

LETTERS FROM ABROAD.*¹

LETTER III.—ITALY.

MY DEAR N.²

I WRITE you, as you request, a very long letter, “on the largest sized paper, and in the smallest hand-writing.” You call the request a modest one, and I cannot but allow it has some pretensions to bashfulness, not only inasmuch as it comes in the corner of another, but because it is—let me see—just twenty lines long. However, you see what I think your twenty lines worth: and you are so accustomed, in matters of intercourse, to have the part of obliger to yourself, that it would be indecent to haggle with you about the tare and tret of an epistle. If you send me forty lines, I suppose I must write you a quarto.

You ask me to tell you a world of things about Italian composers, singers, &c. Alas! my dear N., I may truly say to you, that for music you must “look at home;” at least as far as my own experience goes. Even the biographies which you speak of, are, I fear, not to be found in any great quantity; but I will do my best to get them together. Both Pisa and Genoa have little pretensions either to music or books. We ought to be at Rome for one, and Milan for the other. Florence perhaps has a reasonable quantity of both, besides being rich in its Gallery:³ but I will tell you

* Author: Leigh Hunt / Transcribed by Ilaria Natali; Annotated by Gicomo Ferrari.

one thing, which, albeit you are of Italian origin, will mortify you to hear; viz. that Mozart⁴ is nothing in Italy, and Rossini⁵ every thing. Nobody even says any thing of Mozart, since *Figaro*⁶ (tell it not in Gothland!)⁷ was *hissed at Florence*. His name appears to be suppressed by agreement; while Rossini is talked of, written of, copied, sung, hummed, whistled, and demi-semi-quavered from morning to night. If there is a portrait in a shop-window, it is Rossini's. If you hear a song in the street, it is Rossini's. If you go to a music-shop to have something copied,—“An air of Rossini's?” Mayer,⁸ I believe, is the only German who takes the turn with him at the Opera here; but Mozart, be assured, never. I believe they would shut their ears at a burst of his harmony, as your friends the Chinese did at Lord Macartney's band.⁹

I suspect, however, that there are more reasons than one for this extraordinary piece of intolerance, and not altogether so unhandsome as they appear at first sight. As to theatres, I need not tell you the dislike which singers have to compositions that afford them no excuse for running riot in their own quavers and cadences. They hate to be

“Married to immortal verse.”¹⁰

They prefer a good, flimsy, dying sort of a “do-me-no-harm, good-man,” whom they can twist about and desert as they please. This is common to theatres every where. But in Italy, besides a natural prejudice in favour of their own composers, there has always been another, you know, against that richness of accompaniment, with which the Germans follow up their vocal music, turning every air, as it were, into a triumphal procession. They think that if a melody is full of nature and passion, it should be oftener suffered to

make out its own merit, and triumph by its own sufficing beauty: like Adam in the poem, when he walked forth to meet the angel,—

Without more train
Accompanied than with his own complete
Perfections:

or Eve afterwards, when she received him,—

Undeck'd, save with herself; more lovely fair
Than wood-nymph, or the fairest goddess feign'd
Of three that in Mount Ida naked strove.
— — — — — No veil
She needed, virtue-proof: no thought infirm
Alter'd her cheek.¹¹

(What poetry is there! what sentiment! what delicacy! what words full of meaning!) You know what I think on this subject, when the composer is a truly great one like Paesiello:¹² and I know what you think too, when the air is one of his divinest, like *Il Mio Ben* in the opera of *Nina*.¹³ But Rossini is not Paesiello? True. He gives us a delightful air now and then; but in the hurry of his industry and his animal spirits, pours forth a torrent of common-places. His is not a flow of music,—

“Whose stream is amber, and whose gravel gold.”¹⁴

It is, for the most part, common water, brisk in its course, and bringing down only grains of gold, however worth sifting. Nevertheless, he *has* animal spirits, he runs merrily; his stream is for the most part native; and the Italians are as willing to be made merry with “thin potations”¹⁵ as with old hock.¹⁶ I meant to shew you how it was that they were prepared to undervalue Mozart; and I think I can now explain to you, in one word, how it is that they contrive to render themselves deaf to the rest of his merits, and to the

inspiration which he himself drank at an Italian source. Mozart was a *German*. I do not mean simply that he was a German in music; but he was a German by birth. The Germans in Italy, the lords over Italian freedom and the Italian soil, trumpet his superiority over Italian composers; and however right they may be, at all events with regard to modern ones, this is enough to make the Italians hate him. It mortifies them the more, because they know that he is an exception to the general dulness of their conquerors; and not even the non-chalance of his own conduct towards kings and composers (which was truly edifying*) could reconcile

* Even when this great musician was a child, he felt the superiority of genius over rank. If his flatterers, however high their station, exhibited no real feeling for the art, he played nothing but trifling pieces for their amusement, and was insensible even to their flattery. When called upon to display the astonishing prematurity of his powers before the Emperor Francis the First, he said to his Majesty, with a simplicity that must have been somewhat frightful at court, "Is not Mr. Wagenseil¹⁷ here? We must send for him; *he understands the thing*." The Emperor sent for Wagenseil, who took his Majesty's place by the side of the performer. "Sir," said Mozart, "I am going to play one of your concertos; you must turn over the leaves for me." The Emperor Joseph the Second¹⁸ said to him once, speaking of his opera the *Enlèvement du Sérail*,¹⁹ "My dear Mozart, this is too fine for my ears: there are too many notes." "I beg your Majesty's pardon," replied Mozart, "there are just as many as are necessary."—See the "Lives of Haydn and Mozart."²⁰ The genius of Haydn was not of this self-sufficing and jacobinical turn. He was eminently loyal and orthodox,—the reason, no doubt, why the *Quarterly Review*²¹ mentions his parting with his wife, and "attaching himself to the society of Signora Borelli,"²² with so much indifference, or rather a tone of approbation. "Flesh and blood," they say, "could no longer bear it."²³ We have no sort of objection, for our parts, if this was the case; especially as his wife was "a prude and a devotee," who made him write masses for the monks;²⁴ whereas Signora Borelli was a "lovely" woman, who sympathized in his pursuits till she died. But how the *Quarterly Reviewers* settle all this with their conventional consciences,

them to the misery of preferring *any thing* German to the least thing Italian.

The Genoese are not a musical specimen of the Italians; but the national talent seems lurking wherever you go. The most beggarly minstrel gets another to make out a harmony with him, on some sort of an instrument, if only a gourd with a string or two. Such at least appeared to me a strange-looking “wild-fowl” of a fiddle, which a man was strumming the other day,—or rather a gourd stuck upon a long fiddle of deal. Perhaps you know of such an instrument. I think I have seen something like it in pictures. They all sing out their words distinctly, some accompanying themselves all the while in the guitar style, others putting in a symphony now and then, even if it be nothing better than two notes always the same. There is one blind beggar who seems an enthusiast for Rossini. Imagine a sturdy-looking fellow in rags, laying his hot face against his fiddle, rolling his blind eyeballs against the sunshine, and vociferating with all the true open-mouth and syllabical particularity of the

we leave it to themselves to explain, and shall be glad to hear. As the singers say, we shall be “all attention.” They are bound to cant in their most choral style, to make amends for this incautious and profane ebullition,—this *extra-cathedram* chaunt,²⁵—this whistle in church-time; as strange as if a Bishop, instead of the Athanasian creed,²⁶ or rather the Seventh Commandment, were to strike up “In the merry month of May.”²⁷ (See an article on the Lives abovementioned, in the Review for October, 1817.)

The example of Mozart might be instructive to certain German men of talent, who do not blush to fall in with all the nonsense of the Allied Sovereigns.²⁸ How delightful would it be, for instance, if M. Gentz,²⁹ when about to write some legislation under his master’s eye, were to say, “Is Mr. Bentham³⁰ here? we must send for him: he understands the thing.” Or if the Emperor should say to him, “My dear Gentz, this is too free for my notions: there are too many popular provisions,” for M. Gentz to answer, “I beg your Majesty’s pardon: there are just as many as are necessary.”

Italians, a part of one of the duets of that lively master. Ilis³¹ companion having his eye-sight and being therefore not so vivacious, sings his part with a sedater vigour; though even when the former is singing a solo, I have heard him throw in some unisons at intervals, as if his help were equally wanting to the blind man, vocal as well as corporal.

Among the novelties that impress a stranger in Italy, I have not before noticed the vivacity prevalent among all classes of people. The gesticulation is not French. It has an air of greater simplicity and sincerity, and has more to do with the eyes, and expression of countenance. But after being used to it, the English must look like a nation of scorers and prudes. When serious, the women will walk with a certain piquant stateliness, evidently the same which impressed the ancient as well as modern poets of Italy, Virgil in particular; but it has no haughtiness. You might imagine them walking up to a dance, or priestesses of Venus³² approaching a temple. When lively, their manner out of doors is that of our liveliest women within. If they make a quicker movement than usual, if they recognise a friend, for instance, or call out to somebody, or dispatch somebody with a message, they have all the life, simplicity, and unconsciousness of the happiest of our young women, who are at ease in their gardens or parks. I must add, that since I have known more of Genoa, I have found out that it possesses multitudes of handsome women; and what surprised me, many of them with beautiful northern complexions. But an English lady tells me, that for this latter discovery I am indebted to my short sight. This is probable. You know that I have often been in raptures at faces that have passed me in London, whose only faults were being very coarse and considerably bilious. But never mind. It is not desirable to have a Brobdingnagian³³ sight; and where the mouth is

sweet and the eyes intelligent, there is always the look of beauty with me. Now I have seen heaps of such faces in Genoa. The superiority of the women over the men is indeed remarkable, and is to be accounted for perhaps by the latter being wrapt and screwed up in money-getting. Yet it is just the reverse, I understand, at Naples; and the Neapolitans are accused of being as sharp at a bargain as any body. What is certain, however, from the testimonies of all I have met with, is, that in almost all parts of Italy, gentility of appearance is on the side of the females. The rarity of a gentlemanly look in the men is remarkable. The commonness of it among women of all classes, is equally so. Now the former was certainly not the case in old times, if we are to trust the portraits handed down to us; nor indeed could it easily have been believed, if left upon record. What is the cause then of this extraordinary degeneracy? Is it, after all, an honourable one to the Italians? Is it that the men, thinking of the moral and political situation of their country, and so long habituated to feel themselves degraded, acquire a certain instinctive carelessness and contempt of appearance; while the women, on the other hand, more taken up with their own affairs, with the consciousness of beauty, and the flattery which is more or less always paid them, have retained a greater portion of their self-possession and esteem? The alteration, whatever it is owing to, is of the worst kind. The want of gentility is not supplied, as it so often is with us, by a certain homely simplicity and manliness, quite as good in its way, and better, where the former does not include the better part of it. The appearance, to use a modern cant phrase, has a certain *raffishness* in it, like that of a suspicious-looking fellow in England, who lounges about with his hat on one side, and a flower in his mouth. Nor is it at all confined to men in trade, whether high or

low; though at the same time I must observe, that all men, high or low (with the exceptions, of course, that take place in every case) are notoriously given to pinching and saving, keeping their servants upon the lowest possible allowance, and eating as little as may be themselves, with the exception of their favourite *minestra*,³⁴ of which I will speak presently, and which being a cheap as well as favourite dish, they gobble in a sufficient quantity to hinder their abstinence in other things from being regarded as the effect of temperance. In Pisa, the great good of life is a hot supper; but at Pisa and Genoa both, as in “the city” with us, if you overhear any thing said in the streets, it is generally about money. *Quatrini*, *soldi*, and *lire*,³⁵ are discussing at every step. I do not know how the case may have been in Spain of late years. It is certainly better now. But a stranger, full of the Italian poets and romances, is surprised to find the southern sunshine overgrown with this vile scurf. One thinks sometimes that men would not know what to do with their time, if it were not for that succession of petty hopes and excitements, which constitutes the essence of trade. It looks like a good-humoured invention of nature to save the foolish part of mankind from getting tired to death with themselves. But we know, from a comparison of different times and nations, that this is not the case. The dancing African and the dozing Asiatic are equally sufficed with a hundredth part of it; and the greater activity of the European has, in times quite as active and a great deal more healthy and pleasurable, dispensed with at least half of it, devoting the rest of his hours to sports and society. Mammon³⁶ has undoubtedly been the god of these later times; and philosophy will have a harder task in displacing him, than it has had in shaking the strong holds of his colleague, Superstition: for though men cannot serve “God and Mammon”

together (a truth which the Mammonites³⁷ are always practically disputing, in the very teeth of their own alleged doctrines) they can serve Superstition fast enough. Selfishness is the soul of both, as money formed the inside of Dagon.³⁸ I believe, for my part, that both the causes above-mentioned have had great effect in forming the character of the modern Italians; but I believe also that the greatest of all (and I need not hesitate to mention it to a man of Catholic stock, out of the pale of the Pope's dominion)³⁹ is the extraordinary blight that has been thrown in the course of time over all the manlier part of the Italian character, by the notorious ill example, chicanery, worldliness, and petty feeling of all sorts, exhibited by the Court of Rome. I do not allude to the present Pope;⁴⁰ and a Pope here and there is of course to be excepted. I believe the reigning Pontiff is a well-meaning, obstinate old gentleman enough, whom events have rendered a little romantic; a character which is nobleness itself compared with that of the majority of his brethren, or indeed with most characters. But the Italians, for centuries, have been accustomed to see the most respected persons among them, and a *sacred* Court, full of the pettiest and most selfish vices; and if they have instinctively lost their respect for the persons, they have still seen these persons the most flourishing among them, and have been taught by their example to make a distinction between belief and practice, that would startle the saving grace of the most impudent of Calvinists. From what I have seen myself (and I would not mention it if it had not been corroborated by others who have resided in Italy several years) there is a prevailing contempt of truth in this country, that would astonish even an oppressed Irishman. It forms an awful comment upon those dangers of *catechising* people into insincerity, which Mr. Bentham has pointed out in his Church-of-Englandism.⁴¹

We are far enough, God knows, from this universality of evil yet. May such writers always be found to preserve us from it! See Mr. Shelley's admirable preface to the tragedy of the Cenci, where the religious nature of this profanation of truth is pointed out with equal acuteness and eloquence.⁴² I have heard instances of falsehood, not only among money-getters, but among "ladies and gentlemen" in ordinary, so extreme, so childish, and apparently so unconscious of wrong, [t]hat⁴³ the very excess of it, however shocking in one respect, relieved one's feelings in another, and shewed how much might be done by proper institutions to exalt the character of a people naturally so ingenuous and so ductile. The great Italian virtues, under their present governments, are being catholic, not being "taken in" by others, and taking in every body else. Persons employed to do the least or the greatest jobs, will alike endeavour to cheat you through thick and thin. It is a perpetual warfare, in which you are at last obliged to fight in self-defence. If you pay any body what he asks you, it never enters into his imagination that you do it from any thing but folly. You are pronounced a *minchione* (a ninny) one of their greatest terms of reproach. On the other hand, if you battle well through your bargain, a perversion of the natural principle of self-defence leads to a feeling of real respect for you. A dispute may arise; the man may grin, stare, threaten, and pour out torrents of reasons and injured innocence, as they always do; but be firm, and he goes away equally angry and admiring. If you take them in, doubtless the admiration as well as the anger is still in proportion, like that of the gallant knights of old when they were beaten in single combat. An English lady told me an amusing story the other day, which will shew you the spirit of this matter at once. A friend of hers at Pisa was in the habit of dealing with a man, whose knaveries, as

usual, compelled her to keep a reasonable eye to her side of the bargain. She said to this man one day, "Ah, so-and-so, no doubt you think me a great *minchione*." The man, at this speech, put on a look of the sincerest deference and respect; and in a tone of deprecation, not at all intended, as you might suppose, for a grave joke, but for the most serious thing in the world, replied, "*Minchione! No! E gran furba lei.*"—"You a ninny! Oh no, Ma'am: *you* are a great thief!") This man was a Jew: but then what dealer in Italy is not? They say, that Jews cannot find a living in Genoa. I know of one, however, who both lives and gets fat. I asked him one day to direct me to some one who dealt in a particular article. He did so; adding, in an under tone, and clapping his finger at the same time against his nose, "He'll ask you such and such a sum for it; but take care you don't pay it though." The love of getting and saving pervades all classes of the community, the female part, however, I have no doubt, much less than the male. The love of ornament, as well as a more generous passion, interferes. The men seem to believe in nothing but the existence of power, and as they cannot attain to it in its grander shapes, do all they can to accumulate a bit of it in its meanest. The women retain a better and more redeeming faith; and yet every thing is done to spoil them. Cicisbeism⁴⁴ (of which I will tell you more at another opportunity) is the consequence of a state of society, more nonsensical in fact than itself, though less startling to the present habits of the world; but it is managed in the worst possible manner; and, singularly enough, is almost as gross, more formal, and quite as hypocritical as what it displaces. It is a stupid system. The poorer the people, the less of course it takes place among them: but as the husband, in all cases, has the most to do for his family, and is the person least cared for, he is resolved to get what he can before marriage; and a

vile custom prevails among the poorest, by which no girl can get married, unless she brings a certain dowry. Unmarried females are also watched with exceeding strictness; and in order to obtain at once a husband and freedom, every nerve is strained to get this important dowry. Daughters scrape up and servants pilfer for it. If they were not obliged to ornament themselves, as a help towards their object, I do not know whether even the natural vanity of youth would not be sacrificed, and girls hang out rags as a proof of their hoard, instead of the "outward and visible sign"⁴⁵ of crosses and ear-rings. Dress, however, disputes the palm with saving; and as a certain consciousness of their fine eyes and their natural graces survives every thing else among southern womankind, you have no conception of the high hand with which the humblest females carry it at a dance or an evening party. Hair dressed up, white gowns, satins, flowers, fans, and gold ornaments, all form a part of the glitter of the evening, amidst (I have no doubt) as great, and perhaps as graceful a profusion of compliments and love-making, as takes place in the most privileged ball-rooms. Yet it is twenty to one, that nine out of ten persons in the room have dirty stockings on, and shoes out at heel. Nobody thinks of saving up articles of that description; and they are too useful, and not shewy enough, to be cared for *en passant*. Therefore Italian girls may often enough be well compared to flowers; —with head and bodies all ornament, their feet are very likely in the earth; and thus they go nodding forth for sale, "growing, blowing, and all alive." A foolish English servant whom we brought out with us, fell into an absolute rage of jealousy at seeing my wife give a crown of flowers to a young Italian one, who was going to a dance. The latter, who is of the most respectable sort, and looks as lady-like as you please when dressed, received the flowers with gratitude,

though without surprise; but both of them were struck speechless, when, in addition to the crown, my wife gave her a pair of her own shoes and stockings. They were doubtless the triumph of the evening. Next day we heard accounts of the beautiful dancing,—of Signor F. the English valet⁴⁶ opening the ball with the handsome chandler's-shop woman, &c. and our poor countrywoman was ready to expire.

As the miscellaneous poetry of Alfieri⁴⁷ is little known in England, I will take this occasion of sending you the commencement of a satire of his on money-getting. I was going to translate the whole of it, but it turned off into allusions of too local a nature. He does not spare the English; though he would have found some distinction, I trust, between us and the Dutch, in this matter, could he have heard the shouts sent up the other day upon Change⁴⁸ in honour of the Spanish patriots,⁴⁹ and seen the willingness which nine tenths of us evince to open our purses in behalf of that glorious cause. May God speed it, and contrive to make *all* our rich men as much poorer, and our poor as much richer, as they ought to be! But I am forgetting my satire. The close of the extract, I think, presents a very ludicrous image.

E in te pur, d'ogni lucro Idolo ingordo
Nume di questo secolo borsale,
Un pocolin la penna mia qui lordo:

Ch'ove oggi tanto, oltre il dover, prevale
Quest'acciecatto culto, onde ti bei,
Drittè, che ti saetti alcun mio strale.

Figlio di mezza libertade, il sei;
Nè il niego io già; ma in un mostrarti padre
Vo' di servaggio doppio e d'usi rei.

Ecco, ingombri ha di prepotenti squadre
La magra Europa i mari tutti, e mille
Terre farà di pianto e di sangue adre.

Sian belligere genti, o sian tranquille,
Abbiano o no metalli, indaco, o pepe,
Di selve sieno o abitator di ville,

Stuzzicar tutti densi, ovunque repe
Quest'insetto tirannico Européo,
Per impinguar le sua famelichèpe.

Stupidi e inguisti,⁵⁰ noi sprezziam l'Ebreo,
Che compra e vende, e vende e compra, e vende;
Ma siam ben noi popol più vile e reo:

Che, non contenti a quanto il suol ci rende,
Dell'altrui ladris⁵¹ ove il furar sia lieve,
Facciam pel globo tutto a chi più prende.

Taccio del sangue American, cui bene
L'atroce Ispano; e il vitto agl'Indi tolto
Dall'Anglo, che il suo vitto agl'Indi deve.

Se in fasce orrende al nascer suo ravvolto
Mostrar volessi il rio commercio, or fora
Il mio sermone (e invan) prolisso molto.

Basta ben sol, che la sua infamia d'ora
Per me si illustri, appalesando il come
L'iniqua Europa sue laidezze indora.

Annichillate, impoverite, o dome
Par lei le genti di remote spiagge,
Di alloro no, di Baccalà le chiome,

*Orniamle, &c. &c.*⁵²

YES, glutton of the land and sea,
This pursy age's deity,
I'll dirt my pen awhile with thee.

For since this gloating in a purse,
Which blinds mankind, grows worse and worse,
'Tis fit I smite thee with a verse.

Half-freedom's child, I know thou art:
I'll prove thee father, ere we part,
Of two-fold slavery and no heart.

Lo, dry-drawn Europe sends her brood
Of traders out, like a new flood,
To sow the earth with tears and blood.

Whether a land's at war or peace,
Produces metals, tops, or teas,
Or lives in towns, or villages,

This vermin, mightiest thing alive,
Makes them all herd, and crowd, and drive,
To fatten up it's⁵³ hungry hive.

Unjust and stupid, we despise
The Jew that buys, and sells, and buys,
As if we acted otherwise!

Nay, we are worse; for not content,
Like other thieves, with a home rent,
We rob on every continent.

I pass the Americans that bled
For Spain's fierce thirst, and English bread,
Torn from the Indians it should feed:

Were I to track through all his woes
The monster to his swaddling clothes,
Where I should end, God only knows.

Enough for me, if I can tear
The mask off now, and show the care
Hag Europe takes to be thought fair.

How should we crown her, having trod
Whole nations down for this her god?
With laurel? No,—with salted cod.

This species of dried fish being greatly in request in Catholic countries, the image becomes very ludicrous to an Italian. There is a propriety, and yet a beautiful want of propriety in it. Were Satirists to strike coins as well as verses, a head of Italy some centuries hence, with a crown of dried fish on it, would puzzle the antiquaries.

If Italy is famous at present for any two things, it is for cicisbeism and *minestra*. Wherever you find shops, you see baskets full of a yellow stuff, made up in long stripes like tape, and tied up in bundles. This is the main compound of *minestra*, or to use the Neapolitan term, your old acquaintance *macaroni*.⁵⁴ I need not explain the nature of it to you; but some of your fellow readers may chuse to be informed, that it is

nothing but common paste, made up into interminable pipes. Much of it is naturally of a yellowish colour, but the Genoese die it deeper with saffron. When made into a soup it is called *minestra*, and mixed sometimes with meat, sometimes with oil or butter, but always, if it is to be had, with grated cheese, and that cheese Parmesan. An Italian has no notion of eating any thing plain. If he cannot have his minestra and his oil, he is thrown out of all his calculations, physical and moral. He has a great abstract respect for fasting; but fights hard for an indulgence. The Genoese in particular, being but Canaanites or borderers⁵⁵ in Italy, and accustomed to profane intercourse by their maritime situation, as well as to an heterodox appetite by their industry and sea-air, appear to be extremely restive on the subject of fasting. They make pathetic representations to the Archbishop respecting beef and pudding, and allege their health and their household economies. Fish is luckily dear. I have now before me a Genoese Gazette of the 8th February last,⁵⁶ in which there is an extract from the circular of the Archbishop respecting the late Lent indulgences. He says, that "the Holiness of Our Lord" (for so the Pope is styled)⁵⁷ "has seen with the greatest displeasure, that the ardent desire which he has always nourished" (an awkward word!)⁵⁸ "of restoring the ancient rigour of Lent, is again rendered of no effect, by representations which he finds it impossible to resist." He therefore permits the inhabitants of the Archbishop's diocese to make "one meal a-day of eggs and white-meats (*latticini*) during Lent; and such of them as have really need of it, the use of flesh:" but he says; that this latter permission "leaves a heavy load on his conscience,"⁵⁹ and that he positively forbids the promiscuous use of flesh and fish. I must add, for my part, that I think the Pope has reason in this roasting of eggs. In all countries

the devil (to speak after the received theory of good and ill) seems to provide for a due diminution of health and happiness by something in the shape of meat and drink. The northern nations exasperate their bile with beer, the southern with oil, and all with butter and meat. I would swear, that Dante was a great eater of minestra. Poor Lord Castle-reagh⁶⁰ (for *you* will readily believe, that in the abstract, and setting aside his Six Acts⁶¹ and other tyrannous doings, the Liberal can pity even him) had had his buttered toast, I see, served up for breakfast the day he killed himself; a very mock-heroic help, I allow, towards a political catastrophe; but not the less likely for that. If wars have been made, and balances of power overturned, by a quarrel about a pair of gloves,⁶² or a tap of the fan from a king's mistress,⁶³ it is little to expedite the death of a minister by teasing his hypochondres⁶⁴ with fried butter.

God bless you and all friends. If I write another word, my illegitimate signature will stare the postman in the face.

P.S. Nothing which has here been said upon the faults of the Italians, can of course prejudice those finer characters among them, who, by the very excess of the corruptions and foreign oppression they see on all sides, are daily excited more and more to a patriotic wish to get rid of them. You may rest satisfied, that the multitude of these characters is daily increasing. I have just lit upon a sonnet of Alfieri's, by which it appears that the Genoese in his time were as fast bound in the Styx of superstition as of money-getting. It is not so now at any rate:—the folds are neither so strong nor so numerous.⁶⁵—The first quatrain is a fine and true picture of the city.

TO GENOA.⁶⁶

Nobil città, che delle Liguri onde
 Liede a specchio, in sembiante altera tanto,
 E, torreggiando al ciel da curve sponde,
 Fai scorno ai monti, onde hai da tergo ammanto;
 A tue moli superbe, a cui seconde
 Null'altre Italia d'innalzare ha il vanto,
 Dei cittadini tuoi chè non risponde
 L'aspetto, il cor, l'alma, o l'ingegno alquanto?

Loro sudato, che adunasti e aduni,
 Puoi seppellir con minor costo in grotte
 Ove ascondon se stessi *e i lor digiuni*.
 Tue ricchezze non spese, eppur corrotte,
 Fan dignoranza un denso velo agli uni;
 Superstizion tien gli altri; a tutti è notte.

Proud city, that by the Ligurian sea
 Sittest as at a mirror, lofty and fair;
 And towering from thy curving banks in air,
 Scornest the mountains that attend on thee;
 Why, with such structures, to which Italy
 Has nothing else, though glorious, to compare,
 Hast thou not souls, with something like a share,
 Of look, heart, spirit, and ingenuity?

Better to bury at once ('twould cost thee less)
 Thy golden-sweating heaps, where cramp'd from light,
 They and their pinch'd fasts ply their old distress.
 Thy rotting wealth, unspent, like a thick blight,
 Clouds the close eyes of these:—dark hands oppress
 With superstition those:—and all is night.

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EDITORIAL NOTES

¹ This is the third of four “Letters from Abroad” in *The Liberal*, one per issue.

² Vincent Novello (1781-1861), organist, composer and music publisher who lived in England, son of an Italian father, Giuseppe, of Piedmontese origins. Novello was Hunt’s correspondent and an admirer of his work in *The Liberal*.

³ Hunt devotes several pages of his *Autobiography* (vol. 2, 1850, 202-8) to describing the structure and treasures of the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence.

⁴ Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-91), Austrian composer, one of the most important in history. Among his better known works, the opera buffa *Le nozze di Figaro* (1786, mentioned below) and the dramma giocoso *Il dissoluto punito, ossia il Don Giovanni* (1787).

⁵ Gioachino Antonio Rossini (1792-1868), Italian composer eminently famous for his many operas. Among the most famous, the opera buffa *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (1816) and the dramma giocoso *La Cenerentola* (1817).

⁶ Mozart’s *Le nozze di Figaro* (1786).

⁷ Hunt’s reworking of the biblical expression “Tell it not in Gath” (2 Samuel 1:20), meaning not to mention something that your enemies might gloat over. Hunt’s “Gothland” probably refers not to the Swedish territory of Gothland, but to the territorial “equivalent” of the sixth-century Ostrogothic Kingdom and therefore, by metonymy and ironically, to the Austrian Empire and northern Italy. Hunt’s reworking of the proverbial expression also changes the meaning into “do not mention something to those who might resent it”: as Hunt writes below, “Germans in Italy, the lords over Italian freedom and the Italian soil, trumpet [Mozart’s] superiority over Italian composers”.

⁸ Johannes Simon Mayr (sometimes spelled Mayer, 1763-45), German composer, one of the most respected operatic composers in Italy at the time. His popularity peaked with the premiers of *Tamerlano* (1812, Milan) and *La rosa bianca e la rosa rossa* (1813, Geona).

⁹ Hunt refers to the 1793 Macartney embassy in China, led by George Earl Macartney (1737-1806), that was said to have failed owing due to his inability or refusal to perform the *kowtow* (nine ceremonial bows), or to the absence of shared political and cultural language. Hunt’s ironic comparison must rely on accounts of the Chinese appreciation (or lack thereof) of the “band” of musicians that Macartney brought along on the embassy. One of these accounts reports how “the Chinese seemed wholly unmoved by the perfect execution of the best pieces, of the best composers in Europe” (Charles Burney, “Chinese music”, in *The Cyclopaedia; or, Universal Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Literature*, vol. vii, ed. Abraham Rees, London: 1819, sig. 4S3’).

¹⁰ Quotation from John Milton’s pastoral poem *L’Allegro* (1645), 137.

¹¹ Quotations from John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667, book V, 351-3, 380-5).

¹² Giovanni Paisiello (or Paesiello, 1740-1816), Italian operatic composer whose influence was decisive to Mozart and Rossini’s work. His masterpiece, *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (1782), is now only infrequently staged.

¹³ “Il mio ben quando verrà” is an aria in the first act of Giovanni Paisiello’s *Nina, o sia La pazza per amore* (1789).

¹⁴ Loose quotation from John Denham’s poem “Coopers-Hill”: “Whose *foam* is Amber, and their Gravel Gold”.

¹⁵ Quotation from Falstaff in William Shakespeare’s *Henry IV, part 2*, IV.ii.129.

¹⁶ “The wine called in German *Hochheimer*, produced at Hochheim on the Main; hence, commercially extended to other white German wines”, *OED*, “hock (*n.*4)”.

¹⁷ Georg Christoph Wagenseil (1715-77), Austrian composer, worked at court from 1739 to his death.

¹⁸ Joseph II (1741-90), Holy Roman Emperor (1765-90).

¹⁹ *L’Enlèvement au sérail* (“Die Entführung aus dem Serail”, 1782), is a *singspiel* in three acts by Mozart.

²⁰ Stendhal [Marie-Henri Beyle], *The Lives of Haydn and Mozart, with observations on Metastasio, and on the present state of music in France and Italy*. Translated from the French of L.A.C. Bombet, London: John Murray, 1818 (quotations from pp. 342-43, 389).

²¹ *The Quarterly Review* (1809-1967), periodical launched and published by John Murray and William Gifford as tory counterblast to the successful, Whiggish *Edinburgh Review*.

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²² In *The Quarterly Review*, “Haydn attached himself to the society of Signora *Boselli*, a lovely singer in Prince Esterhazy’s orchestra” (October 1817, 79).

²³ *The Quarterly Review*, October 1817, 79.

²⁴ *The Quarterly Review*, October 1817, 79.

²⁵ Theological phrase meaning “outside the chair of Peter”, that is, not in one’s official capacity, as a private person. In this case, for Hunt, out of character for a conservative, traditionalist journal.

²⁶ A Christian statement of belief named after the theologian Athanasius of Alexandria (296/98-373).

²⁷ A canzonet by the 17th century composer Henry Youll (or Youell).

²⁸ The sovereigns of Austria, Prussia, Russia, Spain, the United Kingdom, Portugal, Sweden, Sardinia, and a number of German states that defeated and exiled Napoleon.

²⁹ Friedrich von Gentz (1764-1832), Prussian-Austrian diplomat, imperial councillor to the Emperor Francis, and advisor to Von Metternich. He took part in the Congress of Vienna in 1814, and in December 1822, shortly before Hunt wrote the present letter, in the Congress of Verona.

³⁰ Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), philosopher, jurist, and reformer. His ambitions as codifier of laws resulted in an involvement with early liberalism, especially in Spain, Portugal, Greece, and Latin America. This involvement began with the *Trienio liberal* (1820-23), the three-year period during which a liberal government ruled Spain under the reinstated 1812 Cádiz Constitution.

³¹ In some copies, misprint for “His”.

³² In Roman mythology, goddess of love, beauty, and desire.

³³ “Of huge dimensions; immense; gigantic”, *OED*, “Brobdingnagian (*adj.* & *n.*)”. Adjective deriving from Brobdingnag, the giants’ land in Jonathan Swift’s 1726 *Gulliver’s Travels*.

³⁴ Main course made with (Hunt’s) *macaroni*; similar to present-day *pasta*.

³⁵ Terms indicating currency.

³⁶ In the New Testament, money and greed personified, and in stark opposition to God.

³⁷ “A worshipper of Mammon; a person dedicated to the acquisition of wealth”, *OED*, “Mammonite (*n.*)”.

³⁸ Dagon was a major deity in the Philistine pantheon. A statue of Dagon is mentioned in 1 Samuel 5:1-7, where it falls to the ground and breaks when the Ark of the Covenant is placed in its temple. Although there is no trace of the inside of Dagon being “formed” by money, it is the Ark which is plated in gold, inside and out (Exodus 25:11). Hunt is arguably conflating the two.

³⁹ Vincent Novello’s father was Italian, from Piedmont. A pale is a district or territory within determined bounds, or subject to a particular jurisdiction, in this case the Pope’s.

⁴⁰ Pope Pius VII (1800-23).

⁴¹ In *Church of Englandism and its catechism examined* [...], London: Effingham Wilson, 1818, Jeremy Bentham claims that “a Church of England education” had as objective “the securing of an *habit* of insincerity throughout life” (xxi-xxii).

⁴² Hunt might have been thinking of the following excerpt: “Religion coexists, as it were, in the mind of an Italian Catholic with a faith in that of which all men have the most certain knowledge. It is interwoven with the whole fabric of life. It is adoration, faith, submission, penitence, blind admiration; not a rule for moral conduct. It has no necessary connexion with any one virtue” (Percy Bysshe Shelley, “Preface”, in *The Cenci*, London, 1819, xi).

⁴³ In some copies, misprint for “that”.

⁴⁴ The practice of attending a married woman as *cicisbeo*, her recognized gallant or *cavalier servente*.

⁴⁵ Jeremy Bentham, *The Church of England Catechism Examined*, in *Church-of-Englandism and its catechism examined* [...], 49.

⁴⁶ Unidentified reference.

⁴⁷ Vittorio Alfieri (1749-1803), Italian poet and dramatist, forerunner of the ideals of Italian Risorgimento. He was author of poem collections (*Rime*, 1804), an autobiography (*Vita*), and nineteen tragedies (1776-86), among which *Saul* (1788) and *Mirra* (1792). His treatises *Della tirannide* (1777) and *Del principe e delle lettere* (1778-86) are concerned with freedom and the struggle against tyranny.

⁴⁸ At the Royal Exchange, on the stock exchange. The Royal Exchange in Capel Court, modelled on the Antwerp Bourse, was built by Thomas Gresham in 1565-7 in the City of London.

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⁴⁹ Reference to the Spanish *liberales* of the *Trienio liberal* (1820-23), the three-year period during which a liberal government ruled Spain under the reinstated 1812 Cádiz Constitution.

⁵⁰ Misprint for “ingiusti”.

⁵¹ Misprint for “ladri”.

⁵² Vittorio Alfieri, “Satira decimaseconda. Il commercio”, in *Satire* (1777-98).

⁵³ The possessive form of “it” without apostrophe (“its”) is only recent; until the 19th century the form “it’s” was very diffused.

⁵⁴ See n. 34 above.

⁵⁵ A native or original inhabitant of ancient Canaan prior to the Israelite conquest. Canaan was the forefather of the various nations who peopled the seacoast of Palestine. In Job 41:6 and Proverbs 31:24, the Hebrew word for Canaanite is used as a synonym for merchant.

⁵⁶ *Gazzetta di Genova*, 8th February 1823. The article is nevertheless dated 8th January.

⁵⁷ “N.S.”, *i.e.* “Nostro Signore”.

⁵⁸ The irony of using the Italian word “nutrito” in this context – correctly translated as “nourished” – is not lost on Hunt.

⁵⁹ *I.e.* The Archbishop’s conscience.

⁶⁰ Robert Stewart (1769-1822), Viscount Castlereagh, British statesman and politician. He committed suicide on 12th August 1822. See n. 27 “Advertisement to the Second Volume”.

⁶¹ In 1819, Castlereagh supported the infamous Six Acts, suppressing any form of meeting that would foster radical reforms, in response to the Peterloo Massacre (16th August 1819).

⁶² Unidentified reference.

⁶³ Unidentified reference, possibly to an historical episode involving Madame de Pompadour and King Louis XV. The use of hand fans evolved into the elaborate, intimate language of “fanology” in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe.

⁶⁴ “Either of the two regions of the upper abdomen located beneath the ribs on either side of the epigastrium”, *OED*, “hypochondre (*n.*)”.

⁶⁵ In Greek and Roman mythology, the Styx is a river in the underworld. In *Inferno* by Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), it forms a marshy lake, the “fifth round” where the wrathful are punished. Despite this, the fact that Hunt’s Styx binds the Genoese with “strong” and “numerous folds” – though not as strong and numerous as in Alfieri’s time – suggests a debt towards Dantesque imagery.

⁶⁶ Vittorio Alfieri, *Rime varie*, LXXXV.