"The Salabue Stradivari"

A History of the famous Violin Known as "Le Messie"

W. E. Hill & Sons
38 New Bond St
London.

The Salabue Stradivari.

A History and Critical Description

OF

THE FAMOUS VIOLIN

COMMONLY CALLED

"LE MESSIE."

Containing many particulars obtained from authentic sources and now published for the first time.

Illustrated with Three Coloured Plates by
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THE SALABUE STRADIVARI.

THE Exhibition of Ancient Musical Instruments, held at the South Kensington Museum in 1872, comprised a Collection of Violins such as had never before been brought together, and afforded to the musical amateur an unprecedented opportunity of studying the beauties of some of the most precious instruments in Europe. Of these, perhaps none excited so much interest among connoisseurs as a Violin by Stradivari, lent by M^sr. Vuillaume, the celebrated Parisian maker and dealer, and thus described by him in the official Catalogue of the Exhibition.*

* This account coincides almost word for word with a notice of the instrument by F. J. Fetis quoted in part on p. 30 of this work.

91. Violin.

By A. Stradivarius, 1716.

"*Le Messie.*"

"Cet instrument a été à peine joué. Il fut acheté vers 1760 par le Comte Cozio de Salabue, grand seigneur et dilettante, qui l'a toujours respecté et conservé jusqu'à sa mort. Ses héritiers l'ont vendu à Luigi Tarisio, connoisseur et fanatique d'instruments, qui l'a conservé sans le laisser voir à personne jusqu'à 1854. A l'epoque de sa mort il était recommendé à ses héritiers, et caché soigneusement dans la Ferme de la Croix, à côté du Village de Fontaneto, près de Novara (Italie). C'est là que son propriétaire actuel est allé le chercher dans le mois de Janvier, 1855. Le bois dont il est fait est rémarquable par la richesse de ses ondes. La perfection du travail, la beauté du vernis, rien ne lui manque. C'est un violon qui semble sortir de la main du maître. C'est enfin le seul, l'unique instrument de Stradivarius, qui soit parvenu jusqu'à nous, en cet état de parfaite conservation ; or, ce monument intact de l'ancienne lutherie, cet instrument que l'archet n'à pas fait resonner dans l'espace de plus d'un siècle et demi, qui s'est ecoulé depuis l'epoque de sa fabrication, cet instrument vient donner un éclatant dementi à cette opinion d'après laquelle le son ne pourrait se produire libre et pur qu'après un long usage, parcequ'ici dans un instrument neuf on trouve toutes les qualités réunies—force, moelleux, rondeur, finesse, vibration facile, ton distingué, noble, incisif."

Lent by M. VUILLAUME, Paris.

The title at the head of the enthusiastic description above quoted sufficed in itself to excite the great interest exhibited by the musical public in this celebrated instrument. They saw for the first time a violin, long known to them by repute, which, partly by design and partly by accident, had been surrounded with a certain halo of romantic mystery, ever since its existence had first been asserted, and long before the instrument itself had been actually inspected by any of the recognised experts of England or France. As will be seen later, the title was conferred upon it in connection with its long deferred production to the musical world.

The extraordinary industry of the great master Antonio Stradivari is well known. Notwithstanding the minute care and precision which characterised his work, he may safely be credited with the construction of not less than two thousand instruments during his long and active life. We have evidence that he remained at his bench to the very end of his days, for in a document to which further reference is made below we find mention of a perfect instrument bearing date 1736, with his age, inscribed with his own hand upon the label as ninety-two.*

* The article on Stradivari in Grove's Dictionary of Music assigns eighty-eight as the maker's age at his death, but the evidence of Count Salabue, quoted at p. 12, confirmed by further evidence lately obtained from authentic instruments of this maker, point to the conclusion that he lived certainly to 1737, when he had entered his ninety-fourth year. This conclusion refers his birth to the year 1644, which would accord more naturally with the events of his life than the later date suggested in Grove. This question will be treated more fully in a future publication.

The instruments made by Stradivari were for the most part distributed throughout the Courts and noble houses of Europe. We have records of several concertos of instruments made by him upon the commission of the Courts of Spain, Modena, Tuscany, Poland, and others, from the time when he began to acquire a European reputation. Among these was the great concerto presented by the Cremonese Nobleman, the Marchese Bartolommeo Ariberti, to the Court of Tuscany, and containing that marvellous instrument which, after being long hidden from the world, came to light in recent times and excited so much admiration two years ago, when it was first exhibited in this country. There were, however, undoubtedly many fine specimens of his work remaining in their maker's hands at the time of his death, and these passed into the possession of his family. Fortunately, from a manuscript which remained in the possession of an enthusiastic Cremonese chronicler, Vincenzo Lancetti, we learn the fate of some of the instruments inherited by the great maker's sons. Lancetti was an active man of letters, and the author of important biographical works, including "Cremonese Worthies," "A Dictionary of Pseudonyms," "A Dictionary of the Poets Laureate of every Nation," and numerous other books, published between 1796 and 1830, when he was in Milan as Director of the Archives of the War Office. In 1823, having in contemplation a biographical memoir of the violin makers of his native town, he enlisted the assistance of the wealthy amateur and great connoisseur, Count Alessandro Cozio di Salabue, of Casale

Monferrato (Piedmont.) The work unhappily was never completed, but Count Salabue's original sketch for the memoir (in the hand of his amanuensis, here partly reproduced in fac-simile) affords us some valuable information on the subject. From this memorandum, dated "Milan, January, 1823," we learn that, in addition to the large number of Stradivari's violins scattered throughout Europe, ninety-one were in his possession at the time of his death. In 1775 ten of these instruments were still in the hands of his son Paolo, the youngest child of his second marriage, who sold them in that year, together with two choice instruments by Francesco Stradivari (the second son), and all the forms, models, and tools left by their father, to the Count Salabue, whose collection has become so famous in the annals of the Cremona School.

The name of this amateur must ever be held in grateful remembrance for his loving care of the Italian masterpieces. It is to such men that we owe the preservation of nearly all the finest existing instruments of the 17th and 18th centuries. Endowed with great wealth and rare judgment, he formed an unrivalled representative collection of the works of the great masters of the craft, and by his careful researches amassed an amount of information which might well have served as an invaluable tradition of an apparently vanishing art. To such a man the acquisition of ten undoubted specimens of the incomparable Stradivari must have been one of the greatest events of his life.

The Count's memorandum informs us that his purchase included two masterpieces of the great maker; one of large size, with a label bearing date 1716, and another of medium size, dated 1736, and bearing on the label the inscription "d'anni 92," in Stradivari's own hand; both quite new and untouched, and rare models for a good maker. The former instrument, with which we are now concerned, is described in the memorandum as of exquisite workmanship, and perfect quality of wood, with a tone of great evenness and power.

This remarkable violin, received at first hand from the very workshop of its great maker, remained carefully preserved in the Count Salabue's collection at Milan, until after his death. It is a noteworthy instance of the fascination exercised by a perfect violin, that no one of the successive owners of this splendid instrument, from Stradivari himself downwards, would part with it until called away by death. After the death of the Count, his heirs in 1827 sold the Stradivari of 1716 to a man whose career merits a passing notice, on account of the important part he played in rescuing innumerable works of the greatest violin makers from obscurity and, perhaps, destruction.

Luigi Tarisio was a man of humble birth, and followed the calling of a carpenter in the small village of Fontaneto, near Novara, in Piedmont, where also the celebrated Viotti was born. Taking up fiddle playing as an amusement, Tarisio was led by degrees to devote his attention to the subtle beauties of the great instruments of his country, the pursuit of which

Si grande fu poi il numero de' Violini principalmente che fabbricò esso Antonio Stradivari che dopo esserne sparsi per tutta l'Europa ne lasciò al suo decesso N.º 91., e sino nel 1775. ~~[illegible]~~ ve ne erano soltanto dieci che comperò dal figlio Paolo, il sudd.to Conte Cozio assieme a due Capi d'opera di suo figlio Francesco.

Nella più volte citata Collezione del Sig.r Conte Cozio si ritiene due de' principali Capi d'opera di esso celeberrimo Antonio Stradivari, cioè quello di forma più grande, e bellissimo di lavoro e di legno, e di perfetta qualità, eguaglianza di voce, e di gran forza portante nel Viglietto antropostovi 1716., e l'altro sebbene di forma mezzana portante nel biglietto l'anno 1736., ed al disotto l'indicazione d'anni 92. scritta dallo stesso Stradivari, che assai si approssima alla perfezione, ed alla forza di voce del precedente, ed interamente affatto nuovi, ed intatti per cui possono servire di scielti modelli ad altri fabbricatori d'istromenti.

TRANSLATION.

"So large was the number of (instruments and) especially violins, made by Stradivari that, in addition to those distributed over the whole of Europe, ninety-one were left by him at his death. In 1775 ten of these still remained in the hands of his son, Paolo, and were then bought, together with two masterpieces of his other son, Francesco, by Count Cozio. In the collection of the Count Cozio—so often cited—are two of the greatest masterpieces of the most famous Antonio Stradivari. The one, of larger size—of most beautiful workmanship and wood—of perfect quality—having a very powerful and even tone—bears on the label the date 1716. The other has on the label the date 1736, and, written below by Stradivari himself, the inscription "92 years old." This violin, though of medium size, nearly equals the earlier instrument in perfection and power of tone. Both are quite new and intact and well suited to serve as choice models for a good instrument maker."

became the absorbing passion of his life. So strong was its influence that he left his trade and home to wander about the country in search of violins. The experience thus acquired soon taught him to appreciate the merits of the great creations of Brescia, Cremona, and the other homes of violin making in Italy, and the commercial instinct, which formed so marked an element of his character, convinced him that the increasing demand for these instruments might be turned to profitable account.

It must be remembered that in those days the works of the leading Italian makers had in great part remained in their native country, and in their original condition; but they were not, as is popularly supposed, to be found in the hands of peasants in out-of-the-way villages.

Tarisio could hardly fail to become aware of the treasures amassed by Count Cozio di Salabue, whose estate was near to his own native province, and he availed himself of the opportunity afforded by the death of that great enthusiast, and the partial dispersion of his collections, to gain possession of some of the gems, which he had probably long coveted. How much of the Count's collection came into the hands of Tarisio is not recorded, but evidence is forthcoming that the perfect Stradivari of 1716 became the property of the humble Italian carpenter in 1827. When he had accumulated a stock of instruments which he believed would command a market in any of the European capitals, he determined to try his fortunes in Paris. He reached that city for the first time in 1827, travelling, it is said, on foot, in order

to save his purse. Although furnished in the first instance with the less rare specimens of his collection he soon found a ready demand for the goods of which he had then almost a monopoly, and, encouraged by the leading dealers of Paris, he soon established a regular trade with that city, making periodical visits thither, separated by intervals which he devoted to collecting in his own country; and, on each occasion, astounding his foreign friends by some fresh evidence of his judgment and good fortune in securing the masterpieces of Cremona and Brescia. Early in the course of his relations with the Parisian dealers, he began to talk of the wonderful Stradivari which he had obtained from the Salabue collection; but he was careful never to bring it with him to France, relying on reiteration of its wondrous qualities to create a sufficiently acute curiosity among his customers. So long was this mystery maintained that Tarisio and his Salabue became a byeword among the dealers of Paris, and gave rise to the name by which the violin has ever since been known. On one occasion Tarisio was enlarging upon his favourite theme to Vuillaume, when Alard, the violinist, who was present, exclaimed: "Ah ça, votre violon est donc comme le Messie; on l'attend toujours, et il ne parait jamais." The violin, as Vidal says, "was baptised!" Tarisio, however, could never be persuaded to produce "le Messie," and at his death, in October, 1854, the world had still only the tradition of its excellence. The celebrated author, Mr. Charles Reade, who was himself a great enthusiast and no mean connoisseur, and in his

earlier days an importer of Italian instruments, refers, in some notes on this violin, to Tarisio's reluctance to produce it.

The man's death was in keeping with his life. The possessor of priceless specimens of the instruments he loved, he lived in penury, and was found dead in his garret in Milan, surrounded by fiddles, large, small, perfect, and imperfect, piled up on the floor in cases, hung upon the walls, and even from the rafters of the miserable attic that he made his home.*

Many characteristic anecdotes are related of this strange man which cannot find a place in our brief notice, and for which the curious reader is referred to the notes of Mr. Charles Reade, given in "Readiana," and to other works.

Mr. Reade says of him, writing from personal knowledge, "The man's whole soul was in fiddles. He was a great dealer, but a greater amateur, for he had gems by him no money would buy from him."

Relatives were soon found to claim the effects of the deceased collector; and three months afterwards the news of his death reached Paris, where it created no small flutter among the dealers and amateurs, who were well aware that the shabby Italian must have left a magnificent collection of instruments. The most eminent of all that Paris community, J. B. Vuillaume, lost no time in placing himself in communication with Tarisio's heirs, with a view to the acquisition of his

* The information here given concerning Tarisio has been obtained by Signor Sacchi, chiefly from the late Enrico Ceruti, the last descendant of an old family of violin makers in Cremona.

treasures, and started for Italy on the 8th January, 1855. There, at the small farm De la Croix, near Fontaneto, which had belonged to Tarisio, he found the relatives assembled with every appearance of the most sordid poverty. His first question was, "Where are the instruments?" "At Milan," was the answer; "but six violins are here," and there in a corner of the room were six cases. Vuillaume was not slow to inspect their contents, kneeling upon the floor, on which they were piled in default of furniture, and one after the other he drew forth five splendid instruments—first a magnificent Stradivari, then a beautiful Giuseppe Guarnieri; next a Carlo Bergonzi, in perfect preservation, and two almost untouched Guadagnini, and lastly the gem of the collection, the long talked of "new" Stradivari of 1716—Le Messie. Vuillaume's experienced eye at once recognised the justification of all Tarisio's raptures over this instrument, and, determined by what he had already seen, he entered into negotiations which resulted in the purchase of the whole of the collection. The purchase was completed at a price which has been stated at £3,166, an amount which Vuillaume probably more than realised without parting with the most precious treasure of them all. This he kept as the apple of his eye for twenty years, and before pursuing its fortunes farther, we may glance in passing at the life of the man who is entitled to share with Count Cozio di Salabue, and Tarisio, the chief credit of having rescued and preserved one of the greatest masterpieces that have issued from Cremona.

Jean Baptiste Vuillaume was born in 1798 at Mirecourt, where his father and grandfather before him had followed the calling of violin makers, and where he served his apprenticeship to the craft. At nineteen years of age he made his way to Paris, where he obtained an engagement as workman with the elder Chanot (Francis), with whom he remained until 1821, when he entered the service of an organ builder named Lété, who also dealt in violins, and with whom he was taken into partnership in 1825. In 1828, happily married, and fortified with considerable experience, grafted on a strong natural intelligence, he launched himself on a career which made his name famous in the annals of violin making. Sprung from an industrious and thrifty working class, he had lost no opportunity of perfecting his knowledge of the instrument to which he devoted his talents and the application of his whole life. Of all the great Italian masters of violin-making Stradivari was always his ideal, and by constant study, and cultivation of his own rare natural powers of observation, he acquired such an intimate knowledge and judgment of Stradivari's work in every detail, that he might almost be said to be better acquainted with that maker's instruments than the master himself. Vuillaume soon found the sale of violins, issued as new works, without any semblance of antiquity, an unprofitable undertaking, and, recognizing the growing demand in all parts of the world for instruments resembling the great works of Cremona, he determined to apply his great skill as a workman, and his extraordinary familiarity with

Stradivari's models, to the construction of faithful copies of that great maker's works. This was the foundation of his success, for the modern copies found a ready sale, and orders poured in upon Vuillaume from all parts of the world. These instruments, imitations though they were, had high intrinsic merit; and it is to be remembered that they were copies made from unrivalled models, with a fidelity and care such as only a devoted worshipper and a great master of his art could attain. He spared no pains in striving after perfection in the quality of his materials, and he treated the obscure and difficult problem of varnish (the secret of which, as applied by the old Italian masters, seems to have died with them) with a success which has probably not been equalled by any other maker since their time. The number of these instruments bearing his name is enormous, upwards of two thousand five hundred being known to exist; and many of them he made throughout with his own hand. They were almost always numbered inside, in the middle of the back, in pencil, and we have it on the best authority that every instrument was varnished by his own hand. In a letter written by Vuillaume in 1875, a few weeks before his death, to the well-known Parisian violin maker, M. Silvestre, then living in Lyons, he says: "I have completed three thousand instruments, all sold, paid for, and the money spent, and it affords me great satisfaction."

To return to "Le Messie." This wonderful instrument remained in Vuillaume's possession until his death. He kept it for inspection in a glass case, and never allowed it to be touched, even by the most

experienced hands, as we can personally testify. These precautions gave rise to the rumour of its being a violin of his own construction, and the statement written by him inside the belly has, therefore, an additional interest and importance. We have some interesting records of the anxieties attendant upon such precious possessions, in a correspondence which passed between Vuillaume and Madame Alard (his daughter) at the time of the Franco-German war. On the 30th of August, 1870, he wrote—"In my last I spoke to you of Alard's Violin, of my 'Messie,' and of certain valuables which I have here. I do not know what to do with them, for, if one survives, one will be able to recover the valuables when the hubbub is over, as some sous can be buried; but violins cannot be buried."

In another letter he wrote—"I do not know what to do with the precious things I have; first, there are your violins—what ought I to do with them? The boxes of plate, my medals, and the 'Messie'—where ought I to place all these in case of pillage?"

The medals referred to are no doubt those conferred upon him in connection with the Paris Exhibitions of 1827, 1834, 1839, 1844, 1855, and the Great Exhibition in England of 1851.

Again he wrote on the 13th of September—"I am going to hide your husband's violins with the 'Messie.' I have found quite a safe hiding place protected from fire—'puis à la grâce de Dieu'!"

"Le Messie" happily escaped the dangers apprehended by Vuillaume, and after his death (19th

March, 1875), in the absence of definite instructions as to its disposal, it was inherited by his only children, Jeanne Emilie and Claire Marie, in common. The former was the wife of M. Alard, the violinist, and the second daughter had married M. Mestayer, in whose charge the violin was left, together with other valuable instruments, during Vuillaume's absence from Paris in the terrible time of the Commune. After his death the violin was valued for the estate at £1,000, and in 1877 M. Alard bought out his sister-in-law's half-share for £500 and thus became, through his wife, the entire owner. Vuillaume probably considered it unnecessary during his lifetime to present Alard with this violin, as he was already well provided with instruments, and had the choice of some of the finest that passed through Vuillaume's hands. These included the famous Stradivari known as the "Alard," the fine Giuseppe Guarnieri, dated 1742 (presented after Alard's death to the Paris Conservatoire), and the Grand Nicolo Amati, dated 1645, now in the possession of Baron Knoop.

Delphin Alard was the most eminent representative of the modern French school of violin playing. After studying as a pupil of the Paris Conservatoire, he in 1843 succeeded Baillot as professor, and achieved a great reputation both as performer and teacher, and as the author of a violin school and editor of classical compositions for that instrument. He numbered among his pupils many who have since distinguished themselves, and notably the celebrated violinist Señor Sarasate. At Alard's death, on

February 22, 1888, "Le Messie" came into the possession of his widow and two daughters, Madame Guesnet and Madame Croué—he, like Vuillaume, having left no directions as to the disposal of his instruments. On the death of Madame Alard, M. Croué, on behalf of his wife and her sister, sold the violin, on the 5th May, 1890, to us, on behalf of Mr. R. Crawford, an enthusiastic amateur, of Trinity, Edinburgh, for the sum of 50,000 francs (£2,000), which is the largest authenticated amount ever paid for a violin. It is interesting to compare these figures with Mr. Charles Reade's estimate of the value of the instrument in 1872 at £600 (*see* "Readiana").

Having traced from authentic sources the unbroken record of this famous violin, let us examine the characteristic features of an instrument which has excited the unqualified admiration and ambition of the first makers and connoisseurs of Europe. The plates which accompany this memoir have been admirably executed by Mr. Shirley Slocombe, and reproduced by chromo-lithography under the direction of Mr. Alfred Slocombe; and they offer an accurate and beautiful representation of the instrument.

The striking originality of Stradivari's work asserts itself in nearly all his productions, there being hardly an instrument of his which is not characterised by some features peculiar to itself. The Salabue violin has several unmistakable characteristics. The most original and distinctive is the height and pronounced sharpness of the wave-like ridge, bordering the surfaces of the back and belly close to the

outline. In other instruments of the same maker this *ridge* is much rounder in form. Let us further illustrate the point. The purfling, which is sunk in the wood at about one-eighth of an inch from the outline, lies generally at the bottom of a hollow which forms the lowest portion of the surface. In our example the surface rises outwards from the purfling in a concave curve to a greater height and to a more sharply defined ridge than in any other Stradivari instrument known to us. Another distinctive feature is the form of the corners, which are cut more square than any we have seen. Both these features are accentuated by the absolute freshness of the instrument. The sound holes are more slanting than is usual in instruments of this period, although this was less rare in those of earlier date. In fact, we have seen no other Stradivari violin of the years 1715, 1716, 1717, or 1718 with sound holes similarly placed.

The model of the violin is decidedly flat, especially in the belly, but the genius of the master asserts itself in the compensation he has provided in the height of the sides.

The wood leaves little to be desired. The back, in two pieces, has a broad, handsomely marked curl, while the pine of the belly has a fine silky grain, neither too coarse nor too fine. The sides and head, as well as the neck, which is original, are perhaps a little plain in comparison with the back; but the great Italians never troubled about matching the sides and head to the back, as is the custom among modern makers. It is not uncommon to meet with instruments with the

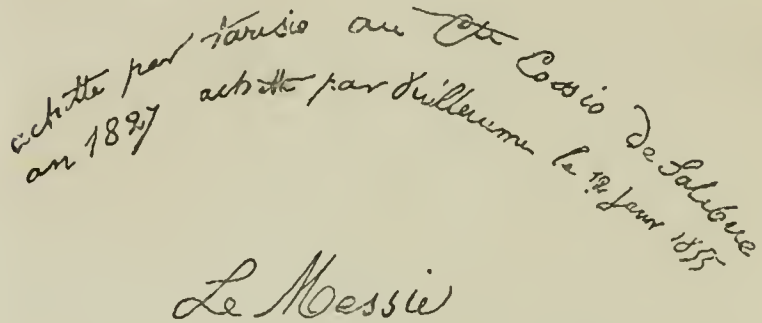
back cut in slab form, and the sides and head cut on the quarter.

Mr. Charles Reade in some notes in "Readiana," from which we have already quoted, refers to what he calls a crack in the violin. The mark which has given rise to his statement is in reality one of three insignificant and almost imperceptible shakes in the wood, such as frequently appear during the seasoning of the pine blocks used for bellies. These shakes are easily glued and then become invisible; but are opened again by exposure to the sun during the drying of the varnish. They are, however, in no sense defects.

The varnish is a study in itself, for it is untouched and unrubbed, as if it had been laid on yesterday. It has not perhaps the luscious richness of some of Stradivari's instruments, and it appears drier and less thickly laid on than usual in violins of the same period. This is especially noticeable on the sides, where the grain of the wood rose as the varnish was applied to it, and still stands up as on the day when the brush left it. On the head again one can clearly see where the varnish accumulated slightly as it flowed round the volute. Such details as these could not be traced but for the wonderful preservation of the varnish.

The necessity of opening the instrument, in order to insert a stronger bass bar, gave us an opportunity of examining the inside, which is as remarkable as the outside. This is only the second occasion on which the violin has been opened in the course of its existence. Vuillaume opened it, and took the opportunity to write inside on the

belly the following inscription, which affords valuable corroborative evidence of the authenticity of the record already given.



The bass bar which Vuillaume then fitted was not strong enough, and allowed after a time a slight depression of the belly, necessitating the renewal above referred to. Excepting for the change of bar, everything inside is as Stradivari left it. The blocks and linings, considered in relation to the thicknesses, are a model of consistency, neither heavy nor flimsy, made of the lightest and toughest wood we know, and all finished with the gouge and knife alone. Stradivari evidently disdained the superficial finish given by modern copyists to their interior work by the free use of glass paper.

The thicknesses of belly and back, a point on which Stradivari appears to have made numerous experiments, are of his stoutest.

The whiteness of the label, and the variance of the instrument in some features from the characteristic style of that period of Stradivari's work, have given rise on different occasions to the supposition that the label was not genuine, and that the violin was of a later date ;

but the careful examination which we made of the interior when the belly was removed, has enabled us to finally dispose of this idea. The label has never been moved since Stradivari fixed it in its place, nor have the figures upon it been tampered with in any way.*

Details of construction, such as we have examined in the preceding paragraphs, offered, to a man of Stradivari's great originality, scope for almost endless variety of treatment, which has furnished us with a key to the pronounced distinctions between his instruments and others of the Italian school.

In the Brescian instruments, for instance, there is, as a general rule, no hollowing near the edges of the backs and bellies, nor any *bordering ridge* like that discussed above. They consequently have an appearance of strength and solidity, but lack the style and elegance of the Cremona school. The Amati family, on the other hand, gifted with a keen sense of harmony and beauty of form, gave perfect expression to these ideas in their works; but, unfortunately, at some sacrifice of dignity of appearance. Stradivari attained the happy mean between these two extremes, and carried his ideas into execution with such perfection of detail, that all his successors have had to content themselves with the *rôle* of copyists, and none have been found to improve upon their model.

There can be no doubt that the Salabue Violin has exercised a strong influence upon modern copyists. The

* There is a curious mistake in M. Vidal's valuable recent work "La Lutherie," in which the transcript of the label accompanying the illustration of "le Messie" bears the date 1715.

Turin maker, Pressenda (1777 to 1854), who was acquainted with Count Salabue, and his pupil Rocca (d. 1862), who knew Tarisio, were evidently familiar with the instrument. Rocca in particular would seem to have made it his ideal, for we find reproduced in nearly all his copies of Stradivari the characteristic sharp *bordering ridge*, slanting sound holes, and general flat model of the Salabue. As soon as it came into Vuillaume's possession, he set to work to reproduce it in every detail, and his copies of this instrument are unquestionably the finest violins he made. They are true to the original in bearing no traces of wear ; but a few of them are fitted with carved pegs and tailpiece similar to those added by him and still attached to the Salabue. The carving on the tailpiece represents the figure of the Madonna with the infant Christ. Nearly all the other Parisian and Mirecourt makers in turn have copied Vuillaume, but without his advantages in ability, and in having the original model to work from. The copies of the present day are becoming in consequence more and more ridiculous exaggerations of the peculiar features of the Salabue.

The year 1716 appears not to have been prolific of great works from Stradivari, as we know at present of only one fine violin of that year beside the Salabue. This is the one known as the Cessol, belonging to Mr. William Croall. The previous year, 1715, produced five famous violins, two now belonging to Herr Joachim, one to Señor Sarasate, one to G. Haddock, Esq., and another known as the Alard. The year 1717 again produced two notable instruments, a violin belonging to J. G.

Orchar, Esq., and the well-known violoncello for many years the property of Bonamy Dobree, Esq., and now in the possession of E. I. Holden, Esq.

For an appreciative description of the beauties of the Salabue we may quote an enthusiast, the Rev. H. R. Haweis, whose writings and lectures upon his favourite study have made the name of Stradivari familiar to thousands of the English-speaking people. Mr. Haweis, referring to the exhibition of the instrument in London, in 1872, wrote—"It is for the first time unveiled in all its intact glory to the gaze of thousands to whom for years it has been a kind of myth. It is as though the ivory Minerva of Phidias, that stood once in the Parthenon, should be discovered hidden away with the utmost care in some deep dry and hermetically-sealed sepulchre of the East, and brought over scatheless to be set up amidst the Elgin fragments. So stands this matchless new violin amidst its time-worn, rubbed, and fractured brethren. It is of the grand pattern; it is massive without looking massive; its strength is hidden beneath its grace. The back is in two parts; the wood very choice. The fine graining of the flat belly is remarkable. The holes are delicately cut, the left ʃ a shade lower than the right; a practice so common that it must have been intentional with Stradivarius, his fine eye not tolerating even there a suspicion of mechanical work. We see in this violin what the perfect Stradivari corners were. In almost every other known specimen the corners and the wood are both rubbed. In Le Messie they are untouched and clean-looking; wondrously sharp and

wide awake, yet without vulgarity, and of a perfect finish. The ease and neatness of the purfling is incomparable, and over the whole instrument lies a thick rich red brown varnish wondrous to behold; the washing of it is level and lavish, and unworn by time or use. The brush seems to have left it about a week. The neck has been lengthened by M. Vuillaume. The head is light and graceful rather than heavy or powerful, the scroll thrown off like a ribbon lightly curled round the finger and drawn in; one side of the scroll is slightly lower than the other, the fluting smooth, with a surface like that of clear still water, and the lines of the scroll picked out with a thick rim of black varnish that serves to accentuate the outlines of the head, just as purfling calls attention to the contour of the back and belly. In nearly every other violin this black head-rim has been almost entirely effaced, but in Le Messie it remains to show us the maker's intention. He meant you to take up his violin and see at a glance its whole outline traced and emphasized by a sharp purfling carried out in the head by a deep rim of black varnish. This brooding over the beauty of curves, this anxiety that they should be manifest to all men is most instructive and touching; neither the purfling nor the black varnish added to the tone, nor even the preservation of the instrument—it was the art instinct of the old makers piercing the manufacture."

That ardent student and devotee of the violin, Mr. Charles Reade, has made some suggestive remarks upon the method of varnishing which he supposed Stradivari to have pursued; and, as Mr. Reade makes

reference to the Salabue, his words may prove of interest in the present connection. He preferred to describe the violin as the Vuillaume Strad, and while agreeing with his objection to the name which has clung to it, we regret that the title conferred upon it by Tarisio, the "Salabue," has not been retained. That name has the merit of historical distinctiveness, and would create a most desirable precedent in violin nomenclature, as a set off to the absurd and confusing nicknames which have become so common. There are no less than three "Jupiter Strads"; one "Emperor Strad"; two "King" Josephs (Guarnieri); and another of the same maker called "Le Diable."

Mr. Reade begins with some general suggestions as to the great maker's method, and says: "He began with three or four coats of oil varnish containing some common gum. He then laid on several coats of red varnish made by simply dissolving some fine red unadulterated gum in spirit; the spirit evaporated and left pure gum lying in a rich oil varnish from which it chips by its dry nature and its utter want of chemical affinity to the substratum. . . . The Vuillaume Strad, not being worn, does not assist us in this particular line of argument; but it does not contradict us. Indeed there are a few little chips in the top varnish of the back, and they reveal a heterogeneous varnish below, with its rich yellow colour like the bottom varnish of the Pawle bass. Moreover, if you look at the top varnish closely you shall see what you never see in a new violin of our day; not a vulgar glare upon the surface, but a gentle inward fire. Now that inward

fire, I assure you, is mainly caused by the oil varnish below; the orange varnish above has a heterogeneous foil below. That inward glow is characteristic of all foils. If you could see the Vuillaume Stradivarius at night, and move it about in the light of a candle, you would be amazed at the fire of the foil and the refraction of light. . . . .

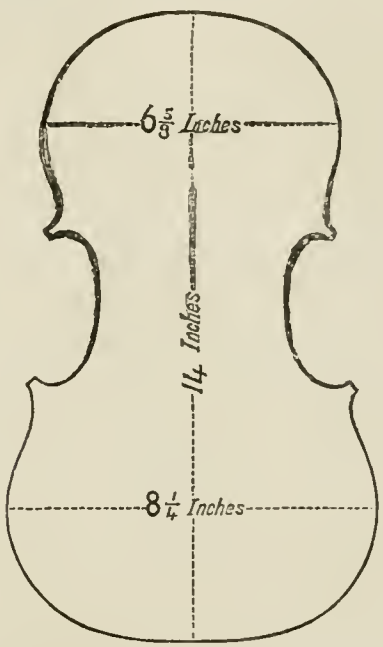
"A violin varnished as I have indicated will look a little better than other new violins from the first; the back will look nearly as well as the Vuillaume Stradivarius, but not quite. The belly will look a little better if properly prepared; will show the fibre of the deal better. . . . .

". . . Sand-paper is a great enemy to varnish; it drives more wood-dust into the pores than you can blow out. . . . . The back of the Vuillaume Stradivarius, which is the finest part, has clearly not been sand-papered in places, so probably not at all."

With regard to the tone of the instrument, some comments written in 1864 by the well-known authority, F. J. Fetis, are worthy of repetition. He writes of the Salabue Stradivari: "This genuine memorial of ancient manufacture—this instrument which has not resounded under the bow for nearly a century and a half—gives striking refutation to the idea that a free and pure tone cannot be produced from a violin until after it has been long in use; for here, in this new instrument, we find in combination all the qualities of power, mellowness, roundness, delicacy, freedom, with a noble and penetrating tone. In a word, this violin is a type of external beauty and of sonorous perfection."

Nevertheless it is our opinion after a careful trial that the instrument would be greatly improved in tone by further use.

These descriptions of one of the finest instruments in existence, from the hands of devoted and disinterested lovers of the Cremona handiwork, leave hardly anything to be added except the exact measurements of the violin, which are as follows :—



Height of sides :—At the top, $1\frac{3}{16}$ inches; at the bottom, $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches.

The label affixed to Le Messie is presented below in fac-simile.