

# FANNY KEMBLE IN LANCASTER

By WILLIAM FREDERIC WORNER

IN that most delightful volume entitled, "An Old Turnpike-Road," published for private distribution in 1888, the author, Jacob L. Gossler, graphically describes the great ice freshet on the Susquehanna river near Columbia, Pa., his native home, in 1832. The bridge, which spanned the river at that place, was destroyed by the crushing ice, and the river was impassable for several days. Huge blocks of ice had piled high—from thirty to fifty feet—in the narrow gorge several miles below, and the back-water had flooded a portion of the town of Columbia. The water was several feet deep on the front street, while great fields of broken ice filled the river from shore to shore, and entire spans of the old bridge circled round and round. Of course, no communication was attempted with the opposite shore. In this condition of affairs, Frances Anne (Fanny) Kemble, then an actress of fine histrionic ability, who subsequently became noted as an author, and as a reader of the plays of Shakespeare, was obliged to remain in Columbia over night, at the General Washington tavern, which at that time was kept by Mr. Gossler's father.

Mr. Gossler's description of Fanny Kemble, who was at that time a young woman twenty-three years of age, is as follows:

"I saw her first, sitting squarely on the floor of the little parlor, in front of the open Franklin stove piled high with blazing logs. Presently, she rose, not 'like an exhalation,' but a solid, substantial reality of flesh and blood, a healthy young woman, with very black eyes, an exuberance of black hair, and a very determined mouth and manner. As yet, no one had ventured to cross the river: but cross it, in the morning, she must; and, after much coaxing and bargaining, two boatmen were found willing to make the attempt. With the Highland Chieftain, when eloping with Lord Ullin's daughter, Miss Kemble may have exclaimed:

'———Boatman, do not tarry!  
And I'll give thee a silver pound  
To row me o'er the ferry.'

Whether she thought of these well-known lines or not, the little boat with its precious freight succeeded in reaching the farther shore in safety, after almost as perilous, if not so fatal, an attempt as that described by Thomas Campbell in his beautiful and familiar poem of 'Lord Ullin's Daughter.' "

Two years later, Fanny Kemble was married to a Southern planter, Pierce Butler, and retired from the stage. The marriage not proving a happy one, Mrs. Butler returned to the stage in 1847. Later, following her father's example, she appeared, with much success, as a Shakespearean reader. It was in this capacity that she visited Lancaster.

The Lancaster Intelligencer of Tuesday, December 11th, 1849, contained the following announcement:

"Mrs. Fanny Anne Kemble, having been invited by a number of our citizens, has consented to come to Lancaster on Wednesday evening, December 12th, on which occasion she will read Shakespeare's play of Antony and Cleopatra, at the Mechanics' Institute. Doors open at 6:30. Reading commences at 7:30. Tickets 50 cents."

The succeeding issue of The Intelligencer stated that "Mrs. Kemble's reading of Shakespeare at the Mechanics' Institute on Wednesday evening last is highly spoken of by all who had the pleasure of listening to her. The hall was crowded to overflowing."

The Mechanics' Institute was located at 31 South Queen street, and the theatre or hall in which the reading was given was in the rear of the building.

In 1877 Fanny Kemble returned to England where she lived until her death, which occurred January 15th, 1893.

# OLE BULL AND ADELINA PATTI IN LANCASTER

By WILLIAM FREDERIC WORNER

ON Thursday evening, October 14th, 1852, Fulton Hall, now the Fulton Opera House, 10-16 North Prince street, was formally opened to the public, with imposing ceremonies.<sup>1</sup> Fifteen hundred tickets were distributed gratuitously by the promoter and owner, Christopher Hager; and notwithstanding the inclemency of the weather, the hall was crowded. The Philharmonic Society, a local organization, and the Lancaster brass band, were present and played in superior style. A new composition, called "Fulton Polka," arranged expressly for the occasion, was very fine and elicited much applause. Hon. Alexander L. Hayes delivered an address, which was listened to with deep interest. His speech filled more than two columns in the Lancaster Examiner and Herald of Wednesday, October 20th, 1852. He stated that the hall was named in honor of the famous inventor, Robert Fulton, and that it stood on the site of the old Lancaster jail. The building contained two halls above the basement, each more than one hundred feet in length; and also five other handsome and convenient apartments. The main hall, or saloon, was 105 feet, seven inches in length, by fifty-seven feet and nine inches in width. The ceiling was twenty feet and ten inches in height. About 1500 spectators could be accommodated on the floor.

One week after the formal opening, Ole Bull, the celebrated violinist, gave a concert in the hall—Thursday evening, October 21st. The house was well-filled—not less than twelve hundred tickets having been sold. He was assisted by Maurice Strakosch, a popular pianist, and by the gifted Adelina Patti, vocalist, who, at that time, was a little girl nine years of age. Even at that youthful period, her singing was the delight and admiration of all who had the privilege of hearing her.

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<sup>1</sup> The Lancaster Intelligencer, Tuesday, October 19th, 1852.

On the following evening, Friday, October 22nd, a concert was given in the hall by the Philharmonic Society. The room was filled with an appreciative audience, and the concert received much applause. The members of the society were assisted by the youthful Patti, Strakosch, and Miska Hauser, a celebrated composer and violinist of Philadelphia. The local papers stated that Hauser's playing on the violin was not inferior to that of the great Norwegian, Ole Bull himself. Both were, undoubtedly, accomplished musicians.<sup>2</sup>

Ole Bull gave another concert in Fulton Hall on Saturday evening, October 23rd, which also was well attended; and it was claimed by those present that he surpassed his efforts on the preceding Thursday evening.

A little more than four years later, Ole Bull was in Lancaster again. The Lancaster Intelligencer of Tuesday, February 12th, 1856, contained the following in reference to his visit:

"Ole Bull's concert on Thursday evening [February 7th] last, was pretty well attended considering the very bad state of the weather. Ole Bull has the reputation of being the best violin performer in the world, and he certainly sustained that reputation on this occasion. His playing had a thrilling effect on the audience, and excited their enthusiasm to the highest pitch. Besides, there is a dignity and true gentlemanly bearing about Ole Bull which at once commands the respect and admiration of all who hear him. The artists who assisted him performed their parts admirably, and gave great satisfaction to the audience. We hope Ole Bull will favor us with another visit."

During his visit to America (1852-57) he bought 125,000 acres of land in Potter county, Pennsylvania, for a Norwegian colony, which was to have been called Oleana after his name; but he had been deceived in regard to the land-titles, and the project, after considerable expenditure, was abandoned. His death occurred August 17th, 1880, in the 71st year of his age.

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<sup>2</sup> The Lancaster Intelligencer, Tuesday, October 26th, 1852.