

**THE OPERA: VIEWS
BEFORE AND PEEPS
BEHIND THE CURTAIN**

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The opera: views before and peeps behind the curtain by Sedgley Marvel

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SEDGLEY MARVEL

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VIEWS BEFORE

AND

PEEPS BEHIND THE CURTAIN.

"Some wandering touches—some reflected light—
Some flying stroke alone can hit it right."

"——— Elysian scenes,
And crystal domes, and angels in toachines."—POPE.

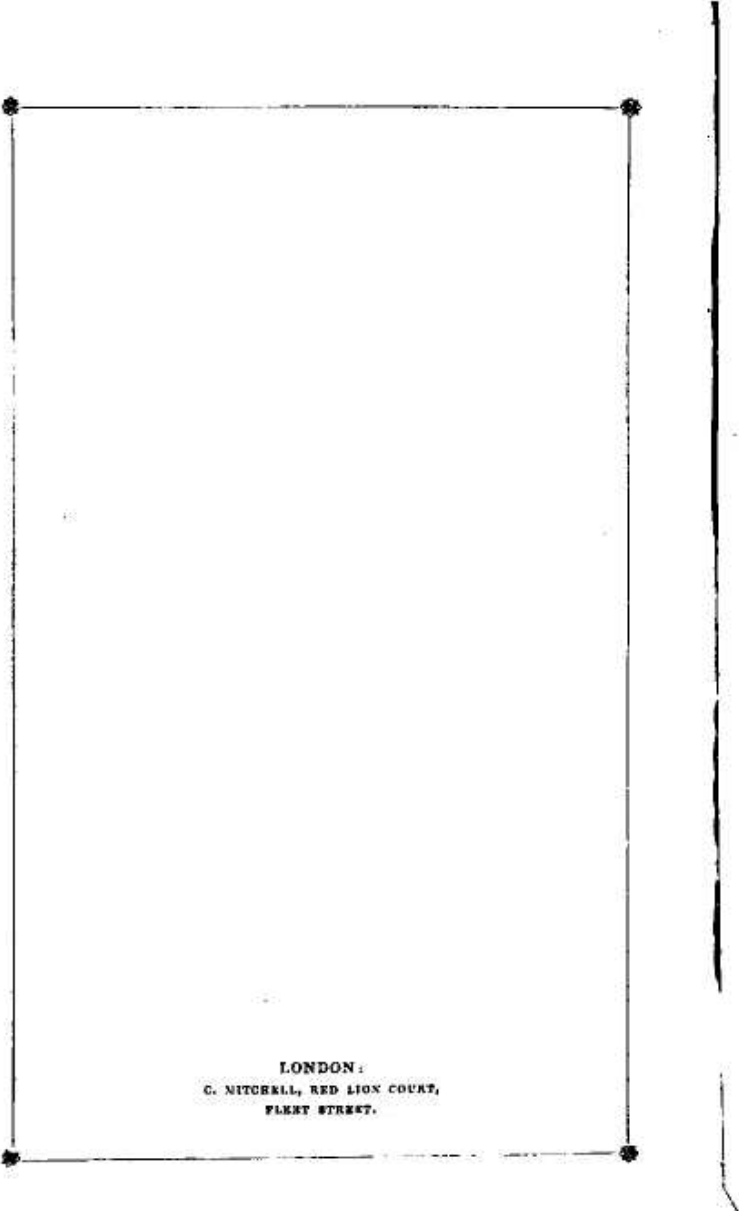


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THE OPERA :

VIEWS BEFORE, AND PEEPS BEHIND THE CURTAIN.

Or this suggestive subject we shall profess to give a new view. No reader need expect a history of the Opera—an account of its chances and changes—its managements and its miseries—its “pounds, shillings and pence” peculiarities. Like a skirmishing detachment striking out a new path from the advance of an army—ordered on particular service, and lightly equipped for the active duties to which it is destined, shall we separate ourselves from the “heavies,” and commence operations far in advance, prepared alike to hit or miss, but agile and lively in either case.

One advantage we can assure our readers of,—laying our hand on our editorial heart to make the

intimation the more emphatic ! The slides of our magic lantern were painted amidst the scenes which they undertake to represent. Every figure may be depended upon as faithful to the original "model," so far as the steadiness of the artist's hand, copying from the object before him, could secure.

We maintain that ours is a serious subject ; and we demand serious attention to it. The lighter as well as the darker angles of the grand polygon of life are man's business. We are all the better for a variety of impressions ; nay our severer qualities are deepened by contrasting them.

Foe as I am (for I shall drop the stiff and distant "we") to a general revolution in mind, or in anything else, I yet perceive clearly enough the advantage of alteration now and then. We are born to improve ; and improvement is change. Prejudice at first stigmatises it as innovation. We afterwards grow into it as improvement ;—nay, wonder at ourselves and our previous short sight. We are better for a shifting of ourselves now and then—a transference into some other guise ; though let it be understood we ought to carry our mould with us, and construct upon a base already provided. Let us never lose sight of that history of feeling chronicled in our lives ;—that education

of the mind which has formed us as we are, living, breathing, thinking creatures. The moon has her phases;—but she is still the moon. To never change is stagnation. To be constantly changing is to be nothing—is to have only a piece of a character.

I feel something as should the reverend though mistaken owl that—educated amongst old grey ruins and glimpses of moonshine, his repose amidst shadows concealed by curtains of ivy from inquisitive glowworms—precipitates himself in a moment of infatuation upon the brightness of the noonday. So do I feel when athwart me stealeth the recollection that I have, “with these presents,” (as the lawyers phrase it,) undertaken to chalk out a sketch of that castle of clouds, guiltless of scaling-ladders of real hard wood—the London Opera.

Therefore is it with no unreasonable dread about me, and no slight fear that I may fail in the bold task, that in my mind's eye I stand before this cloudy fortress. I see it raised so much above me;—I behold it so inaccessibly suspended in its own rosy atmosphere, moving through which are the broad bright rays—the strong and arrowy beams,

“With their long-levelled rules of streaming light,”
of the magnificent sun (“glorious Apollo”!) him-

self; I contemplate with such excited wonder its airy bastions and embattled walls—its gleaming turrets and extended glow of buttresses, that truly I am “afeard,” and the heart seemeth to turn to water in my bosom! I see its banners glittering with the thousand devices of fashion—I see the walls peopled in long array with the brightest legion of the fairy army, their white hands armed for deadly strife with flowers for cannon-balls, and beside them such annihilating ammunition as there can be no facing—baskets of *bouquets*, which latter, I too quickly gather, the lightning-like finger and thumb of these muslin divinities, with malicious nimbleness and graceful dexterity, would soon reduce into a killing shower of roses and lilies! Such fearful odds there is no withstanding. Even if I were disposed for battle, my old grey standard and its pewter moon must sink into the inglorious dust before the starry pennons of the cloud of my dancing opponents. The combat would be an old grey hermit fighting with the fairies. Long life and all honour be to their silver slippers! May they skip for many years yet, and touch out their figures of flame over the otherwise dingy and too solid and heavy stage of our London commercial stupidity and arithmetical utilitarianism!

But down must I come from my clouds—straight down if I can upon a shining gold wire—if I wish people not to mistake me for a wildfire, or a wreath of red vapour at least, with perhaps neither a top nor tail, only an electric brush of flame. I must

“Speak more like a man of this world”

if I desire to do more than give only a picture in the manner of that eccentric professor of the pencil, Turner (he of the fiery earth and the green sky) of that kingdom of bright shadows, the Italian Opera.

Once or twice in the season the Opera doors receive me, not as an invited guest, though I hint that the “powers which be” would not find me ungrateful for a friendly beckon of that kind, as an old man, and moreover a modest man who waits to be asked. But on the occasions that I visit theatres I pay; whether therein prevail the “illustrated dialogues,” as which, I think, we should not be far off in characterising modern comedies and plays, or the tuneful troubles with which opera stars astonish a generally comfortable and complacently listening public, whose best satisfaction ought to be that they have no daggers and poison bowls to be mixed up with their history;—a pri-