

ing in a shop-window! He went in, and very soon bought it for about forty francs. He then ascertained that the bass belonged to a lady of rank. The belly was full of cracks; so, not to make two bites of a cherry, Ortega had made a nice new one. Chanot carried this precious fragment home and hung it up in his shop, but not in the window, for he is too good a judge not to know the sun will take all the colour out of that maker's varnish. Tarisio came in from Italy, and his eye lighted instantly on the Stradiuarius belly. He pestered Chanot till the latter sold it him for a thousand francs and told him where the rest was. Tarisio no sooner knew this than he flew to Madrid. He learned from Ortega where the lady lived, and called on her to see it. "Sir," says the lady, "it is at your disposition." That does not mean much in Spain. When he offered to buy it, she coquetted with him, said it had been long in her family; money could not replace a thing of that kind, and in short, she put on the screw, *as she thought*, and sold it him for about four thousand francs. What he did with the Ortega belly is not known—perhaps sold it to some person in the tooth-pick trade. He sailed exultant for Paris with the Spanish bass in a case. He never let it out of his sight. The pair were caught by a storm in the Bay of Biscay. The ship rolled; Tarisio clasped his bass tight, and trembled. It was a terrible gale, and for one whole day they were in real danger. Tarisio spoke of it to me with a shudder. I will give you his real words, for they struck me at the time, and I have often thought of them since—

"AH, MY POOR MR. READE, THE BASS OF SPAIN WAS ALL BUT LOST."

Was not this a true connoisseur? a genuine enthusiast? Observe! there was also an ephemeral insect called Luigi Tarisio, who would have gone down with the bass: but that made no impression on his mind. *De minimis non curat Ludovicus.*

He got it safe to Paris. A certain high priest in these mysteries, called Vuillaume, with the help of a sacred vessel, called the glue-pot, soon re-wedded the back and sides to the belly, and the bass being now just what it was when the ruffian Ortega put his finger in the pie, was sold for 20,000 fr. (£800.)

I saw the Spanish bass in Paris twenty-two years ago, and you can see it any day this month you like; for it is the

identical violoncello now on show at Kensington, numbered 188. Who would divine its separate adventures, to see it all reposing so calm and uniform in that case—" *Post tot naufragia tutus.*"

### THIRD LETTER.

August 27th, 1872.

"THE Spanish bass" is of the grand pattern and exquisitely made: the sound-hole, rather shorter and stiffer than in Stradiuarius's preceding epoch, seems stamped out of the wood with a blow, so swiftly and surely is it cut. The purfling is perfection. Look at the section of it in the upper bought of the back. The scroll extremely elegant. The belly is a beautiful piece of wood. The back is of excellent quality, but mean in the figure. The sides are cut the wrong way of the grain; a rare mistake in this master. The varnish sweet, clear, orange-coloured, and full of fire. Oh, if this varnish could but be laid on the wood of the Sanctus Seraphin bass! The belly is full of cracks, and those cracks have not been mended without several lines of modern varnish clearly visible to the practised eye.

Some years ago there was a Stradiuarius bass in Ireland. I believe it was presented by General Oliver to Signor Piatti. I never saw it; but some people tell me that in wood and varnish it surpasses the Spanish bass. Should these lines meet Signor Piatti's eye, I will only say that, if he would allow it to be placed in the case for a single week, it would be a great boon to the admirers of these rare and noble pieces, and very instructive. By the side of the Spanish bass stands another, inferior to it in model and general work, superior to it in preservation, No. 187. The unhappy parts are the wood of the sides and the scroll. Bad wood kills good varnish. The scroll is superb in workmanship; it is more finely cut at the back part than the scroll of the Spanish bass; but it is cut out of a pear tree, and that abominable wood gets uglier if possible under varnish, and lessens the effect even of first-class work. On the other hand, the back and belly, where the varnish gets fair play, are beautiful. The belly is incom-

parable. Here is the very finest ruby varnish of Stradiarius, as pure as the day it was laid on. The back was the same colour originally, but has been reduced in tint by the friction this part of a bass encounters when played on. The varnish on the back is chipped all over in a manner most picturesque to the cultivated eye; only *it must go no farther*. I find on examination that these chips have all been done a good many years ago, and I can give you a fair, though of course not an exact, idea of the process. Methinks I see an old gentleman seated sipping his last glass of port in the dining-room over a shining table, whence the cloth was removed for dessert. He wears a little powder still, though no longer the fashion; he has no shirt-collar, but a roll of soft and snowy cambric round his neck, a plain gold pin, and a frilled bosom. He has a white waistcoat—snow-white like his linen: he washes at home—and a blue coat with gilt buttons. Item, a large fob or watch-pocket, whence bulges a golden turnip, and puts forth seed, to wit a bunch of seals and watch-keys, with perhaps a gold pencil-case. One of these seals is larger than the others: the family arms are engraved on it, and only important letters are signed with it. He rises and goes to the drawing-room. The piano is opened; a servant brings the Stradiarius bass from the study; the old gentleman takes it and tunes it, and, not to be bothered with his lapels, buttons his coat, and plays his part in a quartett of Haydn or a symphony of Corelli, and smiles as he plays, because he really loves music, and is not overweighted. Your modern amateur, with a face of justifiable agony, ploughs the hill of Beethoven and harrows the soul of Reade. Nevertheless, my smiling senior is all the time bringing the finest and most delicate varnish of Stradiarius into a series of gentle collisions with the following objects:—First, the gold pin; then the two rows of brass buttons; and last, not least, the male chatelaine of the period. There is an oval chip just off the centre of this bass; I give the armorial seal especial credit for that: “à tout seigneur tout honneur.”

Take another specimen of eccentric wear: the red Stradiarius kit 88. The enormous oval wear has been done thus:—It has belonged to a dancing-master, and he has clapped it under his arm fifty times a day to show his pupils the steps.

The Guarnerius family consisted of Andreas, his two sons Petrus and Joseph, his grandson Petrus Guarnerius of Venice

and Joseph Guarnerius, the greatest of the family, whom Mons. Fétis considers identical with Guiseppe Antonio, born in 1683. There are, however, great difficulties in the way of this theory, which I will reserve for my miscellaneous remarks.

Andreas Guarnerius was the closest of all the copyists of the Amati; so close, indeed, that his genuine violins are nearly always sold as Amati. Unfortunately he imitated the small pattern. His wood and varnish are exactly like Amati; there is, however, a peculiar way of cutting the lower wing of his sound-holes that betrays him at once. When you find him with the border high and broad, and the purfling grand, you may suspect his son Petrus of helping him, for his own style is petty. His basses few, but fine. Petrus Guarnerius of Cremona makes violins prodigiously *bombés*, and more adapted to grumbling inside than singing out; but their appearance magnificent: a grand deep border, very noble, sound-hole and scroll Amatisé, and a deep orange varnish that nothing can surpass. His violins are singularly scarce in England. I hope to see one at the Exhibition before it closes.

Joseph, his brother, is a thorough original. His violins are narrowed under the shoulder in a way all his own. As to model, his fiddles are *bombés* like his brother's; and, as the centre has generally sunk from weakness, the violin presents a great bump at the upper part and another at the lower. The violin 97 is by this maker, and is in pure and perfect condition; but the wood having no figure, the beauty of the varnish is not appreciated. He is the king of the varnishers. He was the first man at Cremona that used red varnish oftener than pale, and in that respect was the teacher even of Stradiarius. When this maker deviates from his custom and puts really good hare-wood into a violin, then his glorious varnish gets fair play, and *nothing can live beside him*. The other day a violin of this make with fine wood, but undersized, was put up at an auction without a name. I suppose nobody knew the maker, for it was sold on its merits, and fetched £160. I brought that violin into the country; gave a dealer £24 for it in Paris.

He made a very few flatter violins, that are worth any money.

Petrus Guarnerius, the son of this Joseph, learned his business in Cremona, but migrated early to Venice. He worked there from 1725 to 1746. Hé made most beautiful

tenors and basses, but was not so happy in his violins. His varnish very fine, but paler than his father's.

Joseph Guarnerius, of Cremona, made violins from about 1725 to 1745. His first epoch is known only to connoisseurs; in *outline* it is hewed out under the shoulder like the fiddles of Joseph, son of Andrew, who was then an old fiddle-maker; but the *model* all his own; even, regular, and perfect. Sound-hole long and characteristic, head rather mean for him; he made but few of these essays, and then went to a different and admirable style, a most graceful and elegant violin, which has been too loosely described as a copy of Stradiuarius; it is not that, but a fine violin in which a downright good workman profits by a great contemporary artist's excellences, yet without servility. These violins are not longer nor stiffer in the inner bought than Stradiuarius: they are rather narrow than broad below cut after the plan of Stradiuarius, though not so well, in the central part, the sound-holes exquisitely cut, neither too stiff nor too flowing, the wood between the curves of the sound-holes *remarkably broad*. The scroll grandiose, yet well cut, and the nozzle of the scroll and the little platform. They are generally purfling through both pegs, like Stradiuarius; the wood very handsome, varnish a rich golden brown. I brought three of this epoch into the country; one was sold the other day at Christie's for £260, (bought, I believe, by Lord Dunmore,) and is worth £350 as prices go. This epoch, unfortunately, is not yet represented in the collection.

The next epoch is nobly represented by 93, 94, 95. All these violins have the broad centre, the grand long inner bought, stiffish yet not ungraceful, the long and rather upright sound-hole, but well cut; the grand scroll, cut all in a hurry, but noble. 93 is a little the grander in make I think; the purfling being set a hair's breadth farther in, the scroll magnificent; but observe the haste—the deep gauge-marks on the side of the scroll; here is already an indication of the slovenliness to come: varnish a lovely orange, wood beautiful; two cracks in the belly, one from the chin-mark to the sound-hole. 94 is a violin of the same make, and without a single crack; the scroll is not quite so grandiose as 93, but the rest incomparable; the belly pure and beautiful, the back a picture. There is nothing in the room that equals in picturesqueness the colours of this magnificent piece: time and fair-play have worn it thus; first, there is a narrow irregular line of wear caused by the hand in shifting, next comes a sheet of ruby

varnish, with no wear to speak of; then an irregular piece is worn out the size of a sixpence; then more varnish; then, from the centre downwards, a grand wear, the size and shape of a large curving pear; this ends in a broad zigzag ribbon of varnish, and then comes the bare wood caused by the friction in playing, but higher up to the left a score of great bold chips. It is the very beau-ideal of the red Cremona violin, adorned, not injured, by a century's fair wear. No 95 is a roughish specimen of the same epoch, not so brilliant, but with its own charm. Here the gauge-marks of impatience are to be seen in the very border, and I should have expected to see the stiff-throated scroll, for it belongs to this form.

The next epoch is rougher still, and is generally, but not always, higher built, with a stiff-throated scroll, and a stiff, quaint sound-hole that is the delight of connoisseurs; and such is the force of genius that I believe in our secret hearts we love these impudent fiddles best—they are so full of chic. After that, he abuses the patience of his admirers; makes his fiddles of a preposterous height, with sound-holes long enough for a tenor; but, worst of all, indifferent wood and downright bad varnish—varnish worthy only of the Guadagnini tribe, and not laid on by the method of his contemporaries. Indeed, I sadly fear it was this great man who, by his ill-example in 1740-45, killed the varnish of Cremona. Thus—to show the range of the subject—out of five distinct epochs in the work of this extraordinary man we have only one and a half, so to speak, represented even in this noble collection—the greatest by far the world has ever seen. But I hope to see all these gaps filled, and also to see in the collection a Stradiuarius violin of that kind I call the dolphin-backed. This is a mere matter of picturesque wear. When a red Stradiuarius violin is made of soft velvety wood, and the varnish is just half worn off the back in a rough triangular form, that produces a certain beauty of light and shade which is in my opinion the *ne plus ultra*. These violins are rare. I never had but two in my life. A very obliging dealer, who knows my views, has promised his co-operation, and I think England, which cuts at present rather too poor a figure in respect of this maker, will add a dolphin-backed Stradiuarius to the collection before it is dispersed.

CARLO BERGONZI, if you go by gauging and purfling, is of course an inferior make to the Amati; but, if that is to be the

line of reasoning, he is superior to Joseph Guarnerius. We ought to be in one story; if Joseph Guarnerius is the second maker of Cremona, it follows that Carlo Bergonzi is the third. Fine size, reasonable outline, flat and even model, good wood, work, and varnish, and an indescribable air of grandeur and importance. He is quite as rare as Joseph Guarnerius. Twenty-five years ago I ransacked Europe for him—for he is a maker I always loved—and I could obtain but few. No. 109 was one of them, and the most remarkable, take it altogether. In this one case he has really set himself to copy Stradiuarius. He has composed his purfling in the same proportions, which was not at all his habit. He has copied the sound-hole closely, and has even imitated that great man's freak of delicately hollowing out the lower wood-work of the sound-hole. The varnish of this violin is as fine in colour as any pale Stradiuarius in the world, and far superior in body to most of them; but that is merely owing to its rare preservation. Most of these pale Stradiuariuses, and especially Mrs. Jay's and No. 86, had once varnish on them as beautiful as is now on this *chef-d'œuvre* of Carlo Bergonzi.

Monsieur Fétis having described Michael Angelo Bergonzi as a pupil of Stradiuarius, and English writers having blindly followed him, this seems a fit place to correct that error. Michael Angelo Bergonzi was the son of Carlo; began to work after the death of Stradiuarius, and imitated nobody but his father—and him vilely. His corners are not corners, but peaks. See them once, you never forget them; but you pray Heaven you may never see them again. His ticket runs, "Michel Angelo Bergonzi figlio di Carlo, fece nel Cremona," from 1750 to 1780. Of Nicholas, son of Michael Angelo, I have a ticket dated 1796, but he doubtless began before that and worked till 1830. He lived till 1838, was well known to Tarisio, and it is from him alone we have learned the house Stradiuarius lived in. There is a tenor by Michael Angelo Bergonzi to be seen at Mr. Cox, the picture dealer, Pall-mall, and one by Nicholas, in Mr. Chantot's shop, in Wardour-street. Neither of these Bergonzi knew how their own progenitor varnished any more than my housemaid does.

STAINER, a mixed maker. He went to Cremona too late to unlearn his German style, but he moderated it, and does not scoop so badly as his successors. The model of his tenor, especially the back, is very fine. The peculiar defect of it is that it is purfling too near the border, which always gives

meanness. This is the more unfortunate, that really he was freer from this defect than his imitators. He learned to varnish in Cremona, but his varnish is generally paler than the native Cremonese. This tenor is exceptional: it has a rose-coloured varnish that nothing can surpass. It is lovely.

SANCTUS SERAPHIN.—This is a true Venetian maker. The Venetian born was always half-Cremonese, half-German. In this bass, which is his uniform style, you see a complete mastery of the knife and the gauge. Neither the Stradiuarius nor the Amati ever purfling a bass more finely, and, to tell the truth, rarely so finely. But oh! the miserable scroll, the abominable sound-hole! Here he shows the cloven foot, and is more German than Stainer. Uniformity was never carried so far as by this natty workman; one violin exactly like the next; one bass the image of its predecessor. His varnish never varies. It is always slightly opaque. This is observed in his violins, but it escapes detection in his basses, because it is but slight, after all, and the wonderful wood he put into his basses, shines through that slight defect and hides it from all but practised eyes. He had purchased a tree or a very large log of it; for this is the third bass I have seen of this wonderful wood. Now-a-days you might cut down a forest of sycamore and not match it; those veteran trees are all gone. He has a feature all to himself; his violins have his initials in ebony let into the belly under the broad part of the tail-piece. This natty Venetian is the only old violin maker I know who could write well. The others bungle that part of the date they are obliged to write in the tickets. This one writes it in a hand like copper plate, whence I suspect he was himself the engraver of his ticket, which is unique. It is four times the size of a Cremonese ticket, and has a scroll border composed thus:—The sides of a parallelogram are created by four solid lines like sound-holes; these are united at the sides by two leaves and at the centre by two shells. Another serpentine line is then coiled all round them at short intervals, and within the parallelogram the ticket is printed:—

Sanctus Seraphin Utinensis,  
Fecit Venetiis, anno 17—.

THE MIGHTY VENETIAN.—I come now to a truly remarkable

piece, a basso di camera that comes modestly into the room without a name, yet there is nothing except No. 91 that sends such a thrill through the true connoisseur. The outline is grotesque but original, the model full and swelling but not bumpy, the wood detestable; the back is hare-wood, but without a vestige of figure; so it might just as well be elm: the belly, instead of being made of mountain deal grown on the sunny side of the Alps, is a piece of house timber. Now these materials would kill any other maker; yet this mighty bass stands its ground. Observe the fibre of the belly; here is the deepest red varnish in the room, and laid on with an enormous brush. Can you see the fibre through the thin varnish of Sanctus Seraphin as plainly as you can see the fibre through this varnish laid on as thick as paint? So much for clearness. Now for colour. Let the student stand before this bass, get the varnish into his mind, and then walk rapidly to any other instrument in the room he has previously determined to compare with it. This will be a revelation to him if he has eyes in his head.

And this miracle comes in without a name, and therefore, is passed over by all the sham judges. And why does it come without a name? I hear a French dealer advised those who framed the catalogue. But the fact is that if a man once narrows his mind to three or four makers, and imagines they monopolize excellence, he never can be a judge of old instruments, the study is so wide and his mind artificially narrowed. Example of this false method: Mr. Faulconer sends in a bass, which he calls Andreas Guarnerius. An adviser does not see that, and suggests "probably by Amati." Now there is no such thing as "*probably* by Amati," any more than there is probably the sun or the moon. That bass is by David Tecchler, of Rome; but it is a masterpiece; and so, because he has done better than usual, the poor devil is to be robbed of his credit, and it is to be given, first to one maker *who is in the ring* and then to another, *who is in the ring*. The basso di camera, which not being in the ring, comes without a name, is by Domenico Montagnana of Venice, the greatest maker of basses in all Venice or Cremona except one. If this bass had only a decent piece of wood at the back, it would extinguish all the other basses. But we can remedy that defect. Basses by this maker exist with fine wood. Mr. Hart, senior, sold one some twenty years ago with yellow varnish, and wood striped like a tiger's back. Should these

lines meet the eye of the purchaser, I shall feel grateful if he will communicate with me thereupon.

I come now to the last of the Goths, thus catalogued, No. 100, "ascribed to Guarnerius. Probably by Storioni."

Lorenzo Storioni is a maker who began to work at Cremona about 1780. He has a good model but wretched spirit varnish. Violin No. 100 is something much better. It is a violin made before 1760 by Landolfo of Milan. He is a maker well known to experienced dealers who can take their minds out of the ring, but, as the *writers* seem a little confused, and talk of two Landulphs, a Charles and a Ferdinand, I may as well say here that the two are one. This is the true ticket:—

Carolus Ferdinandus Landulphus,  
fecit Mediolani in via S. Mar-  
garite, anno 1756.

Stiff inner bought really something like Joseph Guarnerius; but all the rest quite unlike: scroll very mean, varnish good, and sometimes very fine. Mr. Moore's, in point of varnish, is a fine specimen. It has a deeper, nobler tint than usual. This maker is very interesting, on account of his being absolutely the last Italian who used the glorious varnish of Cremona. It died first at Cremona; lingered a year or two more at Venice; Landolfo retained it at Milan till 1760, and with him it ended.

In my next and last article I will deal with the varnish of Cremona, as illustrated by No. 91 and other specimens, and will enable the curious to revive that lost art if they choose.

#### FOURTH LETTER.

August 31st, 1872.

THE fiddles of Cremona gained their reputation by superior tone, but they hold it now mainly by their beauty. For thirty years past violins have been made equal in model to the *chef-d'œuvres* of Cremona, and stronger in wood than Stradi-