

THE REIGN OF PATTI

By Henry T. Finck

THE late Adelina Patti once received \$4,000 for singing "Home, Sweet Home". It was at the inauguration of the new Auditorium in Chicago, which had cost \$8,000,000, according to the newspapers. Four thousand is doubtless the record for a single song; in her prime she exacted the same sum for a concert in London, and \$3,000 elsewhere. Her opera prices were higher still, at least in America. In New York Mapleson had to pay her \$5,000 each performance before she set foot on the stage. South America was even more lavish in its enthusiasm. In eighteen months of the years 1888-89, which included a tour to that continent, she earned almost, if not quite, half a million dol-

lars, which, it is needless to say, no other musician before or after her ever equaled, although high salaries were already paid two centuries ago: the male soprano Farinelli got \$40,000 for a season in London, a sum equaling in the money of today at least six times that sum, or a quarter of a million dollars.

Patti's official biographer, Herman Klein, emphasizes the fact that, unlike some other high-priced vocalists, she nearly always drew such large audiences, at increased prices, that a handsome sum was left for the manager; he does not deny, however, that after meeting her demands, the impressario did not have much left to secure other good singers, so the ensemble was apt to suffer. The plain truth is that from her childhood she was so accustomed to look on herself as the "whole show" that she didn't care a rap for ensemble. Mr. Klein frankly admits that she never attended rehearsals. Her brother-in-law, coach and manager, Maurice Strakosch, took her place, except at formal dress rehearsals, and the biographer hasn't a word of censure for her on that account. "Why not?" he asks. "As her 'coach', no one knew better than he exactly what she was going to do; and he was perfectly capable of going through the entire opera in the precise manner that Adelina would sing and enact it at night." Mr. Klein is perfectly serious—so serious that he doesn't see the joke of it. Suppose singers and actors in general followed Patti's example? What's the use of having rehearsals anyhow?

In what opera did Patti achieve her biggest triumph? Most of those who heard her in New York or abroad would name "The Barber of Seville", "Don Giovanni", "Lucia", "La Traviata", "La Sonnambula", as "the best five", for her, of the forty-one operas

she appeared in. Not so Mr. Klein; to him Aida was the greatest of her achievements. He admits, on the other hand, that her Carmen was a complete failure. It "proved to be clever but colorless. She elected to raise the tessitura of Carmen's music by making numerous changes and introducing 'ornaments' which were out of keeping with the design of the composer. This naturally aroused adverse criticism; indeed, the press notices as a whole were frankly unfavorable."

It was not always that Patti was the whole show at an operatic performance. In London and Paris she sometimes appeared with several other singers of her rank. For instance, a "Don Giovanni" performance in 1861, in London, at which she sang Zerlina, presented Grisi as Donna Anna, Faure in the title rôle, Tamberlik as Don Ottavio, Ronconi as Masetto, Formes as Leporello, Tagliafico as the Comendatore—a cast that takes one's breath away, although it must be remembered that New York, in the days of Grau and Hammerstein, heard this masterwork of Mozart with casts nearly if not quite as astonishing.

Most of Mr. Klein's pages are inevitably taken up with details regarding Patti's triumphs in European and American cities. These included, of course, the capital of Mexico. Her first plan to invade that country, early in her career, was given up because on her way, at New Orleans, she met two young girls who told her how they had been robbed and maltreated by brigands across the border. Thirty years later, however, she did the Cortez act and conquered Mexico. All the natives along the railway line came out of their huts to stare at her palatial private car, on which her name was painted in huge letters. In Mexico City the populace went crazy;

many pawned their jewels to buy seats. Many costly presents came to her and—an important detail mentioned by Mme. Arditi—she had her little dog for comfort in her dressing room; just as, when she first sang as a little girl in New York, she refused to go on until she had her doll.

Throughout the book the personality of Patti is painted in rosy hue by Mr. Klein, who knew her intimately many years, and whom she herself chose to be her biographer (it was at first to have been an autobiography written with his assistance). He often was invited to her half-million-dollar castle in Wales, Craig-y-Nos, where she continued to amuse herself and her friends by appearing in operatic rôles. Of these occasions the biographer gives entertaining accounts. Some of the performances given there were considered so important by London newspapers that they printed telegraphed accounts of them.

Oliver Herford once asked, "Why do people marry Lillian Russell?" Concerning Patti's three marriages, about which there has been so much unreliable gossip, one is glad at last to get authentic information in this book. The first marriage, to the Marquis de Caux, was certainly an extraordinary affair—at least from the American point of view. He held the position of Equerry to Napoleon III, who, with the Empress Eugénie, favored the matrimonial plan. Eugénie encouraged Patti to go on singing five more years in order to earn money for her future husband, who had only \$2,000 a year. She was then to be made a *dame d'honneur* at court. The match, as a matter of course, turned out badly. The Marquis had a legal right to the money she earned in France—so she sang elsewhere. Finally she got rid of him by dividing her fortune with him, his

share being \$300,000. She then married the tenor Nicolini, and after his death the Swedish Baron Cederström, with whom she spent much of her time in traveling after her singing days were practically over. From first to last, she was known as a public singer for fifty-six years.

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