

THE "TUSCAN,"
A SHORT ACCOUNT OF A
STRADIVARI VIOLIN.



W. E. HILL & SONS,

38, New Bond St.

(Opposite Grosvenor Gallery).



THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

Gift of

Mrs. Lawrence C. Lockley

MUSIC
LIBRARY

(3)

University of California
SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
305 De Neve Drive - Parking Lot 17 • Box 951388
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90095-1388

Return this material to the library from which it was borrowed.

NON-RENEWABLE

FLL BIP
JAN 03 2002

DUE 2 WKS FROM DATE RECEIVED

UCLA ACCESS SERVICES BL19

Interlibrary Loans

11630 University Research Library

Box 951575

Los Angeles, CA 90095-1575

- Sidney Shipman

London Oct. 1892.



THE TUSCAN STRADIVARI, 1690. W. E. HILL & SONS, LONDON.

The "Tuscan."

A SHORT ACCOUNT

OF A

Violin by Stradivari,

MADE FOR

COSIMO DE MEDICI,

Grand Duke of Tuscany,

Dated 1690.

LONDON:

W. E. HILL & SONS,

38, NEW BOND STREET, W.

1891.

Music
Library

ML

830

H556t

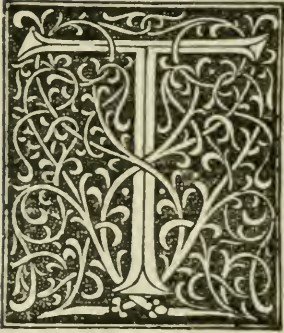
PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN.



THE TUSCAN STRADIVARI, 1690. W. E. HILL & SONS, LONDON.



A SHORT ACCOUNT
OF A
VIOLIN by STRADIVARI.



HIS remarkable instrument, one of the finest examples of Stradivari's work, is probably unique in the preservation, in every detail, of the original beauty of its form and workmanship.

The violins of Stradivari, like most other old works of art, have almost all suffered from the accidents of time. Even in exceptionally well preserved instruments, cracks have appeared in the soft wood of the belly, the sound holes have often lost some of their accuracy of outline, and the varnish has been rubbed off the parts most exposed to wear. It has consequently been difficult to realise, even from the best specimens, how a violin looked and spoke when fresh from the hands of Stradivari.

But the condition in which this instrument has been preserved, for nearly two hundred years, enables us to stand, in imagination, as contemporaries of the great master, and to see and handle a violin just as it left his workshop; for, excepting only the longer neck and larger bass-bar demanded

by the increased compass and elevated pitch of modern times, it is almost absolutely in the same state as when it received the last finishing touches from Stradivari himself. The delicate surface of the matchless orange-red-brown varnish shows scarcely a sign of the wear of the two centuries passed since it was first laid on ; and even the exposed projecting lines of the scroll, which in old violins, almost without exception, have lost the original dark varnish used to pick them out, are here scarcely rubbed, and the lines remain almost as fresh and distinct as if the instrument were a new one.

The violin was made in 1690, when Stradivari had been for some ten years established for himself, in his house in the Piazza San Domenico. At this time he was far advanced in what is known as his second period, in which his innate genius, matured by experience, freed him from the direct influence of his master Amati, and enabled him to carry into successful execution the original conceptions which were the true foundation of his great frame.

Although the work of Stradivari may broadly speaking be divided into periods, the instruments made in any one of these were not mechanically precise reproductions of one another, but were, for the most part, independent creations ; and many of those belonging to the earlier periods foreshadowed the higher developments of form to which he afterwards attained.

This instrument in particular shows how little fettered he was, even at this time, by the early influence of Amati, and marks his advance towards the culmination of his creative power in the grand pattern period of 1700 to 1725. In its flatter form, freer curves, and altogether bolder conception, it strongly suggests the later period, while possessing at the



Alfred
Glover
del

THE TUSCAN STRADIVARI, 1690. W. E. HILL & SONS, LONDON.

same time that microscopic perfection of workmanship which distinguished his earlier work.

The exceptional fortune by which this violin has been preserved intact has happily fallen to one of the very finest instruments that ever left the Cremona workshop. The quality of the wood selected, the grace of form, alike in the curves and in the cutting of the scroll; the extreme technical perfection of workmanship, notably shown, among other points, in the precision of the purfling at the corners; and the transparent beauty of the varnish, stamp it beyond question as a great masterpiece: while the tone, in power, rich brilliancy, and purity, fully sustains the impression created by the appearance of an instrument so perfect in form and material.

It is perhaps unnecessary in this place to assert the pre-eminence conceded by the greatest players to the work of Stradivari; but it may be of interest to record the opinion of the first living violinist, Herr Joseph Joachim, who, in a letter written to a well-known English connoisseur, has given expression to an almost universal feeling. He says—“While the violins of Maggini are remarkable for volume of tone, and those of Amati for liquidity, none of the celebrated makers exhibited the union of sweetness and power in so pre-eminent a degree as Giuseppe Guarneri [del Gesu] and Antonio Stradivari. If I am to express my own feeling I must pronounce for the latter as my chosen favourite. It is true that in brilliancy and clearness, and even in liquidity, Guarneri, in his best instruments, is not surpassed; but what appears to me peculiar to the tone of Stradivari is a more unlimited capacity for expressing the most varied accents of feeling. . . .”

The record of the instrument for the second century of its existence is complete ; and there is a strong presumption as to its previous history. The interesting document (a *facsimile* copy of which is annexed), in the possession of Messrs. Hill & Sons, shows that in 1794 the violin passed from the hands of Signor G. F. Mosell, of Florence, into those of Mr. David Ker, of Portavo, in Ireland, for the sum of about £25.

Signor Mosell's statement, quoted by Mr. Ker, that the violin originally belonged to the Court of Tuscany, points to the strong probability of its having been one of the Concerto of instruments supplied by Stradivari in 1690 to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo III de Medici. The Concerto consisted of five instruments—two violins, a violoncello and two violas. The violins and violoncello were ordered in 1684 by one Marquis Ariberti, but appear not to have been completed until 1690, when they were presented by the Marquis to the Grand Duke, who thereupon gave an order to Stradivari for the two instruments required to complete the Concerto.

The history of this transaction is contained in a manuscript notice of Stradivari by Don Desiderio Arisi, which contains many interesting particulars of the commissions executed by the great master, and of the works with which we are now concerned. We reproduce here, with a translation appended, an extract referring to the subject of the present notice.*

* Don Desiderio Arisi was a conventual priest of the order of the Gerolimini, and resided in the convent attached to the famous church of St. Sigismonde outside Cremona. He left several unpublished biographies of his principal contemporaries in Cremona. These manuscripts are now preserved in the Town Library.

Ar

Adi

Io Gio: Felice Mosca
Inglese Cecchini Cingh
Antonio Stradivari
fode Mars propria do

Io Pudd: Gio: Fel
D. Corse di Tavana
Legittimo del Ind C

Mr. Moselli
Tuscany & by
it has been
Merch the sup
50 Guineas

The Viola
is 104 Years

Document of
the Violin of Stradivari
bought at Florence

1794

Adi 10 Maggio 1794

Io Gio: Felice Mosell ho ricevuto dal Sig.^{ro} David Ker.
Inghese Settanta Cinquanta π averlo venduto un Violino di
Antonio Stradivari π detto prezzo d'accordo a me^o Cont. et in
fede Mans propria dico ----- L.^{ro} 50. —

Io Pudd: Gio: Felice Mosell Direttore, Primo Violino della
C. Corte di Toscana, aperisco che il detto Violino, è vero,
Legittimo del P^{re} Autore Antonio Stradivari — — —

Mr. Moselli thinks it belonged to the Court of
Tuscany & by some manner perhaps improper
it has been taken from it. he says it is of the first
Merch the fappos in England it will be worth
50 Guineas. Florence 10 May 1794. David Ker

The Violin was made in the year 1690 consequently
is 104 Years old.

Arbiter.

Ho fatto pochi giorni ceno il parente de due vidini, e vi stene llo al S. S. Sinigo
D. Toruara, da 'oseriuo D. che gli ha' goditi a un segno, che non averei S. mi:
concordione saputo argummi maggiore. Tudi i suoi vishioni de questi re l'ave
finito corona, s'ello stesso sed inarto d'aggruanti, come perfecti, ma non h'et,
postando del Vidinello confesano forzamente non aver iteso il più grasso e più
conno i vane. Del grandimento, ch'io n' ho' niente da q' d'Allegria, che non so
bastermente appimute, io n' ho' molto, a la principale obligatione all'adengion
D. D. de tanto, e' placata in q' d'ipera, si come co. anal'io d'arummi esco accu
tato qualche grado d' marito avendo portata in pratica la nota, ja della uerata
maestria d'una cosa, ond' e' p' espressioni continue con misioni. So p'ovvato
che depe gurganta cominciar m' b' to due vide, cioè il Tavora, e sen tratto, che
magnano compimento del concerto intero.

On the 19th September, 1690, Antonio (Stradivari) received the following letter from the Marchese Bartolommeo Ariberti.

“A few days ago I presented the Prince of Tuscany with the two violins and the violoncello, and to my great satisfaction, he accepted them with a gratification that fulfilled all my expectations. All the members of his band were unanimous in their praise of the instruments, which they declared to be perfect, and of the violoncello in particular, they admitted that they had never heard an instrument with such a powerful and agreeable tone. I feel that for the flattering reception accorded to my present by His Highness, I am indebted principally to the great care and labour which you have bestowed upon the construction of these instruments. At the same time I think I may claim some credit with you for bringing your great skill to the notice of such a princely house, and I trust that it may procure frequent orders for you from the same quarter. In earnest of my good will I have now to beg you to begin at once the construction of two viols, viz., the tenor, and the contralto, which are wanted to complete the full concerto,” &c., &c.

Of the Concerto, made for the Court of Tuscany, only one of the violas and the violoncello remain at Florence, where they are preserved in the Royal Institute of Music. All traces of the other viola and violin have been lost; the greater part of the valuable collection, left by the Grand Duke at his death, having disappeared from the Pitti Palace. The viola that has been preserved is a very fine instrument of unusual size. It had to be opened in 1869, when the

belly was found to have been strengthened in several places by the maker, who had carefully notified the fact in the following words, written in his own hand, "Corretta da me Antonio Stradivari"—and added the inscription—

"Prima. 20 Ottobre 1690 per S. A. da Fiorenza."

The violoncello is also of a very large pattern and is a splendid instrument.

How the violin came to be removed from the Court remains a matter of conjecture. When the Duchy, in 1734, passed away from the family of the Medici, the great art patrons of Italy, the musical collections may have been less jealously guarded, and many opportunities may have occurred for the "improper removal" hinted at in the document cited above. But the statement, which we have at first hand, of Mosell's position at the Court, and the peculiar opportunities he must have enjoyed for making a judicious transfer of instruments of which he no doubt had the use in his professional capacity, point to an uncharitable but simple explanation of the means by which this violin came into his hands. Certain it is that the two violins belonging to the Concerto are gone from the Court collection at Florence.

Although Mosell was undoubtedly aware of the exceptional value of the instrument, Mr. Ker, the purchaser, appears to have had no interest in violins beyond that of a collector of artistic rarities; but, according to his own account, given to members of his family, he bought the Tuscan by the advice of no less a person than Angelica Kauffmann, to whom he was at that time sitting for his portrait (probably at Rome, where she was then living with her second husband, Zucchi). Probably by her aid also he bought at the same time, out of the Pitti Palace, two

pictures—one a fine Leonardo da Vinci, and the other a head by Raffaele—both of which are preserved in the family. He brought the violin home to Ireland and put it away in some obscure place of safety in one of his houses in that kingdom (locally known as “Glory Holes”) where it remained *perdu* for more than fifty years; although diligently searched for in several houses by other members of the family its existence was ignored by the successor to the property, who was engrossed in the absorbing pursuit of book-collecting. The violin no doubt owes its wonderful preservation to this apparent indifference on the part of its new owners, for, as a well-known musical writer, the Revd. H. R. Haweis, has said—“it is the collector who keeps them for years unstrung, and the violinists who lay them by, and neither play upon them nor lend them about, who are the real benefactors and conservers of the Cremona gems.”

In the year 1847 Mr. Richard Ker, a grandson of the original purchaser, ascertained, when on a visit to his family in Ireland, that the violin had at last been found, and he identified it at once by the original receipt, quoted above, which was found inside the case. The circumstances in which the discovery was made have been communicated to Messrs. Hill by Mr. R. Ward, a connection and neighbour of the Ker family in the north of Ireland, and mark an interesting epoch in the history of the violin. About the year 1845, Portavo House, the residence of Mr. David Ker (son of the original purchaser) was destroyed by fire, and the family took refuge at Bangor Castle, Belfast, Mr. Ward's seat. Among the chattels rescued from the fire and conveyed to the Castle was found the

long-sought fiddle! It was enclosed in its original old leather-covered case, studded with brass nails and opening at one end ; but was quite out of order, with no sound post or fittings. With a view to placing the instrument, which he christened "The Toscana," in careful hands, Mr. Richard Ker took it to a friend, Mr. F. Ricardo, an ardent amateur, then resident in Paris, and its subsequent history includes several interesting incidents. Mr. Ricardo was at first puzzled by its fresh appearance, but lost no time in taking it to the celebrated Parisian maker, Vuillaume. His old foreman examined it carefully, but would give no opinion ; but, on Vuillaume's entrance, held it up and said : "Here ! Monsieur Vuillaume, here is a Stradivari," to which Vuillaume, without approaching nearer, replied at once : "Oui, certainement." He then took the violin in his hands and pulled out the pegs, remarking that they did not belong to it. This interesting testimony to the genuineness of the instrument, and to the remarkable judgment possessed by Vuillaume, was given by an eye-witness of the occurrence.

On another occasion it was shown to the great English maker, Fendt, who is reported to have exclaimed : "If it is not a Strad it is something better ;" and about twelve years ago it was seen by the head of the present firm of Messrs. Hill & Sons, whose experienced eye at once recognised the rare beauty of the instrument.

To return to 1847 ; the violin was put into playing order by Vuillaume, and it could not have been entrusted to better hands. It then remained in the custody of Mr. Ricardo, by whom it was little used but carefully preserved, until the year 1875, when it was acquired by that

gentleman from Captain Alfred Ker, a great-grandson of the original purchaser, for the sum of £240, and in the summer of 1888 it was bought by the firm of Messrs. Hill & Sons.

The following details of the construction and dimensions of the violin are of some interest :—

The back is in one piece, supplemented a little in width, at the lower part, after a common practice of the great makers ; and is cut from the handsomest wood that Stradivari possessed. The ribs are of the same wood, while the belly is formed of two pieces of soft wood of rather fine and beautifully even grain.

The *f* holes, cut with perfect precision, exhibit much grace and freedom of design. The scroll, though less varied in curve than is often the case with the later violins, is very characteristic and beautifully modelled, and harmonizes admirably with the general modelling of the violin.

The measurements given below are the same as those of the Dolphin Strad (1714), formerly in the Adam Collection, but now in the possession of R. Bennett, Esq., and described in Mr. Hart's well-known work.

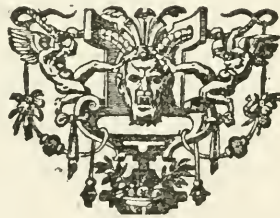
The only features which characterize this violin as a work of the earlier period are the slightly greater hollowing out of the model round the edges, the exquisite finish of the purfling, and the drooping corners.

The dimensions are as follows :—

Length of body	-	-	-	14	inches full.
Width across the top	-	-	-	$6\frac{1}{16}$	„ bare.
Width across the bottom	-	-	-	$8\frac{1}{4}$	„
Height of sides (top)	-	-	-	$1\frac{3}{16}$	„
Height of sides (bottom)	-	-	-	$1\frac{7}{32}$	„

It may be mentioned that, excepting the change of bass bar already referred to, the inside of the violin is untouched.

We are able to add three illustrations of the "Tuscan" Stradivari which represent the instrument accurately, and give a very faithful rendering of its exceptional beauty. We are indebted for these plates to the admirable drawing of Mr. Alfred Slocombe and to the skilful superintendence by Mr. William Gibb of their reproduction by chromolithography. We believe that these illustrations are the first pictures of a Stradivari violin ever produced with sufficient accuracy to show its true colour, the character of the wood, and the minuter details of the master's workmanship.



Antonius Stradiuarius Cremonensis
Faciebat Anno 1690



What voices hast thou heard, what hands obeyed,
What love sustained, what lonely vigils blest,
Of those who now are silent and at rest,
Since thy great maker's hand was on thee laid
In far Cremona, and thy fabric made,
Strong, resonant, of beauty manifest,
In delicate amber like a garment drest,
A type of perfect art no time can fade.
What memories haunt thee of the glorious hour
When wakened by a master's hand, thy voice,
First thrilled with passionate, heart compelling power,
Making thy listeners tremble and rejoice ;
As the rich tide of music swept along
In highest ecstasy of wordless song !

F. S.



UCLA - Music Library

ML 830 H556t



L 007 025 407 3

MUSIC
LIBRARY

ML
830
H556t

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



D 000 882 143 1

