other men's ideas and suppose them to be their own, mistaking thus memory for creation.

Septimius has the most florid music in the oratorio. It is the most indifferent too; indifferent, comparatively speaking, in merit, but still more so in expression. The Roman officer is one of those steady-going old believers, who persevere in the creed of their fathers, because they will not be at the pains of collating its corruption with the purity of a new faith. He has no cruelty toward the Christian sect, but

likes the ease of following established order, and gaily obeys commands, even to the execution of believing victims, rather than suffer the inconvenience of disputing them. He is willing to serve his friend, as shown in his accommodating him with entrance to Theodora's dungeon; but he takes no steps to save his life or that of the heroine for whom this friend is self-sacrificed. It cannot be too much to advance that the character here set forth is portrayed in the music, which is fluent, vocal, and effective as a medium for vocal display, but less interesting than that of the other personages.

By the laws of—nature may not be said, but of nature as conventionally represented in art, basses are either tyrannic or venerable, or malevolent, or comic. Valens belongs to the first of these types; he is a thorough tyrant without a redeeming quality, and according to custom if not to prescription, his music is for a bass voice. The librettist did nothing for him that would not repulse more than inspire the musician, who, with such words as "Racks, gibbets, swords, and fire," for the beginning of an Air, may indeed be wondered at and justly be admired, for having escaped the ludicrous, and given a spirit of dignity to the fierce declamations of the President of Antioch. The pieces of this part are all brief; they are all emphatic, and they have the value in the general effect of the work of contrasting the music of the others.

The Heathen Choruses are quite individual. They have not the riotous jollity of those of the Babylonians in "Belshazzar," nor the rugged fierceness of those of the Philistines in "Samson," but they have a character of their own which is as distinct and as appropriate as that which distinguishes the music of either of their pagan cognates. The citizens of the Roman empire are presented as pleasure-loving, but as finding pleasure in grace and gaiety, certainly not in ebriety or savage violence. The choral continuation of the air of Valens "Go, my faithful soldier," is a joyous acceptance of the proclamation of the festival. When the mortal penalty is announced of refusal to share in the rites of Venus, the people's exclamation "For ever thus stands fixed the doom," in simply melodious and rhythmical phrases, betokens no vengeful lust for the blood of those who refuse compliance with usages that have made them and their fathers happy, but a pleasant content with things as they are, and an entire unwillingness for anything that may disturb their enjoyment. "Venus, laughing from the skies," and the preceding address to the same deity, "Queen of Summer," are what no one but Handel ever could have written, and in their clear and charming tunefulness, exempt from every kind of elaboration, they prove as much the self-reliance as the poetical conception and the happy invention of the great master.

The Choruses of the Christians are of a totally different type. They are grave in expression and comparatively complicate in structure; but though the fugal element abounds in them, there is scarcely a set fugue among their number, and indeed there are fewer pieces in this form in all the oratorio than in any other, except "Athaliah," by the composer. "Go, pious youth," addressed to Didimus, when he departs in the hope to rescue Theodora, is a particularly favourable specimen, and the termination of this with the often repeated words "Glory, peace, and rest"—the reward that will be merited by his generous act—has a charm that may not be described; the voices, at their softest, end upon the harmony of the dominant, the piece being completed by the fading sound of the instruments, and the effect is as of a farewell blessing upon the mission, as much of valour as of religious zeal, and of personal love. The most important choral piece, as much because it is the longest as because it is the most elaborated and the most beautiful, is that which ends the Second Part, "He saw the lovely youth." The Christians, uncertain of the fate of Theodora, whose holiness they revere, and whose gentleness they love, pass the night in praying for her deliverance, addressing their prayers to Him who raised the dead and can protect the living. The story of the Widow of Nain illustrates their faith, and gives strength to their reliance; and this is recounted in the Chorus under consideration. The first movement is beautifully pathetic, having somewhat the manner of a funeral march—so much so at least as to suggest to the

mind's eye the procession to the sepulchre, the grief of the mourners, their vain efforts to console the bereft mother, and the Saviour's benign contemplation of the sorrow He alone could heal. A change of tempo gives most joyous and majestic colour to the words "Rise, youth, he said;" and to the narrated result of the divine behest. The final movement, "Lowly the matron bowed," tells of the widow's gratitude; it is the completest fugue in the work, the form in which Handel loved to invest his loftiest aspirations and grandest expressions of praise, and it closes the eminently dramatic episode with dignity worthy of the theme and of the technical excellence of the foregoing portion of the Chorus. This noble piece will always be a foremost feature in the oratorio, and its occasional selection for separate performance is quite accountable on the ground of its self-sufficiency, the incident it describes being entirely comprehended within its limits. The chorus sequent upon the leading away of the martyrs to execution, "How strange their end," is beautifully plaintive; but that which closes the work, "O love divine," is scarcely appropriate to its position. As music, it is by no means equal to many a piece that has gone before it; its effect is gloomy, which is not a little induced by the nature of its key of G minor, and not a little by the nature of its phraseology, and it is likely to stamp the hearer with an unhappy impression of the oratorio, and even of their sufferings who glory to die for the sake of truth. It cannot but be regretted that Dr. Morell (if it were he that wrote the words) made not this an opportunity for exultation, showing the triumph of heavenly constancy over the passing pangs that earthly tyrants can inflict, and it is still more to be wished that Handel had taken the rule into his own hands, and insisted on terminating his great work with a piece of such brightness as he, more than other musicians, could have produced, irradiating the crown of martyrdom.

Anticipating a plan that has become general, if not unexceptional, the Overture to "Theodora" is in the same key, G minor, as the closing Chorus. It would be futile and pedantic to lament, that the effect of tonal consistency and consequent internal completeness, thus given to a large work composed of many several portions, prevails not in many of the master's finest productions. Any of them may well rest upon its own merits, but this has the satisfactory excellence of ending where it begins, of returning after wide divergence to its starting key, and a consequent effect of entirety that is admirable, in addition to its other beauties. Such is the case in operas and masses by Mozart, and reference might easily be made to masterpieces of other musicians, as proving that these men thought the plan desirable. The Overture to this oratorio is one of the very finest by its author. The *M maestoso* wherewith it opens is most majestic. An incident in it of distinguishing beauty, is where an E flat in the bass, bearing an inversion of the suspended ninth of C and its resolution, is followed, not by the chord of D major which the context tempts one to expect, but by an inversion of that of B flat which has the full beauty of effect that always accompanies surprise; and it is not unlike in character to a movement of similar expression and in the same key in the Overture to "Ariodante," and to another in the harpsichord Suite, also in G minor, both by Handel, but it surpasses them both in merit. The Allegro is a far better wrought fugue than the kind of piece the author mostly placed in a corresponding position; the subject is answered in the second bar, and is continued through the answer, so as to comprise as it were a counter-subject within itself. A movement in E flat ensues, of sweetly melodious charm, bearing the inexplicable definition of "Trio"—inexplicable, because the music is written for the entire band, and it stands not between a foregoing portion and the repetition of the same—and this is described as *Larghetto e piano*, as if to imply that no modification of tone was to be made during its performance, an implication that Handel can scarcely have meant by the general definition, though he not rarely employed it. Lastly, there is a Courante, which is as good of its kind as the other portions, and this concludes in the opening key the excellent Overture.

Much more might have been written of this fine work, which should be as attractive as it is unknown; but that to talk of music apart from the music itself, cannot convey the

faintest notion of the sound or its beauty; and to attempt a description could but be tedious, and could raise no image of the matter it described. The coming performance of "Theodora" will enable those who are interested in its beauties to hear and to judge them, and the aim will be fulfilled of these scanty comments, if they direct the attention of real music lovers to the oratorio itself, and urge them to look in it for a grand specimen of Handel's genius.

THE Exhibition Concerts, under the direction of Mr. Barnby, at the Royal Albert Hall, have fully maintained their character; and, as we predicted, by the constant introduction of works of the highest class, by giving an occasional appearance to artists who have yet to make a name, and by the promise of the production of compositions comparatively unknown, have shown to the public that music can be made as important a feature at an International Exhibition as any other of the arts and sciences. Mr. W. H. Thomas, son of Mr. Lewis Thomas, the vocalist, made a highly successful *debut* as a pianist in Mozart's Concerto in C, playing the work throughout with a facility of execution and a reverence for his author which elicited the warmest applause; and we may also mention the first appearance of Madlle. Napoléone Voarino, who performed Mendelssohn's "Capriccio Brillante" with much success. Two concerts have also been given on successive Saturday evenings, commencing at seven and terminating at nine, in which the Royal Albert Hall Choral Society took part. At the first of these the programme was devoted exclusively to the works of Mendelssohn, and comprised the music to "Athalie," the fragments from "Loreley," the "Wedding March," and the Overture to "Ruy Blas." The solo vocalists were Madame Lemmens-Sherrington, Miss Emily Spiller, and Miss Dones. The second concert consisted of popular vocal solos, part-songs, &c., the singers being Madame Lemmens-Sherrington, Miss Dones, Mr. Sims Reeves, and Mr. Thurley Beale. Mr. Sims Reeves was in fine voice, and responded to encores for Clay's ballad "Tis better not to know" and "Tom Bowling," both of which he sang to absolute perfection. Madame Sherrington was also compelled to repeat the "Shadow Song," and the audience finding these demands complied with, encoored Sullivan's "O hush thee, my babe" and Barnby's "Sweet and low," unquestionably the two most attractive choral pieces in the selection. Some dashing pianoforte pieces by Mr. Willem Coenen, were admirably played by the composer; and at a reasonable hour concluded one of the best popular concerts ever given in this Hall. Mr. Barnby may be fairly congratulated on the result of his efforts to establish music as a permanent attraction in this locality; and there can be little doubt that he has but to persevere to ensure a still greater success.

AN event peculiarly interesting to the musical public during the present month will be the revival of Handel's Oratorio "Theodora," on the 10th inst. at the Hanover Square Rooms. Thanks are already due to Mr. Barnby for reviving "Jephtha" and "Belshazzar," and it is to be under his direction that "Theodora" (an analysis of which forms the leading article of our present number) will be heard for the first time in England since its composer's death. The work will be performed with complete orchestra and a chorus composed of the voluntary choir of S. Anne's Church, Soho, augmented to about 100 voices; and the solo parts will be entrusted to ladies and gentlemen amateurs. The proceeds of the concert are to be devoted to the restoration of S. Anne's Church.

HER MAJESTY'S OPERA.

DONIZETTI'S "La Favorita" has been revived at this establishment, chiefly for the purpose of bringing forward Madlle. Titiens in the part of *Leonora*, a character admirably suited to display both her vocal and histrionic powers, the more tragic portions, especially, being realised with an intensity rarely approached by former representatives of the part. Signor Aramburo, who made his first appearance as *Fernando*, in the same opera, was suffering from a cold, and failed therefore to do himself justice until the second repre-

sentation of the work, when he proved the possession of a good voice and excellent stage presence, although perhaps somewhat wanting in dramatic energy. The singing of Signor Rota, as *Alfonso*, must also be mentioned as highly satisfactory. The *debut* of Signor Castelmaly as *Mefistofele*, in "Faust," was successful, his acting especially telling with excellent effect, and his singing showing signs of careful cultivation. He is now announced to appear in Ambroise Thomas's Opera "Mignon." Madlle. Alwina Valleria, who made her first appearance as *Lady Enrichetta* in "Marta" has a genuine soprano voice, especially good in the upper notes, and sings with an ease and freshness which ensured her a highly favourable reception. We trust shortly to see her in a new character. Signor Campanini has added to his former list of successes by his assumption of the parts of *Raoul*, in "Les Huguenots," and *Lionello*, in "Marta;" and Madame Christine Nilsson has re-appeared with an increased power of voice and a decrease in that demonstrative style of acting which we feared last season was rapidly growing upon her.

ROYAL ITALIAN OPERA.

THE revival of "Guillaume Tell" for the first time these two years, and of "Masaniello" after a slumber of six years, are the only two productions of any note during the past month. M. Maurel, of whom we spoke in high terms on his *debut* in "Un Ballo in Maschera," has more than confirmed the impression he then made upon the usually frigid audience at this establishment. His singing and acting in the part of *Tell*, and also as *Valentino*, in "Faust," have so firmly secured his reputation that we have little doubt of his becoming one of the most valuable permanent members of the company. The failure of Signor Urio in the arduous part of *Arnold*, in "Guillaume Tell," was an event which seems to have been foretold by all except those most interested in putting him forward; and the welcome accorded to Signor Mongini in the same character, on the next representation of the Opera, was perhaps even more cordial in consequence. "Guillaume Tell" also brought forward Madlle. Sebel in the small part of *Tell's* son. She has a somewhat feeble voice, but sings with refinement, and may be found useful in minor characters. The *debut* of Signor Nannetti as *Mefistofele* in "Faust," produced but little effect, although he is evidently both a singer and actor of experience: his greatest success was in the well-known *Serenade*, which elicited much applause. The return of Madame Adelina Patti (who made her first appearance this season as *Rosina*, in "Il Barbiere") has created the usual amount of enthusiasm; but she has not as yet sustained any new part. It is to be hoped, now that Signor Mongini has seceded from Her Majesty's Opera, and joined the company at this establishment, that the best use will be made of his services, for the cast of the operas still suffers from the weakness of the tenor department.

CRYSTAL PALACE.

WE are glad to find that the series of Summer Concerts, which commenced on the 10th ult., are now transferred from the central transept to the concert-room, for we are inclined to believe that this new locality, and the abolition of the term "Opera Concerts" will have a highly beneficial effect upon the character of the programmes. At the first concert, Mendelssohn's Overture to "Ruy Blas" and Rossini's to "Semiramide" were the orchestral pieces; and Dr. von Bülow's performance of Beethoven's Pianoforte Concerto in G was an attractive feature in the selection. Well-worn vocal music from the operas were contributed by Madlle. Titiens, Madame Trebelli-Bettini, Signor Mongini, and Signor Agnesi, which elicited the usual amount of enthusiastic applause from those who adhere to the opinion that classical works are not suited for warm weather. Mr. Manns, as usual, conducted.

ALEXANDRA PALACE.

THE opening of this beautiful Palace and grounds, which took place on the 24th ult., was a decided success. No State ceremonial was arranged to inaugurate an event which has so long been looked forward to with much interest; but as nothing of this kind can be considered complete without music, Sir Michael Costa was there to preside over an efficient orchestra and choir, and Madlle. Titiens, Madame Natalie Carola, Madame Trebelli-Bettini, Madlle. Macvitz, Signori Campanini, Borella and Agnesi contributed a number of popular vocal pieces. The concert would have