AN EVENING WITH LISZT.

OUR trunks were packed, and the last adieux spoken. Our four months in the Eternal City had glided *swiftly* away, and the next morning we were to leave for Florence.

Who ever says farewell to Rome without a feeling of sadness? I, young though I was still in the white muslim period—felt, as I stood upon our *loggia* lined with flowers, and heard the church and convent bells chime out the hour of the Ave Maria, and saw the amber sun-rays kiss the purple mist that canopies Monte Mario—I fait great sobs swelling up in my heart that the next day I must quit my beloved Rome, and "It might be for years, and it might be forever."

A very unreasonable little specimen of womankind would I have been had I not felt regret, for, aside from the manifold attractions of Home, her palaces and museums, her beautiful gardens and parks and incomparable blue skies, her dear, dirty streets and lovely beggars, I had made many warm friends in Rome; who, from the great Liszt down, had all manifested a sincere good-will and kindness toward " the little American." Not only had Liszt been pleased to comment the progress I had made in piano-forte-playing, but he playfully styled me his *"petite prodige,"* thereby making it the fashion to like my playing; for what Liszt said was authority for all Rome. Very enthusiastic in my temperament, Liszt's kindness to me had been sincerely appreciated, and my admiration for the great *maestro* was intensified by the thought that those charming mornings I had passed with him at the old convent of Sta. Francesca Romana were now over, and I should no longer listen to his matchless rendering of the grand old masters, or his own weird improvisations.

But, besides Liszt, there were other attractions for me in Rome. Not only did I know that circle of young musicians, pupils, or rather disciples of the great *maestro,* who met weekly in the old convent, more for advice than instruction, but I had also many friends among the "American colony." Although too young to enter into general *society,* my indulgent mother had permitted me to mingle with the artist-world of Rome, both native and foreign, and thus I became acquainted with the queen of the American colony, our grand Charlotte Cushman; Miss Stebbins, graceful, amiable, and charming; Miss Hosmer, *petite* and piquante, notwithstanding her frosted locks; Buchanan Read, our graceful poet and painter, whose loss we now mourn ; Albert Bierstadt, then working upon his splendid *"'Vesuvius'"* Randolph Rogers, and his charming wife; and our own *diva,* the beautiful Louisa Kellogg, then journeying through Italy, and flushed with the excitement of her first London triumphs.

Thus standing lost in thought, I did not hear the light step of my picturesque little Roman handmaiden, and it was not until she repeated "Signora Signora Cecilia!" that she could draw my attention. "The *signora madre* has sent for you," she said ; there is a visit in the *salon*, Signor Scio—Scior—bah ! I cannot say it. The blond signore—he who plays the harp like Santa Cecilia!"

In Maria's fanciful description I recognized Adolph Sjörden, a young, fair-haired harpist from Sweden, whose wonderful playing had caused the latest sensation in Roman circles. Entering the salon, I found the golden harp standing beside my piano, and the musical rival of St. Cecilia running his fingers over the strings. "I have come for another farewell, Miss Cecilia," he said, rising; "and I have brought my harp to taka leave of your piano." Then, turning to his instrument, he said "As it is the hour of the Angelus, I will play you an Ave Maria which Liszt has just arranged for my harp." It was by Arcadelt, soft and tender as a sigh, and the young artist threw into it all the poesy and sentiment of his romantic nature. Then, with a dreamy, distant gaze in his large, blue eyes, he played some of his own Swedish

melodies—tender, also, and plaintive as the song of a lovesick maiden. Then, with a sudden change of mind, he dashed into a sparkling Spanish *bolero,* smiling to see our faces light up with the gay music.
Sjörden was, in personal appearance, a counterpart of his beautiful countrywoman Nilsson—tall, slight, and graceful, with a complexion of girlish transparency, blond hair, and soft-blue eyes. Six months later (the winter of 1868—69), I met him in Paris, and I heard of him subsequently in London, where he went with the intention of proceeding to America, but I have since ascertained that he has returned to Sweden.

A ring at the door, and Signori Sgambati aud Pincelli are announced—two young Romans, styled "Twins in art," equal in talent, and most devoted friends. Sgambati, the eldest, is Liszt's pet pupil, although he can no longer be called a *pupil,* for the *maestro* announces that in *technique* he can teach him nothing more ; still, he continues to go every week to Liszt's convent to play to him, and receive advice about his concerts and compositions. A very handsome young man—the "Raphael of the piano," the Romans have aptly styled him, and, although dark-eyed and dark-haired, he is indeed not unlike the famous "portrait of a young man" in the Louvre Museum.

Eltere Pinelli is a violinist—the most prominent one in Rome. He also belongs to the Liszt circle, for the *maestro* does not confine his kindly advice and instruction to pianists.
He has, like Sgambati, dark eyes, and dark, clustering hair, but, unlike his brother artist, his complexion swarthy, whereas Sgambati inherits the exquisite fairness of his English mother. Then, too, he differs in expression, for while Sgambati's eyes are lustrous with romance and tenderness, Pinelli's face has a dash of passion and *diablerie* which, intensified in his music, has caused him to receive the *sobriquet* of the *"Mefisto del violino."*
The next arrivals were two young men in the graceful clerical dress — Don Zefirino Falcioni, a young priest, whose time, when not saying mass or reading his breviary, was devoted to the study of the piano under Liszt's guidance; and Davis, a young contralto of the Sistine Chapel, and therefore dressed in the very becoming casssock *de rigueur,* for all those belonging to the papal choir. With them entered Boccaccini, the youngest of Liszt's pupils, and in character and appearance very different from the others. Don Zefrino looked the incarnation of sentiment; large, liquid, black eyes, and long, drooping lashes, which impart to them a most bewitching tinge of melancholy. His figure, too, was grace itself, and no costume could have shown it to better advantage than the Roman *soutane.* "The sentimental Zefirino," as he was styled, was a great favorite in the *salons,* for in Rome it is usual for the secular clergy to mingle in society.
Boccaccini was, as I said, very different; merry, brown eyes, and an expression of thorough enjoyment and self-content, stamped upon his handsome face. As an artist, too, he differed from the others; his style was more dashing, and he had a strong *penchant* for the heretical popular music from which Liszt was endeavoring to wean the young disciples of his school.
With such a reunion of musicians, the evening passed delightfully. My Roman friends had come for one more farewell, and each one expressed it musically by playing my favorite *morceau.* Sgambati played "Aux Bords d'une Source," a transporting little bit of Nature-painting by Liszt; while Pine1li caught up mamma's scarlet shawl, and, draping himself in its folds, played, with diabolic fire, Tartini's wonderful "Trille du Diable." Zefirino played a Chopin waltz (in A minor), for the sad, despairing notes of the broken hearted Polish composer were dearer to him than all other music; while Boccaccini said to me: "I have learned something expressly for you, Signora Cecilia, which I think you will like—the 'Ultima Speranza.' " I have many times writhed under school-girl performances of " The Last Hope;" but, indeed, Boccaccini's interpretation was must interesting from its novelty. Totally misunderstanding it, he made of Gottschalk's beautiful religions meditation a very brilliant *morceau* in lively *tempo.* Then, with a laugh, he said:
"As the *signor maestro*" (Liszt) "is not here, I will play you something Italian "—

Gordigiani's well-known "Santissima Maria," with variations of his own to display his splendid *technique.*
At ten o'clock our chocolate was served. We were lingering over it, chatting, and making plans for a reunion at some future time, when we wore startled by a sharp ring at the door.

"We are all here. Who can it be at this hour?" said Sgambati—" unless, indeed Signor Sjörden's servant, to fetch home the harp."
"Or mine come for my violin," said Pinelli.—" Let me open the door, Signora Cecilia. I think your Maria must be in bed." Glancing into the antechamber, I saw the outlines of an abbé's dress; Pinelli respectfully kissed an outstretched hand ; and— Liszt entered.
"I have come to say good-by once more to my little *prodige*," he said, extending both hands in his usual impulsive way; for Liszt had a grand, enthusiastic way of greeting his friends, that you felt instinctively was *de tout coeur*. "I knew from these children of mine that you would be at home; so *me voici*!"
Then he greeted his "children " with much warmth, saying, however, teasingly, to the young *abbé*.
"Ah, *Don* Zefirino!" (with a very mocking emphasis upon the ecclesiastical title)—"pray what is a priest doing here among the ladies?"
Seating himself, and glancing about the room, his eyes kindly passed over the empty chocolate-service (the fire was out and the cook in bed, so I could offer him no refreshment), and rested upon a little picture of Gottschalk, wreathed in Parma violets.
"It is your master's *fête*, I suppose, as you have crowned him," he said. "Let us *souhaiter* him with music. Play me the 'Gioventù.'
It was, indeed, his birthday—the last but one that he passed upon this earth.
I had often played Gottschalk's music for Liszt, and it interested him much from its great originality. For the sparkling though dreamy little "Jeunesse," or "Gioventù," as he styled it, he had an especial liking; and I was not surprised to hear him say :

"Play it once more, *petite*. How original! how bizarre!"
When I had complied, he said:
"Now I must hear my pretty Creole duets " (Gottschalk's " Ojos Criollos,""Di que si," and " Gallina," which my sister and I had often played for him).
The "Gallina" (" The Hen") pleased him especially.
"How very droll !" he would say. "The hen must be in love.
And, as we played, he would walk up and down, marking the rhythm by snapping his fingers, and calling us charming *fillettes*—real little loves. Then, when the pieces were ended, he leaned upon the piano, and looked over my music. Presently he discovered a song— the romance of the princess in "William Tell."
"Here is the 'Sombre Forêt,'" he said. "We will now have some vocal music. Who sings this romance? Is it *ma belle Marguerite* ?
Poor Marguerite grew scarlet. She was very young and timid, and, having taken lessons only the previous winter, had not sufficient confidence in her execution to sing before Liszt; indeed, although possessed of a beautiful soprano-voice, she had never even told him that she sung, and, whenever we expected him to visit us, had always carefully locked up her songs. Receiving no answer, he repeated :
"I am sure that this is your song, *mon enfant*. Come and sing it for me."
Overcome with alarm, Marguerite ran into a corner, and, hiding her face, said:
"Never, never, can I sing for you, *maestro!*""Oh, but you will !" ho said, taking her hand; "for I will play your accompaniments. Come—you cannot now be afraid."
Liszt has such a very quiet and assured manner of saying "you *will* do" so and so that any resistance is unavailing, and Marguerite no longer dreamed of escaping, but submitted to being led to the piano. Liszt played the beautiful introductory violoncello

passage, and then began himself to sing— "'Sombre forêt, désert triste,'" etc. Marguerite commenced, but, before singing a dozen bars, stopped, and again tried to run away.
"That is a pretty way to leave me," said Liszt, with mock severity. "Try again immediately, *mademoiselle*—

'Sombre forêt'

Thus encouraged, Marguerite resumed her song, and went bravely through the first verse; and her really beautiful voice won from Liszt much commendation.
"Now," he said, in his mocking way, "we will leave the 'Sombre Forêt,' and try the 'Doux-Berger' a while."
The *doux-berger* verse was a success. Marguerite, as she advanced, forgot her timidity, and the last note of the cadenza was drowned by a pleased *br-r-r-r-r-r-ava* from Liszt.
And now a moment of anxiety. Liszt was still seated at the piano—would he remain there and play for us? It was not etiquette to invite him to play, so we waited quite breathless. In another moment he took up some of Sjörden's music, saying:

"What have you here? I will play a duet with yen, if you like."
A delighted chorus of *"merci, maitre,"* burst from all present. The selection was quickly made.
"A fantasia open 'God save the Queen. By Bochsa,'" he said, with a grimace, as he took it up; "let us, however, try it all the same."
"Do you think it too difficult, *maestro?*" said Sjörden, affecting a feeble joke.
The *fantaisie* opened with an *andante* passage of sustained chords, into which Liszt threw such wonderful expression that the tears stood in our eyes; in a moment, however, he exclaimed:
"Here I have a variation : *diable,* that is very embarrassing! " with a look of such mock perplexity that our tears changed to merry laughter.
Liszt was that evening in his grandest mood, and he remained at the piano for more than an hour. After concluding the duet, he said:
"When I first went to England, I was a boy—Master Liszt—that was before your mamma was born, *petite.*

With a smile, mamma said :
"I believe you are the same age as my brother"
"I do net know," said Liszt, quite coquettishly. "I am so old that I have forgotten when I was born;" then added, "I believe it was in '11."
"Yes, *maestro*," said I, "October 22, 1811. I know the date, if you do not."
Liszt laughed heartily, and said :
"I must come to you, *petite*, for instruction in chronology. But I was speaking of England. When I went there (as a man, of course), I had to write a *fantaisie* upon 'God save the Queen.' I believe it went so—" And, with these words, he dashed into an exhibition of *bravoura* playing that fairly took my breath away.

When I heard him for the first time, I was chiefly impressed by his extreme naturalness, both in pose at the piano and in playing, and was secretly amused at the recollection of the imitations of Liszt, which third-rate pianists are so fond of giving, and which consist mainly in a most exaggerated style of throwing one's arms about, and distorting one's face. Hearing him, upon many other occasions, both when alone with him and when friends were present, I still thought his style the quietest I had ever known in so great a pianist; but this evening I could not but own that, when truly inspired, Liszt was of a very

different being from the Liszt of every day. Never did I see a face change with the music as his did—now pale, with firmly-compressed lips; now glowing, as his hands dashed and leaped from bass to high treble, seeming fairly to *tear* out the massive chords and wonderful cadenzas. “Liszt is inspired,” his pupils whispered, and softly we clustered about the piano. But, more wonderful to me than the playing, was that rapt face—se weird, often almost grotesque, in expression, as the iron-gray hair tossed wildly, and the Titanic arms still hurled thunder-bolts rather than chords.

When the *fantaisie* was ended, we could not speak, and, appreciating our emotion, Liszt drifted into an improvisation, tender as an evening zephyr. “I must tell you an anecdote about that *fantaisie*,” he said, “When I was in Manchester, I played it, and the audience made a *furore*. After it was over, and I was about to leave the hall, an old gentleman, very respectable-looking, stopped me and covered me with compliments. Finally, he said, hesitatingly, ‘Permit me to express to you my delight, my gratitude,’ and held out his hand. Thinking he wished to shake hands with me, I gave him mine, into which he slipped a *sovereign*, and disappeared—the highest expression of the poor man’s emotions that he could give me. I have always kept the sovereign as a memento of this funny episode.”

Parting is always “sweat sorrow,” and was now doubly sorrowful to me, for, although I had drunk from the Fountain of Trevi, I knew not if I should ever return to Rome. Four years have now elapsed, I have crossed and recrossed the Atlantic, but, although I have had constant and kind letters from Liszt, I have never looked upon his grand face since I received his parting blessing. Some changes have come over that little group since we separated in the Via Felice. Liszt is now a monsignore; Don Zefirino left Rome for Paris, was locked up in that ill-fated city during the siege, ate, he assured me, of every species of animal in the Jardin des Plantes, and was decorated by the French Government for his services to the wounded ; Sjörden has gone back to Sweden ; Davis has thrown off the cassock of a pontifical singer, and is, *dit-on*, engaged to an American widow ; and the beautiful Sgambati is married! *Tempora mutantur et nos mutamur in illis!*

Cecilia Cleveland.