

# The theatres of Paris, with illustrations after Madrazo, Carolus Duran, Gaucherel, Sarah Bernhardt, and others

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THE NEW OPERA Frontispiece THE AVENUE DE L'OPERA 18 THE GRAND STAIRCASE 43 THE GRAND FOYER 47 THE RENAISSANCE 67 COQUELIN (AFTER GAUCHEREL) 79 FEBVRE (AFTER GAUCHEREL) t.. 83 SARAH-BERNHARDT (AFTER GAUCHEREL) 93 SARAH-BERNHARDT (SKETCHED BY HERSELF) 95 SOPHIE CROIZETTE (AFTER THE PAINTING BY CAROLUS DuKAN) 103 MARIA FAVART (AFTER GAUCHEREL) 111 GOT (AFTER GAUCHEREL) 117 DELAUNAY (AFTER GAUCHEREL) 125 MOUNET-SIJLLY (AFTER GAUCHEREL) 129 WORMS (AFTER GAUCHEREL) 133 THE THEATRE FRANCAIS 137 COQUELIN (AFTER MADRAZO'S PAINTING) 145 THE ODEON 158 THE VAUDEVILLE 161 THE PORTE ST. MARTIN 169 THE CHATELET 179 THE THEATRES OF PARIS. CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION. IN the fulness, strength, and originality of its dramatic literature, France has for fifty years stood alone among the nations of Europe; and in the number of its theatres, in the excellence of its actors, and in the careful splendor of its theatrical performances, Paris is the first among the cities of the world. The Parisians are essentially a theatrical people; their talk and their tastes are theatrical—and at times even their actions are theatrical. A new play by a well-known author is an event. It is a nine days' topic. It is criticised, written about and written against, abused and praised, seen and heard by all Paris. Sometimes, like the " Rabagas " of M. Sardou, it is a political pamphlet; then it is applauded and hissed at once; the police are always present; there may be nightly disturbances; and there is constant fear of a riot. Sometimes, like the "Femme de Claude " of M. Alexandre Dumas ' the younger, it treats a social evil, attacking it with a daring, unconventional pen ; then it is heard in silence and discussed with acrimony. Sometimes, like the " Balsamo " of the two Dumas, a play expected to cause a great sensation fails, and sinks at once beneath the wave of oblivion. Sometimes on the eve of production it is forbidden by the censors ; then the author immediately prints it for all Paris to read, and the censors are either scolded or laughed at. The interdict laid on the piece remains until the censors change their minds, or the nation changes its government. Permission being finally given to produce the play, the forbidden fruit is tasted by the palates of the Parisians, and it is generally found to be over-ripe ; for it has been kept too long. This Parisian predilection for the theatre and frank recognition of the importance of the stage is of no recent growth. The populace thronged to the miracle-plays of the early brethren ; Corneille was induced to compose the " Cid " as an attack on Richelieu's policy; the Cardinal himself wrote tragedies; Moliere was sustained against the attacks of the clerical bigots by Louis XIV.; Beau-marchais's " Barber of Seville " may have hastened the rising of the people; the theatres were crowded during the Revolution ; and Napoleon dated a decree about the Theatre Franc.ais from Moscow. In a work on dramatic art, published in 1772, M. de Cailhava, one of the dramatists of that day, says: " A new piece is advertised, all Paris flies there ; the curtain rises, the actors appear, the friends of the author applaud, the enemies of his person or his talent hawk or blow their noses. They go to supper; those of the guests who could not be present in the theatre, ask about the success of the novelty. Tis pitiable, or 'tis delicious, says a mer-veil/eux, who in his life never judged anything but by contagion. From the end of the table a pretty woman confirms his judgment, only adding that the hair of the actress was very badly dressed." Tern-pora

mutantur, but might not this paragraph have been written in this year of grace 1880? It is not only in France, alas, that people are prone to judge by contagion. The desire to be present at the first performance of a new piece has but deepened with the lapse of years. Upon the announcement of the name of the play and the date of its birth, the author is besieged with applications for seats. His relatives, his friends, his enemies, those who know him, those who do not know him, even those who have never heard of him, all signify their anxiety to be present at the first night of his new piece. And, as M. Dumas warns us, woe betide him if he accede to the requests thus made, if he fill the house with his enemies, his friends, or his family! The piece will fail! It was not played before the proper audience. It was not seen by the three hundred people who arrogate to themselves the title of "all Paris." These men of letters and men of the world, these strangers, artists, and critics, these ladies of good society and bad, these bankers and do-nothings about town, do not care whether the play be good or bad, whether it be tragedy or opera bouffe—they only want to be present in their proper places at its first performance; they only want to hear it; they will see whether it be good or bad; they will judge it, and their judgment will be final. If this "all Paris" disapprove of a drama; if it fail upon its first performance before this mixed, indiscriminating, and yet critical audience—its doom is sealed. It may be eulogized by the critics, but it can never hope to hold a lasting place on the stage, and—it will never make money! Rash is the writer who, afraid of this public or ignorant of its power, seeks to avoid its verdict. His piece is fated. If on its first night "all Paris" be not present, and if the play does not find favor in their eyes, it cannot be good. M. Dumas, in a witty article on first performances in Paris, tells an anecdote in point. A Russian nobleman, long resident in France, and a friend of M. Dunras's, wrote a comedy, which was accepted and produced at the Gymnase Theatre. The author, holding a high social position, bought up every seat, invited his titled friends; the countess, the duchess, the baroness filled box and balcony; the Almanack de Got ha crowded the theatre. And the play—a charming comedy not unworthy of Scribe—fell flat. Why? Because, said M. Dumas, the author knew how to compose his piece, but not how to compose his house. Whereupon the noble Russian returned to St. Petersburg, saying to M. Dumas, "Decidedly it is too difficult to be a Parisian!" Before taking up the theatres of the capital of France, one after another, let us consider the physiognomy of a Parisian playhouse. The theatres of Paris are very unlike those of New York, but they are so like each other that a description of one will answer for nearly all the others. From the proscenium arch, broad enough to hold two boxes in each tier, stretch three or more semi-oval or horseshoe galleries, built almost directly over each other, and not receding as is the custom in American theatres. The body of the ground floor is filled with orchestra chairs, to which formerly ladies were not admitted. Now, however, except at the Theatre Francais, the Odeon, the Opera Comique, and the Palais Royal, this Salic law has been abrogated, and the fair sex may sit where it likes. Behind the orchestra chairs is the pit, which extends back only to the first galleries, under which, on the ground floor, is a semicircular tier of dark boxes called baignoires, or bathrooms, and the heat of Parisian theatres makes the name not inappropriate. The first balcony as a rule contains two or three rows of chairs, backed by a row of boxes; the second tier is generally all small boxes; the third, given up entirely to benches, corresponds to our family circle. Sometimes there is a fourth gallery, named the amphitheatre, and nicknamed the paradise most aptly, for it is inhabited by the "gods," or perhaps, as the younger M. Dumas has wittily put it, "because they eat apples there." Scattered along the boulevards are four or five ticket offices, containing not a map but a model of each theatre, so that the purchaser of a ticket can see at a glance his future position. Strange to say, following a short-sighted custom, the price of seats, if bought in advance either at one of these agencies or at the theatre itself, is higher than when the doors are open. An orchestra chair at the Theatre Francais costs six francs if purchased at the gate just as you enter the theatre at night, and eight if chosen during the day. At the Opera the same seat costs ten or twelve francs. These prices do not differ greatly from those which we pay in America, but when we allow for the greater purchasing power of money in Europe, we see at once that prices are decidedly higher there than they are here. And in all that conduces to material comfort, the theatres of New York are far superior to those of Paris. In fact, the playhouses of Paris, even the best of them, are very uncomfortable. The seats are narrow, hard, and stiff; the aisles are not wide, and are frequently

filled up with little folding-chairs. There is no mode of rapid egress in case of fire. There is little or no ventilation. To relieve the pressure on your legs, cribbed, cabined, and confined in very close quarters, you can hire a footstool from one of the aged hags who act as ushers. For this boon you are expected to pay half a franc. If you wish a bill of the play, that also must be purchased. If, however, the Parisian manager has not shown himself solicitous for the comfort of his customers, he has at least endeavored in one way to save them trouble. The spectator in Paris is not called on to applaud. Never mind how much he may be pleased with the performance, he need not rend his gloves or make his hands tingle in the effort to express his approbation. He may rest sure that the salaried applauders of the theatre, detailed for regular service every night, will do their duty, and enliven the evening's entertainment with the regulation rounds of applause. In the front row of the pit, immediately behind the orchestra chairs, sit the *claque*, as the hirelings who thunder forth the repeated salvos are called, marshalled under the eye of the "contractor for success," as the chief of the band grandiloquently styles himself. It is only the chief and two or three picked hands who come to the theatre every night; the rest are volunteers picked up each evening and doing their share of the applause under the orders of the chief, in return for a chance to see the play gratis. A humble-minded man, of broad palms and liberal views, by a little manoeuvring may thus manage to see every play in Paris for nothing. One finds the *claque* everywhere, except of late at the Opera and the Theatre Francais. At these two houses it was found possible to dispense with it during the rush and excitement of the Exhibition of 1878, and the experiment having succeeded then, the hireling bravos have not yet returned. The *claque* is autocratic and intolerant; like true Frenchmen, the members of it know their own importance, and are inclined to regard themselves as public functionaries. A characteristic letter is in circulation, written to Rachel by a chief of the *claque*, who had heard that she was dissatisfied with the applause she had received on the second performance of a successful piece: "Mademoiselle, I cannot remain under the obloquy of a reproach from lips such as yours! The following is an authentic statement of what really took place: At the first representation I led the attack in person no less than thirty-three times! We had three acclamations, four hilarities, two thrilling movements, four renewals of applause, and two indefinite explosions. In fact, to such an extent did we carry our applause that the occupants of the stalls were scandalized, and cried out, \* Turn them out!' My men were positively overcome with fatigue, and intimated to me that they could not again go through such an evening. Seeing such to be the case, I applied for the manuscript, and, after having profoundly studied the piece, I was obliged to make up my mind, for the second representation, to certain curtailments in the service of my men. I, however, applied them only to MM. ; and, if the temporary office which I hold affords me the opportunity, I will make them ample amends. In such a situation as that which I have just depicted, I have only to request you to believe firmly in my profound admiration and respectful zeal; and I venture to entreat you to have some consideration for the difficulties which environ me.—I am, mademoiselle," etc. The spirit of a performance in Paris really does in a great measure depend on the *claque*. Having had the matter so long taken out of their hands, the people (except upon rare occasions) seem to have forgotten how to applaud. Now applause is necessary to the actor. It gives encouragement, and, as Mrs. Siddons said, "better still—breath!" Hired approbation is better than none at all. There is a curious anecdote, at once pertinent to this, and peculiar in its revelation of a great artist's whims. Once after playing one of his best creations in a minor theatre, Frederick Lemaitre was not called before the curtain after one of his finest bursts of passion. Indignant and impudent, the actor caused the curtain to be raised, and walking to the centre of the stage in front of the footlights, he asked if M. Jules was present. No one answering, he then demanded M. Auguste. Nor was there any response to this either. "Gentlemen," said the actor, "I have been cheated—robbed! I paid those two fellows twenty francs apiece to call me before the curtain to-night; and they have not done it." Although Parisian play-goers have seemingly abandoned the privilege of applauding a good performance, they have not surrendered the right to hiss a bad one. This right is sometimes exercised gently and wittily, as was the case in the last century when the heroine of Marmontel's tragedy of "Cleopatra" clasped upon her arm a mechanical asp of cunning workmanship, devised by Vaucanson, and the venomous beast reared its head, and before plunging its apparent fangs

into the arm of the actress, hissed shrilly ; whereupon a spectator arose and went out with the simple remark, " I agree with the asp." More generally in our day the hissing is done vigorously. In a hit at the times, called " 1867," produced at the Porte St. Martin, Mile. Silly was roundly hissed for a parody on her intimate enemy Mile. Schneider; and a few weeks later Mile. Delval, Mile. Silly's statuesque sister, appeared as Truth, robed only in her innocence and a halo of electric light, a clothing deemed inadequate by the audience, and so she too was hissed. On both these occasions the claue frantically applauded, trying in vain to hide the hisses; and when the police in the theatre turned the hiss-ers out, the audience refused to allow the play to go on until the ejected spectators were permitted to return. The French law, while recognizing the right of the paying spectator to express his disapproval, if the goods he has purchased are not what he had been led to expect, will not allow any cabal or conspiracy, and forbids disturbance of any kind except while the curtain is up. So long as the green cloth shuts out the stage, all must be decorum. In Paris the boisterousness of the Dublin gallery boy could never be tolerated. The Parisians would have been amazed at an incident which is told in the history of the Irish stage. When Sophocles' tragedy of " Antigone " was produced at the Theatre Royal, with Mendelssohn's music, the gallery gods were greatly pleased, and, according to their custom, demanded a sight of the author. \*' Bring out Sapher-claze," they yelled. The manager explained that Sophocles had been dead two thousand years and more, and could not well come. Thereat a small voice shouted from the gallery, " Then chuck us out his mummy." Like almost everything in France, the theatres are ruled by rigid laws. There is a duly prescribed way of building a theatre and of isolating its scenery from all chance of conflagration. The scene-room must never be in a building contiguous to the theatre, and so it is no unusual sight in Paris to see immense carts carrying the painted parlors, and porticos, and forests, and firesides of the stage through the streets from the theatre to the scenic storehouse and back again, as occasion serves. A detail of firemen and of police is always on duty at the theatre. During the performance there must be present a physician, to whose use a special seat is reserved, known to all the officials of the theatre. Nor does the parental care of the government confine itself to the interior of the house ; it also provides for the exterior. It even prescribes the method of bill-posting. In their theory of advertising, the theatres of Paris, judged from an American point of view, are miserably defective. There are no " mammoth bills" to be seen in Paris; no " streamers;" no " gutter-snipes;" none of the pictorial printing which is the pride of an enterprising American speculator. Special permission had to be asked and obtained in 1867 before the gorgeous hues of the many-colored posters, brought across the ocean by the American circus, were allowed to be displayed before the wondering eyes of the Parisian populace. In the same year Mr. Sothern ran over to the French capital to show the Parisians the " American Cousin" (admirably acted by Mr. John T. Raymond), and to announce his coming he caused life-size heads of Lord Dundreary, eyeglass and whiskers and nil, to be stuck up wherever space offered; and the surprised Parisians went around asking one another who "the man with the eyeglass" might be? Instead of all this—and even a patriotic American can but acknowledge that the custom is more quietly artistic and probably quite as effective—the bills of all the theatres, of a given size prescribed by law (about fifteen inches broad by thirty high), are printed together and displayed on posts in the principal streets and boulevards, as well as on an occasional dead wall. The announcements are printed in black on colored backgrounds, the hue varying for each theatre, thus making a curious parti-color effect. Any sudden change in the programme must be notified to the public by a white band pasted across the original advertisement. No theatre can post a bill all white, as that color is reserved for the official announcements of the state. By these regulations the government does no real harm to the theatres; it may even benefit them in so far as it restricts the competition in bill-posting, which is at times wellnigh ruinous to an American manager. But the interference of the government is not always so beneficent. For example, it takes one-tenth of the gross receipts of every theatre in Paris for the benefit of the poor of the city. Again and again have the managers tried to obtain the repeal of this obnoxious tax, but as yet in vain. When the theatre-goer in Paris enters the door and presents his ticket, that document is not glanced at hastily by a single gateman, as in New York, but critically examined by three grave officials who consider it carefully. One of these three is the ticket-taker of the theatre ; the second is the

government envoy, who sees that a correct statement of the gross receipts is made up, so that the poor may get their tithe; and the third is the agent of the Society of Dramatic Authors and Composers, who also verifies the gross receipts, so that the author may not be defrauded of any of his dues. Space fails in this little volume to tell at length of the hooks of steel by which the powerful association of the dramatic authors has bound to itself the managers of France. The old country manager who liked to give Shakespeare's plays, because the author could not "come to the treasury asking for money," would be greatly displeased in France to find that, however old the play, and however dead the copyright, the agents of the society would still collect the proportionate fee, although in this case only to turn it over to a charitable fund for the relief of the theatrical poor. The dramatist in France is paid a certain percentage of the nightly receipts; it may vary from ten to fifteen per cent. according to the importance and classification of the theatre. When, as is generally the case, there is more than one piece acted on the same evening, the authors divide their percentage of the receipts in proportion to the length of the plays of each. The Society of the Dramatic Authors and Composers contains every dramatic author of France. It is therefore in effect a monopoly; and it rules managers with a rod of iron. It makes a contract with each manager, specifying what proportion of his receipts the society shall take. If he refuse to sign the contract, the society forbids any of its members to allow any of their plays to be acted in his theatre. This step practically closes his doors, for he has nothing to act except translations from foreign languages — which the Parisian play-goer does not care for—and old pieces on which the copyright has run out—which the Parisian play-goer has probably seen until he is tired. So in the end the manager accepts the proffered contract. There is then no haggling about terms. The young author never need fear being beaten down, and the dramatic veteran never can doubt the certainty of payment. The society collects the royalty and holds it, subject to the author's order. The manager dare not attempt to pay even the freshest novice less than the percentage agreed upon, and to secure a favorite writer he very often offers to pay more. The Opera alone is exempt from this payment of a percentage of its gross receipts. It pays instead a fixed sum of five hundred francs a night, to be divided between the author and composer, whatever may be its receipts.

CHAPTER II. THE ACADEMY OF MUSIC. IN the very centre of modern Paris, in a broad and ample space, cleared expressly for the more abundant display of its gorgeous coloring and lofty proportions, stands the magnificent monument which France has erected in its capital to honor and to house the union of music and the drama. Seen of all men who may pass through the city by the Seine, and situated in the midst of what is called the American quarter, as though to extort by dint of boldness the admiration of all transatlantic wanderers, the Opera bears witness to the high esteem in which the Parisian people hold the three fine arts closely akin one to another—acting and singing and dancing. Even the streets around this temple of the muses lend their testimony also to show how highly Paris appreciates those who have contributed in a great degree to its intellectual enjoyment, and aided in the attainment of the artistic preeminence it claims over other cities. In other parts of the city are an Avenue Moliere and a Boulevard Beaumarchais, and here, around the new home of the institution the- did so much to lift above all its rivals, are The Theatres of Paris, streets bearing the names of Meyerbeer, Halevy, Auber, and Scribe. And from the Opera to the Theatre Frangais, linking the two great histrionic institutions of the nation, runs a noble street, recently cut, and called the Avenue de TOpera.

THE AVENUE DE L'OPERA. As the National Academy of Music—for such is the official style and title of the theatre which every Parisian calls simply the Opera—is the most prominent of all places of amusement in France, from its ancient and honorable history, as well as from its sumptuous and flamboyant habitation, it is fit that any description of the theatres of Paris should begin with some account of what was for long, even if it be no longer, the first musical theatre of the world. The opera has always been a royal, imperial, or national institution; even in these days of heavy taxation, the republic allots it a substantial annual subvention of nearly a million of francs. According to Voltaire, France owes her comedy and her openi to two cardinals. The assertion is not absolutely accurate, for while Richelieu was of material assistance to the earlier dramatists, credit is due to Mazarin only for suggestion. The success of a company of Italian singers, imported by the cardinal to please Anne of Austria, incited the Abb£ Perrin to produce, in 1659, the " Pastorale d'Issy," with music by Cambert.

Mazarin was disposed to encourage the new enterprise, but he died in 1661, and it was not until 1669 that Perrin received a royal patent according him a monopoly of the opera. This was soon revoked in favor of Lulli, a wily little Italian, who is popularly believed to be the originator of French opera. Lulli, at one time a scullion, and then the head of a band of violinists, first attracted the attention of the king in one of Moliere's pieces, for which he had composed the music, and was at last emboldened, by the aid of Madame Montespan, to open the Opera in May, 1672, with a pastoral into which he had woven his musical interludes from the "Bourgeois Gentil-homme" and "Georges Dandin." The next year Moliere died, and by royal command Lulli took possession of the great humorist's more commodious theatre, thus ousting Moliere's widow and her fellow-actors, just as he had previously supplanted Perrin. Lulli was versatile and industrious, and when he died, in 1687, he left behind him nineteen operas (not counting ballets and interludes), and six hundred and thirty thousand golden livres. And whatever his personal failings, it can scarcely be denied that he was of great and lasting benefit to the opera. To his personal influence was due the royal favor which sustained the new enterprise in its helpless infancy. So much was it petted by the court and patronized by the king, that the nobility thought it no disgrace to appear in person and sing on its stage. In royal letters-patent of the date of 1672, one may read that, "We wish and it pleases Us, that all gentlemen and damsels \* (damoiselles) " should sing in the pieces and representations of our Royal Academy of Music, without its being supposed that they detract from their title of nobility, or from their privileges, duties, rights, and immunities." To Lulli also is due the development of dramatic dancing. Although the ballet had a footing at the Opéra before his reign, there were no female dancers, the women characters being taken by boys. As we all know, the same custom obtained in the English theatres in Shakespeare's day. Lulli reformed this altogether. In 1681 he brought out "The Triumph of Love" (a ballet which, at court, had found favor in the eyes of the king) at the Opera, with four female dancers, the first professional ballerine of which we have record. One of these, Mademoiselle Lafontaine, "a beautiful and stylish dancer/' says Durey de Noinville, was so successful that she was hailed as the "queen of the dance." During the next hundred years there is but little of interest to record in the history of the Opera, excepting only the often-described quarrel between the partisans of Gluck and of Piccini. But in 1781 there occurred an instance of royal generosity well worthy of record. The theatre in the Palais Royal, in which the Opera had been established for ninety years, was burnt, and, under the patronage of Marie Antoinette, the architect, Lenoir, by working day and night, built a new opera-house at the Porte St. Martin in eighty-six days. Rumors at once began to circulate at court that it was unsafe—that a building erected in such hot haste could not have been properly constructed. The intimidated authorities therefore decided that, in order to test the strength of the new opera-house before permitting the queen to enter it, a performance should be given gratis to the people of Paris. The beams having been thus tested by the common herd, their majesties honored the Opera with their presence. And the building thus hastily erected long survives the departure of the Opera from within its walls, for, like the line of kings which encouraged its first steps, the National Academy of Music has been a migratory institution, and has moved twelve times from its foundation to the day when it took possession of its thirteenth home, the present opera-house, occupied by it only within the last half decade. In 1791, for the first time, the names of the singers appeared in the bill of the play. Previously it had been understood that the best singers appeared on Fridays only. Three years later, when the Opera was transferred to the building confiscated by fraud from Mile. Montansier, the spectators in the pit were at last provided with seats. The year before this, under the Terror, on March 20, 1793, Mozart's "Marriage of Figaro" was performed for the first time. The vacillating Louis XVI., after absolutely interdicting Beaumarchais's piece, at length authorized its performance, and finally acted in it himself with his queen. His predecessor, Louis XIV., had danced in ballets, and his successor, Louis XVIII., when Count of Provence, was the anonymous author of more than one opera libretto, notably of the "Caravan of Cairo," set by Gretry. This composer did not long retain his royalist tastes. During the troublous times of '93 and the succeeding years of the republic over two thousand revolutionary dramas were written; more than half of them were acted, and the stage of the National Academy of Music did not fail to have its share; and in the archives stored away in the capacious galleries of

the new building are the scores of many revolutionary operas by Gretry, Mehul, and Rouget de l'Isle, in which the representatives of the people—municipal officers girt with their tricolored scarfs, or sans-culottes curates—replace the gods of Olympus as the *dei ex machina*. In these curious works we find the new-born Goddess of Reason dancing the Carmagnole, or singing the *Ça Ira*, a revolutionary song of particular interest to Americans, for it was suggested by a remark of Franklin's. The Goddess of Reason was the wife of the bookseller Momoro. The Goddess of Liberty was the beautiful Mile. Maillard of the Opera, who had so often played the part in the "Offering to Liberty," that at last it became incarnated in her. The people, giving a load habitation to their ideal, no longer distinguished the actress from the goddess. In spite of her unconcealed royalist sympathies, she was constrained to personate Liberty in all the civic celebrations, and even to be adored in the "Temple of Reason" (formerly Notre Dame), together with M<sup>me</sup>. Ducamp and Mile. Florigny, also of the Opera, as Equality and Fraternity. This "Offrande à la Liberté" and a kindred piece, "La Rosière Republicaine," were the two great successes of a new school of high-flown and hybrid ballet-operas, half dancing and half singing. Other and more regular ballets fared badly; revolutions are bad times for the fine arts. Three times was the money appropriated for a patriotic ballet composed by Gardel on so revolutionary a subject as "William Tell," and three times was the money stolen before it could reach the composer. It was only clap-trap and blood-and-thunder pieces, full of sound and fury and signifying nothing, which could hope for a hearing on the stage of the Opera. And of these there was no lack. The National Academy of Music turned itself into the illustrated supplement of the daily newspaper, reflecting the lurid glare of the "latest from the seat of war." Battle after battle was repeated on the stage of the Opera, after the news of the reality had come from the borders of France. The rapidly-succeeding events of the last ten years of the century were often mirrored behind the curtain of the Opera. In this a precedent was followed. Twenty years before, the Opera had brought out "Mirza," a ballet in three acts, setting on the stage the events of the American Revolution, in which the soldiers of France were then fighting side by side with the Continentals of these colonies. Let us imagine, if haply we can, the figure cut by the dignified Washington and "Grandison-Cromwell" Lafayette as they pirouetted in a minuet with grave reserve! A few years later, America again appears on the stage of the Opera in "L'Embarras de Richesses," a ballet by Gretry, in which the four quarters of the world were seen—America dancing "a minuet of the time of Pericles." During the whole Revolution the stage of the Opera was prompt to set forth the shifting scenes of blood and iron; and every victory over the foreign foe was at once set to music and represented before the footlights. Indeed the Opera had a direct connection with the first great event of the Revolution: its property-room had been sacked of its sabres to assist in arming the populace for the assault on the Bastille. It was, perhaps, in return for this timely loan that, upon the spoliation of the churches, the Opera was presented with a chime of bells, unfortunately destroyed in the fire of 1873. M. Kuitter mentions a tradition, impossible to verify, that one of these bells came from the Church of St. Germain l'Auxerrois, and after having been used to give the signal for the real massacre of St. Bartholomew, it had again tolled the alarm during the five hundred performances of Meyerbeer's "Huguenots." But the downfall of the monarchy and the subsequent anarchy had its influence on the box-office of the National Academy of Music as well as on its stage. Like everything else, the Opera felt the beneficent effect of paper money issued by the people for the people. With the unlimited putting forth of assignats, the price of tickets was rapidly raised, until a seat in the boxes cost 9,000 livres. The 18th Prairial, Year IV., the receipts of the Opera were 1,071,350 livres! The real value of this million of livres was a little over two hundred dollars. Under the Empire and the Restoration the Opera prospered. In 1822 it spent 188,260 francs upon the mounting of one piece, "Aladdin, or the Marvellous Lamp." In February, 1820, as the Duke of Berri was handing his wife into her carriage, he was assassinated. In consequence, the Government razed the building and gave the ground to the public as the Place Louvois. A temporary home was found for the National Academy of Music in the Rue Lepeletier, and there it remained for more than fifty years, until the night of October 28, 1873, when the building caught fire. Within a few hours it was burnt to the ground. As M. de la Salle, the author of an ample and amusing history of "Les Treize Salles de l'Opera," walked home from the fire, he saw by the early dawn the wet and just posted bill of the Opera announcing the \*

one-hundredth performance of 4 Hamlet' for this evening at 7 1-2 o'clock." The half century which the National Academy of Music passed in the theatre built for it in the Rue Lepeletier was the most glorious period of its existence. The French people are very proud of their chief musical theatre, and it is in the history of these fifty-two years—from August, 1821, when the opera-house, on which work had been begun as soon as the Duke of Berri died, was first thrown open to the public, to the dismal day in October, 1873, when it was wholly destroyed by fire—it is in the history of these years that there is most to be proud of. The house proved to have remarkable acoustic qualities, and it was the first of all the Parisian playhouses to be lighted by gas. To these physical advantages an artistic superiority over almost every other musical theatre in Europe was soon added. For two score of years the history of the French Academy of Music—by turns Royal, National, and Imperial—was in a great measure the history of opera itself. Half of the operas composed during this period, and retaining the stage to-day, were written especially for the Paris Opera. After Lulli, Rameau, Gliick, Sacchini, and Spontini, who had rendered its stage illustrious in the past, there soon came forward Rossini and Meyerbeer, who were to make it even more famous in the present. But a little behind these two great musicians came Auber and Halevy, who gave to the Opera some of their best work. As may be seen by a glance down this list of names, the French Academy of Music has always been hospitable to foreigners. Owing its solid foundation to an Italian, Lulli, it has extended an open welcome to the German Gliick and Meyerbeer, as well as to the Italian Piccini, Spontini, and Rossini, while at the same time offering a broad stage to the native Rameau, Gretry, Halevy, and Auber. It was perhaps to this very cosmopolitanism, this freedom from the narrowness of nationality, which only too often tends to degenerate into the groove of petty provincialism, that the Opera owed its broad and vigorous vitality. The Paris Opera built itself up by attracting to it the rising musical geniuses of Europe, be they French, or Italian, or German, and by attaching them to it by liberal treatment. The capital of France is one of the cities of the world in which the foreigner, in the end, feels most at home. Rossini and Meyerbeer became pure Parisians, in spite of their accident of birth.

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IN the fulness, strength, and originality of its dramatic literature, France has for fifty years stood alone among the nations of Europe; and in the number of its theatres, in the excellence of its actors, and in the careful splendor of its theatrical performances, Paris is the first among the cities of the world.

The Parisians are essentially a theatrical people; their talk and their tastes are theatrical; and at times even their actions are theatrical. A new play by a well-known author is an event. It is a nine days' topic. It is criticised, written about and written against, abused and praised, seen and heard by all Paris. Sometimes, like the *Rabagas* of M. Sardou, it is a political pamphlet; then it is applauded and hissed at once; the police are always present; there may be nightly disturbances; and there is constant fear of a riot. Sometimes, like the *Femme de Claude* of M. Alexandre Dumas

the younger, it treats a social evil, attacking it with a daring, unconventional pen; then it is heard in silence and discussed with acrimony. Sometimes, like the *Balsamo* of the two Dumas, a play expected to cause a great sensation fails, and sinks at once beneath the wave of oblivion. Sometimes on the eve of production it is forbidden by the censors; then the author immediately prints it for all Paris to

read, and the censors are either scolded or laughed at. The interdict laid on the piece remains until the censors change their minds, or the nation changes its government. Permission being finally given to produce the play, the forbidden fruit is tasted by the palates of the Parisians, and it is generally found to be over-ripe ; for it has been kept too long.

This Parisian predilection for the theatre and frank recognition of the importance of the stage is of no recent growth. The populace thronged to the miracle-plays of the early brethren ; Corneille was induced to compose the &#x22; Cid &#x22; as an attack on Richelieu's policy; the Cardinal himself wrote tragedies; Moliere was sustained against the attacks of the clerical bigots by Louis XIV.; Beau-marchais's &#x22; Barber of Seville &#x22; may have hastened the rising of the people; the theatres were crowded during the Revolution ; and Napoleon dated a decree about the Theatre Franc.ais from Moscow. In a work on dramatic art, published in 1772, M. de Cailhava, one of the dramatists of that day, says:

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