Aïda's grief betrays her love, and Amneris threatens her with destruction. The second scene shows a great square, into which the triumphal army marches with Radamès glorified as a conqueror. He brings with him a number of Ethiopian prisoners, among them Amonasro, who is not known to be the king. Aïda rushes to her father's arms, and joins him in begging for the lives of the prisoners. Radamès, seeing Aïda's grief, joins in the prayer, which Amneris and the priests oppose. The King releases all the prisoners save Amonasro, who is to remain as a slave with Aïda. Then, to the joy of Amneris, and the horror of Radamès and Aïda, the King bestows his daughter's hand on Radamès.

The third act takes place on the Nile's bank before the temple of Isis, whither Amneris, on the eve of marriage, has gone to pray. Aïda has made an appointment to meet Radamès near the temple, and while she waits for him she bewails her separation from her native land. She is surprised by her father, who has discovered her love for Radamès, and orders her to induce the young man to reveal the plans of the Egyptians. Aïda at first refuses, but after an outburst of savage wrath on the part of her father, she consents. Radamès arrives. Amonasro conceals himself. Aïda tries to lure Radamès to flight with her. He yields, and discloses the Egyptian plans. Amonasro appears, announces that he has overheard, and that he is the king of Ethiopia. Amneris comes out of the temple in time to overhear some of the dialogue. Amonasro rushes upon her with his knife. Radamès interferes and forces Amonasro and Aïda to fly, while he remains and surrenders himself to Ramphis.

The fourth act opens in a chamber adjoining the court in which Radamès is to be tried. Radamès is brought in for trial, and is met by Amneris. She beseeches him to abandon Aïda, and promises that she will intercede for him if he will do so. He refuses. She tells him that Amonasro has been killed and that Aïda has fled. Still he refuses, and Amneris bitterly repents the outcome of her own jealousy. The priests lead Radamès to trial. Amneris, in an agony of grief, hears them accuse him, while he submits in silence to condemnation. They return with their prisoner, and as they pass out Amneris curses them. The second scene shows the temple and the vault beneath it. Radamès, shut in the vault, breathes a prayer that Aïda may never know his fate. But Aïda, who has already found her way to the vault and awaited him there, comes forward. They embrace one another, while above the priestesses sing their chant. Aïda dies in the arms of Radamès, while Amneris, garbed in mourning robe, enters the temple and sinks prostrate in despair upon the huge stone that closes the vault.

This is an admirable story for operatic treatment. It presents an effective sequence of the grand emotions—love, joy, hatred, jealousy, despair and rage, all of which are susceptible of adequate musical expression. It offers a fine variety of action and scenery, and excellent opportunity for spectacular display. The glitter and pomp of the triumphal procession at the close of the second act make a strong and impressive contrast with the subdued glory of the moonlight night on the banks of the Nile in the third act. Indeed, there are few operas in which the scenic surroundings, the action and the emotions are so completely in accord, and it is partly owing to this that Verdi was able to make his music a puissant element in a



powerful organization. As for the music, it is difficult to speak of it without appearing to indulge in extravagant praise. It is so rich in melody and harmony, so closely wedded in expressive power to the meaning of the text and so broadly dramatic in all its aspects, that it claims a place among the most striking art-products of our time. The glitter of theatrical tinsel offends finer taste here and there, but, as a whole, "Aïda" is without doubt a masterpiece.

It is an opera from which one can easily select "gems," but closer study will convince the music-lover that it is a necklace of equally fine jewels. The opening recitation of Ramphis and Radamès, by its melodious character and the strong coloring of its accompaniment, invites one to enter at once the enchanted domain of the ancient East. The first aria of Radamès, "Celeste Aïda," is full of character and tenderness, and in the ensuing trio the note of tragic portent is firmly sounded. The martial finale makes the first scene a sort of prologue to the opera, summing up, as it does with its pomp of war, the opening chapter of love, jealousy, ambition and defiance. All the passions of the drama make their appearance in elementary form in the first scene, and give us a foretaste of what is to come. The dance and song of the priestesses in the temple of Ftha are weirdly Oriental in character, and the invocation is broad and dignified. The opening of the scene in the chamber of Amneris is luxurious in color and feeling, while the duet between the princess and her slave is full of passion. The finale of the act, the triumphal procession and the plea for the prisoners, is dazzling in its splendor.

But Verdi reaches his climax in the Nile scene. In all Italian opera there is no finer example of the true aria than Aïda's "O patria mia." It is eloquent in its expressive power, beautiful in its pure melody, perfect in form, and subtly forceful in its harmonization. The subsequent duet for Aïda and Amonasro is a superb piece of writing, while the duet for Aïda and Amneris, though it falls somewhat more into the habit of theatrical diction, especially in its *ad captandum* close, has nevertheless the power of a warm mood-picture. The remainder of the opera is less effective with the general audience, but it is all good music and beautiful.

Those who are familiar with Verdi's earlier works, such as "La Traviata" and "Il Trovatore," while they may detect in "Aïda" occasional reminiscences of them, cannot fail to perceive the great change in the master's style. In "Aïda" he has abandoned the elementary dance-rhythms, the antique melodic formulæ, the bald and empty passages of recitative between the set numbers, and the cheap and noisy instrumentation. The rhythms are broader and more scholarly; the melody is fresh, original and diversified in character; the harmony is immensely rich and expressive, and the instrumentation glows with Oriental warmth of color. The critics who went to Cairo in 1871 declared that Verdi, the Italian Verdi of the honey-tuned Neapolitan school of composers, had been inoculated with the virus of Wagnerism. It would have been strange, indeed, if Verdi had not discerned the general trend of operatic art under the stimulus of Wagner's proclamations; but although he arose and girded himself to step to the place rightly his in the van of progress, he made no sacrifices of his own individuality.

Verdi remained in "Aïda" as truly an Italian composer as he was in "Rigo-

letto." His melody was purely Italian in its technical character and its adherence to the fundamental forms of its school. He continued to employ the set forms, the aria, duet, trio, etc., but he molded them on broader lines and infused into them a truer dramatic utterance. He remodeled his instrumentation so as to add to his operatic canvas all the colors of the modern orchestral palette. In a word, he showed how a man of genius could vitalize the shopworn apparatus of Italian grand opera, just as Mozart had done nearly a century earlier in his "Don Giovanni." In his earlier works Verdi demonstrated that he possessed immense vigor, abundant melodic invention, and inexhaustible resourcefulness. But he was working on the lines of tradition, and the traditions of the Neapolitan school, founded by Alessandro Scarlatti, father of the operatic aria, and maintained by Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini, demanded tunefulness for its own sake without regard to the spirit of the text. It was when Verdi threw overboard the traditions of this school and adapted its methods, after modernizing them, to the legitimate business of dramatic expression, that he produced "Aïda," a work which ought to live among the masterpieces of our era:

Some critics have affected to discover "leading motives" of the Wagnerian kind in "Aïda," but such critics do not understand the nature of the Wagner system. Verdi does use a melodic phrase to indicate the personality of Aïda, but it is employed chiefly to herald her entrance. Other commentators have pointed to his instrumentation as an evidence that he had succumbed to the influence of Wagner. But in "Aïda" Verdi for the first time in his career made a deliberate attempt at local color. Some writers have pointed out what they believed to be Oriental themes in his music. Whether he adapted extant themes to his purpose or not is a matter of small import. The main point is that he employed a scheme of harmony and instrumental color which keeps the Oriental locale of the opera constantly in the hearer's mind. The music of "Aïda" is fitted not only to the emotions of the drama, but to the scene of action, and that, too, without any clap-trap obtrusiveness.

The career of Verdi is an epitome of the history of Italian opera in his time, for he has been the leader of his school. His followers number all the members of what has been called the young Italian school. Its one product has been the condensed opera, such as "Pagliacci." The one-act operas of Mascagni and Leoncavallo employ every item of Verdi's apparatus as found in "Aïda." The single new element is the condensation. Verdi has been the model and the despair of these younger men. Whosoever desires to know the Italian opera of our time at its best, should study the scores of Verdi's last three operas, "Aïda," "Otello" and "Falstaff." But of these three, the first is the only one that preserves the forms of the older school, and hence it is to-day and must remain for all time the noblest example of Italian opera as established by its most admirable exponents.

W. J. HENDERSON.



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