

Donizetti's opera of Lucia di Lammermoor was performed last night for the first time in this country. It is an adaptation of Sir W. Scott's novel "The Bride of Lammermoor" but a very sparing use is made of the original incidents. Like other Italian Operas, it is rather a succession of scenes than any attempt at a plot or regular drama. It is divided into three acts. The first is chiefly occupied with the interview between Ravenswood and Lucy at the Mermaids well, where they exchange vows of fidelity; the second exhibits the preparations for Lucy's marriage with the Laird of Bucklaw (called Lord Arthur Bucklaw in the libretto), and the astonishment of all parties at the unexpected entrance of Ravenswood, who reproaches Lucy with infidelity; the feature of the third is the bride's madness after she has stabbed Bucklaw in the nuptial chamber. Here all resemblance with the novel ceases: the dramatist, instead of allowing Ravenswood to be swallowed up by "the Kelpies' flow" makes him kill himself on hearing of Lucy's death; which shortly follows her insanity. The character of Sir William Ashton may be said to be altogether omitted, and his son Sholto to be raised to importance and made the "tiranno" of the piece, under the name of Enrico, or rather perhaps the two characters are blended into one. Lady Ashton, Caleb and old Alice take no part in the drama, though the Rev. Mr. Bide-the-bent is introduced as a confidant to Lucy.

Madame Persiani's performance of Lucia di Lammermoor is finely discriminated from that of Amina, assuming throughout that deeper tinge of melancholy, the pathetic or the tragic, which the character demands, and viewed in this respect along, is a striking instance of the soundness of her judgement. But this was not confined to the mere conception in a dramatic sense of the part; the music too was of a different kind, the style varied, the embellishments were rich and original. The material on which she had to work was poor and spiritless in itself- by no means good even for Donizetti, who is but of a mediocre school, yet she imparted to it a charm, of which it would be too little to say that the workmanship exceeded the material in value. The opera, as already stated, may be compared to a series of tableaux rather than a connected drama, in all of which she is the chief or commanding figure of the group. All that she has to do is arduous as well as prominent, such as to an ordinary singer would be labour and difficulty insurmountable, but accomplished with a degree of ease which betrays no effort, whatever it may cost her.

A Cavatina, or rather scena, beginning "ancor non giunse", which occupies a great portion of the first act, and throws the sustaining of the whole effect upon the singer, was a striking instance of this quality, yet would have proved in other hands a most perilous introduction. Her duet with Rubini, who joins her shortly afterwards, was charming, and proved to us how much comparatively she acquired in effect by singing with "the first tenor in Europe". Bad singers cannot be made foils of as bad actors sometimes are: on the contrary, they mar and 'acidize' the whole. Her exclamation "Che dici" when Edgar announces his intention to leave the country, was beautiful. In the other scenes of the opera, that of the forced marriage, and of the deeply tragic catastrophe, were equally well sustained. Her voice was perfectly at her command throughout the opera, and equally sure in the highest and the lowest notes of its extensive range. If such trifles are worth mentioning in speaking of so finished a piece of art, it should be stated that Madame Persiani looked all the better dressed than as the rustic Amina; her changes of dress were frequent, and all, as the ladies would say, rich and becoming. There was nothing even in exterior to be desired, and the flush of conscious success has given animation, almost beauty to her countenance. Signor Rubini, who made his first appearance of the season, which season as the report goes, is to be his last in the profession, did not sing like a man of whom the public would be willing to take leave. His voice is still in its full perfection, and in the scene of the second act in which as Edgar he discovers the supposed perfidy of Lucia, he gave one passage with a degree of energy, and even passion, to which he has seldom been roused. His position at the close of the piece, where he is left to sustain, after the death of the heroine the whole weight of the interest, was a hazardous one, but he bore up triumphantly through it, and received an encore in his concluding air. Signor Tamburini, who, as Lord Ashton of the novel, also reappeared for the first time this season, well sustained his former reputation, and the reception of both, but especially that of Rubini was of the best description. Signor Tati, who took the part of Bucklaw at short notice, acquitted himself respectably, but would have done more and better had he attempted less. He has no real power. The other parts were carefully sustained, and the choruses effective. The Queen was present at this performance. The house was crowded early in the evening.