

TALES FROM THE OPERAS

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Tales from the operas by George Frederick Pardon

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GEORGE FREDERICK PARDON

**TALES FROM
THE OPERAS**



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EDITED BY

GEORGE FREDERICK PARDON.

AUTHOR OF "THE FACES IN THE FIRE, ETC., ETC., ETC."



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M DCCC LXIV.

TO
MAX MARETZEK,

THIS
AMERICAN EDITION OF AN ENGLISH WORK
IS
INSCRIBED.

P R E F A C E .

THE want of a book, which, while preserving all the force and spirit of the original Operas, attempts the relation of the several narratives in a graphic and pleasing style, has often, probably, been felt by the patrons of the lyric drama. To supply such a want, and to provide all classes of readers with an accurate and succinct knowledge of the incidents on which are founded our most celebrated Operas, is the object of the following pages. Whether the experiment has been successfully carried out, the public, and the critics, must decide. Few who have listened to the tragic story of Lucrezia ; few who have wept with Norma or laughed with Figaro, but will, it is believed, welcome their old favorites of the theatre in their new literary costume. As it was manifestly impossible to unravel the plots of *all* the famous Operas in one little book, only such of them have been detailed as are intimately known to American audiences.

It is but right to add that these tales have had their origin, mainly in the published Books of the Operas, aided always by a familiar acquaintance with the Operas themselves, as they have been placed on the boards of European and American theatres.

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TALES FROM THE OPERAS.

LUCREZIA BORGIA. (DONIZETTI.)

CHAPTER I.

When Satan fell, some of the essence of the god-head pityingly clung about him — hence those of men whose faces turn towards the darkness have ever something of the god within them, which raises them above the poor animals who eat and die.—*Montaigne.*

THE Venice of nearly four hundred years ago was a great, splendid, gay, and powerful city. Gold was every day showered into the coffers of its merchants from all parts of the earth, and every night there was feasting, laughing, and dancing in Venice, the richest and the gayest city in the world.

On the night when our story opens was being held at the Palazzo Barberigo a masqued ball. All Venice, masqued, was there. The lamps hanging in the trees, laughed at the water as it threw back the gay colored rays of light which kissed it, in tremulous softness and beauty.

And there below on the still canal, the Giudecca, glided the silent black gondolas, bearing gaily dressed cavaliers and dames to and from the fête.

So silently the gondolas passed, that not a soul upon the shore knew a boat had gone by, a boat, perhaps, from which peered out a jealous eye.

The gardens of the palace were large, and ever when the music ceased, there were seen in all parts of it gay masquers, courting, talking, singing, flirting, or watching,

Among the guests was Gennaro, young and beautiful as the nights of Italy. With him was one of the great Orsini, even younger than himself, and far gayer. Nay, he was but a boy. These two were ever together, in peace or on the battle-field, at fêtes, or quietly at home.

So now amidst the group wherever walked Orsini, Gennaro had a place. These two as they sauntered along with their friends, all either carrying their masks in their hands, or else tied to their belts, these two were deploring, and being pitied, for they were to leave Venice on the morrow.

"Alas!" said one, "You will never like Ferrara, as you like the poorest street in Venice."

"But, still," cried another, "'tis something to form part of an ambassador's suite."

"Faith," cried a third, "I would sooner be as I am and in Venice."

"Let me tell you Signors," said a fourth, who was called Gubetta, a Spaniard, and not in good repute, "let me tell you the court of Alfonzo is superb, and as for Lucrezia Borgia" —

"What!" cried one, "name *her*, here, at a fête?"

"Pray ye be silent," cried another.

"The Borgia," said a third, "I abhor her very name."

"In faith," added another, "'twould not be saying much for thee to say that thou lovdst her."

"As for us," said the Orsini, whom they called Maffio, "we should dread her more than any of you, if the sorcerer spoke truly."

"Again a tale, Maffio," said Gennaro. "Leave the Borgia alone, who cares to hear of her."

"No, no, Gennaro, let us hear the tale. Go on Maffio."

"Then I'll fain go to sleep," said Gennaro. "Faith I could fall asleep standing, when Orsini begins his long tales."

"Signors, 'tis a good tale, though my friend has heard it before. See, now, he has flung himself down on that seat. Well,—well, 'tis but two ears the less. In the fatal battle of Rimini I was wounded; and while lying on the ground, and dying as I thought, Gennaro found me, helped me to horse, and bore me in safety from the