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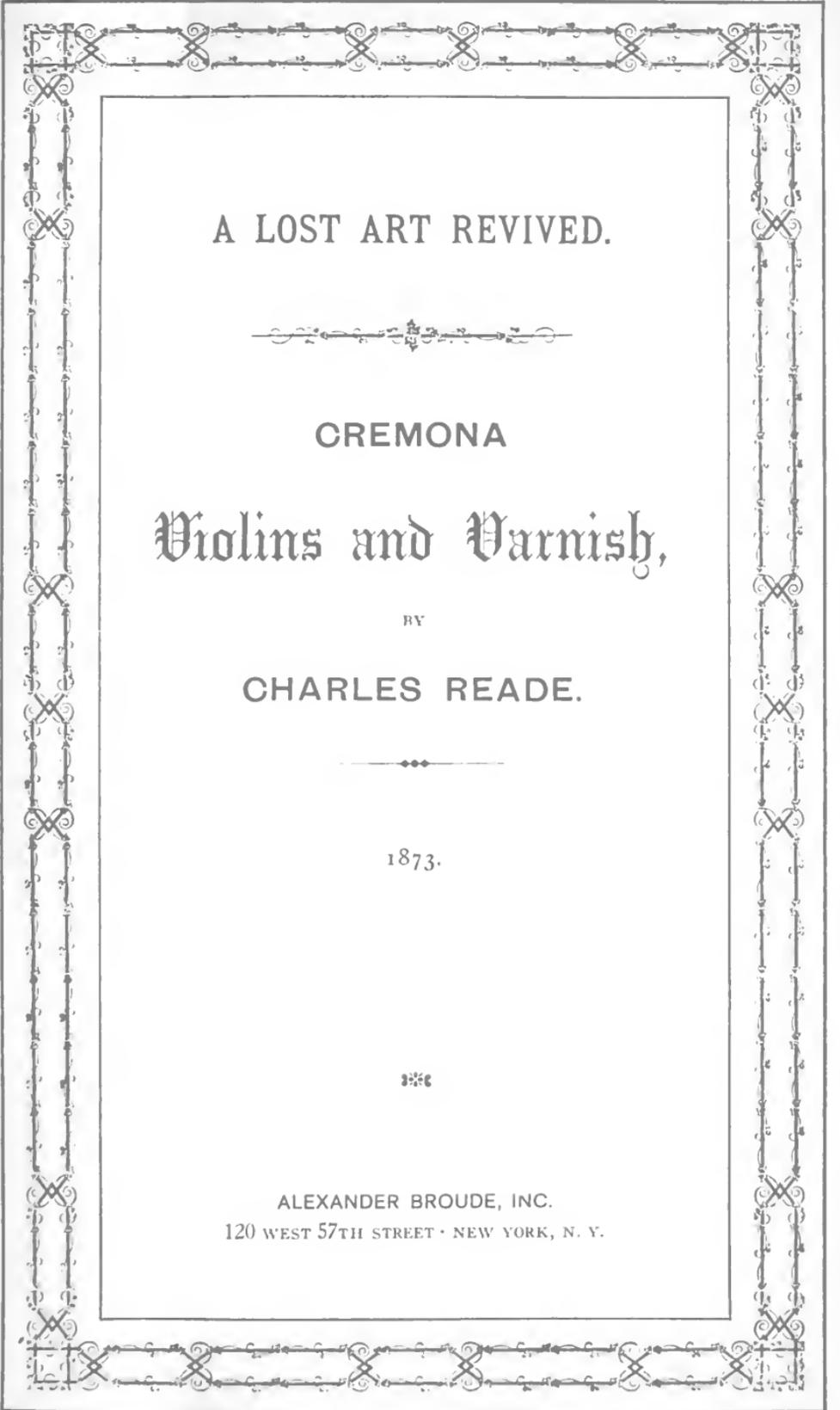
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A LOST ART REVIVED.



CREMONA

Violins and Varnish,

BY

CHARLES READE.



1873.



ALEXANDER BROUDE, INC.

120 WEST 57TH STREET • NEW YORK, N. Y.

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Cremona Violins.

— ♦ ♦ ♦ —

FOUR LETTERS DESCRIPTIVE

OF

THOSE EXHIBITED IN 1873

AT THE

South Kensington Museum.

— ♦ ♦ ♦ —
ALSO

GIVING THE DATA FOR PRODUCING

The True Varnishes

USED BY THE

GREAT CREMONA MAKERS.

— ♦ ♦ ♦ —
BY

CHARLES READE.

— ♦ ♦ ♦ —
A Facsimile Reprint

ALEXANDER BROUDE, INC.

120 WEST 57TH STREET · NEW YORK, N. Y.

INTRODUCTION.

THE following Letters, by Mr. CHARLES READE, were first published in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, on the 19th, 24th, 27th, and 31st of August, 1872, and are now reprinted by permission of the editor of that paper, and the proof sheets have passed through the hands of their author for this publication of them.

To the artist and connoisseur, the information afforded in these letters is of permanent value and of the utmost importance, as the exhibition of musical instruments at South Kensington in 1872 had brought together some of the finest examples of stringed instruments, made by the great Cremona makers.

And it is most fortunate that Mr. READE has devoted himself to the task of examining and criticising the four stringed instruments, being, as he is, one of the very best judges we have ever had.

It is only very long experience, coupled with the examination of the finest instruments, that enables the best judges to speak with certainty as to the genuineness of violins; but both artists and amateurs will have their stock of knowledge largely increased by a careful study of these letters; and I trust this will be accepted as my apology for the reprinting of them.

GEORGE H. M. MUNTZ,

Birchfield.

June, 1873.

1546299

Cremona Fiddles.

Reprinted from the PALL MALL GAZETTE, August 19th, 1872.

UNDER this heading, for want of a better, let me sing the four stringed instruments that were made in Italy from about 1560 to 1760, and varnished with high-coloured yet transparent varnishes, the secret of which, known to numberless families in 1745, had vanished off the earth by 1760, and has now for fifty years baffled the laborious researches of violin makers, amateurs, and chemists. That lost art I will endeavour to restore to the world through the medium of your paper. But let me begin with other points of connoisseurship, illustrating them as far as possible by the specimens on show at the South Kensington Museum.

The modern orchestra uses four stringed instruments, played with the bow: the smallest is the king; its construction is a marvel of art; and, as we are too apt to underrate familiar miracles, let me analyze this wooden paragon, by way of showing what great architects in wood those Italians were, who invented this instrument and its fellows at Brescia and Bologna. The violin itself, apart from its mere accessories, consists of a scroll or head, weighing an ounce or two, a slim neck, a thin back, that ought to be made of Swiss sycamore, a thin belly of Swiss deal, and sides of Swiss sycamore no thicker than a sixpence. This little wooden shell delivers an amount of sound that is simply monstrous; but, to do that, it must submit to a strain of which the public has no conception. Let us suppose two Claimants to take opposite ends of a violin-string, and to pull against each other with all their weight; the tension of the string so produced would not equal the tension which is created by the screw in raising that string to concert pitch. Consider, then, that not one but four strings tug night and day, like a team of demons, at the wafer-like sides of this wooden shell. Why does it not collapse?

Well, it would collapse with a crash, long before the strings reached concert pitch, if the violin was not a wonder inside as well as out. The problem was to withstand that severe pressure without crippling the vast vibration by solidity. The inventors approached the difficulty thus: they inserted six blocks of lime, or some light, wood; one of these blocks at the lower end of the violin, one at the upper, and one at each corner—the corner blocks very small and triangular; the top and bottom blocks much larger, and shaped like a capital D, the straight line of the block lying close to the sides, and the curved line outwards. Then they slightly connected all the blocks by two sets of linings; these linings are not above a quarter of an inch deep, I suppose, and no thicker than an old penny piece, but they connect those six blocks and help to distribute the resistance.

Even so the shell would succumb in time; but now the inventor killed two birds with one stone; he cunningly diverted a portion of the pressure by the very means that were necessary to the sound. He placed the bridge on the belly of the violin, and that raised the strings out of the direct line of tension, and relieved the lateral pressure at the expense of the belly. But as the belly is a weak arch, it must now be strengthened in its turn. Accordingly, a bass-bar was glued horizontally to the belly under one foot of the bridge. This bass-bar is a very small piece of deal, about the length and half the size of an old-fashioned lead pencil, but, the ends being tapered off, it is glued on to the belly, with a spring in it, and supports the belly magically. As a proof how nicely all these things were balanced, the bass-bar of Gasparo da Salo, the Amati, and Stradiuarius being a little shorter and shallower than a modern bass-bar, did admirably for their day, yet will not do now. Our raised concert pitch has clapped on more tension, and straightway you must remove the bass-bar even of Stradiuarius, and substitute one a little longer and deeper, or your Cremona sounds like a strung frying-pan.

Remove now from the violin, which for two centuries has endured this strain, the finger-board, tail-piece, tail-pin and screws—since these are the instruments or vehicles of tension, not materials of resistance—and weigh the violin itself. It weighs, I suppose about twenty ounces: and it has fought hundredweights of pressure for centuries. A marvel of construction, it is also a marvel of sound; it is audible farther off than the gigantic pianoforte, and its tones in a master's hand go to the

heart of man. It can be prostituted to the performance of difficulties, and often is; but that is not its fault. Genius can make your very heart dance with it, or your eyes to fill; and Niel Gow was no romancer, but only a deeper critic than his fellows, when, being asked what was the true test of a player, he replied, "A MON IS A PLAYER WHEN HE CAN GAR HIMSEL GREET WI HIS FEDDLE."

Asking forgiveness for this preamble, I proceed to enquire what country invented these four-stringed and four-cornered instruments?

I understand that France and Germany have of late raised some pretensions. Connoisseurship and etymology are both against them. Etymology suffices. The French terms are all derived from the Italian, and that disposes of France. I will go into German pretensions critically, if any one will show me as old and specific a German word as *viola* and *violino*, and the music composed for those German instruments. "Fiddle" is of vast antiquity; but pearshaped, till Italy invented the four corners, on which sound as well as beauty depends.

THE ORDER OF INVENTION.—Etymology decides with unerring voice that the *violoncello* was invented after the *violono* or double-bass, and connoisseurship proves by two distinct methods that it was invented after the violin. 1st, the critical method: it is called after the *violon*, yet is made on the plan of the violin, with arched back and long inner bought. 2nd, the historical method: a *violoncello* made by the inventors of the violin is incomparably rare, and this instrument is disproportionately rare even up to the year 1610. *Violino* being a derivative of *viola* would seem to indicate that the violin followed the tenor; but this taken alone is dangerous; for *viola* is not only a specific term for the tenor, but a generic name that was in Italy a hundred years before a tenor with four strings was made. To go then to connoisseurship—I find that I have fallen in with as many tenors as violins by Gasparo da Salo, who worked from about 1555 to 1600, and not quite so many by Gio Paolo Maggini, who began a few years later. The violin being the king of all these instruments, I think there would not be so many tenors made as violins, when once the violin had been invented. Moreover, between the above dates came Corelli, a composer and violinist. He would naturally create a crop of violins. Finding the tenors and violins of Gasparo da Salo

about equal in number, I am driven to the conclusion that the tenor had an unfair start—in other words, was invented first. I add to this that true four-stringed tenors by Gasparo da Salo exist, though very rare, made with only two corners, which is a more primitive form than any violin by the same maker appears in. For this and some other reasons, I have little doubt the viola preceded the violin by a very few years. What puzzles me more is to time the violon, or, as we childishly call it (after its known descendant), the double-bass. If I was so presumptuous as to trust to my eye alone, I should say it was the first of them all. It is an instrument which does not seem to mix with these four-stringed upstarts, but to belong to a much older family—viz. the *viola d'amore*, *da gamba*, &c. In the first place, it has not four strings; secondly, it has not an arched back, but a flat back, with a peculiar shoulder, copied from the *viola da gamba*; thirdly, the space between the upper and lower corners in the early specimens is ludicrously short. And it is hard to believe that an eye which had observed the graceful proportions of the tenor and violin could be guilty of such a wretched little inner-bought as you find in a double-bass of Brescia. *Per contra*, it must be admitted, first, that the sound-hole of a Brescian double-bass seems copied from the four-stringed tribe, and not at all from the elder family; secondly, that the violin and tenor are instruments of melody or harmony, but the violon of harmony only. This is dead against its being invented until after the instruments to which it is subsidiary. Man invents only to supply a want. Thus, then, it is. First, the large tenor, played between the knees; then the violin, played under the chin; then (if not the first of them all) the small double-bass: then, years after the violin, the violoncello; then the full-sized double-bass; then, *longo intervalle*, the small tenor, played under the chin.

However, I do not advance these conclusions as infallible. The highest evidence on some of these points must surely lie in manuscript music of the sixteenth century, much of which is preserved in the libraries of Italy; and, if Mr. Hatton or any musician learned in the history of his art will tell me for what stringed instruments the immediate predecessors of Corelli, and Corelli at his commencement, marked their compositions, I shall receive the communication with gratitude and respect. I need hardly say that nothing but the MS. or the *editio princeps* is evidence in so nice a matter.

The first known maker of the true tenor, and probably of the violin, was Gasparo da Salo. The student who has read the valuable work put forth by Monsieur Fétis and Monsieur Vuillaume might imagine that I am contradicting them here; for they quote as "luthiers"—antecedent to Gasparo da Salo—Kerlino, Duiffoprugcar, Linarolli, Dardelli, and others. These men, I grant you, worked long before Gasparo da Salo; I even offer an independent proof, and a very simple one. I find that their genuine tickets are in Gothic letters, whereas those of Gasparo da Salo are in Roman type; but I know the works of those makers, and they did not make tenors nor violins. They made instruments of the older family, viole d'amore, da gamba, &c. Their *true* tickets are all black-letter tickets, and not one such ticket exists in any old violin, nor in a single genuine tenor. The fact is that the tenor is an instrument of unfixed dimensions, and can easily be reconstructed out of different viole made in an earlier age. There are innumerable examples of this, and happily the Exhibition furnishes two. There are two curious instruments strung as tenors, Nos. 114 and 134 in the catalogue: one is given to Joan Carlino, and the year 1452; the other to Linaro, and 1563. These two instruments were both made by one man, Ventura Linarolli, of Venice (misspelt by M. Fétis, Venturi), about the year 1520. Look at the enormous breadth between the sound holes; that shows they were made to carry six or seven strings. Now look at the scrolls; both of them new, because the old scrolls were primitive things with six or seven screws; it is only by such reconstruction that a tenor or violin can be set up as anterior to Gasparo da Salo. No. 114 is, however, a real gem of antiquity; the wood and varnish exquisite, and far fresher than nine Amatis out of ten. It is well worthy the special attention of collectors. It was played *upon* the knee.

There are in the collection two instruments by Gasparo da Salo worth especial notice; a tenor, No. 142, and a violono, or primitive double bass, 199. The tenor is one of his later make, yet has a grand primitive character. Observe, in particular, the scroll all round, and the amazing inequality between the bass sound-hole and the purlling of the belly; this instrument and the grand tenor assigned to Maggini, and lent by Madame Rislér, offer a point of connoisseurship worthy the student's attention. The back of each instrument looks full a

century younger than the belly. But this is illusory. The simple fact is that the tenors of that day when not in use were not nursed in cases, but hung up on a nail, belly outwards. Thus the belly caught the sun of Italy, the dust, &c, and its varnish was often withered to a mere resin, while the back and sides escaped. This is the key to that little mystery. Observe the scroll of the violono 199! How primitive it is all round: at the back a flat cut, in front a single flute, copied from *its true parent*, the viola da gamba. This scroll, taken in conjunction with the size and other points, marks an instrument considerably anterior to No. 200. As to the other double-basses in the same case, they are assigned by their owners to Gasparo da Salo, because they are double purfled and look older than Cremonese violins; but these indicia are valueless; all Cremona and Milan double-purfled the violon as often as not; and the constant exposure to air and dust gives the violono a colour of antiquity that is delusive. In no one part of the business is knowledge of work so necessary. The violoni 201-2-3, are all fine Italian instruments. The small violon 202, that stands by the side of the Gasparo da Salo 199, has the purfling of Andreas Amatus, the early sound-hole of Andreas Amatus; the exquisite corners and finish of Andreas Amatus; the finely cut scroll of Andreas Amatus; at the back of scroll the neat shell and square shoulder of Andreas Amatus; and the back, instead of being made of any rubbish that came to hand after the manner of Brescia, is of true fiddle wood, cut the bastard way of the grain, which was the taste of the Amati; and, finally, it is varnished with the best varnish of the Amati. Under these circumstances, I hope I shall not offend the owner by refusing it the inferior name of Gasparo da Salo. It is one of the brightest gems of the collection, and not easily to be matched in Europe.



SECOND LETTER.

AUGUST 24th, 1872.

GIO PAOLO MAGGINI is represented at the Kensington Museum by an excellent violin, No. 111, very fine in workmanship and varnish, but as to the model a trifle too much hollowed at the sides, and so a little inferior to some of his violins, and to the violin No. 70, the model of which, like many of the Brescian school, is simple and perfect. (Model, as applied to a violin, is a term quite distinct from outline.) In No. 70 both belly and back are modelled with the simplicity of genius, by even gradation, from a centre, which is the highest part, down to all the borders of the instrument. The world has come back to this primitive model after trying a score, and prejudice gives the whole credit to Joseph Guarnerius, of Cremona. As to the date of No. 70, the neatness and, above all, the slimness of the sound-hole, mark, I think, a period slightly posterior to Gasparo da Salo. This slim sound-hole is an advance, not a retrogression. The gaping sound-holes of Gasparo da Salo and Maggini were their one great error. They were not only ugly; they lessened the ring by allowing the vibration to escape from the cavity too quickly. No. 60, assigned to Duiffopruggar and a fabulous antiquity, was made by some 'prentice hand in the seventeenth century; but No. 70 would adorn any collection, being an old masterpiece of Brescia or Bologna.

THE SCHOOL OF CREMONA.—Andreas Amatus was more than thirty years old, and an accomplished maker of the older viole, when the violin was invented in Brescia or Bologna. He does not appear to have troubled his head with the new instrument for some years; one proof more that new they were. They would not at first materially influence his established trade; the old and new family ran side by side. Indeed it took the violin tribe two centuries to drive out the viola da gamba. However, in due course, Andreas Amatus set to work on violins.

He learned from the Brescian school the only things they could teach a workman so superior—viz. the four corners and the sound-hole. This Brescian sound-hole stuck to him all his days; but what he had learned in his original art remained by him too. The collection contains three specimens of his handiwork: Violin 202, Mrs. Jay's violin—with the modern head—erroneously assigned to Antonius and Hieronymus; and violoncello No. 183. There are also traces of his hand in the fine tenor 139. In the three instruments just named the purfling is composed in best proportions, so that the white comes out with vigour; it is then inlaid with great neatness. The violoncello is the gem. Its outline is grace itself: the four exquisite curves coincide in one pure and serpentine design. This bass is a violin soufflé; were it shown at a distance it would take the appearance of a most elegant violin; the best basses of Stradiarius alone will stand this test. (Apply it to the Venetian masterpiece in the same case.) The scroll is perfect in design and chiselled as by a sculptor; the purfling is quite as fine as Stradiarius; it is violin purfling, yet this seems to add elegance without meanness. It is a masterpiece of Cremona all but the hideous sound-hole that alone connects this master with the Brescian school.

His sons Antonius and Hieronymus soon cured themselves of that grotesque sound-hole, and created a great school. They chose better wood and made richer varnish, and did many beautiful things. Nevertheless, they infected Italian fiddle-making with a fatal error. They were the first SCOPERS. Having improved on Brescia in outline and details, they assumed too hastily that they could improve on her model. So they scooped out the wood about the sound-holes and all round, weakening the connection of the centre with the sides of the belly, and checking the fulness of the vibration. The German school carried this vice much further, but the Amati went too far, and inoculated a hundred fine makers with a wrong idea. It took Stradiarius himself fifty-six years to get entirely clear of it.

The brothers Amati are represented in this collection, first, by several tenors that once were noble things, but have been cut on the old system, which was downright wicked. It is cutting in the statutory sense, viz. cutting and maiming. These ruthless men just sawed a crescent off the top, and another off the bottom, and the result is a thing with the inner bought of a giant

and the upper and lower bought of a dwarf. If one of these noble instruments survives in England uncut, I implore the owner to spare it; to play on a £5 tenor, with the Amati set before him to look at while he plays. Luckily the scrolls remain to us; and let me draw attention to the scroll of 136. Look at the back of this scroll, and see how it is chiselled—the centre line in relief, how sharp, distinct, and fine; this line is obtained by chiselling out the wood on both sides with a single tool, which fiddle-makers call a gauge, and there is nothing but the eye to guide the hand.

There are two excellent violins of this make in the collection—Mrs. Jay's, and the violin of Mr. C. J. Read, No. 75. This latter is the large pattern of those makers, and is more elegant than what is technically called the grand Amati, but not so striking. To appreciate the merit and the defect of this instrument, compare it candidly with the noble Stradiuarius Amatisé that hangs by its side, numbered 82. Take a back view first. In outline they are much alike. In the details of work the Amati is rather superior; the border of the Stradiuarius is more exquisite; but the Amati scroll is better pointed and gauged more cleanly, the purfling better composed for effect, and the way that purfling is let in, especially at the corners, is incomparable. On the front view you find the Amati violin is scooped out here and there, a defect the Stradiuarius has avoided. I prefer the Stradiuarius sound-hole *per se*; but, if you look at the curves of these two violins, you will observe that the Amati sound-holes are in strict harmony with the curves; and the whole thing the product of one original mind that saw its way.

Nicholas Amatus, the son of Hieronymus, owes his distinct reputation to a single form called by connoisseurs the Grand Amati. This is a very large violin, with extravagantly long corners, extremely fine in all the details. I do not think it was much admired at the time. At all events, he made but few, and his copyists, with the exception of Francesco Ruggier, rarely selected that form to imitate. But now-a-days these violins are almost worshipped, and, as the collection is incomplete without one, I hope some gentleman will kindly send one in before it closes. There is also wanting an Amati bass, and, if the purchaser of Mr. Gillott's should feel disposed to supply that gap, it would be a very kind act. The Ruggier family is numerous; it is represented by one violin (147.)

Leaving the makers of the Guarnerius family—five in number—till the last, we come to Antonius Stradiuarius. This unrivalled workman and extraordinary man was born in 1644, and died in December, 1737. There is nothing signed with his name before 1667. He was learning his business thoroughly. From that date till 1736 he worked incessantly, often varying his style, and always improving, till he came to his climax, represented in this collection by the violins 83 and 87, and the violoncello 188.

He began with rather a small, short-cornered violin, which is an imitation of the small Amati, but very superior. He went on, and imitated the large Amati, but softened down the corners. For thirty years—from 1672 to 1703—he poured forth violins of this pattern; there are several in this collection, and one tenor, 139, with a plain back but a beautiful belly, and in admirable preservation. But, while he was making these Amatisé violins by the hundred, he had nevertheless his fits of originality, and put forth an anomaly every now and then; sometimes it was a very long, narrow violin with elegant drooping corners, and sometimes, in a happier mood, he combined these drooping corners with a far more beautiful model. Of these varieties No. 86 gives just an indication; no more. These lucid intervals never lasted long, he was back to his Amati next week. Yet they left, I think, the germs that broke out so marvellously in the next century. About the year 1703 it seems to have struck him like a revelation that he was a greater man than his master. He dropped him once and for ever, and for nearly twenty years poured forth with unceasing fertility some admirable works, of which you have three fine examples, under average wear, hard wear, and no wear—90, 92, 91. Please look at the three violins in this order to realize what I have indicated before—that time is no sure measure of events in this business. Nevertheless, in all these exquisite productions there was one thing which he thought capable of improvement—there was a slight residue of the scoop, especially at the lower part of the back. He began to alter that about 1720, and by degrees went to his grand model, in which there is no scoop at all. This, his grandest epoch, is represented by the Duke of Cambridge's violin, Mr. Arkwright's, and M. le Comte's: this last has the additional characteristic of the stiffer sound-hole and the wood left broad in the wing of the sound-hole. One feature more

of this his greatest epoch: the purfling instead of exactly following the corner, is pointed across it in a manner completely original. He made these grand violins and a bass or two till about 1729; after that the grand model is confined to his violins, and the details become inferior in finish. Of this there is an example in No. 84, a noble but rough violin, in parts of which certain connoisseurs would see, or fancy they saw, the hand of Bergonzi, or of Francesco or Homobuono Stradiuarius. These workmen undoubtedly lived, and survived their father a few years. They seem to have worked up his refuse wood after his death; but their interference with his work while alive has been exaggerated by French connoisseurs. To put a difficult question briefly: their theory fails to observe the style Stradiuarius was coming to even in 1727; it also ignores the age of Stradiuarius during this his last epoch of work, and says that there exists no old man's work by Stradiuarius himself; all this old man's work is done by younger men. However, generalities are useless on a subject so difficult and disputed. The only way is to get the doubtful violins or basses and analyze them, and should the Museum give a permanent corner to Cremonese instruments, this Francesco and Homobuono question will be sifted with examples. The minutiae of work in Stradiuarius are numerous and admirable, but they would occupy too much space and are too well known to need discourse. His varnish I shall treat along with the others. A few words about the man. He was a tall, thin veteran, always to be seen with a white leathern apron and a nightcap on his head; in winter it was white wool, and in summer white cotton. His indomitable industry had amassed some fortune, and "rich as Stradiuarius" was a byword at Cremona, but probably more current among the fiddle-makers than the bankers and merchants. His price towards the latter part of his career was four louis d'or for a violin; his best customers Italy and Spain. Mr. Forster assures us on unimpeachable authority that he once sent some instruments into England on sale or return, and that they were taken back, the merchant being unable to get £5 for a violoncello. What ho! Hang all the Englishmen of that day who are alive to meet their deserts! However, the true point of the incident is, I think, missed by the narrators. The fact is that, then, as now, England wanted old Cremonas, not new ones. That the Amati had a familiar reputation here and probably a ready market can be

proved rather prettily out of the mouth of Dean Swift. A violin was left on a chair. A lady swept by. Her mantua caught it and knocked it down and broke it. Then the witty Dean applied a line in Virgil's Eclogue—

Mantua vae miserae nimium vicina Cremonæ.

This was certainly said during the lifetime of Stradiuarius, and proves that the Cremona fiddle had a fixed reputation; it also proves that an Irishman could make a better Latin pun than any old Roman has left behind him. Since I have diverged into what some brute calls anec-dotage, let me conclude this article with one that is at all events to the point, since it tells the eventful history of an instrument now on show.

THE ROMANCE OF FIDDLE-DEALING.—Nearly fifty years ago a gaunt Italian called Luigi Tarisio arrived in Paris one day with a lot of old Italian instruments by makers whose names were hardly known. The principal dealers, whose minds were narrowed, as is often the case, to three or four makers would not deal with him. M. Georges Chanot, younger and more intelligent, purchased largely, and encouraged him to return. He came back next year with a better lot; and yearly increasing his funds, he flew at the highest game; and in the course of thirty years imported nearly all the finest specimens of Stradiuarius and Guarnerius France possesses. He was the greatest connoisseur, that ever lived or ever can live, because he had the true mind of a connoisseur and vast opportunities. He ransacked Italy before the tickets in the violins of Francesco Stradiuarius, Alexander Gagliano, Lorenzo Gaudagnini, Giofredus Cappa, Gobetti, Morgilato Morella, Antonio Mariani, Santo Magini, and Matteo Benti of Brescia, Michel Angelo Bergonzi, Montagnana, Thomas Balestrieri, Storioni, Vincenzo Rugger, the Testori, Petrus Guarnerius, of Venice, and full fifty more, had been tampered with, that every brilliant masterpiece might be assigned to some popular name. To his immortal credit, he fought against this mania, and his motto was "A tout seigneur tout honneur." The man's whole soul was in fiddles. He was a great dealer, but a greater amateur. He had gems by him no money would buy from him. No. 91 was one of them. But for his death you would never have cast eyes on it. He has often talked to me of it; but he would never let me see it, for fear I should tempt him.

Well, one day Georges Chanot, Senior, who is perhaps the best judge of violins left, now Tarisio is gone, made an excursion to Spain, to see if he could find anything there. He found mighty little. But, coming to the shop of a fiddle-maker, one Ortega, he saw the belly of an old bass hung up with other things. Chanot rubbed his eyes, and asked himself, was he dreaming? the belly of a Stradiuarius bass roasting 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.

“**T**HE 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 incomparable. Here is the very finest ruby varnish of Stradiuarius, 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 Stradiuarius 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 Stradiuarius 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 Stradiuarius 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 Guisepe 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 volins 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. He 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 in the central part, the sound-holes exquisitely cut, neither too stiff nor too flowing, the wood between the actual hole and the curve of the sound-hole *remarkably broad*. The scroll grandiose, yet well cut, and the nozzle of the scroll and the little platform below cut after the plan of Stradiuarius, though not so well. They are generally purfled 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, then 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 Stradiarius violin of that kind I call the dolphin-backed. This is a mere matter of picturesque wear. When a red Stradiarius 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 Stradiarius 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 Michel Angelo Bergonzi as a pupil of Stradiuarius, and English writers having blindly followed him, this seems a fit place to correct that error. Michel 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 tickets runs, "Michel Angelo Bergonzi figlio di Carlo, fece nel Cremona," from 1750 to 1780. Of Nicholas, son of Michel 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 Michel Angelo Bergonzi to be seen at Mr. Cox, the picture dealer, Pall-mall, and one by Nicholas, in Mr. Chanot'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 purfled 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-
garitæ, 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 Stradiuarius, and more scientific than Guarnerius in the thicknesses. This of class violin is hideous, but has one quality in perfection—POWER; whilst the masterpieces of Cremona eclipse every new violin in sweetness, oiliness, crispness, and volume of tone as distinct from loudness. Age has dried their vegetable juices, making the carcass much lighter than that of a new violin, and those light dry frames vibrate at a touch.

But M. Fétis goes too far when he intimates that Stradiuarius is louder as well as sweeter than Lupt, Gand, or Bernardel. Take a hundred violins by Stradiuarius and open them; you find about ninety-five patched in the centre with new wood. The connecting link is a sheet of glue. And is glue a fine resonant substance? And are the glue and the new wood of John Bull and Jean Crapaud transmogrified into the wood of Stradiuarius by merely sticking on to it? Is it not extravagant to quote patched violins as beyond rivalry in all the qualities of sound? How can they be the loudest, when the centre of the sound-board is a mere sandwich, composed of the maker's thin wood, a buttering of glue, and a huge slice of new wood?

Joseph Guarnerius has plenty of wood; but his thicknesses are not always so scientific as those of the best modern fiddle-makers; so that even he can be rivalled in power by a new violin, though not in richness and sweetness. Consider, then, these two concurrent phenomena, that for twenty-five years new violins have been better made for sound than they ever were made in this world, yet old Cremona violins have nearly doubled in price, and, you will divine, as the truth is, that old fiddles are not bought by the ear alone. I will add that 100 years ago, when

the violins of Brescia and of Stradiuarius and Guarnerius were the only well-modelled violins, they were really bought by the ear, and the prices were moderate. Now they are in reality bought by the eye, and the price is enormous. The reason is that their tone is good but their appearance inimitable; because the makers chose fine wood and laid on a varnish highly coloured, yet clear as crystal, with this strange property—it becomes far more beautiful by time and usage: it wears softly away, or chips boldly away, in such forms as to make the whole violin picturesque, beautiful, various, and curious.

To approach the same conclusion by a different road—No. 94 is a violin whose picturesque beauty I have described already; twenty-five years ago Mr. Plowden gave £450 for it. It is now, I suppose, worth £500. Well, knock that violin down and crack it in two places, it will sink that moment to the value of the “*violon du diable*,” and be worth £350. But collect twenty amateurs all ready to buy it, and, instead of cracking it, dip it into a jar of spirits and wash the varnish off. Not one of those customers will give you above £40 for it; nor would it in reality be worth quite so much in the market. Take another example. There is a beautiful and very perfect violin by Stradiuarius, which the *Times*, in an article on these instruments, calls *La Messie*. These leading journals have private information on every subject, even grammar. I prefer to call it—after the very intelligent man to whom we owe the sight of it—the *Vuillaume Stradiuarius*. Well, the *Vuillaume Stradiuarius* is worth, as times go, £600 at least. Wash off the varnish, it would be worth £35; because, unlike No. 94, it has one little crack. As a further illustration that violins are heard by the eye, let me remind your readers of the high prices at which numberless copies of the old makers were sold in Paris for many years. The inventors of this art undertook to deliver a new violin, that in usage and colour of the worn parts should be exactly like an old and worn violin of some favourite maker. Now, to do this with white wood was impossible; so the wood was baked in the oven or coloured yellow with the smoke of sulphuric acid, or so forth, to give it the colour of age; but these processes kill the wood as a vehicle of sound; and these copies were, and are, the worst musical instruments Europe has created in this century; and, bad as they are at starting, they get worse every year of their untuneful existence; yet, because

they flattered the eye with something like the light and shade and picturesqueness of the Cremona violin, these pseudo-antiques, though illimitable in number, sold like wildfire; and hundreds of self-deceivers heard them by the eye, and fancied these tin-pots sounded divinely. The hideous red violins of Bernardel, Gand, and an English maker or two, are a reaction against those copies; they are made honestly with white wood, and they will, at all events, improve in sound every year and every decade. It comes to this, then, that the varnish of Cremona, as operated on by time and usage, has an inimitable beauty, and we pay a high price for it in second-class makers, and an enormous price in a fine Stradiuarius or Joseph Guarnerius. No wonder, then, that many violin-makers have tried hard to discover the secret of this varnish; many chemists have given days and nights of anxious study to it. More than once, even in my time, hopes have run high, but only to fall again. Some have even cried Eureka! to the public: but the moment others looked at their discovery and compared it with the real thing, "inextinguishable laughter shook the skies." At last despair has succeeded to all that energetic study, and the varnish of Cremona is sullenly given up as a lost art.

I have heard and read a great deal about it, and I think I can state the principal theories briefly, but intelligibly.

1. It used be to stoutly maintained that the basis was amber; that these old Italians had the art of infusing amber without impairing its transparency; once fused, by dry heat, it could be boiled into a varnish with oil and spirit of turpentine, and combined with transparent yet lasting colours. To convince me, they used to rub the worn part of a Cremona with their sleeves, and then put the fiddle to their noses, and smell amber. Then I burning with love of knowledge, used to rub the fiddle very hard and whip it to my nose, and not smell amber. But that might arise in some measure from there not being any amber there to smell. (N.B.—These amber-seeking worthies never rubbed the *coloured* varnish on an old violin. Yet their theory had placed amber there.)

2. That time does it all. The violins of Stradiuarius were raw, crude things at starting, and the varnish rather opaque.

3. Two or three had the courage to say it was spirit varnish, and alleged in proof that if you drop a drop of alcohol on a Stradiuarius, it tears the varnish off as it runs.

4. The far more prevalent notion was that it is an oil varnish, in support of which they pointed to the rich appearance of what they call the bare wood, and contrasted the miserable hungry appearance of the wood in all old violins known to be spirit varnished—for instance, Nicholas Gagliano, of Naples, and Jean Baptiste Guadagnini, of Piacenza, Italian makers contemporary with Joseph Guarnerius.

5 That the secret has been lost by adulteration. The old Cremonese and Venetians got pure and sovereign gums, that have retired from commerce.

Now, as to theory No. 1.—Surely amber is too dear a gum and too impracticable for two hundred fiddle-makers to have used in Italy. Till fused by dry heat it is no more soluble in varnish than quartz is; and who can fuse it? Copal is inclined to melt, but amber to burn, catch fire, do anything but melt. Put the two gums to a lighted candle, you will then appreciate the difference. I tried more than one chemist in the fusing of amber; it came out of their hands a dark brown opaque substance, rather burnt than fused. When really fused it is a *dark olive green, as clear as crystal*. Yet I never knew but one man who could bring it to this, and he had special machinery, invented by himself, for it; in spite of which he nearly burnt down his house at it one day. I believe the whole amber theory comes out of a verbal equivoque; the varnish of the Amati was called amber to mark its rich colour, and your *à priori* reasoners went off on that, forgetting that amber must be an inch thick to exhibit the colour amber. By such reasoning as this Mr. Davidson, in a book of great general merit, is misled so far as to put down powdered glass for an ingredient in Cremona varnish. Mark the logic. Glass in a sheet is transparent; so if you reduce it to powder it will add transparency to varnish. Imposed on by this chimera, he actually puts powdered glass, an opaque and insoluble sediment, into four receipts for Cremona varnish.

But the theories 2, 3, 4, 5 have all a good deal of truth in them; their fault is that they are too narrow, and too blind to the truth of each other. IN THIS, AS IN EVERY SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY, THE TRUE SOLUTION IS THAT WHICH RECONCILES ALL THE TRUTHS THAT SEEM AT VARIANCE.

The way to discover a lost art, once practised with variations by a hundred people, is to examine very closely the most brilliant

specimen, the most characteristic specimen, and, indeed, the most extravagant specimen—if you can find one. I took that way, and I found in the chippiest varnish of Stradiuarius, viz., his dark red varnish, the key to all the varnish of Cremona, red or yellow. (N.B.—The yellow always beat me dead, till I got to it by this detour.) There is no specimen in the collection of this red varnish so violent as I have seen; but Mr. Pawle's bass, No. 187, will do. Please walk with me up to the back of that bass, and let us disregard all hypotheses and theories, and use our eyes. What do we see before us? A bass with a red varnish that chips very readily off what people call the bare wood. But never mind what these echoes of echoes call it. What *is* it? It is not bare wood. Bare wood turns a dirty brown with age. This is a rich and lovely yellow. By its colour and its glassy gloss, and by disbelieving what echoes say and trusting only to our eyes, we may see at a glance it is not bare wood, but highly varnished wood. This varnish is evidently oil, and contains a gum. Allowing for the tendency of oil to run into the wood, I should say *four coats of oil varnish*: and this they call the bare wood. We have now discovered the first process: a clear oil varnish laid on the white wood with some transparent gum not high coloured. Now proceed a step further; the red and chippy varnish, what is that? "Oh, that is a varnish of the same quality but another colour," say the theorists No. 4. "How do you know?" say I. "It is self-evident. Would a man begin with oil varnish and then go into spirit varnish?" is their reply. Now observe, this is not humble observation, it is only rational preconception. But if discovery has an enemy in the human mind, that enemy is preconception. Let us then trust only to humble observation. Here is a clear varnish without the ghost of a chip in its nature; and upon it is a red varnish that is all chip. Does that look as if the two varnishes were homogeneous? Is chip precisely the same thing as no chip? If homogeneous, there would be chemical affinity between the two. But this extreme readiness of the red varnish to chip away from the clear marks a defect of chemical affinity between the two. Why, if you were to put your thumbnail against that red varnish, a little piece would come away directly. This is not so in any known case of oil upon oil. Take old Forster, for instance, he begins with clear oil varnish; then on that

he puts a distinct oil varnish with the colour and transparency of pea-soup. You will not get his pea-soup to chip off his clear varnish in a hurry. There is a bass by William Forster in the collection a hundred years old ; but the wear is confined to the places where the top varnish MUST go in a played bass. Everywhere else his pea-soup sticks tight to his clear varnish, being oil upon oil.

Now, take a perfectly distinct line of observation. In varnishes oil is a diluent of colour. It is not in the power of man to charge an oil varnish with colour so highly as the top varnish of Mr. Pawle's bass is charged. And it must be remembered that the clear varnish below has filled all the pores of the wood ; therefore the diluent cannot escape into the wood, and so leave the colour undiluted ; if that red varnish was ever oil varnish, every partical of the oil must be there still. What, in that mere film so crammed with colour? Never! Nor yet in the top varnish of the Spanish bass, which is thinner still, yet more charged with colour than any topaz of twice the thickness. This, then, is how Antonius Stradiuarius varnished Mr. Pawle's bass.—He began with three or four coats of oil varnish containing some common gum. He then laid on several coats of red varnish, made by simply dissolving some fine red unadulterated gum in spirit ; the spirit evaporated and left pure gum lying on a rich oil varnish, from which it chips by its dry nature and its utter want of chemical affinity to the substratum. On the Spanish bass Stradiuarius put not more, I think, than two coats of oil varnish, and then a spirit varnish consisting of a different gum, less chippy, but even more tender and wearable than the red. Now take this key all round the room, and you will find there is not a lock it will not open. Look at the varnish on the back of the "violon du diable," as it is called. There is a top varnish with all the fire of a topaz and far more colour ; for slice the deepest topaz to that thinness, it would pale before that varnish. And why? 1st. Because this is no oily dilution ; it is a divine unadulterated gum, left there undiluted by evaporation of the spirituous vehicle. 2nd. Because this varnish is a jewel with the advantage of a foil behind it ; that foil is the fine oil varnish underneath. The purest specimen of Stradiuarius's red varnish in the room is, perhaps, Mr. Fountaine's kit. Look at the back of it by the light of these remarks. What can be plainer than the clear oil varnish with not the ghost of

a chip in it, and the glossy top varnish, so charged with colour, and so ready to chip from the varnish below, for want of chemical affinity between the varnishes? The basso di camera by Montagnana is the same thing. See the bold wear on the back revealing the heterogeneous varnish below the red. *They are all the same thing.* The palest violins of Stradiuarius and Amati are much older and harder worn than Mr. Pawle's bass, and the top varnish not of a chippy character: yet look at them closely by the light of these remarks, and you shall find one of two phenomena—either the tender top varnish has all been worn away, and so there is nothing to be inferred one way or other, or else there are flakes of it left; and, if so, these flakes, however thin, shall always betray, by the superior vividness of their colour to the colour of the subjacent oil varnish, that they are not oil varnish, but pure gum left there by evaporating spirit on a foil of beautiful old oil varnish. Take Mrs. Jay's Amatisé Stradiuarius; on the back of that violin towards the top there is a mere flake of top varnish left by itself; all round it is nothing left but the bottom varnish. That fragment of top varnish is a film thinner than gold leaf; yet look at its intensity; it lies on the fine old oil varnish like fixed lightning, it is so vivid. It is just as distinct from the oil varnish as is the red varnish of the kit. Examine the Duke of Cambridge's violin, or any other Cremona instrument in the whole world you like; it is always the same thing, though not so self-evident as in the red and chippy varnishes. The Vuillaume Stradiuarius, not being worn, does not assist us in this particular line of argument; but it does not contradict us. Indeed, there are a few little chips in the top varnish of the back, and they reveal a heterogeneous varnish below, with its rich yellow colour like the bottom varnish of the Pawle bass. Moreover, if you look at the top varnish closely you shall see what you never see in a new violin of our day; not a vulgar glare upon the surface, but a gentle inward fire. Now that inward fire, I assure you, is mainly caused by the oil varnish below; the orange varnish above has a heterogeneous foil below. That inward glow is characteristic of all foils. If you could see the Vuillaume Stradiuarius at night and move it about in the light of a candle, you would be amazed at the fire of the foil and the refraction of light.

Thus, then, it is. The unlucky phrase "varnish of Cremona" has weakened men's powers of observation by fixing a pre-

conceived notion that the varnish must be all one thing. THE LOST SECRET IS THIS. THE CREMONA VARNISH IS NOT A VARNISH, BUT TWO VARNISHES; AND THOSE VARNISHES ALWAYS HETEROGENEOUS: THAT IS TO SAY, FIRST THE PORES OF THE WOOD ARE FILLED AND THE GRAIN SHOWN UP BY ONE, BY TWO, BY THREE, AND SOMETIMES, THOUGH RARELY, BY FOUR COATS OF FINE OIL VARNISH WITH SOME COMMON BUT CLEAR GUM IN SOLUTION. THEN UPON THIS OIL VARNISH, WHEN DRY, IS LAID A HETEROGENEOUS VARNISH, VIZ. A SOLUTION IN SPIRIT OF SOME SOVEREIGN, HIGH COLOURED, PELLUCID, AND, ABOVE ALL, TENDER GUM. Gum-lac, which for forty years has been the mainstay of violin-makers, must never be used; not one atom of it. That vile, flinty gum killed varnish at Naples and Piacenza a hundred and forty years ago, as it kills varnish now. Old Cremona shunned it, and whoever employs a grain of it, commits wilful suicide as a Cremonese varnisher. It will not wear; it will not chip; it is in every respect the opposite of the Cremona gums. Avoid it utterly, or fail hopelessly, as all varnishers have failed since that fatal gum came in. The deep red varnish of Cremona is pure dragon's blood; not the cake, the stick, the filthy trash, which, in this sinful and adulterating generation, is retailed under that name, but the tear of dragon's blood, little lumps deeper in colour than a carbuncle, clear as crystal, and fiery as a ruby. Unadulterated dragon's blood does not exist in commerce west of Temple-bar; but you can get it by groping in the City as hard as Diogenes had to grope for an honest man in a much less knavish town than London. The yellow varnish is the unadulterated tear of another gum, retailed in a cake like dragon's blood, and as great a fraud. All cakes and sticks presented to you in commerce as gums are audacious swindles. A true gum is the tear of a tree. For the yellow tear, as for the red, grope the City harder than Diogenes. The orange varnish of Peter Guarnerius and Stradiarius is only a mixture of these two genuine gums. Even the milder reds of Stradiarius are slightly reduced with the yellow gum. The Montagnana bass and No. 94 are pure dragon's blood, mellowed down by time and exposure only.

A violin varnished as I have indicated will look a little better than other new violins from the first; the back will look nearly as well as the Vuillaume Stradiarius, but not quite. The belly will look a little better if properly prepared; will show the fibre

of the deal better. But its principal merit is, that like the violins of Cremona, it will vastly improve in beauty if much exposed and persistently played. And that improvement will be rapid, because the tender top varnish will wear away from the oily substratum four times as quickly as any vulgar varnish of the day will chip or wear. We cannot do what Stradiuarius could not do—give to a new violin the peculiar beauty, that comes to the heterogeneous varnishes of Cremona from age and honest wear; but, on the other hand, it is a mistake to suppose that one hundred years are required to develop the beauty of any Cremona varnishes, old or new. The ordinary wear of a century cannot be condensed into one year or five, but it can be condensed into twenty years. Any young amateur may live to play on a magnificent Cremona made for himself, if he has the enthusiasm to follow my directions. Choose the richest and finest wood; have the violin made after the pattern of a rough Joseph Guarnerius; then you need not sand-paper the back, sides, or head, for sand-paper is a great enemy to varnish: it drives more wood-dust into the pores than you can blow out. If you sand-paper the belly, sponge that finer dust out, as far as possible, and varnish when dry. That will do no harm, and throw up the fibre. Make your own linseed oil—the linseed oil of commerce is adulterated with animal oil and fish oil, which are non-drying oils—and varnish as I have indicated above, and when the violin is strung treat it regularly with a view to fast wear; let it hang up in a warm place, exposed to dry air, night and day. Never let it be shut up in a case except for transport. Lend it for months to the leader of an orchestra. Look after it, and see that it is constantly played and constantly exposed to dry air all about it. Never clean it, never touch it with a silk handkerchief. In twenty years your heterogeneous varnishes will have parted company in many places. The back will be worn quite picturesque; the belly will look as old as Joseph Guarnerius; there will be a delicate film on the surface of the grand red varnish mellowed by exposure, and a marvellous fire below. In a word, you will have a glorious Cremona fiddle. Do you aspire to do more, and to make a downright old Cremona violin? Then, my young swell, you must treat yourself as well as the violin; you must not smoke all day, nor the last thing at night; you must never take a dram before dinner and call it bitters; you must be as true to your spouse as ever you

can, and, in a word, live moderately, and cultivate good temper and avoid great wrath. By these means, *Deo volente*, you shall live to see the violin that was made for you and varnished by my receipt, as old and worn and beautiful a Cremona as the Joseph Guarnerius No. 94, beyond which nothing can go.

To show the fiddle-maker what may be gained by using as little sand-paper as possible, let him buy a little of Maunder's palest copal varnish; then let him put a piece of deal on his bench and take a few shavings off it with a carpenter's plane. Let him lay his varnish directly on the wood so planed. It will have a fire and a beauty he will never quite attain to by scraping, sand-papering, and then varnishing the same wood with the same varnish. And this applies to harewood as well as deal. The back of the Vuillaume Stradiarius, which is the finest part, has clearly not been sand-papered in places, so probably not at all. Wherever it is possible, varnish after cold steel, at all events in imitating the Cremonese, and especially Joseph Guarnerius. These, however, are minor details, which I have only inserted, because I foresee that I may be unable to return to this subject in writing, though I shall be very happy to talk about it at my own place to any one who really cares about the matter. However, it is not every day one can restore a lost art to the world; and I hope that, and my anxiety not to do it by halves, will excuse this prolix article.

CHARLES READE.

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