

## LISZT AS HIS BARBER KNEW HIM

Kindly Personality of Master of Weimar Recalled by Fritz Mier, Aged Resident of Buffalo, N. Y., Who Shaved Him at Grand Ducal Palace—Seized with Inspiration in Midst of Shaving, Abbé Would Rush to Piano and Play, Despite Soapy Hands and Lathered Face

By MARY M. HOWARD

AT this date a new viewpoint of Franz Liszt is difficult to find. His contemporaries, his pupils and followers, his intimate friends, all have given to the world their impressions of the master and hosts of volumes have portrayed every varying phase of his character and genius. In fact, it would seem as if a new Liszt story were an impossibility. Yet in Buffalo, N. Y., there still lives a man who saw Liszt almost daily during the last three years of his life in Weimar and came into intimate relationship with him during 1859, 1860 and 1861.

This man is Fritz Mier, eighty-two years old, who was Liszt's barber during those

(Mit Verstand.) After my coffee I lighted one. My wife called out: 'Fritz, go into the kitchen and see if any rags are burning.' It was the smell of the cigar that she noticed. It was no good, so I laid it away and lighted the second, with the same result, and so with the third.

### Poor Cigars Enhanced Good Ones

"The next day at the Altenburg, Liszt asked: 'How did the first cigar please you?' I replied, 'I found it very bad.' He laughed and said: 'How was the second?' 'Even worse.' 'And the third?' 'Worse still.' He burst out laughing and said: 'You can buy those cigars for a couple of pfennigs, but I find it a good idea occasionally to smoke a poor cigar, then when I go back to the good ones I enjoy them all the more by contrast.'"

A Liszt souvenir which Fritz Mier values very highly is an autographed picture which the composer gave him, and which bears one of the puns of which many examples are found in Liszt's letters to his friends. Offenbach's opera, "Orpheus in der Unterwelt," (Orpheus in Hell) was now and then performed in Weimar. In this opera the part of Jupiter is characterized by an oft-repeated phrase and gesture. The king of the gods strikes his breast and cries, "Bei mir! Bei mir!" while the chorus trembles and cringes.

"One day," says Mier, "as I entered his room after a performance of the Offenbach opera, Liszt imitated Jupiter as we had seen him on the stage. Striking his breast, he shouted: 'Bei mir! Bei mir!' while I trembled and shook, as I had seen the chorus singers do. He laughed heartily, went to his desk, took out a picture of himself and wrote over his name, 'Bei Mier, wie Jupiter in Orpheus in der Unterwelt,' then gave me the picture to keep."

For years Mier kept this picture fastened upon the wall. When the news of Liszt's death in 1886 came to him across the ocean, he shut himself in his room for hours, grieving over the tidings. Then he carefully wrapped his souvenir in paper and laid it away. Yellowed and seamed by time, it is still one of his dearest treasures.

Mier relates how invariably kind to him was the master. Finding out that Mier enjoyed the opera, he gave him a yearly pass. An instance of Liszt's democracy is thus



Fritz Mier and His Wife on Their Golden Wedding Anniversary, August 20, 1910

years, and whose recollections of the period are still vivid. He tells some stories which have never been published, and which give added proof of the geniality of nature and vein of humor with which Liszt's biographers credit him. Liszt's studio and living rooms were in a wing of the Altenburg, the grand ducal palace near the Weimar Park, and it was there that Mier visited him daily.

"There were no barber shops in those days," says the old man, "and when people wished to be shaved, they sent for me to come to their homes. When Liszt was at home, I went daily for three years to the Altenburg to shave him. I did not cut his hair. He had a *friseur* who attended to that, and often have I seen his long locks lying on the floor after the hairdresser had visited him. If I had realized how famous all over the world he would become, I might have preserved those locks, and I would then be a rich man today."

### Played Imaginary Keys

Mier, whom Liszt always addressed as "Monsieur Mier," tells how the composer would sit while being shaved with his eyes closed and his fingers playing imaginary piano keys.

"When a musical idea came," says Mier, "he would jump up and rush out of the bedroom, where I shaved him, into the next room, where his piano stood. Sometimes, with his face all covered with lather, he would sit and play the strains that had been going through his mind. Perhaps he would wipe off the lather and play on, his hands all soapy. He would forget all about me and would play so long that I would have to knock on the door to remind him I was still there. That would bring him to himself and he would come back with a smile and resume the shaving. There were days when these inspirations would strike him three or four times while I was there."

Mier tells how Liszt would sometimes become very strenuous and strike the piano keys with such force as to break a string or more. Then he would call upon the barber to aid in removing the books and music with which the piano was always loaded and in taking out the broken strings. The reward would be a handful of good cigars.

"It was my invariable custom at three o'clock to drink a cup of black coffee and smoke a cigar," recalls the venerable Mier. "Liszt knew this and one day he handed me three cigars, saying: 'I want you to smoke these this afternoon with careful judgment.'"

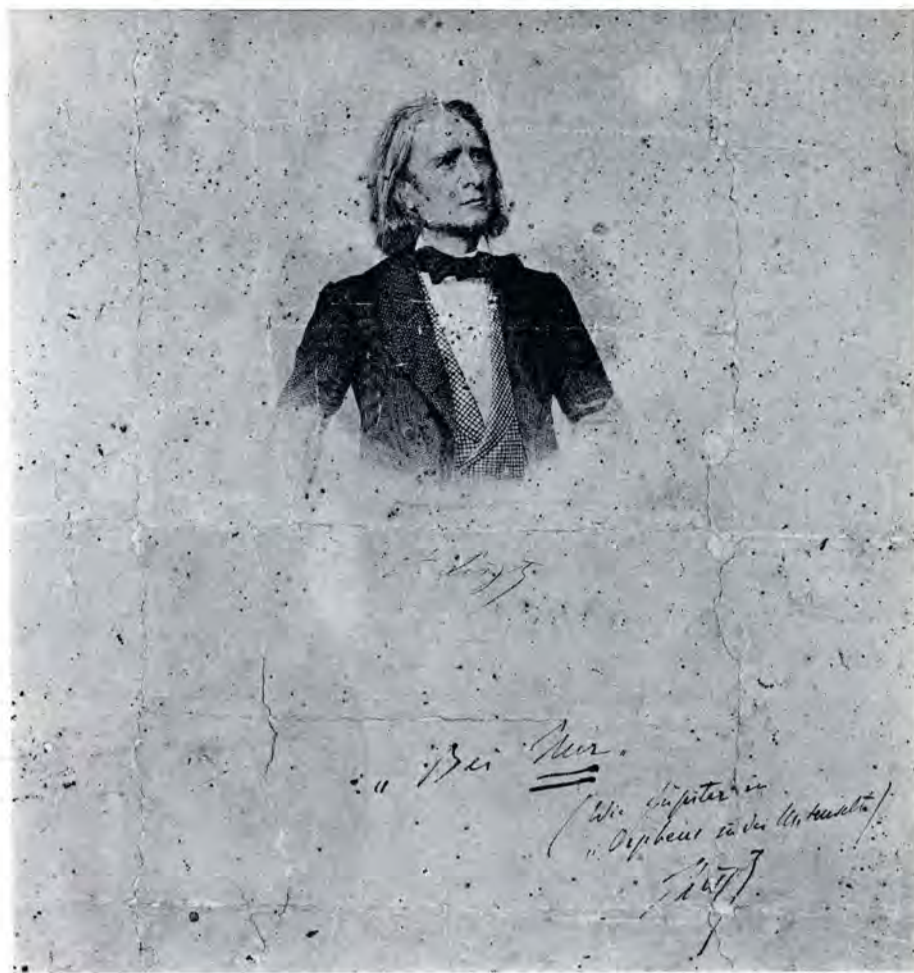


Liszt's Tomb at Bayreuth

told by the barber: "It was Liszt's custom to keep in his bedroom a cabinet full of wines and cordials for the refreshment of his visitors, as he was very hospitable. One day when I went to shave him I found six or eight men in his salon. One was Edouard Lassen and another was a well-known music critic of the city."

### Drank Barber's Health

"They all went into the bedroom with Liszt and I could hardly shave him—they laughed and joked so much. It took me a long time. When I had finally finished, Liszt went to his cabinet and poured out



Autographed Portrait of Liszt Presented to Mr. Mier

two glasses of cognac. One he handed to me, and the other he took, and then we clinked glasses. The music critic said with a sneer, 'Sie machen sich doch sehr populär, Herr Doktor.' (You are making yourself indeed very popular, Herr Doctor.) Liszt did not make any reply or even look at him. He opened his cabinet again, refilled the glasses and said: 'Now we will have a drink, Monsieur Mier.' The men all laughed except the critic, who looked very foolish and said no more."

Mier acted as barber for other celebrities than Liszt. Moving from Alstaedt, his birthplace, to Weimar, in 1853, he numbered among his patrons some of the talented young pupils of Liszt who afterwards became famous, such as Karl Klindworth, William Mason, Dionys Pruckner and Carl Tausig. Up to 1859 Liszt's own valet acted as his barber. When the valet decided to leave his position, he recommended Mier as his successor, and thus began the period of which the old man has so pleasant a remembrance.

"Richard Wagner I shaved for eight days, when he was on a visit to Liszt, on the occasion of a music festival," says Mier. This was probably the second "Tonkünstler Versammlung," which was held in Weimar on August 12, 1861. "After I was

through shaving Wagner the first time, he patted me on the shoulder and said: 'If I were rich, I'd make you my court barber.'

### "Tannhäuser" Wagner's Best

"One day when I came to the Altenburg, Liszt and Wagner were talking together. Knowing that I heard all the operas that were given in Weimar, Liszt asked me: 'What is your favorite opera?' I was somewhat embarrassed to answer before Wagner, but I replied, 'Tannhäuser.' Wagner gave me a pat on the shoulder and said, 'That is my best!'"

Among other celebrities whom Mier shaved when they made visits to Weimar were Hector Berlioz, Hans von Bülow and Peter Cornelius, that friend of Liszt for whom he risked his position of *Hofkapellmeister* in his efforts to produce the Cornelius opera, "The Barber of Bagdad."

Mier came to America in 1872 with the wife whom he married in Weimar. He has never adopted the customs of this land, however, nor even learned its language. He speaks only his mother tongue and his thoughts in his old age are centered chiefly in those years when he was associated with the master of Weimar, of whose kindly and fascinating personality he never wearies of talking.

## KUBELIK HERE FOR TOUR

Says He May Retire in a Few Years to Manage His Musical Daughters

Jan Kubelik, the violinist, arrived in New York on Saturday, September 27, on the *Kaiserin Auguste Victoria*, accompanied by Mrs. Kubelik. He is to appear in eighty concerts in America, Canada and Cuba with Mme. Melba, and it is said will receive \$120,000 for the tour. Mr. and Mrs. Kubelik have just crossed the Atlantic twice on their way here from South America.

Mr. Kubelik was more anxious to talk about his five daughters than about his tour, declaring that in view of the talents revealed by his children he proposed to retire from the concert stage in about eight years and become the impresario of a Kubelik troupe. His oldest children are the twins, Anne and Marianne, aged eight, both of whom, their proud parent avers, have an extraordinary gift for the violin. The next oldest, Johanna, six, seems predestined to become a painter, and Tatjana, four, sings.

"She has a wonderful voice for a child," says Kubelik, "and we are very proud of her. That is, I am proud. My wife does not like it because Tatjana looks like me, but aside from that we are perfectly happy."

The fifth child, Clara, five years old, is described as the "little mother" of the group.

### The Witek's Return

Anton Witek, the noted violin soloist and concertmaster of the Boston Sym-

phony Orchestra, and his gifted wife, Vita Witek, the pianist, arrived in New York Wednesday from abroad to resume their teaching at the Von Ende School of Music.

### Hamlin to Sing in Kaiser's Concert

George Hamlin, the popular tenor of the Chicago Opera Company, will terminate his American season of recitals and operatic appearances by the middle of next February and return immediately to Europe, where several significant engagements await him. Chief among these is a summons to sing at Kaiser Wilhelm's annual concert, a gala event in Berlin's crowded musical season. The event is attended by the Kaiser, while many other nobilities and the Royal Court are also in attendance at this concert, which is under the direction of Siegfried Ochs. Among Mr. Hamlin's other European engagements are two recitals in Beethoven Saal, Berlin, and another gala appearance with Siegfried Ochs's choral society, this time in Vienna.

### Hammerstein's Stage Manager Arrives

Jacques Coint, who has been abroad arranging details connected with the assembling of Oscar Hammerstein's new opera company, of which he is to be general stage manager, returned to New York on the *France* September 26 after a stay of five months abroad. "Mr. Hammerstein will have a memorable season if the personnel of his company counts for anything," he said. "He has made some wonderful contracts with singers already well known and expects to develop a few on his own account."