

**NIGHTS AT THE
OPERA;
VERDI'S RIGOLETTO**

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Nights at the Opera; Verdi's Rigoletto by Francis Burgess

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FRANCIS BURGESS

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By Francis Burgess

(F.S.A., Scot.)

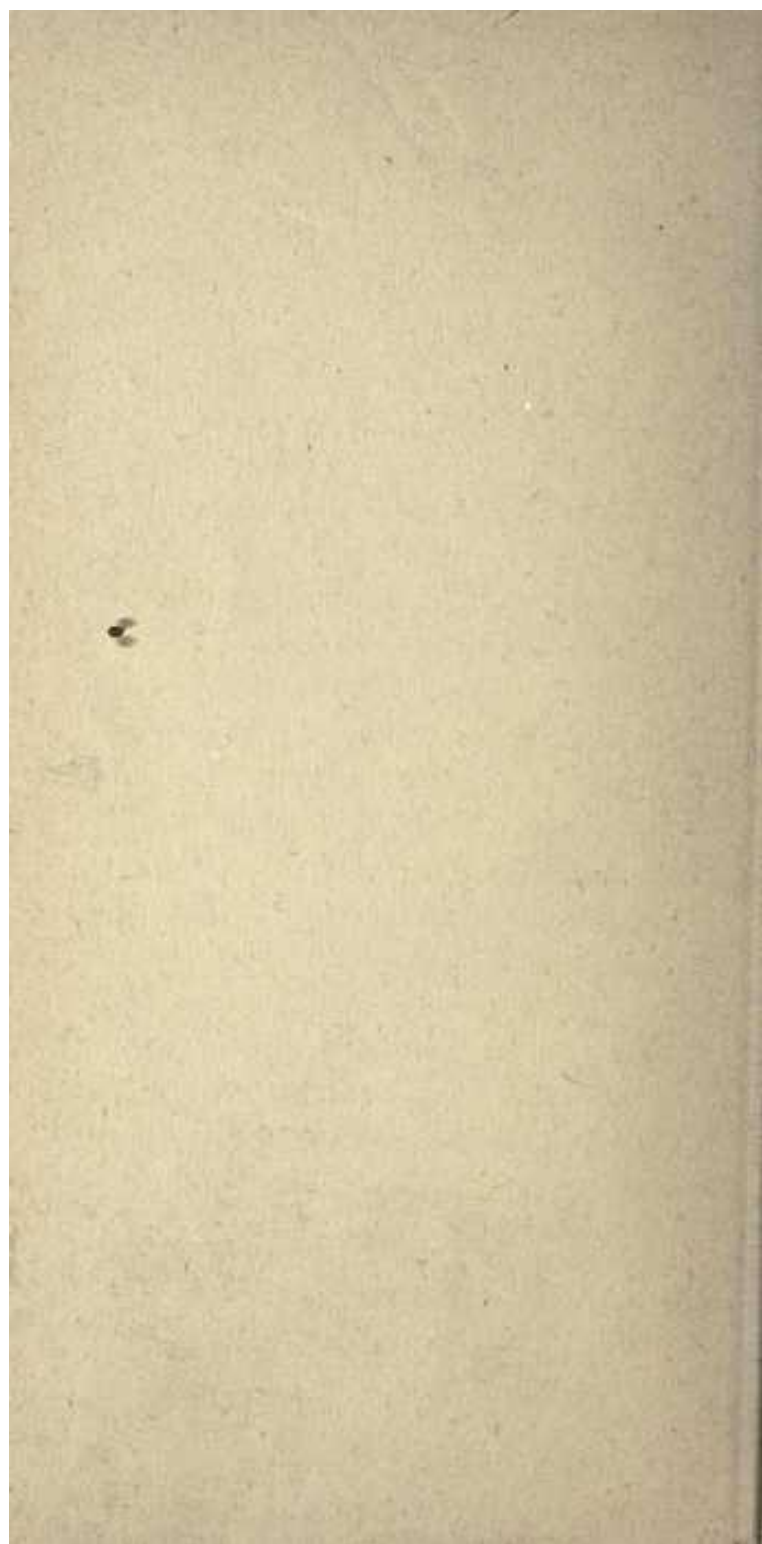


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I. VERDI, THE PATRIOT.

IT is interesting to remember that Verdi, in later life the idol of Italy, was, as a young man, refused admission to the Milan Conservatoire. Through the influence of his early patron, Antonio Barezzi, the young musician had obtained a grant of 600 lire a year for two years in order that he might pursue his studies in Italy's chief musical centre. Verdi applied for admission to the Conservatoire as a paying pupil, and went through an informal examination at the hands of some of its professors, producing his compositions and playing a piece on the piano. He was rejected, and recommended to choose a master unconnected

Verdi's

with the institution. Verdi, himself, writing of the incident in 1880 knew nothing of the reasons which prompted this extraordinary action of the Conservatoire authorities. It resulted in Lavigna becoming Verdi's master, and there can be no doubt as to the benefit which the young and impressionable genius derived from his intercourse with the older composer.

Verdi's next conflict with the "powers that be" occurred after the death of Ferdinando Provesi, organist at Busseto Cathedral. Provesi, who formerly had been Verdi's instructor, was a man of some power, and it had been understood that his young pupil was to succeed to his post. Indeed, it was on this understanding that the local *Monte di Pietà* had given Verdi the necessary money for the furtherance of his studies at Milan.

Rigoletto

At Provesi's death, therefore, Verdi was called back to Busseto, but, to the astonishment of everybody, the cathedral authorities appointed one Giovanni Ferrari, passing over Verdi on account of his having studied stage music. The controversy which ensued attained considerable proportions. The local philharmonic society refused to continue to give their help at the cathedral services. They even broke into the church and forcibly removed the scores which belonged to them, and finally they secured Verdi's appointment as organist at a Franciscan chapel whose musical attractions speedily eclipsed those of the cathedral.

Verdi's return to Milan took place in 1838, and was soon followed by the great tragedy of the young composer's life. His wife (whom he had married in 1836)

Verdi's

and his two young children died within a space of two months and he was left alone in the world. Grief paralysed his efforts for a time, but in 1842 he produced *Nabucco* in Milan, and this was the starting-point of his success as an operatic composer. With *I Lombardi alla prima crociata* Verdi's political troubles began. Signor Visetti, in his recently published booklet on the composer, tells us that "during the more active period of Verdi's working life the political situation of Italy was one of most acute tension. His advent at this stage of affairs had a very far-reaching effect, and it may be truly said that his music was charged with a burning patriotism that did more to fan the embers of revolution than that of any other writer." *I Lombardi* brought Verdi into direct conflict with the authorities. Before its actual production the