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Title: A Short History of English Music

Author: Ernest Ford

Release date: June 5, 2012 [EBook #39925]

Language: English

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A SHORT HISTORY OF ENGLISH MUSIC ***

Transcriber's Notes

Where changes have been made to the text (to correct typographical errors) these are listed at the end of the book.

Footnotes are numbered sequentially through the book, but presented at the end of each chapter in which they are referenced.

Henry Purcell.

Frontispiece.

A
SHORT HISTORY
OF

ENGLISH MUSIC

BY
ERNEST FORD
F.R.A.M.

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK
McBRIDE, NAST & COMPANY
1912

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PREFACE

This book is not, in any sense, technical.

It is an attempt to give a simple and rational, though in a volume of this size, necessarily incomplete, account of events that have led to the complex state of music existing in England at the present time.

Should it offer nothing to the musician or historian, I hope it will be found of interest to the general reader.

The desire to make each chapter as complete, on the subject with which it deals, as space would permit, has necessitated a certain amount of repetition, but I trust that the object will condone the fault.

THE AUTHOR.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Music Before and During the Reformation	1
II.	Music Before and During the Reformation—(*continued*)	20
III.	Early English Composers	47
IV.	The Decline of English Music	67
V.	Musical Education in England	93
VI.	Progress of Orchestral Music	125
VII.	Oratorio in England	150
VIII.	Opera in England	176
IX.	Distinguished Musicians in England during the Nineteenth Century	201
X.	General Survey	244

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Henry Purcell	*Frontispiece*
	PAGE
Queen Elizabeth	32
Calvin	76
G. F. Handel, by Hudson	154
Sir Arthur Sullivan	228
Sir Edward Elgar	246

SHORT HISTORY OF MUSIC IN ENGLAND

CHAPTER I

MUSIC BEFORE AND DURING THE REFORMATION

England at one time musical and "merrie"—England before the Reformation—Out-door life—Natural dramatic instincts—Isolation of country districts in early days—Performances of itinerant minstrels—Ban of the Church—Gradual improvement—

Effect of the wars of the Roses—Early perfection of sacred music—Difficult times after repudiation of Rome by Henry VIII.—His policy and that of Queen Elizabeth—Edward VI. and his sisters—Popular anger against the monks—Dissolution of monasteries natural result amongst uneducated people—Tallis entrusted to write music for reformed services—Orlando Gibbons and Henry Purcell—Early secular music—Old-time music occasionally traceable now in country districts—Ancient instruments—Effect on English music by those returning from the Crusades—Effect on criminal population—The status of the musical composer compared with that of the "musician"—Conclusion.

England was musical—once upon a time.[1]

At least, if it be not too great a strain on our credulity, we must believe so.

England was "merrie"[2]—once upon a time. At least, we read so.

It must have been long ago, and the art long lost.

And yet there was, undoubtedly, a time when England was both musical and "merrie." Yes. When music and "dauncing" were as essential to the life of the people as ranting and canting apparently became in those dismal days after the Reformation, when the spirit of Calvinism stalked abroad, strangling all the rational joys of life. Yes. Those were, indeed, the merrie days of England.

The pageants and plays, which arrived at such a pitch of splendour and magnificence in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, were but the successors of more primitive ones whose history is lost in the long and silent past.

It is, however, quite clear that, like nearly everything else of healthy vitality, we must look to the Church, if not for their origin, at least for the shape and form they came to assume during the Christian era.

Throughout human history there have ever been men gifted with a dramatic temperament who, through sheer natural instinct, not only dramatise their own experiences when they would relate them, but dramatise with equal avidity, any material which may come to their hands for the entertainment of others and the relief of their own exuberant vitality.

A combination of such gifted, congenial spirits would be, not so much probable as inevitable. Hence the bodies of strolling players, regarded by the guardians of the law, doubtless with much excuse, as rogues and vagabonds, who toured the country districts, and were to all appearance, in a state of constant conflict with the "Dogberrys" of the day.

It is difficult, if not impossible, for us to realise the isolation of small communities in mediæval times, but it is not difficult to imagine the excitement that a visit from one of these troupes would arouse; not only on account of the amusement they would afford, but for the news they would bring of that outside world which was, probably, at once a source of curiosity and dread.

It must be recorded that the kind of entertainment given by these itinerant players, was frequently of such a nature as to give a shock to the simple countrymen it was designed to amuse.

Coming directly from the coarse amusements and excitements of London, that included about every possible species of vicious depravity, most of which cannot be written about, and the more innocent, including bear-baiting, drinking contests and cock-fighting, it is not to be wondered at that their displays caused something akin to amazement.

One result was inevitable.

The Church stepped in, banned the performances, and threatened to exclude all who were engaged in them from her sacraments.

However, with the wonderful intuition which seems so clearly to eliminate the purely human theory, she seized upon this elementary instinct to purify it and dedicate it to the highest ends. From that time through many ages the performances were given with the direct sanction of the Church, and were not infrequently utilised on festival occasions, in the precincts of her sacred buildings.

It must not be assumed, however, that in the early stages of the cleansing process any very high standard could be insisted upon. Such an attitude would have put the clergy out of touch with the primitive people, and wholly destroyed the possibility of effecting any lasting good.

Biblical subjects of a simple kind were chosen for portrayal, the story of Adam and Eve being a particularly popular one, and presented with a crude exactitude that would cause considerable astonishment to a modern spectator.

But gradually subjects of a more elevating character were introduced, and at last the most moving incidents in the life of Christ were represented. Thus it is obvious that the Church had no desire to stifle the dramatic instinct; she simply used her power and authority to direct it to a

nobler plane of thought, and help it to become a source of healthy education, instead of a form of moral degradation. Indeed, the most sacred and inspiring service in her liturgy, the Mass, is a dramatisation of the fundamental truths of Christianity.

The Englishman of the Middle Ages was coarse in speech and manner, but he was eminently susceptible to the call of art in whatsoever guise it came, religious or secular. [Pg 5]

The beauty of the cathedrals with their noble altars and gloriously coloured windows and, perhaps most of all, the call of the music which played so large a part in all the functions, would, at least, help to combat the gross spirit of the outer world, and tend to an amelioration of the prevailing tone of the age.

There had been, however, many companies of players who had defied the Church's ban, and continued their performances of unbridled licence, trusting to the general lawlessness of the times to evade the consequences; but with the passing of the Wars of the Roses and their attendant misery, bloodshed and abrogation of civil law, a period of brutality, rapine, and all the consequent horrors of a fratricidal conflict came to an end, and the power of the law, both ecclesiastic and civil, was once more able to actively assert itself. A reign of peace and the confirmed power of the Crown began to inspire a general sense of security. Such wealth as the country possessed, instead of being squandered on the machinery of war, could be spent to ensure the blessings of peace.

Education, even the most elementary, was a boon to a man who, beside the manual work necessary to enable him to feed himself, had hitherto learnt nothing but the use of the pike or some such weapon of warfare.

Thus a better state of things was being inaugurated, and by the beginning of the sixteenth century, was in full progress and the results already apparent. The appearance in the dramatic firmament of that immortal group of writers, of which Shakespeare was the Sun, marked the [Pg 6] glorious opening of a new era.

Through all these centuries the art of sacred music had been slowly, it is true, but gradually developed, mainly by the monks, but wholly in the service of the Church.

It had arrived at such a pitch of perfection by the middle of the sixteenth century, that then began the short era that was afterwards to be known as "The Golden Age of Ecclesiastical Music." It was the time of Palestrina in Italy, and Tallis, Byrd and Orlando Gibbons in England.

The Mass for five voices, written by William Byrd about the year 1588, is one of the most beautiful productions of that extraordinary period, and is sufficient in itself to prove that music in England, like her literature, could then challenge comparison with that of any country whatever, either for beauty or originality.

It may be mentioned here that Byrd never swerved from his allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church. It has been said that there is no proof that Tallis changed his faith, but the fact that he was requisitioned to set music for the new services to English words seems to me perfectly conclusive that he did acquiesce in the new order of things.

In those troublous days there were comparatively few who dared openly to adhere to the Catholic Church—that is to say, to the Church as it was before Henry VIII. repudiated allegiance to the Pope—the many submitted to the behests of the day and declared themselves definitely on the [Pg 7] side they thought would eventually become ascendant, always, however, endeavouring to secure a loophole of escape in case they should find that they had, to use the famous Marquis of Salisbury's well-known phrase, "put their money on the wrong horse."

These words may suggest a more sinister idea than they are intended to convey, but their significance will soon be made clear. It must be remembered that when Henry cast off the supremacy of Rome—for reasons it is not necessary to enter upon here—with one or two exceptions, no repudiation of the general tenets of the Catholic Church was insisted upon. In fact, like his wonderful daughter, Queen Elizabeth, he was averse, with characteristic Tudor caution, to cataclysmic changes which might once more divide his kingdom into two great opposing camps, such as it had only recently escaped from.

On the contrary, having achieved the personal ends he had in view, he desired nothing better than that things should calm down and proceed on the same lines, as nearly as possible, as they had before, without the masses of the people recognising or understanding the true import of what had taken place. Had he been succeeded by Elizabeth, this policy might have been successful, and many a disastrous page of history would probably never have had to be written.

His dominating personality sufficed to avert any open rebellion to his will, but on his death the succession to the throne of a sickly boy, whose fanatical spirit had been fired by still more [Pg 8] fanatical advisers, was the signal for an outburst of Puritanical frenzy.

Dominated as the young King, Edward VI., was by hatred of his elder sister and deep distrust of her actions when she should be called to the throne (an event which he knew full well to be a matter of only a few years), he lost no time in doing whatever lay in him to further the cause of Protestantism, and render it impossible for her to obliterate and make nugatory the work he had so much at heart. Edicts were issued ordering the clergy to abstain from priestly functions which hitherto had not been inhibited, and everything possible was done to instil into the minds of the common people a distrust of them that centuries of devotion to their interests were unable to

dispel.

A possible explanation of the success of these tactics may be found in the undoubted distress among the peasantry at this time.

With the suppression of the monasteries came the resultant loss of the succour they had for so long been accustomed to rely on at the hands of the monks, in case of illness or other trouble. To them they had looked to supply, when in need, the necessities of life, and so, on the sudden cessation of these benefits they, in their ignorance, visited their astonished anger not on those who were the cause of it, but on the victims who were no longer in a position to continue their benevolent offices.

[Pg 9] During this reign the services of the Church were in a constant state of change and confusion, and no cause suffered more than the cause of music.

Its use in the new liturgy was sparingly permitted, and the little that was tolerated soon lapsed into desuetude in the great majority of churches.

To Tallis was entrusted the writing of such music as was to be allowed, and all musicians owe him a debt of gratitude for the beauty of his work, which remains to-day, as the highest type of Church music, of which he has often been called the father, so far as relates to that of England.

Of Byrd we have written.

With Orlando Gibbons we come to the third of that great trio of Church composers whose work may be termed the Apotheosis of Catholic music, so far as England is concerned. Although when Gibbons began to compose, the Latin language had been superseded by English in the Church liturgy, his music retains absolutely all the essential characteristics of the ancient Ecclesiastical style, and is as pure from outside influence as that of Byrd himself, who doubtless lent him aid and encouragement, being as he was, a comparatively young man when the latter died in a green old age.

Gibbons was a copious writer, and his works are one of the greatest treasures of English sacred music.

With him the glorious school of Catholic music may be said to have become extinct in England.

[Pg 10] Henry Purcell, the last and greatest of the old school of English musicians, was born in 1658. At the time of his birth the Reformation had long been an accomplished fact, and the country had accepted it, perhaps not entirely realising in all its bearings, the full extent of the consequences. Orlando Gibbons had only been dead about thirty years, so, happily for music, sufficient time had not elapsed to allow of the entire suppression of the ancient spirit of Catholic music.

Hence Purcell, whose early training came from those who were born and nurtured in its atmosphere, was fully equipped, on arriving at manhood, to deal with the position as he found it: that is to say, a firmly established body of foreign musicians basking in the favours, and enjoying the protection of a largely foreign Court.

With the assimilative power of genius, he was quick to seize upon anything he thought politic. But whatever he borrowed he soon turned into gold. He was a veritable alchemist.

It is only necessary to say here that for many centuries he has been universally accepted as the greatest of all English musicians, and that he was the last of that original school of English music whose origin goes back to the dark ages, and can only be sought for in the solitude and seclusion of the cells of ancient and long forgotten monasteries.

We must now retrace our steps and endeavour to follow, as far as scanty records allow, the [Pg 11] progress of secular music along those bygone ages. Something at least is known of the ancient music of the East, and the probability is that Greek music, from which that of the Latin Church descends, is but the offspring of the far older art of Egypt.

The question, however, is one for the antiquarian. It may with safety be affirmed that such music as existed among the people of England at the time of the Norman Conquest was not only considerably affected by that event, but still more, probably, by the Crusades not long after.

The music of the French Troubadours shews undoubted Eastern influences, and it does not require any great effort of imagination to realise, to some extent at least, the result of the constant influx of returned soldiers and camp followers after years of travel and residence in the East, not only on the music, but the morals of a comparatively primitive people.

So far as music is concerned, it is natural to assume that whatever was brought from the East, whether in the shape of novel rhythms and melodic features, or strange (probably percussion) instruments, was speedily absorbed by or brought into the service of, the native musician, and doubtless proved an incentive to renewed creation.

English music would appear to have an ancestry as complex as that of the people themselves.

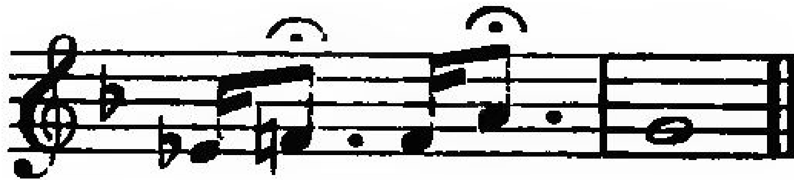
The earliest specimens go to confirm this, for whereas some of them are extremely bucolic and uncouth, others are refined and even sensuous in character. Alternating in grave and gay, the [Pg 12]

music suggests diverse origin. Musical notation, as we know it to-day, is a comparatively modern invention. It is the result of centuries of research and experiment. It is doubtful if the music that Gurth, the swineherd of Cedric the Saxon, may have hummed to himself in his long and solitary vigils could indeed be expressed in it. The scales then in popular use were different in essential respects from ours, and that there are even yet vestiges of the old peasant music still remaining I feel persuaded. For instance, many years ago in an outlying district of Sussex I heard an old man singing a folk song to a roomful of approving companions.

I listened with the interest of curiosity, but beyond the fact that it seemed to be in a minor key I gained little.

Of the language I failed to understand one word. One thing, however, struck me, and this was that even in the final cadence there was no leading note[3], and that the style of note-succession reminded me of Scotch music.

As nearly as I could approximate it, the key suggested G minor, and the final notes sounded like the following:—



This, of course, may have been the idiosyncracy of the singer, but each verse, as I heard it, was consistent one with the other. [Pg 13]

Doubtless such an authority as Mr. Cecil Sharp would be able to give an explanation of so interesting an experience.

It should be borne in mind that music, for long ages, was transmitted from one individual to another through the ear alone. The invention of a musical notation, even of the most primitive kind, being comparatively recent. The art of reading from it, in the Middle Ages, was practically restricted to the monks, whose creation it was.

Even to this day musical sight-reading is only mastered by comparatively few of a large population.

On this important point, the majority of the people of England are certainly not musical.

We shall later on deal with the earliest known examples of English vocal and instrumental music. For the moment we will consider the means at the disposal of the music-minded in mediæval days.

To the human voice we need not refer, since it is little susceptible of change from age to age.

Musical instruments were few in number and of a crude order in general. The bagpipe, hornpipe and others of a similar kind, together with stringed instruments in the earliest stage of development, being in most general use.

The viols, lute, virginals, recorders, and many others, belong to a much later period. The violin, as we know it, only arrived at perfection in the seventeenth century, when Stradivarius, Amati and Guanarius were making their marvellous instruments. But that they had instruments and even used them in combination is shewn by the following lines from Chaucer:— [Pg 14]

> "Cornemuse and shalmyes,
> And many a maner pipe,"

and again,

> "Both ye Dowced and ye Rede."

"Cornemuse" is generally accepted to mean a hornpipe.

"Shalmyes"[4] was probably a reed instrument of the character of an oboe.

With regard to "ye Dowced" and "ye Rede," numerous controversies have failed to establish any definite conviction.

The poet, however, in another line mentions an instrument, of which there is no doubt possible:—

> "A baggepipe coude wel he blowe and soune."

It is natural to suppose that progress in the art of making instruments would correspond to that in the art of music itself, and the ever-increasing intercourse with the Continent since the Conquest would bring knowledge of many before unknown; both France and Italy being far in advance of England in this respect.

References to them in Shakespeare's works are numerous.

To cite only a few.

In the first part of "Henry IV.":— [Pg 15]

"*Falstaff*: S'blood! I am as melancholy as a gibcat or a lugged bear.

"*Prince Henry*: Or an old lion; or a lover's *lute*.

"*Falstaff*: Yea, or the drone of a Lincolnshire *bagpipe*."

In "Hamlet":—

"*Hamlet*: ... Will you play upon this *pipe*?

"*Guildenstern*: My lord, I cannot.

"*Guildenstern*: I know no touch of it, my lord.

"*Hamlet*: 'Tis as easy as lying: govern these ventages with your fingers and thumb, give it breath with your mouth, and it will discourse most eloquent music. Look you, these are the stops."

We will content ourselves with one more quotation. It consists of some lines of incomparable beauty from the sonnets:—

"How oft, when thou, my music, music play'st,
Upon that blessed wood whose motion sounds
With thy sweet fingers, when thou gently sway'st,
The wiry concord that mine ear confounds,
Do I envy those jacks, that nimble leap
To kiss the tender inward of thy hand,
Whilst my poor lips, which should that harvest reap,
At the wood's boldness by thee blushing stand."

By the time of Queen Elizabeth the number and variety of instruments had greatly increased as the following lines by the poet, Michael Drayton, shew. It may be mentioned in explanation of the words, "the viol best in setts," that it was customary in those days to enclose in one case a set of these instruments, treble, tenor and bass, the last-named being probably the viol da gamba, the predecessor of the modern violoncello.

"The English that repined to be delayed so long,
All quickly at the hint, as with one free consent,
Strook up at once and sang each to the instrument; [Pg 16]
(Of Sundry sorts there were, as the musician likes)
On which the practiced hand with perfect'st fingering strikes,
Whereby their right of skill might liveliest be expressed.
The trembling lute some touch, some strain the violl best,
In setts which there were seene, the music wondrous choice,
Some likewise there affect the Gamba with the voice,
To shew that England could varietie afforde
Some that delight to touch the sterner wyerie chord,
The Cithron, the Pandore, and the Theorbo strike;
The Gittern and the Kit the wandering fidlers like.
So there were some againe, in this their learned strife,
Loud instruments that loved, the Cornet and the Phife,
The Hoboy, Sagbut deepe, Recorder and the Flute,
Even from the shrillest Shawn unto the Cornemute,
Some blow the Bagpie up, that plaies the country 'round,
The Tabor and the Pipe, some take delight to sound."

As some of the above-mentioned instruments are probably unknown to the majority of readers, I will select for explanation a few that seem least likely to be familiar:—

Cithron—An instrument with wire strings, like a German zither.
Pandore—A variety of the foregoing.
Theorbo—A large double-necked instrument of the lute family. It somewhat resembles, on a larger scale, the modern mandoline.
Gittern—Resembles the guitar. Chaucer refers to it more than once.
Kit—Diminutive violin.
Sagbut—Akin to the slide trombone.
Recorder—A wind instrument of the clarinet family.
Tabor—A small drum. In olden times used as an accompaniment to the pipe.

We have alluded to the possible effect on music of the return of numbers of men from the wars of the Crusades. We pass now to the probable effect on the morals of the people, with special reference to the musicians of the period. One of the first results would be to swell the numbers of itinerant musicians and players who were already a source of trouble not only to the custodians of the law, but to the average law-abiding citizen. [Pg 17]

It is not to be supposed that the restless spirit of these wanderers through Europe and the East,

with all the concomitant experiences, would permit them to again settle down to the life of quietude and practical isolation of the tiller of the soil, from which, no doubt, many of them had sprung.

No, the roving life of the itinerant "minstrel" or the riotous life of the city roysterer would be more likely to attract them.

Certain it is, from the diseases they acquired in the East and disseminated in Europe, one may justifiably argue that their presence was not likely to raise the moral tone of any company they might be pleased to join.

To whatever cause it may be assigned, it has to be admitted that musicians in those days had a most unenviable reputation, and were looked upon with the greatest contempt.

One qualification of this statement may be made, as there is little doubt that a great distinction was made between the *composer* and the "musician."

Every rogue and vagabond who scoured the country giving crude and generally offensive performances styled himself musician, so the public, having no greater genius for fine discrimination then than now, came to regard all persons who were engaged in the performance of music, if not with active aversion, at any rate with passive contempt.

It is in these early times that the foundation of the feeling was laid, only to be strengthened later on when Puritanism came with fanatic intensity to still further deepen it. How engrained in the spirit of the people this sentiment became is evident, even to this day.

That the *composer* of music was regarded in a different light, we shall be able to prove.

He obtained degrees at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, where he proceeded to the high position of Professor of the University in the Chair of Music.

Leases of Crown lands were made to him, with grants of armorial bearings in some cases; indeed, there are evidences of many kinds to show that his calling was held in high esteem. With the "musicians," as they were called, or "minstrels," as they called themselves, things went from bad to worse. Doubtless reinforced again by cast-off camp-followers from the armies of the Wars of the Roses, they became, by the reign of Queen Elizabeth, not only a source of terror to the countryside, but a nuisance and a pest to the towns. Gosson writes, about 1580: "London is so full of unprofitable pipers and fiddlers that a man can no sooner enter a tavern, than two or three cast of them hang at his heels, to give him a dance before he depart."[5]

In 1597 a law was passed in which they were classed as "rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars," and were threatened with severe penalties.

The War of the Rebellion probably brought them still another accession to their ranks, as, so far from being harmed by this threat, things must have got even worse, to judge by the following edict issued by Cromwell only a few years later:—

"Any persons commonly called fidlers or minstrels who shall at any time be taken playing, fidling, and making music in any inn, ale-house, or tavern, or shall be taken proffering themselves, or desiring, or intreating any to hear them play or make music in any of the places aforesaid, shall be adjudged and declared to be rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars."

It may be at once assumed that if they were able to evade the hands of Elizabeth, they were little likely to escape those of Cromwell, who may be said to have, at last, cleared the country of what had become a positive menace to the security of life, since under the guise of wandering minstrels, highwaymen and other criminals had long been wont to carry on their occupations with comparative immunity.

The age of Queen Elizabeth was one of transition, the Commonwealth marked the birth of the new era, and with it the final disappearance of the picturesque, even if somewhat depraved, English troubadour.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] A country that has taken its music at the hands of the foreigner for three centuries can scarcely be called musical.

[2] In its original meaning, the term implied a cheerful and righteously joyful sense of living. Its popular significance after three centuries of Puritanism, rather inclines to alcoholic elation.

[3] The leading note is a semi-tone lower than the keynote, and is essential to the modern scales, both major and minor.

[4] More familiarly known as shawn.

[5] "Short Apologies of the School of Abuse," London.

CHAPTER II

MUSIC BEFORE AND DURING THE REFORMATION—(*continued*)

Secular music dating from the thirteenth century—Origin lost in antiquity—Earliest specimens, dance music—Morris dance traced to Saxon times—Dancing always associated with singing—Gradual independence—Popularity of the month of May—The ballad and its antiquity—Popular specimens—"Parthenia," a collection of pieces for virginals—Life in England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth—Its happiness—Authority of Professor Thorold Rogers—Great men living at the time—Pageantry and the Queen—Her love of dancing and music—Her sympathy with the joys of her people—Queen Elizabeth as a musician—Sir James Melvil and his adventure—The masque—Its origin—Popularity—James I. and art—Masque forerunner of opera—The madrigal, catch, round and glee—Shakespeare and the catch—"Sumer is icumen in," a wonderful specimen of ancient skill and genius—The "canon"—Instrumental music—Explanation of its late development—Purcell—Conclusion.

Authentic examples of secular music in England date from the thirteenth century. It is not from this fact, though, one must suppose that it did not exist prior to that period. On the contrary, music of some kind or other has, doubtless, been a source of solace as well as amusement for untold years.

For antiquity, vocal music stands pre-eminent. Ages must have passed before instrumental music came to any position of efficacy at all correlative with it.

It must be remembered that music as we know it, is the gift that the ancient Church gave us centuries ago, and that the pangs of its birth were suffered in days of which all sense of record is lost.

That there were seculars, even in those remote days, whose ideas of musical progress would not be bound by the ties of ecclesiastical gravity may be taken for granted, and as the art progressed in the Church they would naturally take advantage of it to further their skill in the direction of a lighter and less serious type.

To seek for the earliest examples of dance music is simply to grope in the dark. As to its progress, all that can be suggested is that it fairly synchronises with that of sacred character.

This need be no matter for surprise, since seeing that the Church never did other than encourage the healthy outdoor life of the people, it may be assumed that the monks, who were responsible for the music in the Church, were as willing as able, to help in the advancement outside of it.

Research makes it certain that the first efforts at dancing were accompanied by singing, and only in its latest stages of advancement was it strong enough to dispense with this, and rely on the attraction of the rhythmic movements of the dancer.

From this it will be reasonably inferred that for countless centuries the two arts remained in combination, before the incentive genius of either proved too strong to longer brook the artificial ties that had bound them together.

It is said that the Morris dance can be traced to Saxon times, and that it is the one that has remained with the least variation from its original form. It must be admitted, however, that the difficulty of absolutely proving these assertions is almost insuperable, notwithstanding the amount of research that has been directed to the subject.

It can be traced definitely as far back as the reign of Edward III., and in its most popular form, is known as the may-pole dance.

It was particularly associated with May Day, and was danced round a may-pole to a lively and capering step.

Reminiscences of these old "round" dances may be traced in games played by children to-day, such as "Kiss in the ring," "Hunt the slipper," "Here we go round the mulberry bush," and others of a similar type.

The onlookers sang and marked the rhythm by the clapping of hands.

With increasing skill in the making of musical instruments, and increasing art in playing on them, the dance gradually became independent, as is manifestly shown by music that is still extant, and while being evidently intended for dancing, is quite unsingable. Once then separated, the art naturally developed on bolder and more original lines. As the human voice was the first medium of expression in music, all lines necessarily radiated from it. Singing induced dancing; dancing required a more certain rhythmic force than the voice could supply; hence artificial aid by means of instruments, the first, doubtless, being those of percussion.

With the arrival of instruments of a more advanced character and capable of more varied expression, the progress of the art would naturally proceed with greater rapidity, and on lines

displaying greater variety.

England, in those days, was avid of pleasure. It is little to be wondered at.

We speak of the people, not of the nobles, whose wealth enabled them to combat the ordinary existing conditions.

Their day depended, in a very special sense, on the sun, in a manner surprising to those of us living in the twentieth century. It began with the rising, and ended with the setting.

Artificial light, except of the most primitive description, was a luxury entirely out of their reach.

If we, in modern times, remembering its fickle climate, wonder at the popularity of the month of May, and the adulation it received at the hands of the early poets, a little consideration will soon supply the cause. The long, weary months of winter, with its darkness and cold, had been endured; the bitter winds of March and April were over, and the long days and tempered breezes came to the people with a relief, the intensity of which is difficult to realise, with all the means of comfort that modern civilisation has placed at our disposal.

The ballad, as distinguished from the song, is peculiarly typical of the Northern races, and was, up to the time of Queen Elizabeth, a favourite feature of English music. As its name implies,[6] it was danced as well as sang; later on the dance was dispensed with.

Its antiquity is unquestionable, but it is, as is so often the case, impossible to assign any definite date to it.

The early part of the eleventh century certainly knew it in England, as the following stanza proves.[7] It tells of a visit paid to the city by King Canute:—

"Mery sungen the muneches binnen Ely.
Tha Cnut ching reu therby:
Roweth, cnites, noer the land,
An here we thes muneches saeng."

This may be translated for the modern reader as follows:—

"Merry sang the monks of Ely,
As King Canute rowed by.
Row knights, near the land
And hear we these monks sing."

The music is, unfortunately, lost.

In Roman times a popular feature of the processions organised in honour of some newly-arrived conquering soldier was a band of dancers who, while gyrating in graceful movement, sang poems, reciting his heroic deeds.

The praise of heroes was, from the earliest, the dominant feature of the ballad, and, although far removed, as it must be from anything resembling even mediæval methods, the Greek and Roman form of it is most probably the real source from which it is derived.

There are many kinds of ballad known to England, but they are narrative, as a rule, such as "Chevy Chase," and many others of a similar style. Some are sad, some are gay; none are sentimental. One that can be seen in the Sloane Collection in the British Museum, "Joly Yankyn," is probably not much later than the one previously quoted. The name will recall Friar Tuck to the readers of Scott's "Ivanhoe."

A ballad that is believed to be of Eastern origin is the following:—

"There were three ravens sat on a tree."

[Text alternative]

There were three ra-vens sat on a tree,
Downe-hay, downe-hay, downe-hay-downe.
They were as black as they might be,
With a downe, downe-hay, downe-hay-downe.
Then one of them said to his mate,
"Where shall we our break-fast take?"
With a downe, downe-hay, downe-hay-downe.

We are on safer ground, however, when we come to such a one as "To-morrow the Fox will come to Town," with the refrain, "I must desire you neighbours all, to hallo the fox out of the hall." This is altogether more English in character, and is filled with the spirit of open air life. [Pg 26]

Other examples that seem inevitable of quotation, are those that Shakespeare has made immortal, by putting them into the mouth of Ophelia, in the tragic scene from Hamlet.

The music that we quote here is that which, there is every reason to believe, was sung at the original production.

The style accords with Shakespeare's time.

Unfortunately when Drury Lane Theatre was burnt down in 1812, the music library was destroyed. Happily, however, Mrs. Jordan, the celebrated actress with whose fame the part of Ophelia is for ever associated, was alive, and was able to sing to Dr. Arnold, a famous musician of the time, the melodies, as they had been rendered in the theatre in her time, and probably for centuries past.

"How should I your true love know?"

[Text alternative]

And how should I your true love know
From ma-ny an-o-ther one?
O by his coc-kle hat and staff,[8]
And by his san-dal shoon.
Twang, lang, dil-do, dee.

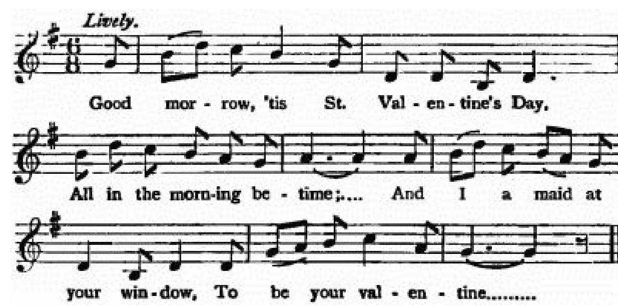
[Pg 27]

"And will he not come again?"

[Text alternative]

And will he not come a-gain?...
And will he not come a-gain?
No, he is dead;
Gone to his death-bed,
And he nev-er will come a-gain....

"St. Valentine's Day."[9]



[Text alternative]

Good mor-row, 'tis St. Val-en-tine's Day,
All in the morn-ing be-time;...
And I a maid at your win-dow,
To be your val-en-tine....

In "Parthenia," a collection of pieces for the virginals (an instrument that may be described as the ancestor of the piano), which was published in 1611, it is shewn to what a high point of development the composition of dance music had arrived.

The music was composed by the three most celebrated English musicians then living, William Byrd, John Bull, and Orlando Gibbons—Tallis had been dead over twenty years. [Pg 28]

The pieces are of the most stately kind, in general, and would scarcely realise the modern conception of dance music, but they are beautiful specimens of the art of those days, and cannot but command our admiration.

Of the more lively and frivolous dances the one known as Trenchmore was the most popular.

"Be we young or old ... we must dance Trenchmore over table, chairs and stools."[10]

Selden, in his "Table Talk," "Then all the company dances, lord and groom, lady and kitchen maid, no distinction."

The more one comes to learn of life in the England of those days, the more one becomes convinced that, taken as a whole, life was both happy and joyous. No less an authority than Professor Thorold Rogers, after profound research into the social conditions of the Middle Ages, says they show that a state of happiness and content prevailed.[11]

Dancing was advised, too, as "a goodly regimen against the fever pestilence."

The fact that there is comparatively little of old-time music extant is due to the late invention of music printing and the slow progress of musical notation. "Parthenia" was, as the title page tells, the first music for the virginals ever printed, and yet appeared as late as 1611.

From that time, naturally, records of everything written of any importance, exist. [Pg 29]

In the reign of Queen Elizabeth the typical life of the England of old, is shown at its best, and in its most characteristic state of development.

Soon afterwards, foreign influence, aided by a foreign Court, added to the depressing element of Puritanism, was to shake to its foundations this character and to mould it into that type which for centuries it retained.

The Wars of the Roses had long been over, and economic conditions greatly modified and improved. The genius of the people seemed to burst out as if relieved from intolerable repression.

The absence of the unceasing scares and horrors of war gave them the opportunity that had so long been denied.

To think that such men as Shakespeare, Bacon, Burleigh, Drake, Raleigh, Tallis, Byrd, and Orlando Gibbons were living at the same time, and may have often passed each other in the streets of London!

There can be little doubt that the reign of Queen Elizabeth was the happiest the people had ever experienced, and it may be truly said that the Queen was the very incarnation of the spirit of the age.

Her love of pageantry and display was an unfailing source of joy to them, all the more, since they were frequently called upon to assist at many of the great functions that were organised in her honour by the great nobles. Her frequent progresses through the country were occasions, not only of gratification to herself, but excitement to them, relieving as they did the monotony of toil [Pg 30] and the sense of isolation incidental to country communities in those days of difficult communications. The Reformation had not been sufficiently long in progress to affect the spirit of the people. It had not really reached them. If England ever deserved the appellation of "merrie," those were the days.

The sports were, if rough and coarse, joyous and frank.

To the Englishman of to-day their amusements may seem childish enough, but education was then, it must be remembered, entirely confined to the few, and the amenities of life, such as we know, were practically absent. A favourite feature was a procession of musicians and dancers dressed to represent such popular characters as Robin Hood and Friar Tuck, and bedecked with bells on elbow and knee that jingled as they danced.

The badinage that passed between the performers and onlookers was of a kind, it must be confessed, that would fall strangely on the ear at the present day, but still, there is every evidence that although the manners were rough and the language guileless of restraint, the heart of the people was sound at the core, and the deep-seated sense of religion in the Anglo-Saxon race was as present then as at any time in its history. The exuberant spirit is ever evidenced by the wealth of drinking songs. These seem to have been as much in vogue in those days as the monotonous frequency of love songs, from which we suffer, is in these.

Shakespeare makes good-humoured fun of the propensity in "Twelfth Night: or What you Will." In the famous drinking scene between Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek he satirises their foibles, it is true, but in the most delightful and even sympathetic manner, and certainly gives Sir Toby a telling rejoinder to the upbraiding of the sober-minded Malvolio, who had come with the intention of putting an end to the carousal: "Dost thou think that because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?"

Music was everywhere apparent. Wherever the monarch went, it was made a special feature at all functions. Whatever entertainments were devised by her courtiers, it ever had a principal place. Of the most gorgeous and notorious of them, the one given by the Earl of Leicester in her honour at Kenilworth Castle takes the first rank. Bishop Creighton, in his "Life of Queen Elizabeth," gives so vivid a description of it that, as one reads, the imagination seems, as it were, to become vitalised.

The Queen especially enjoyed these pageants, as they seemed to symbolise at once the greatness of her position and her personal dignity.

Those who entertained her, well knew both her haughty Tudor temper and intense femininity. To evade the one and satisfy the cravings of the other was the end ever held in view.

 Hence, all kinds of contrivances were devised to glorify her person in allegory. In one, Triton is represented as rising from the water and imploring her to deliver an enchanted lady from the wiles of a cruel knight; upon which the lady straightway appears accompanied by a band of nymphs, Proteus following, riding on a dolphin. Suddenly, from the heart of the dolphin springs a choir of ocean gods, who sing the praises of the beautiful and all-powerful Queen!

Now Elizabeth was neither beautiful in person or character, but she possessed the very genius of sovereignty.

The imperious Tudor temper to which she constantly yielded, certainly detracted from her womanly qualities, but what she lacked as woman, it is only just to say, she more than made up for as Queen.

On this occasion, besides the great pageant, rustic sports of every kind, including bull baiting, were indulged in, and "a play was acted by the men of Coventry."

That she shared her people's love of dancing is again shewn by the following: "We are in frolic here at Court," writes Lord Worcester in 1602, "much dancing of country dances in the Privy Chamber before the Queen's Majesty, who is exceedingly pleased therewith."

In fact, her sympathy with the amusements of the people, and her encouragement of every healthy enjoyment, are certainly great factors in the hold her memory has retained in the minds of the English race.

Queen Elizabeth.

There are other reasons, of course, of graver import, but they do not enter into our immediate consideration. [Pg 33]

All the Tudor monarchs were essentially musical, as being Welsh they well might be. Henry VIII. was a composer of both sacred and secular music. I well remember that the first of an old volume of anthems in the library of Salisbury Cathedral was by no less a personage than that monarch himself. It was not, however, so far as my experience went, ever sung.

Queen Elizabeth was also an accomplished musician and an expert performer on the virginals, as the following quotation goes to prove. Its interest is peculiarly striking as it shows yet another side of the character of this many-sided, wonderful woman. It is from the memoirs of Sir James Melvil, at the time Scottish Ambassador:—

"The same day after dinner, my Lord of Hunsden drew me up to a quiet gallery that I might hear some music (but he said he durst not avow it), where I might hear the Queen play upon the virginals. After I had harkened awhile I took by the tapestry that hung by the door of the chamber, and seeing her back was toward the door, I entered within the chamber and stood a pretty space, hearing her play excellently well; but she left off immediately so soon as she turned her about and saw me. She appeared to be surprised to see me, and came forward, seeming to strike me with her hand, alleging she was not used to play before men, but when she was solitary, to shun melancholy. She asked me how I came there? I answered, as I was walking with [Pg 34] my Lord Hunsden, as we passed by the chamber door, I heard such a melody as ravished me, whereby I was drawn in ere I knew how; excusing my fault of homeliness as being brought up in the Court of France, where such freedom was allowed; declaring myself willing to endure what kind of punishment her Majesty should be pleased to inflict upon me for so great offence. Then she sate down low upon a cushion, and I upon my knees by her; but with her own hand she gave me a cushion to lay under my knee; which at first I refused, but she compelled me to take it. She enquired whether my Queen or she played best. In that I found myself obliged to give her the praise."

Perhaps the most important form of musical and dramatic art that came into prominence during the Tudor period was the masque.

It was a combination of the various arts of music, acting, dancing and mimicry. Simple and unpretentious in its primitive form, it became subsequently, an entertainment of the most elaborate and gorgeous kind, and one that was conspicuously encouraged and patronised by Royalty. It attained to the highest pitch of artistic splendour and efficiency in the reign of James I.

From nearly every point of view it may be reasonably described as the forerunner of modern opera.

Its origin, like all that has to do with music in England, is obscure and dates back to centuries of which we have little or no record. In all probability it was the outcome of the early performances [Pg 35] encouraged by the Church, of representations of biblical subjects, to which we refer in another chapter.

By the time of Henry VIII. it had become as popular a feature in the life of the people as cricket or football is to-day.

Not only did the simple people take part in the performances, but the principal characters were frequently performed by members of the nobility and of the Court, Royalty itself not having altogether resisted their fascination.

The explanation of the vogue to which they attained in the reign of James I. is probably that the

monarch was much less in touch generally with art, and particularly that akin to the Shakespearean drama, than was his more enlightened and intellectual predecessor. In fact, the drama proper was altogether beyond his region of intelligence, and since the masque, while making sufficient appeal to the senses, made less demand on his mental capacity, it suited him and enjoyed his particular favour.

His tastes were, it must be said, so far as appertaining to art, of a peculiarly low order.

Ben Jonson, who supplied the literary part of the most famous of these plays, was, for a man of his genius and learning, extraordinarily coarse in his language even for those days, and his comedy, "Bartholomew Fair," which was about the worst in this respect that even he perpetrated, was King James' special favourite.

[Pg 36] Of music the King knew little and cared less, and it had come, probably in consequence, to play a secondary or even lower part in the productions of this time. In proportion as they increased in splendour they lost in artistic value, and, similarly as they came to be the exclusive amusement of the wealthy, so they lost their hold on the people.

In the year 1616 the splendour and extravagance of these displays culminated in the representation of the masque entitled, "The Golden Age Restored." It was played by the ladies and gentlemen of the Court. George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, so pleasing his Majesty that the latter cried out in ecstasy, "By my soul, mon, thou hast done it full weel." The King is said to have contributed £1000 on the occasion. There is little need for obvious comment on this fact.

It is worthy of remark that for some years before this, most of the performances of which there is any record were given at Whitehall, or in such buildings as the Inns of Court. They had grown out of the simplicity characterising primitive popular spectacles, and had become rather a medium for the idle pastimes of the rich.

The high tide of joyousness and gaiety in the life of the people had been reached in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and was fast receding. The spirit of the Reformation was getting hold of them and, perhaps, in its most fanatical aspect.

However, the masque had served its purpose. It had been in earlier days a source of harmless vent to the exuberant spirit of the people, and it was later to become the source of inspiration [Pg 37] from which the primitive opera, as represented by Purcell's "Dido and Æneas," drew breath.

Of secular music, demanding more skill in invention and more proficiency in performance than the ballad, were the madrigal, catch, round, glee, and similar forms of expression. Being concerted pieces demanding the simultaneous singing of various parts, a technical training was, of course, necessary to enable one to join in them.

Their great popularity in all classes of society is sufficient proof, however, of the general training in the art that then existed. In fact, it was considered an essential thing in a gentleman's education, and the ability to take part in a "catch" or "round" was as natural to him in those days as it is to shoot or play cricket in these.

We cannot give the reader a better means to realise this than by quoting Shakespeare again, in whose words every feature in that wonderful age is held up to the mirror.

In "Twelfth Night" the following will be found:—

> *Sir Toby*: Shall we rouse the night-owl in a catch, that will draw three souls out of one weaver[12]? Shall we do that? [Pg 38]
>
> "*Sir Andrew*: An you love me, let's do it: I am a dog at a catch.
>
> "*Clown*: By'r lady, sir, and some dogs will catch well.
>
> "*Sir Andrew*: Most certain: let our catch be 'Thou knave.'
>
> "*Clown*: 'Hold thy peace, thou knave,' knight? I shall be constrained in't to call thee knave, knight.
>
> "*Sir Andrew*: 'Tis not the first time I have constrain'd one to call me knave. Begin, fool; it begins, 'Hold thy peace.'
>
> "*Clown*: I shall never begin, if I hold my peace.
>
> "*Sir Andrew*: Good i' faith! Come, begin." (They sing a catch.)

The "catch" was a melody started by one singer and followed by another at an interval of one or more bars, singing identical notes, who would be succeeded by yet another in a similar manner. It depended upon the dexterity with which the performers would catch up their notes at the right moment as to whether harmony or chaos resulted.

[Pg 39] It was a popular form of amusement, but we are hardly surprised when Malvolio appears on the scene and addresses the singers thus:—

> "My masters, are you mad? or what are you? Have you no wit, manners, nor honesty, but to gabble like tinkers at this time of night? Do you make an ale-house of my lady's house, that ye squeak out your cozier's catches without any mitigation

or remorse of voice? Is there no respect of place, persons, nor time in you?"

To all of which Sir Toby, treating it as an aspersion on his skill in music, replies, "We did keep time, sir, in our catches."

The madrigal was an altogether more serious form of art, and, except for the words, might be identified with the best specimens of ecclesiastical music. It was polyphonic in treatment, and generally grave in character. Indeed, to judge by some of the most celebrated examples, it seems almost savouring of jest to describe it as secular.

Of English composers, perhaps those who most excelled in this class of composition were Byrd, Dowland, and Orlando Gibbons. The most splendid example being that entitled, "The Silver Swan," by the last-named.

The glee, although less serious in character, as its name implies, was a truly artistic type of concerted music, and there are numerous specimens of early date of great beauty and contrapuntal skill, but they are characterised by comparative simplicity.

The transition from one to the other would seem natural, seeing the extreme elaboration that rendered the madrigal difficult of interpretation to any but highly-skilled singers.

The beautiful "Since First I Saw your Face," by Thomas Ford, can hardly be described by either title, for while it is removed in tone from the glee it lacks the atmosphere of the schools that the madrigal suggests. The glee, as it is popularly known to-day, is of a later date, and came to perfection about the middle of the eighteenth century.

It is a remarkable fact that perhaps the most beautiful and certainly one of the most skilfully written specimens of mediæval music, is also one of the most ancient. The date of it must be purely conjectural, although the scholar may to some extent be guided by the words as to the actual century of its origin.

The opening words, "Sumer is icumen in," are probably familiar to most readers, since they are ever in evidence when the question of old English music is under consideration. Indeed, it would take many volumes to record what has been written about this extraordinary composition.

From whatever point of view it is judged it commands admiration and wonder.

It demonstrates that in the art of music England was then not only abreast of foreign nations, but probably in advance of them.

It shows that polyphonic writing must have reached to a high point of development even so far back as the thirteenth century, and there is every reason to believe, even long before then.

It seems to me to be only a very obvious deduction. Just as there must have been many great poets before Homer, so this work must be the fortunate survivor of a long-lost school that, unhappily for us, had no enduring medium for transmission of its genius to later ages.

It exhibits, apart from the skill that characterised ancient ecclesiastical music, from which it indubitably sprang, a rare genius in interpreting the spirit and feeling of the words. In this respect it may be said to have anticipated centuries to come. With every appreciation, sincere and even reverend, of the ancient music of the Church, it must be acknowledged that in spirit it was rigid, severe and formal. In other words, it appealed to the religious and intellectual sense rather than that of beauty. "Sumer is icumen in," on the contrary, seems to be the work of one who is able to leap over the centuries and speak in the tones of ages unborn, to be, in fact, a forerunner, a teacher of the ages then in the womb of Time.

It has, in perfection, three great qualities of the highest art—perfect skill in execution, commanding appeal to the purest emotions, and the power to leave the mind in a state of ecstatic rest or emotional contentment that makes one oblivious of the world while listening or watching. It was the outcome of an age of great religious enthusiasm. The monks had great dreams, and with them came the energy that inspired their brains to the utmost fulfilment.

The dream that led to the Crusades is the one that has most appealed to the imagination of the world; but it was only one of many.

 "Sumer is icumen in" was written in a form that seems to have especially appealed to those early composers, for the *canon*[13] was a constant medium of musical expression in mediæval times.

That the reader may the more readily understand, I quote here a specimen that is at once beautiful and familiar to all, and is known as the "Morning Hymn." Its simplicity will make it intelligible to the least technically instructed of musical readers:—

It will be observed that the last four notes in the treble clef indicate the repetition of the melody, which can continue indefinitely as here represented.

When we come to the consideration of instrumental music of olden times, we have little to guide us in the formation of any dear conception of its value or importance.

It is evident, however, that up to the time of Purcell or that immediately preceding it, the state of development was altogether inferior to that of vocal music.

For many centuries, except as regards its use in the Church, it occupied the humble position of handmaiden to the sister art of dancing.

Such of it as still exists is, practically, all written in dance measure. The dances were, it is true, in varied forms and rhythms. Some were stately and even serious in character, and offered the composer an opportunity to display his skill in a more thankful task than in furnishing accompaniments to the lighter and more frivolous ones.

Beautiful specimens of these are found in the compositions of William Byrd, John Ball, Orlando Gibbons, and others of the same period; they were mostly written for the virginals.

To those living in this age of stupendous achievement in the art, the comparative simplicity and ineffectiveness of instrumentation may well seem strange, seeing to what a point of splendour vocal music had attained.

The explanation is, I think, to be found in the defective nature of the instrument on which the composer had to rely to provide the sounds that his consciousness urged him to produce.

The violin had yet to be brought to perfection through the genius of a Stradivarius, and time was needed to show its full capacities in the hands of a Paganini.

The wind instruments, too, of the modern orchestra are of incomparable possibilities to those in use in the sixteenth century.

However, with the improvement and perfecting in their manufacture came a decided step towards a higher and independent form of art, and that this advance was not slowly taken advantage of is shown in the most extraordinary way in the works of Purcell.

Again, the very imperfect forms of musical notation must have always proved a stumbling-block to those early musicians. Even to-day, with its advanced methods, the act of putting on paper a modern orchestral composition is a work of enormous labour. The reader will understand this, when I say that music which takes but merely a few minutes in performance may easily take the composer as many hours to translate on to the pages of his score.

That this obstacle to musical progress was signally true as applied to organ music, I am convinced.

An organ is known to have been used in a French cathedral as early as the sixth century.

Primitive in its structure as it must have been, it probably had sufficient pipes to aid the congregation in the singing of the plain-song.

As time advanced, the monks, ever restless in their desire to add glory to the Church, made unceasing efforts to improve this great adjunct to her service, and by the fifteenth century an instrument had been constructed that was secure in the promise of untold possibilities, and had already become a verification of their early dreams.

The sixteenth century saw the organ come into general use, and in the early days of the seventeenth it arrived at maturity. The immense advance in the structural appliances in modern times are, it would seem, simply scientific application to ancient ideas.

One cannot help thinking how many must have been the inspired strains that rang through cathedral aisles in those early days as the hands of the monks wandered over the organ keys, the double incentives of religious fervour and love of art urging them on to higher achievement: a strange and yet fascinating figure of saint and artist.

By the time of Purcell instrumental music had advanced beyond the dance measure, and arrived at a state of independence. It could stand by itself without the aid of singer or dancer to sustain

it. The process of emerging from the parasitic stage of clinging to these arts for sustenance was completed, and it had struck its roots so deep down that future ages might well, with wondering amazement at its magnificent growth, find it difficult to grasp the idea of its humble origin. The compositions left, in this kind, by Purcell, such as the fantasias, sonatas, incidental music to plays, harpsichord and organ music, indicate only, it is true, the first offshoots of the wonderful tree that was destined to so fascinate the world, but they gave birth to many noble branches that helped to invigorate the initial life in its struggles for existence, and were the most prolific of the tendrils that make for healthy growth.

In conjunction with his sacred music, these amply justify the claim made for Purcell that he was, from whatever point of view he may be judged, the greatest of all English composers.

FOOTNOTES:

[6] The word ballad comes from *Ballare*, to dance.

[7] "Shakespeare in Music." Louis C. Elson. L. C. Page & Co., Boston.

[8] Cockle hat and staff were distinguishing marks of a pilgrim.

[9] It may be mentioned that there are numerous variations of these, as of all traditional melodies.

[10] Burton: "Anatomy of Melancholy," 1621.

[11] William Chappell's "Music of the Olden Time."

[12] "That will draw three souls out of one weaver" is a line of peculiar interest.

Although it shows a distinct lack of reverence, it is quite typical of the spirit of the time. The "weavers" were mostly Calvinist refugees settled on the East Coast, whose austere manners and mode of life made them a constant source of ridicule to the people among whom they had taken shelter.

The imperious will of the Tudor monarchs had, hitherto, prevented the dissemination of Calvinism in England, and so, to the boisterous, happy-go-lucky temperament of the Elizabethan Englishman, the ostentation of religious phraseology, added, probably, to their quaint pronunciation of the language, made them at once a butt of scorn and contempt.

The expression used, too, by the clown "By'r lady" shows that Protestantism had as yet made little inroad on the life of the people.

It is worthy of note that it was from this part of England sailed the first batch of emigrants to the new world in the "Mayflower," now immortalised in history.

[13] A canon is a form of composition in which a melody is started by one voice and followed by another, one or more bars later (or even less) in strict imitation of it.

CHAPTER III

EARLY ENGLISH COMPOSERS

THOMAS TALLIS (OR TALLYS)

> Most of the pre-Reformation music destroyed—Tallis, the oldest English musician of which anything certain is known—Organist of Waltham Abbey at time of the suppression of the monasteries—Date of his birth unknown—Favourite of King Henry VIII. and Queen Elizabeth—State of difficulty and danger in intervening reigns—Chaotic state of things in the Church—Queen Elizabeth's policy—View of it taken by the present Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral—Greatness of Tallis as a composer—His death.

We are, unfortunately, not able to write of the earliest English composers, as much of their work (and with their work their very names) perished at the time of the destruction of the monasteries by King Henry VIII. in 1540, and what was left of it was destroyed by fire during the sacking of the cathedrals by the Puritans in the Commonwealth period. We are, then, obliged to begin with the *early* English composers, who date no further back than the sixteenth century and the Reformation.

In dealing with these and their music, it is impossible to think without emotion of the terrible sacrifice of treasures of art caused by the veritable holocaust made of them by the Puritans, for, of the work of centuries, there is, practically, little or no trace left. What we do know of the works of those composers who lived before and during the early Reformation period, shews that ecclesiastical music had arrived at a point of great splendour, and if Tallis may be considered as the descendant of a great school of composers, which he undoubtedly was, it can help us to realize the extent of our loss.

He was, fortunately, able to protect his own work, or, doubtless, that would have perished with the rest, since all of his early music (and some of the noblest specimens) was written for the monastery at Waltham Abbey.

Tallis stands out pre-eminent among the early Church composers, and, indeed, has been generally called the father of English music. The date of his birth is not known, but as he was organist and composer to an important monastery at the time of its dissolution in 1540, it is not only evident that he must have been born early in the century, but that his genius was decidedly precocious. Some authorities give the date as about 1529; Grove's Dictionary, on the other hand, as supposedly in the second decade of the century: this seems more probable, as the former would have found him holding such a conspicuous appointment at the age of eleven. It is a fact of much significance that he was a prominent composer before the Reformation, and thus a descendant of the ancient school of English Church music, pure and unalloyed.

His earliest compositions were, of course, written to Latin words, and the publication of his motets in that language in 1575, more than thirty years after its suppression, suggests that the call of his early training and associations was greater than he could resist, for it must be borne in mind that those were days of fierce bigotry, and many had been undone for acts much less provocative of "suspicion."

Indeed, of all the immediate changes in the Church services effected under Henry VIII., perhaps the most important, after those asserting severance from Rome, was the substitution of English in place of Latin in their administration, and on no point were the reformers more jealous, since it implied complete freedom from outside interference and, above all, that of the Pope.

That Tallis escaped trouble on this occasion shews that he was a decidedly fortunate, or as some unkind critics suggest, a decidedly adroit being. They even go to the length of comparing him to the "Vicar of Bray," because of the continuity of his employment in the Church during four reigns, in which such diverging views were inculcated and, outwardly at least, demanded of acceptance. Thus Henry VIII., who broke the Roman connection, but generally upheld its doctrines; Edward VI., who repudiated them; Mary, who not only enforced them, but restored, as far as she was able, the *status quo* before the act of separation from Rome; and Elizabeth, who reverted, practically, to the position as it was at the death of her father, additional alterations in the liturgy excepted.

The "Vicar of Bray" theory seems to me to be quite easy of demolition. With regard to King Henry and Queen Elizabeth, they were, both, skilled musicians and perfectly capable to appreciate the genius of Tallis in its highest aspects, and were, therefore, little likely to rid the Church of so brilliant an ornament.

In the intervening reigns, it seems only natural to suppose that many who still adhered to their Catholic principles, while bowing to the inevitable for the time being, and, knowing the precarious state of the health of the young Prince, foresaw the probable accession of Queen Mary and the consequent restoration of the ancient Church. Of these, Tallis may have been one.

On the actual accession their hopes seemed justified to the fullest extent, and only the fact of the Queen proving childless rendered them futile.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to say with any approach to exactitude what were, precisely, the immediate changes in the forms of the Church services insisted on at the moment of King Henry's rebellion against Papal supremacy. It is, however, only natural to assume that all reference to that supremacy would be eliminated, and that the use of the English language would be insisted upon, so as to mark, once and for all time, the absolutely irrevocable nature of the act.

The state of affairs in the Church must have been absolutely chaotic, what with those who, while remaining Catholic in principle, were willing to accept such changes as were not inconsistent with their faith, and others who were anti-Catholic by conviction and desirous of banishing all traces of the past, so far as it might be possible.

It was to these that the young King extended his sympathy and help, on his accession to the throne.

His death after a short reign and the consequent accession of Queen Mary, simply made "confusion worse confounded." Although strenuous in her methods, she had not time to achieve what she had at heart, and her death put an end for ever to the hopes of the extreme Catholic party. However much had been carried out that Queen Elizabeth at once settled herself to undo, and thus prolonged, perhaps inevitably, the crisis through which the Church was passing.

It is not difficult to imagine the delicate position in which musicians found themselves at various times during this crucial period. Let me quote Mr. Myles B. Foster in his interesting book, "Anthems and Anthem Composers"[14]: "Can we not picture the puzzled state of these poor composers, never knowing whether, by setting their music to the new English words, they would be burned alive, or, by using the old Latin ones, they would be hanged!"

With the accession of Queen Elizabeth these critical times may be said to have become a thing of the past—at least for the musician. The policy of the wonderful Queen was based on compromise, by which she endeavoured to so broaden the lines of the Church as to make it possible for the two factions to remain within its boundaries. So far as the extremists on either side are concerned, the idea was doomed to failure, but while she lived she pursued the policy with

characteristic pertinacity, and unenviable was the fate of the too-reforming Bishop who encountered her displeasure. The state of the Church of England to-day seems, at once, a tribute to her genius and foresight, for while the trend of feeling and opinion certainly continued to move in the direction of Protestantism, the opposing principles never became quite extinct.[15]

It was, undoubtedly, under circumstances of great uncertainty that Tallis was called upon to write music for a reformed liturgy that was at once novel and, probably, seeing his early training, distasteful to him. How he met the emergency is evident to-day, for his "Preces and Responses" not only remain in use, but are a priceless possession of the English Church. On the greatness of Tallis as a composer it is needless to insist, for it has been universally acknowledged. His contrapuntal skill was amazing, his fertility and originality equally so, and everything he wrote bears the impress of a nobility of mind difficult of description. That he remained in high favour with the Queen until his death, is shewn by the grants of land and other proofs of her regard that she bestowed on him. A complete list of his compositions (so far as can be known) is given in Grove's "Dictionary of Music and Musicians," and is a striking proof of his immense activity.

To secular music he seems to have been quite indifferent, for, to all appearances, he wrote little or none.

He died in 1585 when, probably, about seventy years of age, and was buried in the parish church of Greenwich. We have other of the early English musicians to deal with, but none, I think, of such unique interest, as he was the first of whom we have any reliable record, the works of his predecessors having been literally *burnt* out of existence.

WILLIAM BYRD

> Date of Byrd's birth unknown—Pupil of Tallis—Strict Catholic, yet employed in the English Church—Explanation—Queen Elizabeth's protection—Organist of Lincoln Cathedral—Member of the Chapel Royal—Granted sole privilege of publishing music in conjunction with Tallis—Greatness as composer, both sacred and secular music—His masses—His character—His death.

The date of the birth of this composer is quite unknown. Many speculations have been made on the subject, but they are purely conjectural. It seems certain, however, that he was born late in the first half of the sixteenth century, and thus at the time of the highest development of the ancient English ecclesiastical school of music. He had the inestimable privilege of being a pupil of Tallis, and remained his friend and colleague until the death of the latter dissolved the connection in 1585.

Unlike most of his contemporaries, he sturdily refused to change his religious views at the capricious behests of any monarch, and, strange to say, he does not seem to have suffered for his constancy materially, for he continued in official employment and the favour of Elizabeth as long as the Queen lived.

This fact has often evoked expression of astonishment, and has been cited as a proof, not only of the unstable position in the Church itself, but of instability in the character of its rulers.

It seems to me to be simply one more proof of the extraordinary tenacity with which Queen Elizabeth held to her policy of trusting to the influence of time to gradually moderate opposing views, and ultimately cement them in one creed which should embody the essential beliefs of both.

In any case, two things are known, that his services were retained, and that he adhered to the use of Latin for his sacred music. This, of course, means that either none of his music was sung in the Church, or that the occasional use of Latin for singing was permitted. The latter, I think, extremely probable, at least in the early years of the Reformation. He was appointed organist of Lincoln Cathedral in 1563, and in 1569 became a member of the Chapel Royal. In 1575 he published, in conjunction with Tallis, a collection of motets, which was dedicated to the Queen. It may be noted that it was printed by one Vautrollier, although the two composers had recently acquired the right of exclusively printing music for twenty-one years. It may be assumed that they sub-let the privilege, for it is known that after the death of Tallis, Byrd became sole possessor of the monopoly. This collection was entitled "Cantiones, quæ ab argumento sacræ vocantar, quinque et sex partum." Unlike Tallis, he did not confine his energies to sacred music, but wrote much for the virginals, as well as some beautiful madrigals.

In 1591 was issued his "Liber secundus Sacrarum Cantionum."

By this time Byrd was universally recognised as the greatest English musician of his time, and his fame had spread to the Continent. The death of Tallis had left him absolutely without a rival. There is plenty of evidence proving Queen Elizabeth's regard for him. In fact, it was from a pecuniary point of view, somewhat embarrassing to him, as it must be admitted that the great Queen was exacting of service, and somewhat parsimonious in the paying for it. The many references to him made by contemporary writers, such as "homo memorabilis," "the most celebrated musician of the English nation," and "one of the most famous musicians that ever were in this land," all go to shew that his name was held in the highest esteem.

The year 1607 witnessed the production of the "Gradualia"; this contained music for the complete ecclesiastical year of the Catholic Church. A striking example of his fearlessness!

The work by which he is best known to the general public to-day is the ever popular "Non nobis Domine," which, although written in the severe style of canon form, is at once beautiful and touching in its extraordinary expression of reverence. The highest achievements of William Byrd were the Masses in three, four and five parts.

In these works his genius is displayed to its fullest extent and in its most splendid guise.

The period is declared by so great an authority as W. S. Rockstro (Grove's Dictionary) to be the greatest in the history of Mass music, and Byrd's Mass in five parts is one of the most splendid that were written during that memorable time.

In personal character William Byrd was a decidedly interesting man. At a time when what may be termed opportunism was the evident thing that made for success, he refused to be influenced by it, and steadfastly declined to abate by jot or tittle his allegiance to the Catholic Church in its integrity, and it is an extraordinary proof of the attraction of his forceful character that, notwithstanding this fact, so menacing to his personal safety, he not only retained the Queen's favour during her lifetime, but seems to have held a firm grip on all the benefactions she bestowed on him up to the day of his death.

That this was not easy to accomplish is shown by the legal actions in which he became involved, the principal one being Shelley v. Byrd, upon whose issue depended his retention of Stondon Place, a property granted to him by Elizabeth. It continued for some years, and would seem to have ended in a form of compromise. It is not without interest that the plaintiff in the case was an ancestress of no less a personage than the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. However, Byrd remained in possession, and there is reason to believe that he died there and was buried in the Parish Church, although there are no records to bear out the supposition. His death took place in 1623, when he must have been at an advanced age.

ORLANDO GIBBONS

> Orlando Gibbons, one of a large family of musicians—Born in a time of transition from rigidity of ancient ecclesiastical music—Instrumentation coming into existence—Protest by Byrd—Contrast of the two composers—The age one in which freedom of thought springing up in all directions—Gibbons eager to take advantage of it—The result of the substitution of English for Latin in the Church—His eminence as writer of secular music—His death.

The youngest son in a family of musicians, Orlando Gibbons is a particularly interesting subject for study, not only on account of his genius, but for the fact that he became the most distinguished living composer at a time that was, essentially, one of transition. The old order was giving place to the new.

The rigid severity of the ancient Catholic Church music was gradually yielding to the attractions of greater warmth of feeling, added grace of melody and more freedom in expression. Instrumental music was lifting its head, and instruments other than the organ, the ever accepted aid to the rites of the Church, were invading the sacred precincts. Now, there are always men who are constitutionally averse to change, and of these was the great, but not too amiable, Mr. William Byrd. We can, therefore, quite appreciate his feelings on this particular innovation and understand the frame of mind in which he writes, in a preface to his "Songs of Sadness," thus: "There is no music of instruments whatever to be compared to the voyces of men, when they are good, well-sorted and ordered."

Orlando Gibbons was the impersonator of the new spirit; William Byrd was the jealous guardian of the old. One can, then, easily imagine the indignation with which such innovations would be met, and the accumulated wrath that must have burnt at his heart as he saw the repeated and successful attacks on all that he regarded as sacred. Up to this time all musical instruments, with the exception of the organ, had been associated with dancing and the outdoor amusements of the common people, and since many of these were of a kind far removed from religious exercise, it is only rational to suppose that such a man as Byrd would view with repugnance their introduction into the Church's service. The fact, too, must be taken into consideration that at the time of this particular innovation he was fairly advanced in years, and, therefore, with a disposition less adaptable than that of the young and ardent musician who was destined to leave behind him an imperishable name in the hierarchy of the world's greatest musicians.

Born about forty years after the birth of Byrd, Orlando Gibbons yet but survived him by two, being one of that long list of composers who have died young and whose premature death has robbed the world of who can tell how many masterpieces! His music was as distinct an advance on that of Byrd, as Byrd's was on that of Tallis.

The age was one in which the bonds, by which intellectual effort had been tethered, were being rapidly loosed or broken, and it is only natural that a young and greatly gifted man like Orlando Gibbons would revel in the sense of freedom from which the older one would shrink with something akin to horror.

He was thus fortunate to be born in such an era—an era made for ever memorable by the works of two of the greatest geniuses the world has possessed, William Shakespeare and Francis Bacon—and endowed with faculties that enabled him to grasp the opportunities it held out to him.

The substitution of English for Latin in the Church was, in itself, an event of striking importance to the composer, but, above all, the translation of the Bible into the vulgar tongue placed at his disposition the sources of limitless inspiration.

That Orlando Gibbons was quick to take advantage of the golden opportunity is proved by the list of superb anthems he bequeathed to the English Church. It includes such glorious examples as those entitled "Hosanna," "O clap your hands" and "This is the record of John." Of other forms of sacred music, the service in the key of F is perhaps his most notable achievement. [Pg 60]

He was also eminent as a composer of secular music, and was equalled by few and excelled by none as a writer of madrigals. His music for the viols and virginals not only emphasises the scope of his genius, but marks a veritable epoch in the history of instrumental music. So far did his originality carry him, that some of it might even be attributed to Bach or Handel, without violence to our sense of proportion. He died at Canterbury in 1625, the forty-second year of his age.

HENRY PURCELL

> Purcell, the last of the great early English musicians—His genius—Supremacy of the foreign musicians in England—His short life—His originality—His power of invention—A pioneer—His harmony—His precocity—Handel—An irrepressible conjecture—A comparison—Purcell enters the Chapel Royal—Becomes Organist of Westminster Abbey—Dr. John Blow—Purcell as composer of dramatic music—Te Deum and Jubilate for St. Cecilia's Day—His death and epitaph.

With Henry Purcell we come to the last and greatest of the early English composers.

Born before the traditions and influence of the ancient school of ecclesiastical music had actually died out, and yet after other and conflicting influences had become supreme, he had the extraordinary power that enabled him to seize on what was best in either and blend them in a style that, had there been successors of sufficient genius and independence of thought, might have proved the foundation of a school of English music sufficiently elastic to encourage every possible development and yet remaining absolutely national in character. [Pg 61]

Unfortunately, he had no such successors, and foreign musicians soon asserted that supremacy in the country they have held ever since, until the memorable events of the last decade sounded its death knell.

The Writing on the Wall has appeared. Many think they have read it.

Purcell was one more of that large number of men of genius who have died in early manhood. This fate seems to have been peculiarly conspicuous among musicians and poets. To cite only a few: Purcell, Mozart and Mendelssohn; Shelley, Keats and Chatterton. The list could, alas, be largely extended.

It may be truly said that, seeing how short his life was, his achievements were amazing, both in extent and significance. He advanced the art of music in every direction, to such a degree indeed, that one can only regard his latest works with astonishment at their modernity.

Such combinations of voices and instruments as had hitherto been tried were quite primitive in character, and were simply confined to the support of the voice parts. The illuminating genius of Purcell, however, enabled him to see, even if dimly, the infinite possibilities the combination held out to the composer, and he set himself to give effect to it. The crude efforts of his predecessors became in his hands a tremendous artistic force, and when he died the way had been paved for Handel and other of his illustrious successors. The same originality is displayed in his harmonies. He cast off all the shackles of convention and indulged in progressions and discords that would, doubtless, have shocked the earlier writers. Many of his cadences[16] are altogether too discordant for modern ears. In fact, the extreme harshness of some of them is rather calculated to make one doubt their authenticity. But it is, nevertheless, perhaps in his harmony and its extraordinary beauty that his genius is most conspicuously displayed.[17] [Pg 62]

His melodies were bold and unconventional to the point, as regards rhythm, of seeming wilfulness on occasion. Yet many were lovely and full of intense feeling, and all characterised by a genius at once independent and conscious of its power.

His precocity was amazing, even in the history of an art that has produced so many extraordinary specimens of this particular gift.

Some of his anthems were written while still a chorister boy, and his earliest essays in dramatic music at the age of fourteen.

That in some of his later works in which voices were combined with organ and orchestra, he anticipated Handelian effects is undoubted, and that the great German master was influenced by them, I think, equally so. [Pg 63]

If an account of the orchestra with which he had to deal would read strangely at the present time, it is at least not without interest to think that, even so tremendous a genius as Handel made little advance on it. It has been shewn elsewhere that the genesis of the modern orchestra is of a later date.

Handel was only ten years of age when Purcell died.

It is an irrepressible conjecture of what might have been, if the latter had lived thirty years longer. He then would have failed to reach the age at which the former died. The acting and re-acting of the genius of each one on the other might have produced results of profound importance to English music—might, indeed, have saved it.

Fate, however, on this occasion, probably displayed more kindness than is usually attributed to her. The contest would have proved unequal.

The great German genius, giant in body, overwhelming in energy and ever thirsting for new worlds to conquer (and succeeding), would have been no fitting opponent to the other, frail in physique and already a prey to the terrible disease that has cut off, prematurely, the lives of such countless thousands of men whose possibilities of attainment were barely given time to indicate.[18]

Purcell entered the choir of the Chapel Royal at the age of six, and while there became acquainted, in the best of all possible ways, with such of the masterpieces of the ancient English school as had escaped destruction, by taking part in their performance. At the age of eighteen[19] he became organist of Westminster Abbey, by the voluntary act of Dr. John Blow, who relinquished the post in favour of his illustrious pupil. This fact is immensely suggestive. It shews that not only was his genius universally recognised, but that his personality was already sufficiently developed to justify his appointment to the most important position to which any musician could attain. [Pg 64]

Many theories have been ventilated as to Dr. Blow's action on this occasion, some suggesting that, so far from being a voluntary act, he was dismissed. This seems to me to be without the least justification, seeing that he was re-appointed after Purcell's death. At this early age, too, Purcell seems to have been attracted by the influence of the theatre, as records shew that he was constantly writing music for the stage.

That his genius for this class of composition was, in every respect, equal to that he displayed in any other field open to him, is shewn by his music to "Dido and Æneas," which was not only masterly, but as much in advance of anything that had preceded it, as most of his other work proved to be. The same can be said of his music to "King Arthur," in which he collaborated with Dryden. [Pg 65]

If the word "opera," in its modern significance, can scarcely be applied to it, there is not the slightest doubt that the genius was there to give inspiration and guidance to those who were to come after him.

He wrote upwards of twenty works of this kind. For some years he was a "composer to their Majesties," and in fulfilment of his duties in this connection wrote many odes for use on official occasions. These do not count among his best works. He was a voluminous writer of instrumental music, and his sonatas are in advance of any previously written. He wrote, practically for all instruments then extant, but that by which he is principally known as an instrumental composer is his harpsichord music, this instrument having by this time superseded the virginals.

One of his last, and perhaps the greatest of his works, was the magnificent "Te Deum and Jubilate" for St. Cecilia's Day.

This was for many years sung at the annual Festival of the Sons of the Clergy, but was for some reason or other relinquished in favour of Handel's Dettingen Te Deum. Purcell died when his genius was at the highest point of power and splendour, leaving behind him a name of imperishable memory and a fame that has seldom been eclipsed.

His death took place in 1695, the 37th year of his age. He was buried in Westminster Abbey. Over his grave was inscribed the following epitaph: [Pg 66]

> Plaudite, felices, superi, tanto hospite, nostris
> Præfuerat, vestris addite illa choris:
> Invida nec vobis Purcellum terra reposcat.
> Questa decus secli, deliciasque breves.
> Tam cito decessisse, modo cui singula debet
> Musa, prophana suos religiosa suos.
> Vivat so vivat, dum vicina organa spirant,
> Dumque colet numeris turba canora Deum.

FOOTNOTES:

[14] Novello & Co.

[15] Since the above was written I read in the *Evening News*, November 24, 1911, the following words from a lecture delivered by the Dean of St. Paul's:

"In its present state" (the Church of England) "it was the product of a political compromise, which was so framed as to include Catholics who would renounce the Pope, and Puritans who were not anarchistic on principle. It was officially Protestant and disliked the name. Ever since the Reformation the reformed churches had been in a state

of uncertainty, like a Dotheboys Hall after it had expelled its Squeers, full of earnestness and deep conviction, but undecided as to what kind of church they wanted, how it ought to be governed, what the conditions of membership ought to be and where the seat of authority should reside."

[16] A cadence is the end of a musical phrase.

[17] A tablet to his memory in Westminster records, in touching language, that he "has gone to that Blessed Place, where only his harmony can be exceeded."

[18] He died of consumption.

[19] There is a conflict of authorities on this point, but it may be taken for granted that he was but little, if any, older at the time.

CHAPTER IV

THE DECLINE OF ENGLISH MUSIC

Three principal causes leading to decline—Reformation the principal one—The plain-song and the people—Gradual transition in mode of living—Effect of Calvinistic teaching—Excesses of the Commonwealth soldiery—Facts as to life of Calvin—Effects of change of dynasty—The Stuarts and music—The Restoration and resulting excitement—England rid of the Stuarts—Jonathan Swift a Church dignitary—First appearance of opera in England—Handel and Italian opera—He leaves England—Returns and devotes himself to oratorio—Effect on the people—Its influence on native composers—Ill-effects of imitation—Necessity of relying on native inspiration—Vincent Novello—Novello and Company—Services to English music—Revival—The Wesleys, Samuel and Samuel Sebastian—Conclusion.

The three principal causes that led to the decline and practical extinction of English music were the Reformation, the indifference of a foreign Court, and the settlement in England of large numbers of foreign musicians, among whom was one of the greatest musical geniuses of all time, the German, George Frederick Handel. The two latter causes may be said to be the complement one of the other.

Of these three hostile influences, the Reformation and all that it involved was, overwhelmingly, the most fatal in its effect, for it struck at the root foundation; it killed the very soil that gave birth to the plant. The first blow it inflicted on music—and in those days that meant English music, not as now—and it was a deadly one, was its suppression in the services of the Church. To grasp to the full the significance of this act, one must recall some of the salient features of national life that had existed for centuries.

We have seen how intimately bound together were the lives of the Church and the people; how the very existence of either seemed dependent on the solidity of their union; or, at least, how inseparable a part the services of the Church were from the daily life and occupations of the common tillers of the soil, who formed the majority of the population.

Music, in the early days to which we now refer, was a living force and a vital attraction to the peasantry, who, although perhaps unable to understand the significance of the elaborate ceremonial that characterised mediæval forms of worship, were able to join in the singing of the plain-song that was ever, as far as research can guide us, an essential element in the rites of the ancient Church.

Here let me say, we must utterly discard from our minds any thought of the noble and ornate music of the Mass, the product of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. These works were written for performance by highly trained singers in the employ of bishops or abbots governing the cathedrals or monasteries, possessing sufficient wealth to command their services, and were listened to by a class of people far removed from those under our present consideration. Such music would, indeed, be far more remote from their understanding than that sung at St. Paul's Cathedral to the ordinary agricultural labourer to-day.

No, it was the simple strains of the plain-song that they knew, understood and loved.

To them, religion and music were as one, and happy were those who drew their last breath before the new and fantastic doctrines that were destined to change the whole life and spirit of the people came into actual effect.

The transition from the old life to the new was a slow one, notwithstanding the authorities, but once brought about and accepted by the people, with that tenacity so characteristic of the English race, they not only absorbed but put into practice tenets that, a century before, would have been abhorrent to them. That this is, unhappily, true, the horrible excesses tolerated during the Commonwealth period are more than sufficient proof.

The hideous teaching that music and every other form of art was devil-worship became accepted by those who, but not long before, were the very incarnation of joyous, righteous life, as a

revelation that had only come in the nick of time for their salvation. To suppress every longing for it, any memory of it, even, was considered a duty and the indulgence in it a sin, though clothed in ecclesiastical garb. The strength to resist the yearning for that which for so many ages had been, to say the least, one of the greatest sources of consolation and happiness to them, they counted a righteousness, and the more these poor people suffered, the greater was their assurance of ultimate safety. The loss of music to the English in those early Calvinistic times must have been one of the most bitter of the many miseries they had to endure.

It is impossible to think without pity of the transition from the gay, exuberant and, possibly, irresponsible life that had been theirs for centuries, to the fearful search after the salvation that their days and nights were mostly spent in dread of losing.

Should this appear exaggerated, let us turn to the writings of the poet, William Cowper: we shall find ample confirmation.

It may be said, "Why cite a man who is known to have had fits of temporary insanity?" The answer is simple. The melancholia from which he suffered and which led him, on more than one occasion, to attempt to commit suicide, was the outcome of his belief in the terrible doctrine of Pre-destination, and the ever-present fear that he was among those destined to eternal doom.

This is how he writes:

"Hatred and vengeance, my eternal portion,
Scarce can endure delay of execution—
Wait with impatient readiness to seize my
Soul in a moment.

Damn'd below Judas; more abhorr'd than he was,
Who for a few pence sold his holy Master!
Twice betray'd, Jesus me, the last delinquent
Deems the profanest.

Man disavows, and Deity disowns me,
Hell might afford my miseries a shelter;
Therefore, Hell keeps her ever-hungry mouths all
Bolted against one.

Hard lot! encompassed with a thousand dangers,
Weary, faint, trembling with a thousand terrors,
I'm call'd, if vanquish'd! to receive a sentence
Worse than Abiram's.

Him, the vindictive rod of angry Justice,
Sent quick and howling to the centre headlong;
I, fed with judgment, in a fleshy tomb, am
Buried above ground."

Cowper was born a little more than a hundred years after the death of Shakespeare, and about seventy after that of Cromwell. In Shakespeare's time it is certain that Puritanism had made little way in England, or there would have been far more reference to it than is suggested in his works. He mirrored the spirit of his age and country, and it mattered little whether he placed the scenes of his plays in an Italian city or "on the coast of Bohemia," the life depicted in them is that of England and the spirit embodied that of the robust Elizabethan age. Such reform as had taken place in the Church was little calculated to affect the character or temperament of the people, and although it is quite within ordinary knowledge that there were a considerable number of people already who had accepted the extreme doctrines that were later to so terribly transform the national character, they had then no more influence in the country than the Spiritualists have to-day, in the twentieth century. Once, however, they had taken root they spread with appalling rapidity, until by Cowper's time they had gained an ascendency over the minds of the people that the verses just quoted do but fairly indicate.

It was in the reign of James I. that Puritanism began to assert itself in a manner that at all foreshadowed what was to come, and it is a gratifying thought that Shakespeare did not live to see the England, that he had loved and so glorified by his genius, bend under the burden of the foreign intrusion that was to completely alter the aspects of her life as he had known them. A vital aid doubtless accrued to the movement through the constant influx of Calvinist refugees from the North of Europe, mainly Scandinavians, who were warmly welcomed and aided by Anne of Denmark, wife of the King.

It is curious to note how many movements of anti-national character that have taken place in England since the time of the Tudors have had the support of the reigning house. Happily such days are past. It must be granted, however, that it was as natural on the part of Anne to grant shelter to her own country people, whether in Scotland or England, as it was on their part to seek it at her hands.

To whatever causes the spread of Calvinism may be due, its effect on the nation generally was deplorable, and on music, particularly, absolutely fatal.

The gloomy fanaticism that its teaching engendered not only prompted the entire suppression of music of every kind, wherever possible, but made it become an object of loathing and contempt, and what was found impossible to achieve by legislation was effected by local tyranny. In the conventicles that sprung up all over the country, music was pointed to as the ally of godlessness in its worst and most reprehensible form, and its use a thing that put the offender outside the pale of religious life. [Pg 73]

It needs little consideration to appreciate the result such teaching must necessarily have had on people who had come to accept these views as a revelation of Divine will.

Its effect was, simply, not only to deaden, but to obliterate the very sense of the art among the masses—that art, too, that had been, formerly, one of the glories of England.

In other directions, the results of this fanatic spirit are more concretely shewn, and the terrible evidence that the ancient churches of the country supply is sufficient to cause a shudder to the more tempered spirit of later ages.

Practically, every one of these standing buildings affords evidence of the ruthless and destructive spirit that animated the authorities, and encouraged the common people and soldiery of the Commonwealth period to the utmost license in church desecration. The shocking and stupid brutality of the excesses perpetrated is, at once, a proof of the ferocious spirit that had been aroused, and the unappeasable hatred towards everything that could, in any way, suggest Catholic teaching or influence. When one reads of these atrocities, cold-blooded and calculated, they bring to the mind rather the sacking of ancient Rome by the Huns than the acts of civilised Englishmen living after the age of Shakespeare and Bacon.

The noblest ornaments that the nameless monk-architects had raised to the glory of God, and the unceasing call to the piety of those living after, became a special mark for vengeance. [Pg 74]

To break down the altars, smash to fragments the sculptured representations of the Saviour, the Holy Virgin or the saints, was a source of gratification, and the occasion of licentious jest.

For the destruction of musical instruments and the burning of manuscript music, we owe them—not gratitude.

To make a bonfire of vestments, and everything that was capable of absolute extinction by the agency of fire, was an occasion of ribald mirth and revelry.

To put the glorious cathedrals, the undying evidence of the splendour of Catholic devotion and enthusiasm, to the basest uses was their common habitude.

The turning of the noble cloisters, that had been the pious and unceasing work of so many years to build, into stables for the horses of Cromwell's cavalry was only one feature of many other and even more hideous acts of vileness that were not only accomplished, but approved of.

On these one would rather not dwell. The words horror and indignation seem infantile to express the emotions called forth by the contemplation of such things.

After all this, the smashing of the old and beautiful stained glass windows, sorrowful as it may make us, seems of comparatively little consequence, unique and of priceless value as they were. It is, nevertheless, inevitable to think with wondering awe of the awful waste of the inspired work of centuries. [Pg 75]

There are yet, and we may well be thankful for it, a few remains of the extraordinary beauty of the artistic work of the monks of old. The Lady Chapel of Gloucester Cathedral is a striking example. It was finished only a few years before the Reformation, and was more fortunate than the majority of such buildings, inasmuch as, although the traces of mutilation are evident, the beauty of the work of the monk-artist can yet be seen and appreciated.

That the work of destruction was carried out to the fullest extent of their means by these iconoclasts is proved by the general absence of remains. It is only an occasional chance, such as the digging of foundations of a building on the outskirts of a cathedral city, as happened not long ago, that leads to the discovery of mutilated fragments of statues, broken arteries of altars of untold age, and powdered remains of stained glass, that even modern skill admits its inability to equal, which can give us real and tangible evidence of the wealth of beauty and pious effort that must have been stored up in those marvellous old buildings.

The spirit that could guide to the destruction not only of such things as the eye alone could perceive and appreciate, but of so intangible and defenceless a thing as music, must indeed have been insatiable. The majestic strength of those venerable fanes, that seem to defy the flight of ages, was theirs to successfully resist such enemies as they then had to encounter, and though they were, to some extent, destined to suffer in the conflict, yet such wounds as they received were not altogether incapable of healing. [Pg 76]

The point we have to arrive at is the complete realisation that whatever was beautiful in art was hateful to the Puritans, and it was only when every vestige of it was uprooted, they ceased their work of violent and wanton destruction.

So far as music is concerned, their work may be said to have been complete.

Some facts concerning the life of the extraordinary man who was destined, through the

instrumentality of his teaching, to so vitally affect English life may be of interest to the reader.

Jean Calvin, or Jean Chauvin, as his birth-name was, was a native of Picardy, and born at Noyon in 1509. He was originally destined for the Church, and commenced his early studies with that object in view. At an early age he was sent to Paris, where he soon exhibited remarkable intellectual powers. It was not long, however, before he began to evince a distinct spirit of rebellion against the course of study pursued there, and, with his father's sanction, abandoned theology and, turning his attention to law, proceeded to Orleans with the intention to qualify himself as an advocate. After a short stay in that city he went on to Bourges, where he entered the University.

Calvin.

This period was destined to be a momentous one, not only for himself, but in the history of the civilised world. He here came under influences that, aided by his early misgivings in Paris, impelled him to take that step which was to prove of such immense significance, his severance from the Catholic Church.

In the reading of history one happens upon reformers countless, men of genius many, but men who, added to genius, have the extraordinary personal magnetism that compels, few.

Alexander, Cæsar, Shakespeare, Napoléon, are striking examples, and of such was John Calvin. After a wandering life in France, during which time he both wrote and preached in the interests of the reformed faith, he, for personal safety, finally left the country and took refuge in Switzerland. Eventually he settled in Geneva, and thence propagated those extreme doctrines that were to become known as Calvinism.

On the rapidity with which they spread, and the hold they took upon the northern races of Europe, it is not necessary to dwell; their influence for so long in England is all that it is, here, incumbent to recall. Of the man himself, in view of so much that is contradictory having been written, it is difficult to speak, but it would seem that he retained to the end the æsthetic habits acquired in his early training as a seminarist, and was always more capable of inspiring awe than affection.

The change from an English to a foreign line of Sovereigns was one of far-reaching import. It is certain that when Queen Mary caused the execution of Lady Jane Grey, she little realised how disastrous to the country the event would prove. Not only had this interesting and unfortunate girl an ability probably equal to that of her cousin Elizabeth, but she was possessed of a character that was infinitely superior.

The act, however, was destined to have fateful results.

The Stuarts, descended from a race that had been in deadly conflict with the English for centuries, and allied by blood and intimate intercourse with her enemies, succeeded to an inheritance that immediately placed them in a position of supremacy in the very country that had for so long been an object of hatred and fear.

Had Lady Jane Grey succeeded to the throne after the death of Elizabeth, the line of Sovereigns of English descent might have been perpetuated. It is easy to see how such an event might have affected English music.

It must not be lost sight of that the doctrines of the Reformation, and in their extreme form, took root in Scotland long before they had made any visible impression on the ordinary life in England.

Mainly owing to the efforts of John Knox, a follower and friend of Calvin, the new teaching had taken a complete hold over that country, and been almost universally accepted as the most expedient medium of religious exposition.

The King, James VI., by his marriage with Anne of Denmark, signified his acceptance of the new creed.

With his accession, as James I., to the throne of England therefore, an influence, if not of active hostility, at least of indifference to music, came into existence, with results that could not be otherwise than formidable. [Pg 79]

In the reign of Charles I., the Queen invited large numbers of French musicians to settle in London, and gave them all the patronage that her position enabled her to extend. Their influence on the current music of the day is easily traced.

All this time Calvinist teaching, like the growth of a noxious weed, was spreading far and wide, so that English music was being assailed by two fatal influences at the same time.

This condition of things lasted through the entire reign.

With the Commonwealth the voice of music was altogether silenced.

It needs no keen discernment to see the infinite possibilities of harm to the musical instincts of the country such a state of things opens out.

Imagine the thousands or millions of children born and brought up bereft of the happiness that music might have brought them.

We are told by the biologist that the continued disuse of muscles first renders them ineffective, and eventually leads to their extinction.

Similarly, completely severed from music as many were, they first became indifferent to it, and eventually lost all ear for it. Insistence upon the immense number of people in England to-day, of all classes, who are so situated, is unnecessary. [Pg 80]

The Restoration ushered in a period of delirious excitement,[20] such as had never been known in the history of this country. Unhappily, it was accompanied by an equally unprecedented display of license, in which the common people seemed to vie with the Court for supremacy. To account for this latter fact, one need only recall the policy pursued under the Commonwealth, that drove the whilom vagrant "musician" to take refuge in the cities, and thus materially go to swell the more turbulent portion of the population.

Music was again heard in the churches, but it was not such as the people remembered. It was, at once, novel and unliked. Largely of foreign origin, foreign musicians were engaged to perform it. For such innovations, the wives of Charles I. and Charles II. were doubtless largely responsible, one being French and the other Portuguese, but the Continental wanderings of the latter King had made him familiar with such music, and, being of a much lighter kind than that of the old English church, would, naturally, be more congenial to such a character.

One can easily imagine how the sight of swarthy foreigners, playing such strange sounding music on the viols and other instruments, would astonish the common people. In the diaries, Pepys is frankly condemnatory, saying that it all appeared to him to be more suitable to the theatre than to the church. [Pg 81]

It is astonishing to think how soon the national rejoicing at the re-establishment of the monarchy was to change to national dejection and disgust, caused not only by the policy, but, perhaps, still more by the personal life of the King.

The former brought the country to a state of bankruptcy, both financial and political, the latter to a sense of shame and humiliation that was entirely new to it.

The open and unabashed profligacy of the King and Court, and the absolutely contemptuous disregard, not only of national religious feeling, but of the merest elements of ordinary decency, were bound to bring about a tremendous re-action.

It came, and with irresistible effect. Thousands who had hitherto shunned the severities of Puritan life and teaching, now fled to them for protection against infection by the wave of immorality which was flooding the country. To the people, kingship became once more not the symbol of national glory, but of national abasement.

Every sense, honourable in man, was outraged, and as each year passed in the reign of this wretched monarch, so did it go to further intensify the ever-growing force of Calvinistic conviction, with all its concomitant results, not only on art, but the very character of the people in general.

With the memory of the execution of Charles I. ever present in their memory, they bore with a patience, both exemplary and undeserved, the terrible incubus, but once relieved from it by the death of his successor, they rose as one man and threw off the yoke of a dynasty, the most worthless, perhaps, that any nation in modern history has been burdened with. [Pg 82]

Once rid of the Stuarts, England entered upon a period in which Calvinism was the most vital and dominating force. Its sombre tenets left little room for other than religious exercise, and so far as music is concerned, beyond the lugubrious chanting of psalmody—well, there was none. Indeed, judging by the writings of the age of Queen Anne, it would appear that not only music, but even Christianity itself was at a low ebb.

An age that could witness without protest the appointment of Jonathan Swift, the author of "The Tale of a Tub," to the position of a dignitary of the Church, must surely have been one in which, at least among the ruling classes, the moral sense must have sunk low. At any rate, it may be said that the extreme liberty of thought, encouraged by the then prevalent doctrines, and the utter disregard of ceremonial in the services of the Church, are far removed from the thought and customs of to-day.

After a Scottish a Dutch, after a Dutch, with an interval, a German reigning house. It is impossible, when the consideration of English music is under discussion, to shut one's eyes to the extreme significance of such facts. Opera, even in its most primitive state, had not been known in England before the Stuart times, and, though the genius of Purcell was fascinated by it, yet even he was unable to imbue his countrymen with any taste for it. The masque they could understand, since it was a natural outcome of the kind of play that had been popular in the country for centuries, but this was a foreign institution for which they had no predilection.

So far as England is concerned, it was a hothouse plant fostered principally by a foreign Court and an aristocracy who had acquired their taste for it abroad. Such operatic work, as Purcell was responsible for, was given in English, but it was not long before an Italian company was invited to London for the purpose of presenting Italian opera, which by that time had arrived at a point of much greater advancement, and a permanent home made for it.

With the company came Buononcini, the most celebrated composer of this form of art that his country possessed.

The arrival in this country of Handel, who had not only made a complete study of it, but whose genius had enabled him to carry it to a state of development hitherto undreamt of, was the signal of war between the rival composers, and led to the establishment of another theatre for its exploitation, at the head of which was the great German master. It may be mentioned that at this period of its expansion and introduction to the various countries of Europe, the liberty was granted to the individual exponent of the different parts to sing in his native language, a diplomatic concession that will be readily appreciated; hence two or three, or even more, languages might be heard in the course of a single representation.

To Handel, however, who was always most exacting as to the rendering of his music, such an anomaly would be, naturally, intolerable. And so it proved. His operas were written in Italian, and in that language they had to be sung. That was what he required, and no less would he accept. In this connection, it is strange to observe that, notwithstanding his long residence in England, he not only never mastered the intricacies of the pronunciation of English, but never learnt to appreciate the relative importance of the words of a sentence. Of this, the early editions of his works afford ample proof. In fact, it is known that his struggles with his librettist were frequent and stormy, ending, however, as one would naturally imagine, in the complete collapse of the latter. Fancy Wagner with a librettist. It is unthinkable.

The continued importation of foreign singers who were alone qualified to meet the demands of fashionable society, which was then the only source from which money was to be earned, naturally relegated the English singer to a position of comparative neglect. His energies were confined either to the modest demands made upon him by the then Church services, or devoted to occupations upon which it is unnecessary to dwell.

Similarly, native composers, such as were left, who were, neither by training nor instinct, capable of competing with the foreign musician in this new and strange form of art, found themselves in a position that offered little opportunity of making the barest provision for existence, and, naturally, abandoned a calling that appeared so hopeless. This state of things lasted for a considerable period.

An event, however, was to take place that, at least, had some effect in the amelioration of existing conditions.

Handel, after a long struggle, during which he had gained and lost a considerable fortune, abandoned the conflict and, forsaking Italian opera, left the country for a time to seek a restoration of his health, which had become seriously threatened. Upon his return he decided to make sacred music the medium by which he should regain both the fame and fortune which he had previously acquired. This decision, momentous as it was for the whole world, was peculiarly so for England. It had two results that may be said to be diametrically opposed, for while he soon began to make converts to music by presenting it in a religious guise, among thousands who had for long eschewed it as being anti-Christ, he, at the same time, by the sheer weight of his colossal genius, not only overwhelmed the native composer and rendered him distrustful of his powers, but imbued the people of the country with the conviction that music was not a natural English gift, and that for all serious effort in the art, it must be sought from the foreigner.

That this impression became deeply engrained in the minds of Englishmen is as evident to-day as it ever was, and it is a common-place among those who cater for public entertainment, that the production of serious works by English composers spells financial loss, with one single exception.

To what other cause than the lack of individuality or national genius can such a state of things be attributed?

It cannot be seriously contemplated for a moment that because the composer is an Englishman his countrymen will not listen to him.

The case of Arthur Sullivan proves the very contrary. His music, if not great, had English characteristics, and the public were not slow to recognise the fact. At any rate, they came to believe in him, and the reception accorded to his "Golden Legend" proved that they were not only willing, but eager to readjust previous convictions so soon as anything appeared that seemed to warrant it.

Unfortunately, this work had not sufficient strength, originality, or nationality to stand the stress of time, but it disproved once and for ever the absurd contention that the English people would not accept any serious effort in music because it had been written by an Englishman.

Its lack of *staying* power seems to be attributable to the want of sufficient national character, redolent of the soil, which appears to be so essential to lasting endurance.

At any rate, one cannot read without being moved the following words which appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* after a recent performance at the Norwich Festival, 1911. They were contained in an article, not only brilliantly, but even sympathetically written, yet this is what it says:—

> "Time was when this work was appraised as a world's masterpiece for ever. As a fact, it affords but one more example of the many that go to prove the rule as to the absurdity of prophesying unless one knows. I would not go so far as some one was heard to go yesterday, who vouchsafed the opinion that even the singers seemed somewhat abashed. That is a gross exaggeration. But it is no exaggeration to say that none of them ... seemed very deeply moved by the extreme placidity and suavity of the phrases once deemed to be of purest gold. Nor, for that matter, did the chorus themselves. The truth is that time has not dealt over kindly with this work."

Yet this very work, let it be remembered, was not only the most popular, but practically the single one of its kind written by an Englishman that had ever touched the imagination of the English people. To go still further, it may be said with absolute truth, that it was the most successful sacred work produced in England up to the time of Sir Edward Elgar, since Mendelssohn introduced the "Elijah," at Birmingham in 1846.

The inference, which seems to me obvious, is that no work that is not typical of the country from which it emanates possesses those qualities that make for permanence.

 The amelioration in the position of the native composer, to which we alluded just now, was due to the fact that he had not lost belief in his own powers so far as sacred music was concerned; hence the revival of public interest in this form of art was, naturally, a source of gratification. Unhappily, however, the fact cannot be ignored that instead of pursuing their way on their old lines and traditions, even the most gifted among the English composers gave way to the fatal temptation to try and write on the lines of such a colossal genius as Handel.

The power to hurl the thunderbolts of Jove is given to few, and at the time of which we write, there were certainly no Englishmen among that select company.

We need but cite one example.

William Boyce, one of the most gifted of English composers of the eighteenth century, was born in 1710, and was, therefore, about twenty-eight years of age when the oratorio "Saul" was produced. That he completely fell under the new influence is quite apparent, as little examination of his music, dating from that time, is sufficient to shew. Not only did he allow it to affect his own work, but it carried him to the absolutely indefensible point of taking one of Purcell's greatest compositions, and revising and adding to it, in order to bring it into conformity with the great school which had arisen. There are two kinds of imitation, conscious and unconscious. Such an act as this can only belong to the former. From this date may be said to have commenced that system of imitation of foreign music that has been the bane of English musicians ever since. However unconscious it may have, and doubtless has been, its effect has been equally disastrous. Imitation never made art and never will. The imitator may arrive at temporary distinction, but future generations will not recognise him. He will be, merely, a painted figure in a painted sepulchre of plagiarism. Happily there were yet composers, chiefly cathedral organists, who clung to English Church tradition, and among whose work occasional glimpses of its genius can be found.

This fact did not escape the eyes of so keen and accomplished an observer as Vincent Novello, and to this remarkable man the country is under a great debt of recognition.

An Italian by blood, he was born in England, and spent the greater part of his life here. He was organist in turn of several London churches, and thus gained the opportunity to learn and appreciate such music of the early English school as he found in use.

So interested did he become, that he visited various cathedral libraries and, with the permission of the authorities, copied much of the ancient music of which they were the repositories.

This he carefully edited and published, after transposing the parts written in clefs, with which the public are generally unacquainted. He thus furnished the means of bringing into general use much of the splendid music that had hitherto been confined to the services of the cathedral, for which it had been originally written.

He was, practically, the founder of the world-famed publishing house of Novello and Co., and it is

an interesting fact that this great firm has never deviated from its early traditions, since it is at the present day as emphatically as it ever was at any period of its existence, the home of all that is best in English Church music.

The founding of the firm, if an event of moment to the public at large, was one of still greater import to the musician, for it caused a commercial value to be attached to his work that, previously, had little more than a sentimental one.

It is not difficult to imagine, in those days of stage-coach travelling, the anxious feelings of the composer about to undertake a long journey to London, his manuscript carefully folded in his pocket and intent on this new and even amazing idea of selling it for actual gold; not, perhaps, simply on account of the happiness that it might bring to his home, but of the fame that might accrue to his name. Nor is it otherwise than quite easy to imagine with what different feelings he would start on his homeward course after a successful issue to his venture. At any rate, it would be difficult to over-estimate the services that the historic firm has rendered to the country and the musical profession during the hundred years of its existence.

The decline of English music had been continuous. It culminated in the productions of such composers as Kent and William Jackson, and of these it need only be said that they were lamentable. Yet, amazing as it may seem now, they became not only popular, but perhaps the most notorious of them, once known familiarly as "Jackson in F," retained its hold on the affections of the people until well into the nineteenth century. Happily, the revival was near at hand, and, as densest darkness heralds the dawn, so the birth of Samuel Wesley, in this worst period, proved to be the event that signalised its coming. English Church music was to be restored, if not in the splendour of its ancient originality, at least in a form that was at once dignified and worthy of its mission.

A profound student of the works of Bach, he brought enthusiasm, tempered by deep learning, to bear upon everything he wrote.

The impress, not only of the great German master, but of the still earlier writers of the English school at its most glorious period, was stamped on it, and it is an interesting fact that the Mass he wrote, when entering the Roman Communion, bears every evidence of its illustrious descent. With the birth of his son, this memorable revival was not only to become assured of permanence, but was destined to be an epoch of profound significance in the history of English Church music.

The works by which Samuel Sebastian Wesley enriched the world, and restored England to its kingdom in sacred music again, including the noble anthems, "Ascribe unto the Lord," "Blessed be the God and Father," and, perhaps above all, "The Wilderness," seem as if secure of lasting as long as the Christian religion is the dominant factor in human life. It only remains to be said that many noble works of later origin make for the assurance that English music, as represented in the Church to-day, will never again look back.

FOOTNOTES:

[20] It may be noted here that the excitement caused, during the South African war, by the relief of Mafeking, was not so unprecedented in our history as was generally supposed.

CHAPTER V

MUSICAL EDUCATION IN ENGLAND

The early Church, origin of present development of modern music—Antiphon, precursor of harmony and counterpoint—The invention of the organ and its importance—Tallis, the link between pre and post Reformation music—Purcell and the Augustan age of English music—Acts of Reformation period—Present system of musical education—Principal schools of music—Lack of national character in English music—Suggested explanation—Influence of foreign resident composers—Rival Italian opera companies—Return of Handel and effect of his oratorios—English music festivals and foreign conductors—Sterndale Bennett's "Woman of Samaria"—Sir Edward Elgar's violin concerto—Foreign teachers and their influence—Costa and the high pitch—Recognition of great foreign musicians—The new school of British composers—Mendelssohn on Italian methods of singing for northern races.

PAST

It is to the Catholic Church that modern art must look for the origin of its present development. To the monks of mediæval times must be ascribed the glory of the greatest achievements in Gothic architecture, the art of fresco-painting, and the foundations of modern music.

Not only were the monasteries the repository of every kind of learning, but it is interesting to

think that the impress of religion, which music received in those long-ago days, and in those gone and forgotten buildings, is as alive to-day as it ever was.

Notwithstanding the degrading uses to which a beautiful art has been so constantly put, a degradation greater, perhaps, than that to which any sister art has had to submit, it is still triumphantly evident, in works so otherwise dissimilar as Elgar's "Dream of Gerontius" and Wagner's "Parsifal." [Pg 94]

In fact, it is safe to say that the greatest creations in music have either been dedicated to the services of Christianity or have largely received inspiration from its illimitable resources.

Though many an aching heart may have throbbed out its existence in the seclusion of those cloistered cells, still, many must have been the joyful emotions evoked in the minds of other of their occupants, by the achievement of some long worked-for discovery that has had untold influence on ages then unborn.

What, for instance, must have been their feeling of ecstacy when the first harmonious *triad* fell upon the ears of the amazed monks?

To them, long accustomed as they were to the barbaric sound of sequences of bare fourths and fifths, it must have seemed like a revelation of Heaven itself, and we may fain hope that many a *Nunc dimittis*, all the happier in consequence, came from their grateful hearts as the passing hour arrived.

It is to the antiphon that we may look as the precursor of harmony and counterpoint, and thus the origin of modern music.

Antiphony was the ancient mode of rendering music, in which two sets of voices sang alternately. They were placed on opposite sides of the choir, as may be seen in Catholic and Anglican churches to-day, and were respectively entitled "Decani" and "Cantoris." [Pg 95]

For long they recited on the same note, then came a change in which one side varied it, probably by a perfect fourth or fifth above or below. Afterwards, the chanting of them together indicated the first advance towards *harmony*—that is to say, a combination of notes sounded simultaneously. The undulations of the voices of priest and choir signalled the advance towards melody.

The next and most decisive step was the advent of *counterpoint*; that is the pointing of one note or series of notes against another. Thus while one side would be chanting a series of long notes, the other would be singing quicker ones, which were either momentarily discordant or subsequently in harmony with them.

With the birth of this new development may be associated the origin of music, as we know it to-day.

The process of each was, however, gradual, and it is difficult to suggest, with any conviction, their respective periods of evolution.

To come to later times, with the invention of the organ and its entry into the service of the church, we are well within sight of historical accuracy. It is easy to realise what a stimulus to musical invention this must have proved, and from that time, about the middle of the eighth century, the progress has been continuous if not rapid.

The monks, being the first musicians, were the first teachers, and thus we arrive at the beginning of musical education in England. During the long centuries in which the people, mostly serfs as they were, looked to the monasteries for such amenities of life as were possible in those days, the progress in music was confined to those employed in the service of the ritual of their chapels, but with the increase of population and the building of churches outside, the conditions became materially changed. [Pg 96]

The monks, who had hitherto jealously guarded the secret of the manipulation of the keys, began to teach others, and thus came into existence that body of organists and composers who for many centuries upheld the standard of English music, and who, until the days of the Reformation, kept England in the forefront of musical art.

Let it be well borne in mind that up to this time England owed its music to England alone.

Till then Thomas Tallis was the greatest exponent of the art who had lived in this country, and, if anything were wanting to prove the extraordinary genius the monks had exhibited in teaching the profoundest mysteries of music, the mastery displayed by Tallis in his *Song of Forty Parts* would be sufficient to supply it.

He was the link that united English pre-Reformation and post-Reformation music.

In the reigns of Henry VIII. and Queen Mary, he was a gentleman of the Chapel-Royal, subsequently becoming organist in Queen Elizabeth's time.

It was during this period that he set to music that part of the English liturgy that is now sung. As regards Henry and Elizabeth, the feelings of both these monarchs towards the Reformation were, doubtless, more political than religious, and to this cause may be attributed the retention of his post by Tallis, since there is no proof that he ever embraced the reformed faith. [Pg 97]

Then came an epoch that may well be called the Augustan age of English music, seeing that to the genius of Tallis was added that of Byrd and Orlando Gibbons, culminating in the arrival of Purcell, when it attained its zenith.

With the death of Purcell began the long decline that resulted in the practical decay of English music.

Everything tended to that end.

The suppression of the monasteries, the home of art and literature; the degradation of public worship, including the prohibition of music in such perfunctory ceremonies as were permitted, and the abolition of everything pertaining to art or beauty in its performance; the ruthless destruction of all that could appeal to the sense of the beautiful in the minds of the people, of the altars with their gorgeous adornments, or the stained windows with their picturesque representations of moving incidents in the life of Christ; the covering with stucco or the whitewashing of the marble pillars that supported the decorated roofs: all these monstrosities were calculated to deaden any artistic sense the common people might have had within them, and such was, unhappily, the effect.

Music came to be looked upon as a frivolous or contemptible thing, and the practice of it as only fit for people who had no aptitude for anything better, and who were treated by the average person of any consequence, accordingly. The teaching of it naturally became a matter of small importance, and thus, outside the cathedral cities which sheltered the few remaining educated English musicians, such teaching as could be procured was supplied by persons supplementing their earnings in other directions, or foreigners who had come to the country at the call of the few influential individuals in whom the love for music was not actually dead. This was the state of affairs at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

PRESENT

The present system of musical education in this country may be said to commence with the establishment of the Royal Academy of Music in the year 1822. The advantages offered by an institution of this kind are so obvious that one need only specify a choice of subjects with an expert to teach each, a permanent orchestra for the practice and interpretation of the classics, and the atmosphere engendered by an association of individuals guided by the aspiration to acquire knowledge and stimulated by the generous rivalry of their comrades.

The Academy, Royal and National, as it is entitled, is the oldest of the three principal music schools in England. The prefix "Royal" used in common with many and various kinds of societies, has no very precise significance, while the term "national" is somewhat difficult of application to an institution whose principal teachers and managers are foreigners.

Although flourishing to-day, the school experienced many years of fluctuating fortune, and it was not until the principalship of Sir Sterndale Bennett that it was at last placed on a firm and sure foundation.

To that distinguished man the Academy for many years owed its sole prestige.

He was succeeded by Sir George Macfarren, an able and learned musician, who would doubtless have proved a successful administrator had he not suffered from the terrible affliction of blindness.

As it was, however, the school came practically under a direction that had little educational force at its disposal, and the results were, as might be expected—otherwise than satisfactory. This era has, happily, long passed away, and since Sir A. C. Mackenzie became principal, the school has prospered continuously.

The Royal College of Music, that happiest of English musical institutions, was established on the foundations of the National Training School of Music, which had come into existence largely through the exertions of the Duke of Edinburgh in 1876, and may be said to have been the outcome of a protest against the then existing state of things at the Academy.

Later, the Duke leaving for Coburg, and the resignation of Sir Arthur Sullivan of the post of principal, furnished the occasion to found the larger and more important college, and this being eventually done, it was opened by the Prince of Wales in 1883.

The new scheme was large and comprehensive, including as it did the creation of scholarships in the leading towns of the United Kingdom and the Dominions beyond the seas. The realisation of such a project would have been impossible, had it not been for the extraordinary influence exercised by the late King Edward, and the enthusiasm he extended towards its accomplishment.

The possession of these scholarships, attracting as it does the flower of musical talent throughout the Empire, puts an enormous power for good in the hands of the authorities, and although it is premature to speak with any assurance on the point yet, it may well be hoped that the results in the furthering of the formation of a truly British school of music will be commensurate with the great possibilities. If a happy choice in the appointment of Directors is a good omen, the names of (the late) Sir George Grove and Sir Hubert Parry should supply it.

Like the Royal Academy, the teaching staff is largely composed of foreign musicians.

The Guildhall School of Music was established in 1888 through the generosity of the Corporation of the City of London. It is managed by a committee of expert business men belonging to that body, who give their services gratuitously, and prizes of money are offered by the Lord Mayor, the Lady Mayoress, the Sheriffs and other dignitaries, for the encouragement of the students. [Pg 101]

When first instituted, the main object was to place the best instruction within the reach of those unable to meet the requirements of the older schools either in time or expense.

The entrance fee was made nominal, the choice of subjects for study left to the student, and no conditions insisted upon, other than those necessary for the well-being of any public institution.

The popularity the school instantaneously attained must have been gratifying, even to that eminent body with whom so many philanthropic efforts have been identified.

Recently, however, an important change has been made since Mr. Landon Ronald became principal, in that a curriculum has been designed for students studying professionally, but although under this the learning of certain subjects is made compulsory, and a skilfully-planned course of study laid down, it does not in the least modify the original intentions of the Corporation, since the adoption of it is purely voluntary on the part of the scholar. This development may prove of far-reaching importance, and under the guiding influence of so skilful and versatile a musician as Mr. Ronald, may have unlooked-for results.

As with the other two schools, the teaching staff is a large one, with a strong foreign element in it.

[Pg 102] With regard to the other schools of music throughout the kingdom, it may be said that they fairly conform to the types already described, the only difference being the varying proportions of native to foreign teachers.

Now, with all these facilities for acquiring musical education, how can it be explained that these schools have so utterly failed in the direction of fostering a national tone, a mode of expression which, while capable of infinite variety, is as redolent of the country it emanates from as that of France or Russia? Why is it that until the recent uprising of the new English school of composers headed by Sir Edward Elgar, owing nothing to foreign teaching either at home or abroad, in spite of the enormous amount of music written by British composers during the preceding fifty years, nothing appeared that was in any sense characteristically English or imbued with sufficient vitality to live?

It may be safely said that with the exception of Sir Hubert Parry's "Blest Pair of Sirens," it is doubtful whether there is a single work in all the vast output that will not be absolutely forgotten by the end of the first half of this century. In fact, most of the oratorios, cantatas, and symphonies produced during that period have never been heard again since their first and two or three subsequent performances. They may, with truth, be said to have died of their own drear lifelessness. The explanation seems to be perfectly simple. Underlying it all would appear to be the belief that imitation, however skilful, cannot equal the thing imitated or possess any lasting qualities. [Pg 103] The music of the German speaking race has, until the new epoch that has just dawned, absolutely possessed the minds of our composers and public alike.

Not only have all or nearly all the most influential British musicians been educated in Germany, spending the most impressionable years of their lives there, but they have come back imbued with the spirit and technique of its music and, with the zeal of converts, anxious to impart the same ideals to their pupils. The result has been just what would naturally be anticipated.

Music produced on such a basis could only lack the vital characteristics necessary to take any hold on the people, who, having heard the originals, shewed themselves perfectly indifferent to the imitations, however well disguised they proved to be. They came to the conclusion that their country was not sufficiently endowed with music to produce composers of original gifts and, as a natural consequence, turned to the foreigner to look for all serious musical effort.

This belief has become so deeply seated in the mind of the average Englishman, that he not only long ago ceased to expect any original effort from the native composer, but went a step further, a natural one perhaps, and argued that if he were inferior to the foreigner as a writer of music, he must necessarily be equally so as a teacher.

Hence the extraordinary condition of things that has prevailed so long.

[Pg 104] Foreign teachers are numbered by thousands, many of them holding foremost positions in the leading institutions. They bring with them their own national instincts and characteristics, and, obviously, the greater their gifts the more powerfully must their influence operate against the ideal of a national school of British music.

Sir Edward Elgar, speaking at Birmingham, urged the young English composers "to draw their inspiration from their own country, their own literature, and their own climate. Only by doing so could they arrive at an English art."

If this be true, and I doubt not that most thinking people will agree, the present state of things is unceasingly working towards making the idea impossible of realisation. It must be borne in mind that there are hundreds, even thousands, of students taught by perhaps three masters of different nationalities, leaving our schools yearly, and who consequently spread broad-cast the mixed impressions they have received. Not only is the influence undesirable, but this constant

augmentation of the already congested state of the profession makes it more and more difficult for the young native to earn a living wage, and compels him to direct his thoughts and energies rather to this end than the development of his artistic capabilities. The more one thinks on this practical point, the more serious it seems.

That it has not escaped the attention of the resident foreign musicians is shewn by an illuminating story told in a pamphlet published a little while since, in which one of them advises young Englishmen to *émigrâte* (emigrate)! [Pg 105]

To properly explain the attitude in the past, of the people generally, towards music and musicians, it is necessary to go back some centuries and examine the causes which led up to it.

One of the first effects of the wave of Puritanism which swept over the country after the Reformation, was a contempt for everything that savoured of frivolity, and to the minds of the Puritans, the practice of music was regarded more as a prostitution of mental effort than a calling which could be treated as serious or even moral. Its use was banished from the churches, and it is recorded of Cromwell that on one occasion he entered a cathedral with a squad of soldiers while a service was being held, and ordered the clergy to "stop this fooling." Although this extreme state of affairs was not of long duration, it lasted long enough to instil into the very marrow and bones of the population a prejudice that centuries have not been able to altogether eradicate.

A reaction was, however, inevitable, and with the Restoration it came, accompanied, unhappily, by excesses that rendered the results almost nugatory.

After a period, during which the genius of Purcell shed an undying glory on English music, the people, having finally rid the country of the Stuart dynasty, settled down to a period if of less fanaticism, a not less fatal indifference to and contempt for musical art. It was left to the scornful genius of Dean Swift to express this feeling in words at once typical of him, and unforgettable. [Pg 106]

At the time he wrote them, a foreign Court had attracted a large number of musicians from the Continent, amongst whom was Handel.

For the distractions of a dissipated nobility and a large cosmopolitan element, the Metropolis needed the means of gratification. It is evident that the native musician, whose training had been mainly directed to essentially different objects, was unable to supply them. The foreigner, however, then as now, was quick to meet the deficiency.

Two companies were formed for the exploitation of Italian opera, which had long been the vogue in France and Germany, their headquarters being respectively the Haymarket and Covent Garden Theatres, the one headed by Handel, the other by Buononcini.

Strange as it may appear to us at this day, their rivalry soon became a source of serious trouble to the authorities. Their adherents formed themselves into factions headed by young nobles, and occasional collisions between them led to scenes of rioting and even bloodshed, reminiscent of the ancient feuds between the houses of Montague and Capulet. It was then that Swift wrote the words in which he not only voiced his own savage disdain, but the sentiments of the average Englishman:

> "Strange such difference there should be
> 'Twixt tweedledum and tweedledee."

[Pg 107]

After some years of success, during which Handel amassed a fortune, the tide of affairs turned against him, and in broken health and with impoverished means he retired to a Continental health resort. This, however, was but the prelude to events not only of vital consequence to him, but of momentous significance to the art of music.

On returning to England with restored vigour, he cast about him to find the means of regaining his former ascendency, and, happily for the world at large, he decided to devote his energies to the writing of sacred music.

With the production of the oratorio "Saul" in 1739, Handel initiated that series of works which not only had an untold influence on the musical instinct of the English people, but was destined to write his name in the book of the Immortals. Everything tended to his success.

His genius, colossal as it was, might have proved in vain, but for an unseen element that was to come to his aid and enable him to crown his career in a blaze of glory. This proved to be a resurgence of the old-time love of music amongst the masses, that their Puritan upbringing had long tended to suppress, but which, under a religious guise, was ready to spring to life again.

Thus, crowds of people who would not go to hear music under ordinary conditions, would eagerly seize an opportunity to do so when presented to them under the aegis of Religion.

The spirit of the "Messiah" penetrated their hearts, and helped to exorcise the sullen disposition towards anything approaching art that had become so characteristic of them. [Pg 108]

Splendid as was the result of Handel's work not only in England but the world over, it must be admitted that the immediate effect on the English musician was disastrous.

He had long found it difficult to hold his own against foreign competition, with the influence of the Court continuously exercised in its favour, but this overwhelming display of genius in a field

in which he had hitherto regarded himself as unassailable in his own country, seemed to be the one thing wanting to complete his discomforture and bring about his abdication.

This accomplished, it is unnecessary to insist upon the humiliations that were in store for him during, the next hundred years. Suffice it to say that the ascendency of the foreigner was complete, and was exercised with an intolerance of native effort that seems inconceivable to us to-day. Not only did he occupy the principal official posts, but nearly every other of importance outside the Church, and even the festivals, which were, in most cases, originally organised in connection with one or other of the cathedrals, before long came under his sway.

To cite two examples, those of Birmingham and Norwich. The former has been conducted for over forty years, since the period of its inception, by Costa and Dr. Richter; whilst the latter has been directed for over half a century by musicians who were not only not Englishmen, but not even Christians. This grotesque situation was put an end to as recently as 1908, when Sir Henry Wood was appointed. This ascendency, encouraged by the wealthy classes and contemptuously ignored by the general public, could but have a withering effect on native talent, and its parasitical influence undoubtedly hastened the decay of the once flourishing tree of English music. Handel had many successors here, but no equals. However, so numbed had English musicians become, that nearly any foreigner with sufficient advertising ingenuity, could inspire them with a sense not far removed from awe.

For instance, without wishing to be unjust to such claims on posterity as Spohr may have, we may well express astonishment at the great influence he undoubtedly wielded whilst living in London. His great ability as a performer on the violin, together with his skill as a writer for the instrument, first brought him prominently into publicity, but it was the production of his oratorio, "The Last Judgment," that made him a power in the land.

What chiefly contributed to the fascination his music exercised was a new feature in it that appealed to natures the stern sublimity of Handel's could not touch. This consisted of a dexterous use of chromatic harmony, combined with melody of ballad-like simplicity, which was well calculated to please the untutored ear. Even so robust a personality as Samuel Sebastian Wesley temporarily fell under the spell, though not for long, and afterwards, as if it were an act of expiation, wrote a Church service in which he reverted to the style of Orlando Gibbons. Spohr, however, was a genius, if not of an exalted order, but what are we to say when we take into consideration the position attained to by Costa in this country?

Surely English musical intelligence must have reached its nadir.

He was allowed for thirty years to exercise absolute sway over the festivals at Birmingham, and there produced, with every accessory of pomp and circumstance, his oratorios, "Eli" and "Naaman," works in which you may seek for and fail to find a redeeming feature. Commonplace in idea, blatant in orchestration, theatrical in melody and primitive in contrapuntal effort, these things were, nevertheless, by the artifice of unscrupulous puffing, foisted upon the public as works of genius.

Yet at this very time there was living an English writer of great endowment, lofty character and true genius, whose music was comparatively neglected. Without making extravagant claims for Sterndale Bennett, it may be said, without hesitation, that his cantata, "The Woman of Samaria," contains music with which nothing that Costa and many others similarly exploited, wrote, could for a moment compare. To what extent indifference to English music and musicians was carried may be illustrated by the fact that he was suffered to submit on an occasion to the insult of Costa's refusal to conduct one of his compositions, and this, without redress!

 The day is coming when English composers will have to endure as much adulation as their predecessors did neglect. When that day arrives I hope they will show some consideration for the memory of William Sterndale Bennett. It was with sincere pleasure that many observed the inclusion of one of his overtures on the historic occasion of the production at the Queen's Hall in London of Sir Edward Elgar's first violin concerto.

This was a tribute payed to him by his greatest successor, and was worthy of the man who did it and the occasion which prompted it. Enough has been said to shew how complete foreign supremacy had become. Its days are now numbered, it is true, but the effect remains.

It is idle to suppose that the work of a few men, however gifted they may be, can undo in a decade what has taken two hundred years to accomplish. Only by patience and sustained effort in the direction of making students endeavour to *think* English music rather than German, can any national character be developed.

This can be done by English masters only. It is evident that there is a spirit of revolt abroad against the position as it stands to-day. That a nation with four or five hundred years' musical history behind it should yet be in foreign leading-strings is as absurd as it is uncalled for, and national respect alone should insist on its suppression.

English musicians have recently shewn in manner absolutely convincing, that they can hold their own in any department of music, either as creators or exponents.

The north of England and the Midlands teem with men erudite and enthusiastic.

In Manchester, Sheffield, Birmingham and other towns they are ever in evidence, and it is mainly from these parts of England that the most striking of recent developments have come, and which

give the greatest hope for the future. The fascination of a capital city and the apparently limitless opportunities for advancement naturally attract the consciously gifted young musician. He expects to be greeted on arrival with sympathy and encouragement, at least by people of his own race. He probably knows something of the history of music in London, but even that does not stay him.

His first experience is one of disillusion. He finds himself in an atmosphere of cosmopolitanism where the dominating influences are largely foreign, and if he enters one of the principal schools, he finds himself in a centre whence those influences largely radiate. If he elects to stay there, he will eventually emerge from it as an added unit to that vast army of foreign-taught Englishmen whose work has hitherto proved so abortive.

I would like to say here that there is not the least intention to cast reflections on the capabilities of these foreign teachers. Indeed, it would be a work of supererogation to insist upon the individual excellencies of many of them.

What words, for instance, could adequately portray the work of such men as Oscar Beringer or Johannes Wolff? to mention only two of them.

But that is beside the point.

What we have to consider is the wisdom or unwisdom of continuing a system that has obtained for a hundred years or so, and is still encouraged by the leading authorities. We may assume, or we ought to be able to assume, that what gave rise to it was a dearth of sufficiently competent Englishmen, and that the mission entrusted to the foreigner was to train the students up to his own high standard. Well, has he succeeded after his hundred years' trial? It is evident that in the opinion of these authorities he has not, else, why should Herr this be made to succeed Herr that, and Signor this, Signor that, with such monotonous regularity?

How much longer then is it intended to continue on these lines? If there are still no native musicians fit to hold these important posts (and this in the days of Elgar!), what a commentary on the system!

Such an idea, however, is altogether untenable. There is not the slightest doubt that there are numbers of them fully capable of sustaining the prestige of any institution, were once the chance accorded them. One can only suppose that internal jealousies and foreign-acquired predilections are responsible for what seems such an insensate policy.

There is another point of view that deserves consideration.

Let it be remembered that by all the resources of the latest developments of advertising, these schools attract thousands of pupils from all parts of the kingdom, thus feeding the already congested state of the musical profession, and yet at the same time, bolting and barring the door against their eventually succeeding to these foreign-held posts, however great their claims to them or their fitness to fulfil the duties attached to them may be.

It is like addressing the English student thus: "Yes. It is true you have paid your fees for five years, during two of which we have availed ourselves of your services as an unpaid teacher, thus acknowledging your capabilities, but we are sorry to be unable to give you the post you seek as it is reserved for that inestimable artist Signor ——, who is so unaccountably neglected in his own country."

Thus the game goes on and, I suppose, will go on until the pressure of public opinion or the determination of the native students forces a change. The specious argument that the demand justifies the means may be and probably is adduced. To this, I say that what is applicable to one who has lived long in the country and justified his position, is totally inapplicable to another who is brought here although absolutely unknown.

Now, there cannot possibly be a demand for an unknown quantity. What I would urge is that upon the honourable retirement of the foreign master, an Englishman should be appointed in his place, and be given a chance equal to that of his predecessor in the quality of the students placed under him.

Of the average foreign musician scattered broadcast over the country, it may be said that if he has done no particular good, he has done no particular harm, except in a collectivist sense. This, however, cannot be said of at least one of the most successful of them.

To Sir Michael Costa is due the official adoption of the high pitch, and what that conveys can only be properly appreciated by the trained musician. The British Government, finding themselves under the necessity of supplying instruments for the Army bands, and being informed that these must be tuned alike to a definite pitch—a question to them, probably, of the "tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee" order—characteristically called in a foreigner to advise them on the subject, doubtless thinking he would be the most competent to whom they could appeal.

It may be casually mentioned that among the prominent British musicians at this period, were such men as Sir Sterndale Bennett, Sir George Macfarren, and Sir John Goss.

Now, it is universally recognised that an accurate sense of pitch is of the highest importance to the musician, and seeing that many of the most prominent singers—among them Sims Reeves—refused to sing to it, and some of the leading conductors declined to use it, the confusion that has

resulted may be easily realised. Its adoption, however, by the Italian Opera and Philharmonic Society in London, the Birmingham Festival, and all the other institutions where Costa's influence was paramount, brought it into general use, and until quite recently, it has so remained. [Pg 116]

Yet the protests against it were never silenced, and, constantly increasing in volume, resulted in its abandonment by one after the other of the leading orchestras in the country,[21] thus isolating the numerous choral societies in the provinces, who are necessitated to seek the aid of military band players to supplement the local ones in forming a band for their performances, and are forced accordingly to continue its use.

The effects of this discordance have been, and continue to be positively incalculable.

Happily for England there are few men who have had similar opportunities for doing mischief; he has had imitators, it is true, but none possessed of his talent or force of character.

Indeed, it may be said that he has had few equals among foreign resident musicians, the majority of whom are men of just average ability, who have made such reputations as they possess in this country, and are, in most cases, quite unknown in their own, except perhaps in the immediate neighbourhood of their birthplaces.[22]

In order to explain their presence in thousands, it will be necessary to touch on a subject that cannot be altogether avoided. [Pg 117] I do not think, for a moment, that English opinion on the relative merits of the native and foreign musician as teacher is so decidedly in favour of the latter as figures would suggest. I look, rather, in other directions for a solution of the problem.

In the first place, I cannot but think that internal differences, rivalries and jealousies among prominent British musicians have afforded opportunities that he has not been slow to take advantage of. It would not be difficult to refer to many remarkable appointments of foreign masters that one could only explain on these grounds, so utterly unjustifiable do they seem.

Again, in the art of advertisement which appears so essential to-day, there can be no question that Englishmen are not a match for the foreigner, who uses it with surprising effect on the unsuspecting public. It is certainly one of the secrets of the astounding position they have gained in musical education in this country.

If one may compare teaching with public performance, the point becomes clearer.

Whilst recognising with frankness and spontaneity the genius of such giants as Hallé, Joachim, Piatti, Norman Neruda, Pachmann, Kreisler, and Paderewski, I absolutely fail to see equal merit in the many foreign artists who are so extravagantly advertised at the present time. It seems to me that in many cases the agent displays more skill in his art than the artist advertised. [Pg 118]

One may surely be permitted, without being invidious, to contrast the performances of an Englishman like Mr. W. H. Squire with those of such exponents of their respective schools as Señor Casals and M. Gerardy, and express a preference for the northern virility and dignity of the Englishman.

Granted that many foreign artists who appear here display great ability, there are many more who do nothing of the kind, and the day should be past when every alien musician endowed with long hair and a pallid complexion is to be accepted by the British public as the highest type of musical genius. This delusion has lasted long enough.

Had England shown herself barren in producing sons possessing great musical gifts, the position to-day would at least be explicable, but this is not the case. There has been no time in the centuries since Purcell's death destitute of some living representative of the old English genius, although, perhaps, living in the comparative obscurity of a cathedral town, and far removed from the garish lights of the Metropolis.

Certain it is that of native composers who have shown any English characteristics in their music, the majority of them have been reared in our cathedral cities, and have imbibed their earliest impressions in cathedral choirs.

To go no further back than the Wesleys, Samuel and his son, Samuel Sebastian, we need only cite a few of them: Atwood, Pierson, Goss, Sterndale Bennett, Arthur Sullivan, Sir Frederick Bridge, [Pg 119] Sir Walter Parratt—and crowds of others, both living and dead.

Removed from the centralised cosmopolitanism of London, many of them had a chance of giving expression to their thoughts in music not characterised by foreign idiom.

If the fine work of such men as Hubert Parry, Edward Elgar, Granville Bantock, Walford Davies, William Wallace, Joseph Holbrook, and others of the new British school does not convince the country of the fatuity of perpetuating the state of things existing at present, nothing will, and we must accept the fact that the idea of foreign supremacy in every branch of musical work, is so engrained in the blood of the "man in the street" as to be absolutely ineradicable.

But I do not believe it.

One hardly dares to question the sanity of a nation, even on so elusive a subject as music.

To-day, even, we can see the Dawn: the Penumbra is vanishing.

Not long ago it was considered essential that a singer of any exceptional merit should go to Italy

to "*finish*"—or *be* finished, as the case might be. Not only so, but it was often thought necessary to Italianise the Anglo-Saxon name, and this was occasionally done with grotesque result!

In some cases the possessor of so characteristic a name, say, as Smith (Miss Smith might be a "discovery" by some knowing person and promptly packed off to the "land of song")—after a stay of a year or two in Italy, emerges from that country, having adopted, with a profound sense of the genius of Latin languages, the name of Smith-*ona*.

The fact that such great singers as Sims Reeves and Charles Santley went to Italy and achieved great success there, has, no doubt, been a fruitful source of attraction to the country; but of the many thousands who have followed their example, how many have returned with the least promise of emulating in ever so faint a degree their illustrious careers?

No Englishmen, assuredly.

A few years ago I had the pleasure to spend a day in the company of that great singer, the late Signor Tamagno.

In the course of conversation he expressed the opinion that the old school of Italian singing which had produced so many artists of such extraordinary merit, was practically dead, and that he was the only living exponent to carry on its traditions. As he was speaking in French, I give his actual words in a foot-note.[23]

Without venturing to subscribe to such a pronouncement, I think it is worth while recording. Whilst admitting that Italy occasionally produces singers that electrify the world, such as Madame Tettrazzini and Signor Caruso, I think that a little consideration will convince anyone that the majority of great singers in modern times has emanated from the northern races.[24]

In a memorable address given recently by Madame Melba to the students of the Guildhall School of Music, on which occasion I was fortunate enough to be present, that great singer insisted on the importance of *diction*, and expressed the opinion that in this respect young English singers had much to learn. One is obliged to recognise the justice of the rebuke, but I think that, at least, a partial explanation may be ventured.

In illustration Madame Melba instanced many words that were constantly maltreated, and among them was that of *love*.

This irresistibly brought to my mind an incident that occurred many years ago. When I was, as a boy, acting as accompanist in the studio of a celebrated foreign singing master, an English lady was having a lesson and was singing an English song in which she had to articulate this very word. Suddenly there came a clapping of hands and a voice called out, "No, no, dat will not do. Ze word is—" and I give the pronunciation as nearly as letters will permit—"'loaf.'"

As soon as the lady had gone and we were left alone, I said, "But, maestro, that lady sang the word as it is pronounced in English." The retort came instantly: "Dat is so? Den it *ought* to be as I say it."

 This aspersion on the intellectual intelligence of the Anglo-Saxon race struck me as decidedly amusing.

On a quite different occasion I was present at a function in the course of which another foreign singing master was called upon to make a speech. I was, it is true, seated at a considerable distance from him, could not see him, and had not the slightest idea who he was. After listening carefully for some time, I turned to my table companion and said, "Could you tell me who is speaking, and what the language is?" He shrugged his shoulders and replied: "Upon my word I can't." We afterwards learnt that the language spoken was—English!

I think that the most unsophisticated of my readers, if I have any, will be able to draw his own deductions.

It is at least reasonable to ask why the more virile northerner should subjugate his personality and national characteristics to those of a southern race of different climate, different morals, and different physique. Let us consider for a moment the sister art of painting.

It is quite unnecessary to extol the glories of the British school.

Can you possibly imagine Turner, Hogarth, Gainsborough and Reynolds sitting down and quietly acquiescing, when a set of foreign painters came over to England and addressed them in such terms as these: "You English have lost, if you ever possessed it, the art of painting. We are going to stay over here and shew that we are your superiors, and you will have to submit quietly while we are taking time to do it?"

I, at least, would not like to have been a member of *that* deputation in case Turner and Hogarth were present. Yet this is not an unfair illustration of what English musicians have submitted to.

Let us see what Mendelssohn thought on the subject.

In a letter to Edward Devrient, dated Milan, July 13, 1831, he writes:

"You can have no conception of an Italian chorus. As I was supposed to be in the land of music, I thought I would try and recognise one good voice among it, but they are all vile and roar like quacks at a fair.... No German can have an idea of what it is here—that is to say, no real German;

for such a one as I met here is as much a real German as cheese and beer.

"Fancy, Devrient, the fellow's expenses are paid for two years by the Ministry, in order that he may study Italian music, and on his return teach the Italian method of singing....

"Alas, you have no conception of these horrors.... The great fault is seeking to Italianise themselves, whilst what our northern nature has given them is the best and only good they have."

Enough of the subject.

Let us simply recall again the words of Sir Edward Elgar, spoken at Birmingham: "To draw their inspiration from their own country, their own literature and their own climate. Only by doing so could they arrive at an English art." [Pg 124]

CONCLUSION

Everything points to the fact that in all branches of musical art, the time has come when England should work out her own salvation.

The result of a hundred and fifty years of foreign tutelage is not one of which any nation need be proud.

FOOTNOTES:

[21] The lead taken by Sir Henry Wood in this matter is one of his many claims to the gratitude of the country. His adoption of the French pitch, known as the "diapason normale," was an act of supreme importance, as tending to bring England in line with the rest of Europe.

[22] "Music in London: Impressions of a Stranger" (p. 11).

[23] L'ançienne école de chant Italienne est une chose du passé, dont je suis le seul et dernier représentant.

[24] To cite a few names that come most readily to the mind—Jenny Lind, Christine Nilsson, Madame Patey, Sims Reeves, Jean de Reszke, Charles Santley and Edouard de Reszke. Added to these, the great German singers, inseparably associated with the works of Wagner—all give colour to the idea.

[Pg 125]

CHAPTER VI

PROGRESS OF ORCHESTRAL MUSIC

Former indifference to orchestral music in England—Handel and his orchestra—Difference in character to the modern—Haydn's visit—Its great influence—Philharmonic Society—Great services to England—Celebrated foreign composers identified with its history—Mendelssohn and Wagner—Richter and Wagner festival at Royal Albert Hall—Richter Concerts—Influence on public taste—August Manns and Crystal Palace Concerts—Sir George Grove and the programmes—Sir Charles Hallé and Manchester—The Manchester (afterwards Hallé) Concerts—Influence on music in the North and Midlands—Sir Henry J. Wood and Promenade Concerts—Reformation in character—His establishment of Symphony Concerts—Unique service to British music—London Symphony Orchestra—Mr. Landon Ronald and the New Symphony Orchestra—The Royal Amateur and other amateur orchestral societies—The good work done.

One of the most striking features in the recent development of musical progress in England is the somewhat sudden rise into popularity of orchestral music. One might almost say that as regards this form of art, the vast majority of English people were at one time as dead to any appreciation of it, as their descendants to-day, are alive to its value, and eager to take every opportunity to extend their knowledge of it.

Until the Philharmonic Society was founded by a few enthusiasts in 1813, there was no permanent orchestra devoted to the performances of abstract music in the country. Such bands as there were, consisted of small bodies of performers whose duties were principally confined to the playing of accompaniments, and were generally found in the theatre. [Pg 126]

For especial occasions, such as the appearance of a celebrated foreign composer, singer or player, an orchestra would be temporarily formed, and many of the best musicians of the day would gladly volunteer their services to do honour to the distinguished visitor.

I forbear to speak of Handel in this connection, since the band he required bore little or no approximation to the modern orchestra, and was used, generally, in conjunction with the organ, in the production of his operas or oratorios. The orchestra, as we know it to-day, is of altogether a later date. However, the popularity and frequent performances of his oratorios doubtless

proved a great factor in arousing interest in the instrumental playing connected with them, and thus laid the seed that was to bear such golden fruit in the near future.

Handel died in 1759, and there is little to record of special interest, until the arrival of Haydn in 1791. With this event may be associated the birth of the modern orchestra, in this country. That which Handel had employed seems amazing to modern ideas. To think of a band that contains as many oboes as violins is enough to take one's breath away, without insisting on other quaint details; yet up to Haydn's visit this was what musical people were accustomed to.

[Pg 127]

The revolution he brought about, the great increase in the number of stringed instruments, the limitation of the number of oboes to two, and the many other changes of a like nature, may seem at first rather startling; a little consideration, however, may perhaps suggest a quite simple explanation. In those days it was customary for the great nobles of central Europe to keep a resident band in their palaces, and it is only reasonable to think that instruments of less piercing tone than that of the oboe, would be preferred for *salon* performances. Haydn had been in the service of Prince Esterhazy for thirty years, had written most of his music for performance in the palace, and thus when he came to London at the instigation of Saloman, a Jewish concert agent, he naturally introduced this new type of orchestra which, with the occasional addition of novel instruments, has remained to the present day.

Haydn's visit constituted an epoch in the history of music in England, for it served to stimulate and give impetus to the interest in abstract orchestral music, which was hitherto either absolutely wanting or quite latent. This interest was, happily, either created or aroused, and soon culminated in the founding of the Philharmonic Society.

To this Society England owes a debt she can never repay, for it is only through the unselfish devotion of its members, that the regular presentation of classical orchestral music was, for very many years rendered possible. In the first place the reasonable supposition must be borne in mind that only a limited number of people would be found sufficiently interested in the subject to give it financial support, and thus the inevitable question of ways and means would be ever present and, indeed, even to this day it still confronts the directors who are, and have been from the first, entirely unpaid. In fact, if the truth were told it would reveal many sacrifices, sometimes no mean ones either, made by musicians in order to keep the lamp of orchestral music burning in this country. A high ideal was aimed at, and nothing meretricious or unworthy was suffered to detract from the dignity of the performances.

[Pg 128]

At the beginning it must be admitted, the directors found it necessary to "temper the wind to the shorn lamb" by offering to their patrons other attractions beside the purely orchestral, so they engaged instrumentalists to play chamber music, while one or two singers also helped to vary the programmes. It was not long, however, before chamber music was discarded. From that day to this, the concerts have never changed in character. Under all circumstances, whether of success or depression, nothing but the cult of the great classics was regarded as the essential feature of the aims of the Society. Its history is, assuredly, a fascinating one, not only on account of the intimate association with the greatest composers of the nineteenth century and the wonderful galaxy of genius which has made offerings at its shrine, but of the record of courage and determination which illumines it.

[Pg 129]

In order to appreciate at its true significance the present popularity of orchestral music, it must be remembered that only a comparatively short time ago, there were but few performances given, and that even these did not attract sufficient people to pay the expenses, unless under special and occasional circumstances.

It was then, under such disheartening conditions, that the Philharmonic continued to live and carry on its work in the highest interests of art, and although its light may have been at times somewhat obscured by contemporary brilliancy, its story is one of which not only the Society, but the nation at large may be justifiably proud.

As an interesting commentary on the change that has come over musical taste in England, it may be mentioned that Mendelssohn conducted one season and Wagner another: the former was the most successful in the history of the Society, and the latter the most disastrous.

Cherubini, Spohr, Weber, Mendelssohn and Gounod, amongst many others, wrote works especially for it, and, above all, Beethoven's colossal and immortal Ninth Symphony is denoted by an asterisk in Grove's dictionary, as having been similarly composed.

In recent years one of the greatest events not only in its own history, but in the history of British music, was the first performance at the Queen's Hall in London, of Sir Edward Elgar's first Violin Concerto on the 10th of November, in the year 1910.

[Pg 130]

Played by Herr Kreisler and conducted by the composer, it achieved an instantaneous success with which nothing can compare since the first performance of the similar work of Mendelssohn's in 1844.

Its appearance was, indeed, epoch-making. It is gratifying to think that it aroused, among the general public, an interest in the Society and its history that had long been wanting, and with the arrival of its centenary year, 1912, together with the many new works promised, it may be confidently hoped that new life and vigour will be instilled into this admirable institution.

For Mendelssohn, the Society cherishes a special regard, and no wonder, since his interest in it

and affection for it were so constantly in evidence, and were of such practical value in raising its artistic and financial status. In each visit that he payed to this country, in 1829, 1842, 1844, and the last in 1847, he either conducted or played for the Society and, indeed, retained to the end of his life the keenest and most unselfish wishes for its welfare.

Of the distinguished British musicians whose names are indelibly associated with the history of the Society must be mentioned, among others, Sir Sterndale Bennett (conductor), Sir Arthur Sullivan (conductor), Sir Hubert Parry, Sir Alexander Mackenzie (conductor), Sir Charles Stanford, and Sir Frederick Cowen (conductor).

During the past two decades or longer, the Society has been fortunate enough to have as its leading officials Mr. Francesco Berger,[25] a distinguished musician whose whole life has been devoted to high ideals, and Dr. W. H. Cummings, without whose valuable assistance it is doubtful whether the Society could have successfully resisted certain years of trial and stress.

It is unnecessary to further insist on the great services rendered to the country by the Philharmonic Society.

If we wish to find the cause or causes which brought about the change amongst the masses, from absolute indifference to orchestral music to the present enthusiasm for it, I think we may begin by noting the gradual growth of an appreciation of the music of Wagner, especially among those whose means had enabled them to attend presentations of his works in Germany. It was, I think, to a number of these fortunate individuals, aided by the enthusiastic Schultz-Curtius, that we owe the appearance of Wagner and the memorable Wagner Festival at the Royal Albert Hall, which he, in conjunction with Herr Richter, conducted in the year 1877. The enthusiasm aroused by the marvellous music and the revelation of the wonderful powers of Richter as a conductor, soon led to the establishment of the Richter Concerts, and we may, I believe, regard this as an epoch, as the birth of the new spirit that was so speedily to alter the whole aspect of things musical in this country.

Not only the enthralling fascination of the music, but the striking personality of the conductor, who seemed to inspire the orchestra with his own genius, cast such a spell over the audiences and aroused such frantic enthusiasm, that no one who attended the early concerts can ever forget the sensations they inspired.

The success achieved in London naturally resulted in a call to the great provincial cities, and thus Richter had the gratification not only of doing great service to his idolised master, but also to England, that had so quickly learnt to appreciate him.

If anyone could doubt the extraordinary fascination that Wagner's music wields over the masses, a single visit to a Promenade Concert on a Wagner night should easily dispel it.

For over forty years the Philharmonic Society stood practically alone in any serious efforts on behalf of orchestral music. Eventually, however, another champion entered the lists, and valiantly did he bear himself. This was no other than the late Herr August (afterwards Sir August) Manns, who in 1855 was appointed director of the music at the Crystal Palace.

To appreciate the difficulties he had to encounter, one must know that when he appeared on the scene, he found a wretched brass band installed there; no concert room, no proper platform for the performers, and the music, such as it was, had to be played to the accompaniment of popping corks, shrieking engines, and all the multitudinous noises one can imagine in such a vast place of entertainment. However, he was no ordinary man.[26] He was energetic, determined, and courageous, and whilst being generally genial and even persuasive in manner, he was also undoubtedly of a somewhat combative nature. This was shown some years later when he took exception to a criticism of Mr. Bernard Shaw, and drew from him a characteristic letter in which musical critics are described as divided into "two sorts, musicians who are no writers, and writers who are no musicians," and classes himself among the latter.

The first thing that Manns set himself to do was to replace the brass band by an ordinary orchestra. In this he was ultimately successful, although only after a severe struggle with the Palace authorities, who, even including the late Sir George Grove, inclined to the opinion that a string orchestra was unsuitable to the building. Events justified his judgment, and he ultimately succeeded in evolving, out of an absolute chaos, the famous band and the celebrated Saturday Concerts.

That he did an enormous amount of good during his many years of strenuous work is unquestionable, but it must be acknowledged that the position of the Palace, being so far from London, made the concerts as an institution more or less parochial. The majority of those attending them was mainly composed of local subscribers and their families, while the London element largely consisted of professional musicians or others having business connection with music in various ways. The free list would be, therefore, largely in evidence, and not calculated to ensure the stability of such an expensive enterprise.

As communication between London and Sydenham became more easy, it began to be observed that the local residents were taking advantage of it in ever increasing numbers, to seek the more varied attractions of the Metropolis, with the inevitable result of decreasing subscriptions and gradually diminishing audiences.

When the collapse came at last it caused widespread regret, and there was a unanimous feeling

that Manns had well earned the highest mark of recognition that could be bestowed on him. Let us hope that he looked upon his knighthood as an adequate reward for his services.

Splendid, however, as was the work done, it cannot be said that the concerts ever touched the imagination of the English people as those of Richter did, nor can it be claimed for them that, as regards the people generally, they were in any sense epoch-making. They were too remote from the masses, and the necessary expenditure of time and money made the attendance of the middle-class Londoner a matter of superfluous luxury. Hence the number who were able to benefit by them was limited.

Of these, it will be willingly admitted, English composers were by far the most prominent.

If there were but few of their works that have been able to stand the test of time, the fault was not that of Manns, but simply, they died through lacking the essence of vitality. It will, nevertheless, ever redound to his honour and to his happy memory, that if only a few of the English works he produced had sufficient vitality to live in these more strenuous days, he, at least, gave the prominent native composers a chance, and to his efforts many of them owe the position to which they have since attained, and English art has been enriched by works that otherwise would probably, have never seen the light.

The first object of Manns, however, when he had at length come into possession of the orchestra he had so sturdily striven for, was to perform and popularise classics that were then unknown, and to bring into existence a body of supporters of sufficient importance to justify the large expenditure involved. He would thus not only satisfy his directors, but carry out a work worthy of the earliest traditions of the Palace.

When he arrived in England the music of Schubert and Schumann was practically unknown. Here was a great opportunity, and with the aid of his friend, Sir George Grove, he took advantage of it, and literally played and preached them into such popularity, that their names soon became as familiar on concert programmes as that of Mendelssohn himself.

From whatever point of view one may look, it is certain that the name of August Manns will go down in the history of English music as one of its foremost champions.

German to the core himself (he only naturalised himself when he had lived here over forty years), he had a natural broad-mindedness that gradually enabled him to see things somewhat from the point of view of the country that had sheltered him, and he did his best—and it was noble—for its interests as he comprehended them.

The next great pioneer of orchestral music that we shall deal with is the late Sir Charles Hallé.

What Manns was doing in the South, Hallé was doing not less effectively, and on a larger scale, in the North.

Less eclectic in his tastes than Manns, his efforts were severely limited to the propagation of strictly classical music. In English music, or, perhaps we should say, music written by Englishmen, he never had or pretended to have, the slightest interest, and for many years no British composer's name could be seen on his programmes. From this rigid classicalism he never swerved, unless his successful efforts to popularise Berlioz may be so considered.

He arrived in England in 1848, and soon settled in Manchester, where his strong personality immediately made itself felt, the first result being his appointment as conductor of the "Gentlemen's Concerts" in 1849.

The next and most important feature in his career, from our immediate point of view, was his establishing the "Manchester Concerts," which later became known as the "Hallé Concerts," in 1857.

From that time until he died, about forty years later, he practically devoted his life to his famous orchestra and no less famous choir, and it is certain that Hallé did, in those years, more than any dozen others for the cause of music in the North and Midlands.

The repertoire of his band may be justly said to embrace the whole gamut of the classic and classic-romantic schools. He could scarcely be called a whole-hearted Wagnerian, but his mind was so receptive even to the last, that however antagonistic to his own feelings some of the latest developments in orchestral music proved to be, he submitted willingly to what he saw to be the inevitable tendency of the times, and formed his programmes in accordance with them, provided always that his ideal standard was maintained.

In 1848 there were but few orchestras in the provinces, and these, judged from Hallé's standpoint, were very bad, that of the "Gentlemen's Concerts" being one of them. He accepted the conductorship with the greatest reluctance, and only on the understanding that his power should be unlimited to do what he thought necessary to remodel it.

In fact, his early experience with it was so painful to him, and his dread of conducting the concerts so great, that he nearly abandoned the idea of settling in Manchester. However, the directors were far-seeing men, and, happily, largely through their efforts, Hallé was saved for the North.

It must, however, be said that had it not been for the support he received from the German community, it would not have been possible for him to remain, but through their efforts he not

only quickly acquired a large teaching connection, but was able to establish his classical Chamber Concerts on a satisfactory financial basis. It is interesting to note that four-fifths of the subscribers were fellow-countrymen.

The important question of an adequate income for the support of his family having been thus settled, he was left with a mind delivered from that source of anxiety, and able to devote itself to the cause he had at heart. The field open to him was, Heaven knows, extensive enough.

At that time the English people, even of the more educated classes, had little or no appreciation of purely abstract music, their sympathies being confined more or less to oratorios and ballads. However, Hallé set himself to educate them, and history tells how he succeeded.

He was no believer in violent methods, as the programme of his first orchestral concert shows, but, while dearly indicating the direction in which he intended to go, was wise enough not to frighten away those who were willing to test their power of appreciation of this, to them, new experience. Hence, although the programme was mainly classical, he included a selection from Verdi's "Il Trovatore," doubtless with the familiar melodies played, in the manner of Jullien, on instruments such as the euphonium and cornet. In this way he pursued the wise course of gradually attracting the people towards a higher form of art.

On this historic occasion the Beethoven Symphony, No. 1, Weber's overture, "Der Freyschutz," and his concert-stück for piano and orchestra, were the principal works given, Hallé being the pianist in the last-named. Primitive as this reads to-day, it caused tremors in the minds of the *cognoscenti*, and many were the doubts expressed as to the possibility of success for the undertaking.

Nevertheless, Hallé proved that his faith was justified, and thus began the concerts that were later to attract the attention of musical Europe, and culminate in their being recognised as one of the most important musical organisations in the world.

It will ever redound to the glory of Manchester that it was the birthplace of the awakening of the North of England to its own tremendous potentialities as a crusading force in the cause of music.

If we think for one moment of the great, new and original, national school of composers that the North and the Midlands have been mainly instrumental in bringing into existence, we shall be better able to judge and more properly appreciate the work that Sir Charles Hallé accomplished.

What may be called, I think, the last phase in the struggle of the orchestra to gain its present ascendancy in England was the momentous appearance of Mr. Henry J. Wood[27] on the scene, and the establishing first of his Promenade Concerts in 1895, and then his Symphony Concerts in 1897, at the Queen's Hall in London.

Until Sir Henry Wood proved the contrary, the idea of presenting symphonies and other high-class music at a Promenade Concert with a view to attract paying audiences, appeared not only absolutely hopeless, but positively fanatical.

Up to that time promenade concerts were associated in the minds of musical people, with the methods of Jullien, Rivière and their imitators. They took place in the huge theatres of Covent Garden or Drury Lane. The stage was removed, and the ground floor converted into an immense promenade, in the centre of which was built a platform, and upon it was imposed tier upon tier in the style of a Roman amphitheatre, to receive, in addition to the ordinary orchestra, the military bands that were occasionally called upon to carry out the weird ideas the management had conceived. Of these, the most famous and popular was known as the "Army Quadrilles." In order to give effect to it, several of these bands were put in different places on the highest story of the building, and had to march down in succession from their lofty position and gradually converge on the platform and, in combination, produce the amount of sound and provide the spectacular effect that was considered essential to success. All the time this long process was in execution, the conductor, with jewelled bâton in hand and the limelight focused on him, was strongly in evidence, and little wonder that he sank into his capacious, brilliantly upholstered chair at the end of it, so exhausted as hardly to be able to acknowledge the plaudits that were showered on him! At every possible place on each floor of the theatre, a bar was placed for the supply of alcoholic drinks, and what with the combined fumes of alcohol and tobacco, the atmosphere was of a description more allied to that of a Bacchanalian orgie than to any possible function relating to art.

In later years, it is true, the conditions were improved, even to the point that such a musician as Sir Arthur Sullivan was induced to lend the weight of his influence to bring about a state of things more consonant with the dignity of music, but he soon withdrew and thus tacitly admitted failure. What, then, had happened to hold out a promise of better results?

Why, evidently, the seed sown by the Philharmonic Society, Richter, Manns and Hallé, although much may have fallen on barren soil, other had fallen on good ground and was bringing forth good fruit.

So, at least, must have thought Sir Henry Wood, or he had scarcely ventured on his daring mission of appeal to the general public with such a programme. He courageously staked his all and worthily won.

It is now sixteen years ago that he made his memorable venture. It is only those who know the difficulties, financial and other, in carrying out such a scheme, can adequately estimate what

courage, energy and foresight were needed, to say nothing of great musical gifts, to bring about a result so astonishing as that to which the world is witness to-day.

In place of the many brass bands and "Army Quadrilles," we see a programme consisting of the works of Beethoven, and instead of the jewelled bâton, the alcoholic atmosphere and the focused limelight, a programme is presented that not many years ago would have been regarded, even by music lovers, as classical to the point of severity. The days of Aladdin are evidently capable of duplication!

Nothing more is needed to prove what a vast change has been brought about in the taste of the masses in regard to music, and it is a matter of thankfulness that its consummation has been so greatly accelerated by an Englishman, owing nothing to foreign education.

The establishment by Sir Henry Wood of the Queen's Hall Symphony Concerts, and the great and permanent success attained by them, naturally led to the striving of others to emulate him. The first result was the formation of the London Symphony Orchestra, the majority of whose members, it may be remarked, were originally in Sir Henry Wood's band. Difficulties arose as to the employment of deputies by the older and better known players, who were, naturally enough, reluctant to give up such engagements as the great provincial festivals, and others of serious importance, afforded. The inability to arrive at an agreement caused about fifty members to recede from the orchestra and form one of their own, which they did with the active sympathy and help of Dr. Richter, who conducted their first public performance on June 4th, 1904.

An interesting feature of the scheme inaugurated by the management was the invitation to different celebrated conductors to conduct one or more of the series of concerts decided on. This idea was, undoubtedly, a happy one, and proved a complete success. The curiosity of the public was evidently stimulated by a galaxy of men that included Richter, Elgar, Nikisch, Henschel, Safanof, and Colonne. And well it might be!

In his interesting "History of the London Symphony Orchestra, Ltd.," Mr. F. Gilbert Webb, the well-known critic, writes: "Such a procession of famous conductors is unique in the history of English orchestras."

I am inclined to think, however, that it would be extremely difficult to carry on so complicated a policy, for it would be often impossible to make the arrangements of such men fit in with dates that are, and obviously must be, more or less arbitrarily fixed by the proprietors of the halls in which the concerts are given.

At any rate, the experience of the players has been one of keen enjoyment, and one of the most prominent among them, Mr. T. E. Wotton, in writing to me, alludes to some of the performances as "veritable revelations."

The next organisation to enter the field of competition was "The New Symphony Orchestra."

Here again a decisive and direct policy was determined upon, a leading idea being that the orchestra, from first to last, should consist, solely, of Englishmen.

The happy idea of inviting Mr. Landon Ronald to assume the conductorship has been fraught with consequences of the highest importance, and the success of the movement has long been placed beyond the region of doubt.

Perhaps the most important engagement, up to the present time, that has accrued to it, is that of the Sunday concerts at the Royal Albert Hall. These concerts have, undoubtedly, been a great success, and have not only been a source of financial gain to the orchestra, but a much-needed attraction to that building, the vast size of which renders it suitable for none other than occasions of special interest.

These concerts do not, however, by any means absorb their energies, as the advertising columns of the daily papers shew. Their services are in constant request, and everything tends to their permanency as a living body.

As of the preceding ones, it may be said that this band practically consists of solo players of high excellence.

Before concluding this chapter it may be desirable to call attention to the many amateur bands that have sprung into existence in recent years, as this is, undoubtedly, a feature of peculiar significance, and one that has had no little influence in spreading a knowledge of orchestral music in circles that would otherwise probably have not been reached. Their principal members are generally veterans who, in early life, gave up much of their spare time in gaining sufficient skill on their respective instruments to become fairly competent performers, and it is to such as these, and their enthusiasm, that the existence of these bodies and the good done by them, is due.

It is about forty years since the movement may be said to have begun, when the cult of the orchestra was either non-existent or in the embryo. The requirements for membership were not exacting, it is true, but it must be remembered that the facilities for the acquisition of even these, were far different in those days to the existing ones of to-day. It is easy, then, to imagine the amount of time, money and energy that must have been necessarily devoted to preserve their vitality.

This is eminently true of one of the most prominent of them, the Royal Amateur Orchestral Society. But for the exertions of H.R.H. the late Duke of Edinburgh (afterwards Duke of Coburg), the late Mr. Jas. Ramsay Dow, the late Mr. George Mount, Mr. Herbert W. Symes, Mr. Leonard Beddome and others, it is safe to say that the organisation would have collapsed long ago in the early years of its career. Fortunately, however, the skill and determination they brought to bear upon it, not only averted the catastrophe that seemed often impending, but made its continued prosperity little more than a matter of adequate and prescient direction.

For many years Mr. Jas. Ramsay Dow was not only the honorary secretary, but the principal flute player in the band, during which time Mr. George Mount was conductor. Upon the death of the former, Mr. Henry M. Morris succeeded him, and upon his retirement Mr. Hermann Schmettau accepted and still, happily, retains the position. Mr. Arthur W. Payne is the able conductor. [Pg 146]

The initial difficulties of these older societies were mainly twofold, the finding of a sufficient number of more or less adequate players, and the money necessary to finance them. The latter, of course, involved the constant search after subscribers and the paying audiences that so persistently eluded their efforts. The music performed at the concerts was restricted both by the limitations of the technical resources of the players, and the taste of such people as could be drawn to listen to it. In process of time, and by dint of perseverance, these limitations were, more or less, overcome, and as the performances improved, so increasing audiences were attracted to more pretentious efforts.

Even after twenty-five years' patient work the general public remained indifferent, in the most part, to their claims to recognition, and it is only within the last few years that it has dawned on the average music lover that there could be any real merit in the playing of amateur orchestras. At the time of my early association with one of them, not only were the audiences confined mainly to friends of the players, but the performances were looked at askance by critic and professional musician alike. No prominent virtuoso would dream of playing a concerto or similar piece in conjunction with it, and on the appearance of such a one at a concert, the accompaniments were invariably played on the piano.

[Pg 147] Eventually patience and combined effort on the part of all, were effective in so far bringing about a change that the appearance of eminent artists, and their playing of concerted works, became a regular feature of the concerts, and numerous letters I have at various times received, testify to their appreciation of the efficiency of the work done by the band. Similar results have doubtless, been experienced by most of the more prominent of these orchestras throughout the country.

But while cordially admitting the progress made by them, it must be recognised that the difference between the performance of an amateur band, however worthy, and that of a modern professional orchestra must ever remain abysmal.

This will be easily understood when it is remembered that while most members of the latter are not only expert players, but educated musicians, the amateur, on the other hand, is more often than not, a player of humble attainment, whose knowledge of music, limited by the small amount of time that can be devoted to the subject, is necessarily superficial.

It is not to be questioned that there are many exceptions, many indeed whose knowledge of music is deep and whose performing ability is exceptional, judged by any standard, but of such, the number is, and must naturally be, extremely limited. This lack of musical education leads at times to incidents that, though sometimes distressful, are occasionally diverting.

[Pg 148] It is distressing when an amateur band, while fully capable of playing music that demands nothing more than ordinary technical ability, is swayed by a wild enthusiasm for performing works that even Sir Henry Wood will give many rehearsals to prepare.

The diverting incident is provided, for instance, when, say, a double-bass player, who is not blessed with a superabundant sense of humour or much education, brings you the bass parts of two symphonies, and lays down the law as to the relative artistic merit of the works on such evidence as the parts provide—at the same time, with no excess of delicacy, intimating his complete indifference to any opinion you may have on the subject, even though you may happen to have a fairly adequate knowledge of the full score.

Notwithstanding this, let us hasten to say that there is a great and useful work always lying at hand for the amateur to accomplish, and we venture to indicate it. It would seem, judging by the programmes of our most celebrated orchestras, that the existence of a great amount of the most splendid music ever written, is in danger of being either forgotten or ignored, and it is to this their attention might well be turned. Beyond the fact of its being seldom or never heard, a great deal of it makes so much less demand on the technique of the individual player than that of Tschaikovsky, Brahms, Elgar, Strauss, and others, whose works absorb attention to-day, that it offers the double advantage of novelty and less difficulty in presentation.

[Pg 149] Surely there must be a public left to appreciate the symphonies of Schumann, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Gade, Raff and Goldmark among the moderns, to say nothing of Haydn and Mozart, and these are only a few of the many that might be named.

Of works of less size but equally worthy of attention there is practically no limit.

Nevertheless, a generous recognition of the good work done by amateur players all over the country should be accorded. By their efforts they have given many thousands of people a chance

of hearing music that otherwise might never have been brought home to them, and in doing this they have done worthily for the cause of the progress of orchestral music in England.

FOOTNOTES:

[25] Mr. Berger has retired since this was written, and has been succeeded by the eminent British composer, Mr. William Wallace.

[26] See H. Saxe Wyndham's interesting and instructive "August Manns and the Crystal Palace Concerts."

[27] Now Sir Henry Wood.

CHAPTER VII

ORATORIO IN ENGLAND

Influence of oratorio in England—Commonwealth period and effect on music—Italy original home of oratorio—Origin of the word—Similarity to opera in early stage—Handel—Absurdity of claiming him as an Englishman—Italy has greater claims—Handel's versatility—Early oratorios—"Messiah"—King George III. and the "Hallelujah" chorus—Greatness of the oratorio—Its hold on the people—Effect on the religious feelings of the country—Joseph Haydn—"The Creation"—Its immediate popularity—Reasons for it—Its claims to greatness—Bach—Mendelssohn his greatest disciple—"Elijah"—Its amazing reception at Birmingham—Its continued popularity in England—Spohr—"Last Judgment"—Ephemeral popularity—Reasons—Samuel Sebastian Wesley—"Redemption" and "Golden Legend"—Many years of great popularity—Hallé and English music—Wrong method of teaching—"Dream of Gerontius," and conclusion.

Of all forms of music, that which has long appealed most deeply to the English people is, without question, the oratorio.

For it they entertain not only affection but, and with good reason, gratitude.

The oratorio became, as it were, a city of refuge to them. Within its walls they sought shelter from the grim and forbidding austerity to which Puritanism had doomed them.

To what an extent music had been banned by the intolerant and fanatic spirit of the times, is shown by one fact which is almost picturesque in its weirdness. When, on the Restoration, boys who could sing were wanted for the choirs of the Chapels Royal, none could be found! The treble parts of the music had to be played on cornets or similar instruments. Music had been banished from the home as well as the Church, and this astonishing fact proves with what profound results.

What years of silence those, during the Commonwealth, must have been. It makes one shudder to think of it. What an infancy for those born during those dark days. So completely had all ear for music been, apparently, lost, that it took some years of training before any children could be fitted to take their places in these choirs. The effect of those terrible years was destined to remain, as may be seen by the number of people who may be found in England to-day, possessed of no ear for music whatever.

Oratorio was to prove, in after years, the means of reconciliation between the art of music and the English people. Divested of the taint of frivolity with which, with good reason, they had for so long associated it, music was once more presented to them as the ally of religion. How eagerly they grasped the olive branch held out to them, will be seen later on.

Oratorio doubtless sprang from the mystery plays of the Middle Ages, and its inception arose in Italy at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The earliest specimens would, naturally, have little resemblance to the great creations of two centuries later, but to the genius of the early Italians we owe its birth. It is seen in embryo as early as the fifteenth century or even before, but perhaps the first work known to us, that definitely shows affinity to oratorio is Emilio's "Rappresentazione," which was first performed in the church of the Oratorians, S. Maria, in Vallicella, in the year 1600. A great advance on it is shown in the works of Carissimi, and still more in those of his illustrious pupil, Scarlatti. The development was carried on by Pergolesi, Jomelli, and Stradella, whose "S. John the Baptist" was for long probably the most celebrated of the oratorios in primitive form.

The origin of the word "oratorio" is derived from S. Filippo Neri, who founded the Order of the Oratory in 1577. As its name implies, the first duty of the members was prayer, but what probably brought about the institution, was the humane desire to give shelter to the many thousands of pilgrims who flocked to Rome in various stages of destitution. Each shelter he established, became a religious home—called oratorium—in which services were held, with the

sanction of the Pope, the one condition being that the celebration of the Eucharist was forbidden.

In these services music had a prominent place, and there is abundant evidence to prove that scenes from the sacred writings were illustrated both by singing and acting.

For instance, at the production of Emilio's "Rappresentazione," in the oratory of Santa Maria, not only were the arts of music and acting requisitioned, but the additional aid of costumes, scenery and dancing. Such a work, with chorus, solo and recitative alternating, became known as oratorio. There is little doubt that this is the true origin of the word. [Pg 153]

As oratorio developed, however, all extraneous aid was dispensed with, and music allied to sacred words were the sole constituents. As we have seen, oratorio in its early stages was essentially the same as opera, except that it was confined to religious subjects. It is interesting to compare their respective developments. The one was religious, the other not; one gradually restricting, the other appropriating the aid of other arts; the one steadfast in its appeal to religious fervour, the other restless in effort, by all means within reach, to augment its power of sensuous attraction.

In the case of oratorio, the process has culminated in the production of Elgar's "Dream of Gerontius," in that of opera, Wagner's "Tristan and Isolde."

It is to the genius of Handel that England is ever indebted for the immense service of once more bringing music into the lives of her people.

On his first visit he had used this tremendous power to amuse a dissolute aristocracy and the cosmopolitan hordes that the Restoration attracted to London, by producing "Italian" opera of his own composing, and introducing the most celebrated Italian singers of the day.

For a time this policy was a complete success, and he amassed a considerable fortune, but eventually he lost the greater part of it and, broken in health and spirit, he retired to a Continental health resort, to re-invigorate his tired constitution. [Pg 154]

It was on his last, and what proved to be practically permanent, visit to England that he commenced the memorable series of works that proved of such vital consequence to this country. There can be little doubt that it is the sense of the immense indebtedness of England to this wonderful man, that has led many people to claim him as an Englishman. With every respect for the feeling that prompts it, nothing could be further removed from fact. A long residence in the country no more makes him an Englishman, proud as we should be if he were, than it does the criminal alien who has been so much in evidence of late years.

Indeed, if any country other than his own, had any basis for claiming him, it seems to me it would be Italy.

He lived there in his early years; thoroughly mastered her schools of both sacred and operatic music, the knowledge of which, in after years, was of such incalculable value to him, and acquired such a command of the language, that he was able to speak and compose music to it as if he were, veritably, a native of the country.

Now, when he came to England he was a musician perfectly equipped. There was, certainly, no one who could teach him anything, and all that one can say is, that having a mind extraordinarily receptive, he would be quick to grasp and turn to advantage any new influence with which he might be brought into contact.

By Hudson.

G. F. Handel.

Thus, he was certainly affected by Purcell's music, which he probably became acquainted with [Pg 155]

for the first time. The evidence of this is perfectly clear and convincing.

On the other hand, he never mastered the English language, notwithstanding the many years he lived here. His pronunciation was terrible, and that he often failed to comprehend the relative force of the words of a sentence when setting them to music, the early editions of his oratorios prove conclusively. Yet so impatient of criticism was he, that, did his librettist suggest an alteration, the unhappy man usually provoked a storm from which he was only too happy to escape.

This little weakness, however, counts for nothing in comparison with his splendid integrity and noble independence of character. The latter is especially notable, seeing how eager most musicians were at that period, to secure the patronage of great personages.

He was imperious in temper and, perhaps, aggressively conscious of his powers; but he was generous to a degree, when his means allowed it, and many are the existing institutions which have good reason to call him blessed.

Handel has often been accused, and with some justice, of laying violent hands on anything he came across in the way of musical ideas that he could convert to his own use. Whether large conceptions leading to unknown possibilities, or a simple tune to be converted to immediate use, he seemed to avail himself of them with the freedom of an autocrat. [Pg 156]

The minds of the just may be saddened by the reflection, but there is little doubt that the world at large has every reason to be thankful. When he made the momentous resolution to devote himself to the composition of oratorio, his early experience in Italy and the knowledge he gained there, can but have been of enormous service to him. How thoroughly he had absorbed the Italian spirit and technique is, in his earlier works more particularly, evident, and that he appreciated Italian melody is equally shown by the frequency with which he annexed it.

It has often been pointed out how dissimilar his earliest sacred music is from his so-called English oratorios. Naturally. The former was written when a boy and before he had gained his Italian experience. His oratorios were not begun until he was, at least, fifty years of age. He had then been in the position to become acquainted with the great English school of ecclesiastical music, and the combination of his early German training, his absorption of the Italian school and his connection with this, seems to be quite sufficient to explain the fact. Indeed, it does not require much critical acumen to detect each influence at work in his oratorios.

That he distanced everything that preceded him is, of course, needless to say, but that his work often shows signs of this spirit of opportunism, the most enthusiastic of his admirers, and these are countless, will admit.

What led Handel to devote himself to the composition of sacred music?

[Pg 157] Had he, at last, gauged the true inwardness of the spirit of the people among whom he had elected to live the rest of his days?

Had he come to realise that, so far as they were concerned, he might go on writing operas until the crack of doom, without affecting them in the least? His genius was eclectic. He could write Italian music to delight the Italians, German music to satisfy the Germans, and now, was he determined to reach the soul of the *people*, rather than continue to cater for the amusement of a comparatively few wealthy dwellers in the metropolis? Who can tell?

That he was a man of any deep religious feeling, there had been up to this time, little to indicate. In character he was pugnacious, assertive, and intolerant of the least opposition. For years his life had been spent in continual strife, and the result had been far from commensurate with the wealth of genius and energy he had expended.

Now he was embarking on an enterprise in which he would have no rivals, and which offered as great a scope for his powers as that which he had relinquished. Well, whatever it was that decided him, the world has reason to be thankful for the momentous decision.

In any case, to attempt to explain the ways of genius is, generally, time hopelessly lost.

His first oratorios were devoted to subjects from the Old Testament. In manner and expression, they are quite like his operas. The arias might, indeed, be exchanged without any perceptible difference; the choruses, however, are on a grander scale. [Pg 158]

So far as the English people were concerned, their attraction lay in the fact of being associated with Biblical incidents, and thus making it possible to go and hear them, without any suspicion of irreligious motive. This first and great result was of immense import, for it laid the seeds that were, later, to bring forth such good fruit.

As regards their religious message, they might just as well have been written, great as they are, and stupendous in the case of "Israel in Egypt," for a pagan festival. Nevertheless, the great work was in progress, the great mission in course of fulfilment. It may be said that they were like S. John the Baptist, in that they were the forerunners of that which was to be, for the English people at least, the greatest glory in Christendom, in the sense of religious music.

THE "MESSIAH."

It was on April 13th, 1742, that the immortal and epoch-making work, the "Messiah," was produced in Dublin. Its success was immediate, and the effect produced by it extraordinary. Repetitions of the performance were demanded, and its fame spread with such rapidity that the excitement was intense on the occasion of its first representation in London on March 23, 1743.

The audience embraced the highest personages in the realm, from the King downwards, and as the performance progressed, so did the excitement, which culminated during the singing of the "Hallelujah" chorus, by the people, headed by the King, springing to their feet and remaining standing until the end.

The "Messiah" may be said to have crowned the work that the earlier oratorios had begun. Henceforth the English people were to see, as their ancestors had before them, that music was not only great as an art, but that it could be both an aid and inspiration to religion.

It is little to be wondered at, that a people who must have been thirsting for music so long, should give vent to outbursts of emotion and enthusiasm, when it was restored to them in the form of so sublime a conception.

What an experience! to have been among those on whose ears fell for the first time those wonderfully touching and simple recitatives, in which the vision of the shepherds is described and the announcement of the birth of the Saviour made, or the more poignant one in which, to music of intense emotional power, the terrible story of the Last Agonies is related.

No other work has ever approached the "Messiah" in the strength of its hold on the mind and imagination of the English people, and this is as true to-day as it was a hundred and fifty years ago. They know it incomparably better than any other music ever written, and the many beautiful numbers it contains, may be said to be as familiar in their mouths as household words. The "Hallelujah" chorus, although not by any means Handel's best, still retains its old popularity, and, indeed, nearly the whole work would seem to be endowed with endless life.

There are certain numbers, it is true, of which this cannot be said, and which are usually omitted, but, seeing the extraordinary rapidity with which it was written, the amazing thing is that they are so few. It seems absolutely incredible that this, his greatest oratorio, should have been written within the short space of three weeks, yet it was so.

I have written at some length on Handel and the "Messiah," as it is his unique distinction, through the medium of this immortal work, to have revolutionised the spirit of the English people, and helped to rid it of the Calvinistic thraldom that had enveloped it.

I must now content myself with a brief commentary on the successive oratorios, since Handel's day, that have had any distinct and abiding influence on music in England.

THE "CREATION."

By this time oratorio had become, not only firmly established, but even the principal factor in the musical life of the nation.

The next to whom it was given to successfully carry on its traditions, was Joseph Haydn. This composer, who is justly called the father of the symphony, had never tried his powers in this direction, previous to his first visit to England. Among his many experiences, perhaps the most interesting and certainly the most important, was making the acquaintance of Handel's English oratorios. Their popularity was not lost on him, nor did he fail to discern the strong influence which religious music exercised, and which so clearly indicated the trend of the national mind.

Conscious as he was of his own powers, it was only natural that he should desire to emulate the achievements of his great predecessor, and gain the fame and fortune in this country which such music as he had brought would never realise. So, on his return to Vienna he determined to make a trial, and, encouraged by the enthusiastic friends he happily possessed, he started upon the composition of this oratorio. To say that it was a great success is to say little. Its popularity was immediate and universal, and to think that he was upwards of seventy years of age when he commenced it, only adds to one's admiration of the great composer. With what energy, sincerity and enthusiasm he threw himself into the work is shewn by the way he wrote to his friends at the time: "I pray God to help me every day," he writes in one of his letters. So far as England is concerned, the fact that Haydn advanced the art of music in every other direction, counts as little in comparison with his being the composer of the "Creation." Those who could appreciate abstract music were few, but the numbers who could understand and enjoy such music as this were many.

It is not in the least difficult to understand either its instant popularity or even the enthusiasm the "Creation" aroused when it was first heard. It struck an entirely new note. To ears accustomed to the stern majesty of Handel's music, this came to them not only in the shape of novelty, but even, if one may use the term, as a relief. The melodies with which it abounds, are bright, sparkling and spontaneous. They issued from a fount that was apparently inexhaustible. To the English people all this was quite new. The freshness, youthfulness and akinness to Nature, with its suggestive imitations of the warbling of birds and the cooing of doves; or, again the dramatic outburst when recording the creation of light, the mysterious music accompanying the narrative relating to the "darkness that moved on the face of the waters," and the atmosphere surrounding the "roaming in foaming billows"—all this was positively alluring in its potentiality of

surprise and delight. So daring and original were many of the effects that they would seem to have emanated from the brain of some youthful genius who was pouring forth the unrestrainable creations of his mind, rather than the matured work of a man verging on seventy years of age.

For many years the "Creation" vied with the "Messiah" for popularity, and although not approaching the latter in grandeur, it was successful in attracting thousands who were unable to appreciate the extreme classicalism of Handel.

To this day it holds a distinguished place in the repertory of all our choral societies, after nearly a hundred and twenty years of existence. From whatever point of view it may be regarded, the "Creation" is wonderful. The work of an old man breaking new ground (although he had, many years previously, composed some sacred music, generally unknown and of no significance in his history), it is perhaps unequalled in musical records.

"ELIJAH."

More than forty years were to elapse before another oratorio appeared that could compare with the "Messiah" or "Creation" either in the eminence of its composer, or power of affecting the imagination of the English people.

The magnificent sacred music of John Sebastian Bach was scarcely known to any but a select few, and although of late years performances of some of his finest works have been frequently given and justly appreciated, it cannot be said that they are sufficiently known to have had any effect on the musical instincts of the country.

There have been many Bach enthusiasts among English musicians, from Samuel Wesley onwards, who have used their best endeavours to render his music popular in England, and so far as his organ music is concerned, with unquestionable success.

His oratorios, however, are so vast in design, difficult of performance, and exacting in their demands on the mental capacity of the listener, that it is doubtful whether they will ever become popular in the sense that the "Messiah" is, and thus their influence must be necessarily limited. The stupendous Mass in B minor and the S. Matthew and S. John Passions are the works by which he is best known in England.

It was in 1846 that Mendelssohn, the greatest of Bach's disciples, finished the composition of that oratorio which was destined not only to set a seal on his great fame, but to arouse once again, to its highest possibilities, the enthusiasm of the English people, by the production of the "Elijah" at Birmingham on August 26 of that year. It was a memorable day. Rumours of the wonderful Baal choruses had been spreading from the places of rehearsal, and expectation ran high.

His previous oratorio, "S. Paul," had, when first heard, made a deep impression, and, although in some mysterious way lacking in that vital essence that is so necessary to reach the hearts of the people and stay there, it proved that the composer was endowed, to an extraordinary degree, with the gift of graphic description and dramatic effect, while his melodic resources were unfailing.

The "Elijah" showed Mendelssohn at the very height of his powers. No musician had ever received a more complete education, or been given greater chances to mature it under exceptional conditions. Hence, with whatsoever genius Nature had endowed him, education, the most skilful and scientifically applied, had been brought to bear on it, so as to enable him to display it under circumstances the most brilliant and convincing.

The "Elijah," then, realized, nay more, it exceeded the highest expectations. Teeming with melody which fascinated them, while never exceeding their powers of instant comprehension, full of moving incidents that their reading of the Bible had made familiar, and containing moments of intense dramatic force, this noble work seemed to the English people for whom it was written, a veritable inspiration and a gift from the Highest Sources, to be received with humility and gratitude.

At any rate, the outburst of emotion that it evoked was extraordinary, and, probably, unprecedented. Mendelssohn himself was so moved that he hastened from the city so soon as it was possible for him to do so, in order to escape from the atmosphere of excitement. The success proved a lasting one, and the "Elijah" joined the "Messiah" and "Creation" to form a triumvirate that time has not yet succeeded in dethroning.

Judged by modern standards of criticism, it would be idle to deny that the "Elijah" is not so great a work as it was believed to be when first produced, but notwithstanding this, its great outstanding merit of fascinating the English public and attracting them towards music that, if not monumental like that of Bach, was, at least, artistic and undeniably sincere, should be recognized with gratitude by all who are interested in the subject of "music in England."

"THE LAST JUDGMENT."

When considering the composers of oratorio who influenced musical thought in England in the nineteenth century, a conspicuous place must be assigned to Louis Spohr.

He only commenced writing sacred works when close upon thirty years of age, although by that time he had proved to be a prolific composer of instrumental and operatic music. That the natural

bent of his genius was not in this direction is shewn by the fact that his earliest essays were marred by his lack of contrapuntal skill—absolutely the first essential. Although he tried to remedy the defect, it is noteworthy that he never acquired a mastery of this necessary aid to Church music, and its failure to make any lasting impression is largely due to this fact.

The first oratorio to become famous was "The Last Judgment," which was not composed until he was over forty years of age.

There is no doubt whatever, strange as it may appear now, that his oratorios, at one time, were immensely popular in this country. This is shewn by the fact that in 1847 the Sacred Harmonic Society (of London) gave a special series of concerts, with the sole idea of presenting the whole of Spohr's sacred compositions! These included three oratorios, "The Fall of Babylon," "Calvary," and "The Last Judgment."

One reads that they were received with the greatest enthusiasm, and Spohr certainly looked upon their success in this country, as one of the most notable features in his career. Indeed, he wrote, on one occasion, that the reception of "The Fall of Babylon" when produced at the Norwich Festival, was the greatest triumph of his life.

It is difficult, at the present day, to account for the unquestionable vogue his sacred music enjoyed. Compared with the works we have had under consideration, they are of no great value. One can only imagine that any change from the limited repertory our forefathers possessed, came as a welcome relief from the continued repetition of the few standard oratorios they had at their disposition. Melody, his music certainly contained, but of a kind difficult to associate with the great thoughts they were supposed to typify; while the harmony, with which it is generally accompanied, is of a cloying sweetness positively antagonistic to any deep religious sense. However, not only did it attract average people, but even the great Samuel Sebastian Wesley for a short space came under its spell.

It is true that there are occasional moments when sympathetic and even moving music occurs, but it cannot be said they contained anything of lasting worth.

The oratorios have long passed into desuetude. Perhaps the best of them is "The Last Judgment," which contains certain numbers that are still sung, and which shew Spohr in his happiest vein.

"THE REDEMPTION" AND "THE GOLDEN LEGEND."

Again, many years were to pass before the advent of another oratorio destined to arouse more than temporary interest or achieve any lasting fame. Many sacred works of the greatest importance and significance were produced, it is true, from time to time, but, so far as the common people are concerned, without the least visible effect.

Perhaps the most splendid of them was Dvorak's "Stabat Mater."

This work aroused the enthusiasm of musician and critic alike. Intense in feeling, original in thought and worthy of the noble Latin hymn it illuminated, it created, among those who were in the happy position of being able to fathom its splendid depths, an impression that time cannot efface.

It is rarely given in England, for the public who will hasten to hear the "Messiah" are not, as yet, sufficiently advanced in musical education to understand a work of such cultured severity, and on so high a plane of musical expression.

To the people, as a body, music must be written on lines more obvious, and although of late there is every sign that sacred music of a more complex character is becoming increasingly appreciated and understood, that time had not arrived when the "Stabat Mater" was produced in 1884.

The oratorio which, subsequent to the "Elijah," was destined to appeal most strongly to the people and make the most lasting effect, was Gounod's "Redemption." It was first given at the Birmingham festival in 1882, and the impression it produced was unmistakable. It was quite original in style, being built on lines differing essentially from any of its predecessors. Its atmosphere of mysticism, its religious transport, and strongly suggestive of Latin Catholicism, "The Redemption" seemed the last work to appeal to the English people. Yet, so eclectic are their tastes and broad-minded their sympathies, that, recognizing its deep sincerity and appreciating its many beautiful melodies, they accepted it heartily, and for many years it was one of the most frequently performed oratorios.

It must be admitted, however, that it was not received in the same spirit by many critics, for it aroused a great deal of controversy and even bitterness. While many were willing to do justice to the obvious sincerity underlying the whole score and recognize the sterling value of much of the music, others refused with angry insistence to admit any merit in it whatever, calling it tawdry, vapid and unworthy of serious consideration. Some went still farther, and said that its influence was distinctly baneful.

Well, when the high priests of a cult differ, who is to decide?

Human thought is not cast in one mould. Brahms, in his German "Requiem," gave expression in the noblest manner, to the feelings and aspirations of German Protestantism.

Gounod, on the other hand, although less fully equipped from the point of view of musical science, voiced to the best of his powers, the devout enthusiasm of Catholic Christianity.

So far as England is concerned, there is no doubt that, of the two works, "The Redemption" was by far the more popular.

"The Golden Legend," although not strictly speaking, an oratorio, is written on lines so similar that it can be considered here with perfect propriety. The subject is a religious one, and is treated in that spirit of reverence that is a distinguishing feature of oratorio, and which differentiates it from every other class of work.

It was produced at the Leeds Festival of 1886, and achieved an extraordinary success, the scenes which took place on the occasion being quite reminiscent of those at Birmingham forty years before, when the "Elijah" was first given. The work shews the composer, Arthur Sullivan, at his best. The story enabled him to give play to his strong dramatic sympathies, and he availed himself of the opportunity with splendid results.

The opening scene is not only powerful but picturesque as well, while the scene in which Satan is represented ridiculing the sacred hymn of the monks is really masterly.

The work, however, is too well-known to call for any lengthened description. Suffice it to say that it is more consistent than the majority of his larger compositions can be said to be, since it keeps on a high level plane throughout. In this respect his earlier dramatic cantata, "The Martyr of Antioch," while possessing some splendid numbers—among the finest he ever wrote—is strangely lacking.

He wrote only two avowed oratorios, "The Prodigal Son" and "The Light of the World," but it cannot be said that they had anything more than a temporary success, and they certainly cannot compare with either "The Golden Legend" or "The Martyr of Antioch" in originality or effect. They contain music, no doubt, that many would like to have composed, but they are altogether lacking in that power which compels, and which these works undeniably possess.

The production of "The Golden Legend" not only enhanced Sullivan's already great prestige, but marked him, without question, as the foremost British composer of the day. For years its popularity seemed to be quite inexhaustible, and if to-day there are found British composers working on a higher plane, and this cannot be questioned, there is, equally, no doubt that it not only marked an important stage in his own career, but in the reputation of England as a musical nation.

As an instance of the interest it aroused in the country, it may be mentioned that Sir Charles Hallé, at whose Manchester concerts the appearance of works by British composers was, to say the least, infrequent, found it necessary, in order to meet the demands of his subscribers, to issue an announcement of its early production. He, further, invited Sir Arthur Sullivan to conduct it, and so great was the demand for seats that a second performance was found necessary to meet the call.

For many years oratorio has been the favourite medium of expression by British composers. To George Frederick Handel we must look for the origin of this evident fact. From the time of William Boyce, his contemporary, through the line of Samuel Wesley, Dr. Crotch and other distinguished British musicians, down to the mid-nineteenth century, we trace the progress, and over it all, is the fatal influence of imitation. Indeed, this feature became an obsession over their minds, to such a degree, that until quite recent years, students were taught in all the English schools of music to regard the technique of composition rather as the end in view, than as the medium by which they could express any original thought that might be in them. It is certain that even thirty years ago this was a definite and soul-destroying fact. Such prizes as were at the disposition of the schools of music, were invariably awarded to the student who displayed the greatest facility in illustrating the rules of the pundit, rather than to the one who evinced any trace of original thinking.

Such a system of training could have but one effect, that of stultifying the efforts of the best talent the country could produce. It was left to the man of genius, who, conscious of his power, could kick over the traces of convention, and lead his followers on a path that opened up an avenue of original achievement, to put an end to this evil once and for ever.

Happily for England such a man was, before long, destined to appear.

The nineteenth century had witnessed a monotonous succession of oratorios by English composers, written on such lines as this system would naturally indicate.

They were characterised by earnestness and scholastic efficiency, but of the essence of vitality they were absolutely bereft.

"THE DREAM OF GERONTIUS."

For some years previous to 1900, it had become evident that a star of great magnitude was rising in the firmament of English music.

Succeeding years had witnessed productions from the pen of Sir Edward Elgar that commanded, perhaps, more admiration than any other feeling. They were virile in their mode of expression, original and daring in method. They produced rather the sensation of expectancy than the sense

of complete fulfilment.

The day, however, was fast nearing when his genius was to burst forth in all its splendour, and, with one great and epoch-making work, restore England to its ancient place in the world of music.

If Sir Edward Elgar had no other title to fame, the fact that he brought Cardinal Newman's inspired poem into universal knowledge would have been sufficient to make his name memorable. It is an extraordinary fact that until the production of this oratorio, the poem, magnificent as it was known to be to the few, was scarcely familiar to one educated Englishman in ten. The explanation is not difficult to find. [Pg 174]

The tremendous sensation that John Henry Newman evoked by severing himself from the English Church, is a matter of history, and the bitter feelings it engendered were little likely to be assuaged by the publication of a work of such exalted genius, in which Catholic doctrines are portrayed in majestic and fascinating splendour.

As a matter of fact, Cardinal Newman's writings were practically ignored by the reading public until his famous "Apologia" brought them into universal demand.

To deal with such a theme as "The Dream of Gerontius" on equal terms with the author, required on the part of the composer, immense resources of skill, and an imagination capable of responding to calls of the most exacting nature.

To say that Sir Edward Elgar succeeded in his great endeavour is to say less than the truth. He did more. By intense devotional music he aided the author in the inspired effort to lift the veil, and reveal, if ever so obscurely, those glories of which holy men have dreamed unceasingly since the dread day of the Crucifixion.

It is permissable to doubt if in the whole realm of sacred music, anything more approaching sublimity has been penned by the musician, than the setting of the noble hymn, "Praise to the Holiest in the Heights."

The whole work dwells in an atmosphere of ecstatic emotion, and words seem strangely inadequate to convey a true impression of its nobility. [Pg 175]

The world at large has recognized its supreme merit, and nowhere has this been more eloquently acknowledged than by the great German composer, Herr Richard Strauss, on the occasion of its performance at the Rhine Festival in 1902.

It was hardly to be expected that a work so complex in character and so different from anything hitherto presented in England, should be at once understood and its great qualities immediately grasped.

Hence, on the occasion of the first performance at Birmingham, it scarcely realized the success that those who knew its unique value had expected. Little time, however, was to elapse before English music lovers came to a just appreciation, and its popularity to-day is not only a sign of enduring qualities, but of the immense advance in musical perception that has characterised recent years in the country. There had been signs, many and ominous, of a waning interest in oratorio. The number of works that had any real hold of, or power of attraction for the people in general, were few. The failure of so many new ones to realize the expectations that had been aroused in the public mind before their production, was making an effect that was, in every sense, deplorable; but, happily, "The Dream of Gerontius" came in time to stem the current of popular feeling, and to add an additional lustre to the history of oratorio in England.

[Pg 176]

CHAPTER VIII

OPERA IN ENGLAND

> Italy, the birth-place of opera—Purcell and opera—English people and opera—Charles II. and his court—Italian opera—Its popularity—Managers and great singers—Royal Opera—Dr. Richter—Opera in English—Dr. Richter and English singers—Mr. Thomas Beecham and opera in English—Alfred Bunn and his efforts—"Bohemian Girl"—Louisa Pyne and William Harrison—The Pyne family—G. A. Macfarren—Carl Rosa Company—His distinguished artists—Madame Valleria and Mr. Ludwig—British composers and opera—Goring Thomas' "Esmeralda"—Lack of national feeling—Mr. D'Oyly Carte—Royal English opera—"Ivanhoe"—Eugène Oudin—Remarkable cast of singers—Difficulties attached to opera in English—State aid—Is it to be expected?—Musical comedy—Its popularity—A successful manager—Basis of the plea for State aid—A suggestion.

Opera, as we know it to-day, is a creation subsequent to the Reformation. Like oratorio, the country of its birth was Italy, and similarly, its origin was connected with the miracle plays of the ancient Church. On its introduction to England, Purcell, with his restless genius, was quick to perceive the possibilities it opened out to the imaginative musician, and it was not long before he

was testing his powers in the new field of labour. Unhappily, however, his life was too short to permit him to make any effective appeal on its behalf to the English people, and it soon became looked upon by them, simply, as a diversion of a foreign court or the amusement of an aristocracy, with either of whom they were in little sympathy. So far as the masses of people are concerned, nothing has happened since those days, to materially alter the situation. [Pg 177]

Opera remains a source of entertainment to the wealthy, or a luxury to the middle-classes. In early Puritan times it was regarded with particular horror, but as time passed, it became rather to be looked upon with indifference, since it so evidently made little impression on the common people. It is not difficult to suggest a cause for the hostility with which it was early regarded. Opera came, first, prominently into notice in the reign of Charles II., and as he was a great patron of all foreign inventions, he naturally bestowed his patronage, and probably ostentatiously, on this one. Thus it would be associated in the minds of the people with the hideous immorality of that wretched monarch and his court.

At any rate, to them it was a foreign institution, and, to all intents and purposes, it has so remained to this day. There is little to wonder at in this. If the reign of Charles II. was sufficient to determine the people to get rid of the Stuart dynasty at any price, there is nothing surprising in the comparatively unimportant fact, that they became prejudiced against any new form of foreign amusement to which he and his court accorded princely support. He was alien in blood, in tastes and sympathies, and was utterly cynical in his ways of showing it.

[Pg 178] The performances were mainly given in Italian, a language understood by but few, even of the wealthy classes, but, as ever, so soon as it became the fashion and the "right thing" to support it, success was assured. It is not an excess of language to say the conditions that obtain to-day are not far removed from those of the times described. Italian opera has been for centuries the most fashionable and exclusive source of amusement in the metropolis, and far beyond the reach of the masses.

By the time Handel arrived in London, it had secured a position that promised a permanent hold on fashionable society. It was not long before Handel challenged Italian supremacy, by taking a theatre, and establishing a rival enterprise; "Italian" opera of his own composition being the great source of attraction. He was, for some years entirely successful, but eventually he abandoned the field to his Italian competitors.

The nineteenth century saw Italian opera in England at the height of its glory. In the early part, the world was thrilled by such singers as Sontag and Malibran, but perhaps the most brilliant period of its ascendancy began with the managements of Smith, Gye and Mapleson. The wealth of great singers these three had at their command, is a matter for pure amazement. To think of being able to "cast" Mozart's "Don Giovanni" with the soprano parts alone, filled by Therese Tietjens, Adelina Patti and Christine Nilsson!

[Pg 179] It is out of the question to attempt to give anything approaching a list of the singers they had at their call. A few of the names will be sufficient to give a fairly adequate idea; Guiligni, Mario, Sims Reeves, Niccolini, Santley and Lablache being among them.

The "Royal Italian Opera" as it was, for long called, culminated in splendour and success under the management of the late Sir Augustus Harris. His achievements, being so recent, will be well within public recollection, but it is worthy to recall the triumphs of those supreme artists, Madame Melba and the brothers De Reszke, made during his memorable reign at Covent Garden.

Operas by Italian composers had long ceased to be the sole or even principal, attraction presented; the French school having become more prominent, and above all, the mighty influence exercised by Wagner, making the frequent presentations of his works a matter of inevitability.

The dropping of the word "Italian," in the title of the institution, was simply a matter of expedience, "Royal Opera" being more in accord with the work achieved, and the spirit of the times. Since the accession to power of the Directorate which now rules the fortunes of the historic house, perhaps the most memorable of its many claims to gratitude has been the manner in which Wagner's immortal work, "Der Ring des Nibelungen," has been given, under the direction of Dr. Richter. Every possible accessory of splendour, efficient mounting, the finest cast of Wagnerian singers obtainable, an orchestra that could not be excelled, has been placed at the disposition of the great conductor. [Pg 180]

The result of such enterprise has not only been to increase its already great prestige, but to bring within the cultured circles of the true lovers of Wagner, many thousands who had, otherwise, remained outside. Taking any single season as a characteristic one, it may be truly said that it offers a fair and varied representation of the tastes and predilections of its wealthy and cosmopolitan patrons.

That the "Royal Opera" is, in any sense, national in character, is not claimed for it, but what it does set out to do, is done in a manner that leaves criticism in abeyance.

A feature in the performances of late years, that has been a matter of gratification, is the frequent appearance of English-speaking singers and their pronounced success; that of Madame Kirkby-Lunn being, perhaps, the most notable.

When we come to the consideration of opera in English, or "English Opera," there is, unfortunately, a very different tale to tell. Before commencing to narrate, as briefly as possible, the salient features of its history, I should like to refer to two events which demand recognition, but which, however interesting, as they undoubtedly were, were ephemeral, if not in effect, at least in existence as living forces.

[Pg 181]

When Hans Richter undertook to conduct a series of performances of Wagner's greatest works with English singers as exponents,[28] he not only gave effect to the belief that was in him, of their capabilities, but he gave one more proof, and it was a supreme one, of his love for, and gratitude to the country that had so deeply appreciated him.

It was, looking at it from any point of view, splendid, but when viewed in the light of the expenditure of nervous energy it must have entailed, it was simply heroic. At an age when he was entitled to rest, more even, than most great workers, he entered upon the task with no view to gain for himself or his prestige—that was impossible—but, apparently, with an idea of paying what he may have thought a debt, to the country with which he had been so long associated. At any rate, whatever the motive, it was a noble act, and his name will live long in the memory of those who are interested in English music, and can appreciate a noble and unselfish career.

The courageous attempt of Mr. Thomas Beecham to give prolonged seasons of opera in English, and his astonishingly fine performances of the extremely intricate works of Richard Strauss, deserve grateful recognition, and it is a matter of regret that the public support he received was not sufficient to allow of the continuance of his efforts.

[Pg 182]

His representations were on a scale of efficiency that London had not seen for a great many years, and this fact, although satisfactory in itself, only gives food to the thought that there are not, as yet, unfortunately, sufficient lovers of opera among the masses, to make such seasons possible, without considerable financial loss to those who venture on them.

From earliest times there have ever been enthusiasts who ardently desired to found a school of English opera, or, at least, give the English people a chance to acquire an intelligent appreciation of that form of art, through the medium of their own language and their own people.

Perhaps the first man to grapple with the subject, and attain, to an appreciable extent, any abiding success, was Alfred Bunn, who was born towards the close of the eighteenth century, and became lessee of Drury Lane theatre in 1834.

That there was any enthusiasm shown, when he ventured on a season of English opera, there is little evidence to prove. However, he was an enthusiast and, if not a poet judged by the standard of Percy Bysshe Shelley, he had sufficient literary ability to write the libretto for Balfe's "Bohemian Girl," and thus furnish that composer with the means of producing a work, which, whatever may be thought of it to-day by the cultivated amateur, obtained a hold on the English people, and still retains it, such as no similar one has ever succeeded in effecting.

One would think that he would have been justified in expecting sympathetic encouragement in his endeavour on behalf of native art.

[Pg 183]

There is no trace of it.

On the contrary, he seems to have been gifted with a veritable genius for evoking, somehow or other, perfect cyclones of abuse and opposition. In fact, his whole managerial career appears to have been spent in an atmosphere of turmoil. He was sarcastically dubbed "the poet Bunn," and, although a man of resource, as twenty-five years of theatrical management is, alone, sufficient to prove, his end was sad, and not without significance as regards English opera. He eventually became a bankrupt, and died in exile in 1860.

There is this, however, to his credit, and the honour of his memory, that he was instrumental in bringing into existence the two most popular operas ever written by British composers, Balfe's "Bohemian Girl" and Wallace's "Maritana."

The next most important event in its history, was the formation of a company under the joint management of Miss Louisa Pyne and Mr. William Harrison, in 1856. Here again, the object was not only to present opera in English, but to invite the co-operation of British composers to further the cause—that is to say, the founding of an original school of English opera. Everything seemed to augur well for the enterprise. Both were distinguished singers, with large operatic experience. Miss Pyne had achieved great success, not only in Europe, but in America, where she had aroused the greatest enthusiasm, and her name was, naturally, looked upon as the particular source of attraction to the public, and, indeed, the mainstay of the undertaking.

[Pg 184]

She came of a rare family of English musicians. Her father George, and her uncle, James Kendrick Pyne, were both well-known singers. The son of the latter, Mr. Kendrick Pyne, a splendid musician himself, and lifelong friend of Samuel Sebastian Wesley, for many years organist of Bath Abbey, was the father of two musicians; the elder, Dr. Kendrick Pyne, the distinguished organist of Manchester Cathedral, and Minton Pyne who, unhappily, died at an early age in Philadelphia, U.S.A., before he had been given time to develop the musical genius he undoubtedly possessed.

The Pyne-Harrison company, as it was called, was started most successfully, and soon established a reputation that bade fair to presage permanent results.

Among the most successful of the many operas produced, were Balfe's "Rose of Castille"; Vincent Wallace's "Lurline" and Benedict's "Lily of Killarney."

Such facts as these, unquestionably, shed a lustre over the attempt, so well conceived and so bravely carried out, but unfortunately, the financial position became increasingly difficult as the enterprise progressed, until, finally, the partnership was dissolved, and Miss Pyne retired into private life, in 1862.

After her retirement from the stage, she devoted herself to teaching, and, as Madame Bodda-Pyne, by which name she became known through her marriage, achieved great distinction in her new field of labour.

At the time of her death, in 1904, she was in receipt of a Civil List pension, as a recognition of her distinguished services to the art of music.

Of the British composers who were attracted to the stage in the mid-nineteenth century, one of the most prolific was (Sir) George Alexander Macfarren. He produced, under different managements, upwards of a dozen operas, besides writing many more that never saw the light. The most popular of them was "Robin Hood," which appeared in 1860. It was one of the best examples of ballad-opera ever written. At this period, our national composers would seem to have directed all their thought and energies to this particular form. That their judgment was wrong in this respect, is shown by the absolute oblivion into which, with two or three exceptions, their productions have fallen. The period is, in any case, not one which Englishmen may wish to dwell on.

Another era was initiated, happily, not many years after, by the works of Sir Alexander Mackenzie and Sir Villiers Stanford.

Since the Pyne-Harrison epoch, there have been many attempts, with varying success, to continue the cult of English opera. It would be impossible in a book of the dimensions such as this, to describe them all. One need only say that the sincerity attached to many of them, has deserved a better fate than that experienced. I must content myself with giving an indication of the most important efforts subsequently made,—always with the same object in view.

At the present time, the Carl Rosa company, the Moody-Manners company, so intimately associated with the triumphs of Madame Moody, and the "J. W. Turner" company, are all carrying on the good work, so it would be premature to write fully as to their undertakings.

It is sufficient to say that each one carries on the work of education after its own methods, and doubtless with equal effect.

I will now continue the consideration of fundamentally vital influences that have affected the position as it remains to-day.

The man who, in modern times, most nearly reached the point of founding an English school of opera was, without question, the late Carl Rosa.

This distinguished musician was a German by birth, who, after a prolonged visit to America, where he married the great singer Madame Parepa, came to London in 1874.

He immediately commenced preparations for the formation of a company of English singers, with a view to give performances of opera in the English language.

The lamentable death of his wife soon after their settling in England, on whose aid he had so greatly counted, and whose enthusiasm for the project was very pronounced, naturally delayed its execution.

However, in the following year he opened at the Princess Theatre with Mr. (now Sir) Charles Santley and Miss Rose Hersee as his leading performers. The fact of the season lasting two months, was evidently sufficient to convince him that he had good reason to believe in the ultimate success of his idea, for he at once arranged for a session of longer duration in the following year.

His ambition was not confined, however, to simply give operatic performances in English: he had the greater one, should his venture prove successful, to invite British composers to write works for him, and thus make his enterprise a thing of permanent national importance. That he failed in his splendid effort was no fault of his own, or those surrounding him.

As time went on, he gathered together a band of devoted and enthusiastic artists, many of whose names spring vividly to the memory.

Alwina Valleria, Julia Gaylord, Georgina Burns, Josephine York, Joseph Maas, J. W. Turner, Barton McGuckin, Ben Davies, Leslie Crotty and William Ludwig, in addition to the two distinguished singers already mentioned, were among them, and supply more than sufficient evidence of the powerful combinations he had at his disposal for the interpretation of any work he might decide to produce.

Few, for example, who had the good fortune to hear Madame Valleria and Mr. Ludwig as "Senta" and "Philip Vanderdecken" in Wagner's "Flying Dutchman," could ever forget the experience. Carl Rosa, then, gave British composers their chance, under circumstances that could hardly be more favourable. And yet, of the many of such operas as he produced, there is not a single one

that is now anything more than a memory.

The reflection is positively painful, of the amount of labour, skill and enthusiasm thrown away. The evidence of genius in many of them is apparent.

Still, they failed to weald around the characters the sympathy that attaches to those that have attained to world-wide affection. Why? with all the resources of their art at their hands?

It cannot be said, in view of recent experience, that indifference to native art was the cause. Try as one may, to evade a decision on the point, it seems inevitable to admit, that the feeling and sense of soil-origin that appears to accompany complete success, was lacking.

It is not necessary to deal with more than one of these works, to give the reader an illustration of the idea intended to be conveyed, and I will choose the one that was, indisputably, the most successful of them all.

"Esmeralda," by Arthur Goring Thomas, whose premature death was so deplored by a large circle of friends and still greater number of sincere admirers of his genius, was produced by Carl Rosa in 1883.

It achieved not only a "first night" success, which so often proves to be but a prelude to an "every other night" failure, but, by its charm, it so fascinated opera-goers, that for a few years it became a regular feature of the repertory of the company's performances, both in London and the provinces.

To what, then, must we look for its failure to retain so honourable a position?

I am afraid, and I say it with regret, to unconscious imitation. It was, in his case, not only natural, but, as it seems to me, inevitable. He had lived for long in France and had become so saturated with her school of music, that every bar he wrote proclaimed the fact; but while master of the exterior mode of style, his compositions failed to show the working of the French mind, that underlies the extraordinary expressions of that wonderful people's genius.

They were earnest in intention, skilful in invention, and quite delightful at the first hearing, but of national virility they were, unhappily, not possessed.

Carl Rosa deserves the grateful memory of the English people.

Of the many attempts to establish English opera in London on a permanent basis, the most extraordinary as well as the most disastrous, was that of the late Mr. D'Oyly Carte in 1891, and which was dignified by the title of "Royal English Opera."

The original intention of the founder, as generally understood, was not only to build a sumptuous home for it, but to encourage its cultivation and development and, by commissioning distinguished British composers to write works, make it, in fact, a nursery for native genius.

The idea was, doubtless, a splendid one, but, unfortunately, the attempt to carry it out was characterised by features that were more surprising than convincing. If the design had been to discard, obtrusively, all precedent, it was entirely fulfilled. Certainly, no lack of courage was in evidence, although prudence seemed to be wanting.

Every one engaged to carry out the great scheme was new to such work. Sir Arthur Sullivan, whose "Ivanhoe" was to inaugurate the attempt, was writing his first grand opera; the artistes chosen for its performance were all with one or two exceptions, without any previous experience of it; the musician selected as musical director had never previously conducted a grand opera, and the stage manager had never produced one.

But perhaps the most extraordinary thing of all, and the idea was most assuredly new, was to start such a scheme with only one opera, and no definite decision as regards a second.

If this were not tempting the Fates, it is difficult to know what would be. At any rate, the Fates did not leave the issue long in doubt.

The immense popularity Sir Arthur Sullivan enjoyed, not only on account of his delightful comic operas, but of his splendid work in other and more serious directions, stimulated public interest, and the production of "Ivanhoe" was awaited with feverish expectation.

Never, it can be truly said, did the Press greet a new venture with greater warmth and enthusiasm. Columns of anticipatory notices were devoted to it, many bearing additional weight by being signed by the writers, and even leading articles in the foremost journals of the country, lending encouragement to the enterprise, went to mark the serious mind in which it was regarded. At last, the eventful night arrived, and the opera was produced under conditions that could hardly have been rendered more favourable.

The reception of the work by the Press and the public was scarcely identical. By the former it was generous, although naturally, critical, the evident uneven merit it exhibited being insisted on; but, on the whole, it was decidedly encouraging, although not so enthusiastic as its admirers would have wished. Time, however, has justified the critics. By the people it was accepted whole-heartedly, as may be judged by the fact that its run extended to 168 consecutive performances. It is true that during the last two months, financial loss was experienced, but at the end of the first hundred nights, notwithstanding the expense of the production, which was exceptionally heavy, there was a balance to the good. It may be mentioned that this constitutes a record in the history

of grand opera.

The public were quick to recognise the beauty of much of the music, and its dramatic power, while they were delighted, and perhaps surprised, by the fine acting that accompanied the superb singing of several of the principals.

The universal acclamation of the splendour of the production was a tribute, well deserved, to the genius of Mr. Hugh Moss.

Of the artists who achieved distinction in this memorable production, the name of the late Eugène Oudin, stands out pre-eminently. His rendering of the part of the Templar, being not only masterly, but instinct with genius.

Other noteworthy performances were those of Miss Margaret Macintyre, Miss Esther Palliser, Miss Lucille Hill, Mr. Ben Davies, Mr. Norman Salmond and Mr. Franklin Clive.

Alas! that it all should have been so piteously wasted. There never was a more complete failure to realise hopes that had been, perhaps unduly, raised, and which were responded to with greater generosity by both Press and public alike. When the "Royal English Opera" was actually inaugurated, not only was a second opera by an English composer in anything more than nebulous contemplation, but not even a single relief to the constant succession of performances of "Ivanhoe" was in course of preparation. This state of things continued until the end was reached and the opera house closed. It was re-opened some months later, for the production of the "Basoche," an opera by the distinguished French composer, André Messager. This work, delightful as it is, failed to attract people in sufficient numbers to make the continuance of the scheme possible, and it came to an end, finally, after an existence of one year's duration. The failure was inglorious and inevitable. The break-up of the company, many of whose members had shown evidence of such high capacity, was a matter of deep regret; a regret the more poignant, since many connected with the enterprise were destined to suffer severely by its early collapse.

I think it will be generally admitted that the idea of establishing a school of English opera, with any chance of permanence pertaining to it, seems hopeless of accomplishment without State aid; and of this, viewing the trend of recent legislation, there would appear to be little prospect.

To have the most remote chance of gaining it, it would be incumbent on those prepared to make the proposal, to convince legislators that there was any national demand for it. Of any evidence of this, I am afraid they would find themselves absolutely lacking. The tendency, at the present day, is in the direction of raising the status of the labourer, socially and in the matter of education, rather than in the cause of art, which, after all, mainly appeals to people who are in the position, more or less, to pay for the thing they feel any serious need of. Such I think, would be the nature of the reply from any government official to those courageous enough to urge so forlorn, yet so good a cause.

He would, of course, be able to state a much stronger case if he thought it desirable.

Look at the frequent productions in London of "musical comedies" or "comic operas," or whatever designation it is wished they should be known by.

They are usually on a scale both elaborate and costly, and sometimes of magnificence, but they attract people by the thousand, where a serious opera will fail to draw them by the hundred.

Here, there is no need of State aid. Why? Simply because they provide what the public want and are willing to pay for. In form, taste and atmosphere, they are the very antithesis of grand opera.

Should any of them show the least signs of demanding intellectual effort for immediate appreciation, the modern manager cuts out the offending matter, without a moment's hesitation, or the least compunction. The immense popularity these entertainments command is, unquestionably, a tribute to the sound judgment of those who control them. It is an interesting fact that within quite recent years, there has been a marked tendency to bring continental successes to London, and the music they have contained has often called forth eulogistic notices from the critics, on the occasions of their first performances. A visit to the theatre a month or so later, would, I fear, generally reveal the fact that most of it, which had earned such high praise, had been eliminated.

So accurate a judge of public taste as Mr. George Edwardes, is able to run three or four of such, or similar, pieces, simultaneously, in the West End of London, each of which must fill the house night after night for months together, before they show a profit, on so sumptuous a scale are they presented.

Viewing such facts as these, it is difficult to see on what grounds, really logical, any demand for help from the State can be made on behalf of grand opera, which it would be difficult to prove that the general public, apart from the comparatively few enthusiasts, have any desire for, when it is so abundantly evident that they are ever eager to support any kind of recreation or relaxation that they *do* want.

The basis of the plea is, no doubt, musical education for the masses; and, while such a desire must attract the sympathy of every music lover, it must be granted that the ability to appreciate Wagner, Elgar or Strauss, is not a necessary part of a working man's attainments. It might be a very desirable thing, but we are very evidently at a more utilitarian stage, the present day being regarded in its true light. The illustration may appear, at first sight, to be somewhat strained, but

I venture to think it is not, judging by notices one reads in the papers, in which Mendelssohn's violin concerto is written of as, "a hackneyed medium of expression"; Gounod's "Faust" as full of "sickly sentimentality," or Bizet's "Carmen" as a work of "essential vulgarity." There may be an element of truth in either of these criticisms, and judged in the light of the writers' probable high standard of æsthetic tastes, they are justified, but they only emphasise the fact of the veritable abyss that separates the modern cultured musical critic from the musical "man in the street," in whose interest the proposition is put forward.

Supposing the government at any time, contemplated taking action in this direction, the first thing they would probably do, would be to appoint a Commission to enquire into the question.

[Pg 196] It is only natural to suppose that among the first of those whose opinions would be sought, the eminent writers on music in the principal journals of the country, would be conspicuous. In this case, it may be taken for granted that unanimity will not be the chief characteristic of their utterances. For instance, I cannot bring myself to think of Mr. Joseph Bennett, whose services to music in the columns of the "Daily Telegraph," for many years were so generally recognised, writing in such terms of Mendelssohn's violin concerto.

The question teems with difficulties.

One school of thought asks for opera given exclusively in the English language and performed, as far as possible by British artists. Another, for opera given in the language in which it was composed, and rendered by singers of the country it represents, or those competent to sing adequately in it. Again, some urge that there should be occasional performances of such simple works as Balfe's "Bohemian Girl," which the least musically educated would be able to appreciate; while others would ban such operas altogether, on the grounds that they are out of the spirit of the age, and that their representation would be sheer waste of time and opportunity.

As an illustration of the absolutely divergent views on the subject held by authoritative opinion, I will make a quotation from the "Morning Post."[29]

It was written with regard to the interesting experiment that Mr. Hammerstein is now making in his effort to popularise opera in England.

[Pg 197] "A cry has been raised that the performances should be in English. It shows a *lamentable ignorance* (the italics are mine) of operatic conditions prevailing at the present time. It would be well-nigh impossible for Mr. Hammerstein to give his performances in English at an earlier date than six months from now. There is no lack of English singers, but those with sufficient experience of the stage at present available to carry on a regular series of performances, can be numbered on the fingers of one hand."

If this opinion be justified, and I hope it is not, it suggests a sad commentary on the result of efforts made on behalf of operatic education in England from the time of Carl Rosa to that of Dr. Richter.

It seems to me that if opera is to become a living force in English musical life, as oratorio has been, there are certain essentials that must obtain.

In the first place the operas should be given in the English language, and the performers should be, as far as possible, of British race; the choice of works sufficiently eclectic to appeal to all classes, and the prices of admission to the performances, arranged on such a scale as not to be prohibitive to the average individual of more or less limited means.

The headquarters of such a company would, naturally, be in London, but an "operatic season" should be arranged for in the principal cities of the provinces.

The financial question naturally obtrudes itself, but I believe that a solution of the question is not beyond the wit of man to devise. [Pg 198]

One thing is very certain, and that is the impossibility, under such a scheme, to pay the principal artists inflated salaries such as are in constant evidence to-day. In this respect it could not compete either with such an institution as the Royal Opera, with its exclusive and wealthy patrons, or the theatres producing light operas that enjoy runs of two years' or more duration.

On the other hand, the performances would have to be, if ultimate success were the sole end in view, on a higher level of all-round excellence than any that have been seen in recent years.[30] Under some such conditions as these, there would seem to be nothing irrational in asking for government aid.

To have any national significance, the people, generally, must be attracted, and that object would, naturally, be the main thought of the officials, should such a desirable state of things ever come to pass.

The building of a beautiful theatre in London, and the establishing therein of an excellent company of foreign artists, with the view of producing foreign works in various languages, is, however interesting to the musical enthusiast, and courageous of the impresario in making such a venture with reduced prices of admission to the performances, of no national significance whatever. The experiment will, doubtless, prove whether a sufficiently numerous body of opera [Pg 199] lovers, native and foreign, can be found in the metropolis to permit of its success. That is all. Thanks, nevertheless, the most cordial and ungrudging, are due to Mr. Hammerstein for the boon

he has offered to the dwellers in London.

The thoughts, however, of all Englishmen who are interested in the music of their country, must necessarily turn to native product.

So far as opera is concerned, it is clear that there is much spade work to be done.

There is, however, in reality, no evidence to show that, granted circumstances were favourable, the old-time love of it, or such forms of it as were in existence centuries ago, is incapable of resurgence.

All that seems wanting, is the hour and the man.

At present, it cannot be said that the outlook, from the national point of view, is very hopeful.

Unless the native composer can see some definite reward for his labour, it is scarcely to be expected that he should devote his genius and energies to the composition of a work that may, perhaps, take the greatest part of his time for a year or more.

And yet no return, in the least degree equivalent to the labour expended, could be looked for as things are now.

If a committee of influential personages could be formed, and a scheme for the furtherance of English opera be inaugurated, with a work from the pen of Sir Edward Elgar, there is every reason to believe that an interest would be aroused in the country sufficient to guarantee immediate success, and settle, once and for all, the question whether, given fair conditions, the English people were in the disposition to welcome, not only opera in England, but *English* opera in England. I think the response would be of a character that every one interested in English music would ardently wish for.

FOOTNOTES:

[28] Not long before this greatest of Conductors retired, he directed a performance of "Der Ring" under these conditions.

[29] The date, February the 9th, 1912.

[30] This remark does not, of course, apply to such performances as those given by Dr. Richter or Mr. Thomas Beecham, which were purely temporary in their nature.

CHAPTER IX

DISTINGUISHED MUSICIANS IN ENGLAND DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

WILLIAM STERNDALE BENNETT

> Birth—Family connected with English Church music—Enters Royal Academy of Music—Importance of the step—His work there—Proceeds to Leipzig—Schumann's appreciation of his genius—The German impress—His return to England—Life-long association with Royal Academy of Music—Bennett as pianist—Institutes chamber concerts—His conservative views—Rivalry of foreign musicians—His most important compositions—Founds The Bach Society—His place in musical history.

William Sterndale Bennett was born at Sheffield in 1816. Like the majority of celebrated English musicians, he came of a family long associated with the music of the Church; several of his relatives, including his grandfather, having been members of cathedral choirs.

When he was only eight years of age he entered the choir of King's College Chapel, Cambridge, and there became acquainted with, and as later events proved, influenced by, the ancient school of English ecclesiastical music, which, notwithstanding his subsequent foreign education, never entirely lost its effect on his mind.

He was not, however, perhaps unfortunately, allowed to remain there long, for after two years he was sent to the Royal Academy of Music in London, which was then a young institution in which the pupils were not only taught music and given an elementary general education, but were, at that period of its history, boarded as well.

It is certainly open to question whether it was a wise step on the part of his relatives to take, seeing that it removed him from a centre where all the surroundings were English—English thought, influence, music and all that goes to mark national characteristics—to one which was, however admirable from many points of view, to say the least, cosmopolitan in character.

A genius so precocious as Bennett would be perfectly capable to assimilate, even at so early an

age, the spirit of the ancient school, and this he certainly accomplished to some extent at Cambridge: the fact that it subsequently became subservient to another was, simply, the result of the force of circumstances.

In the end, it cannot be denied that the spirit of German music practically obliterated it, and, while acknowledging the independence of thought that Bennett's music often displays, and which one likes to think may be owing to his Cambridge days, it must be admitted that its similarity in style to that of, above all, Mendelssohn's, detracts from the value that it would otherwise possess.

He remained at the Academy for several years, during which he wrote, among other things of note, two or three pianoforte concertos, the most popular, although not the best, being the one in F. [Pg 203] It is related that one of its movements, which attained great popularity, was composed one afternoon when the other students were absent on a holiday excursion. Their delight when, on their return they heard The Barcarole, as it was called, was so great that, as the late Dr. Steggall, for many years Organist of Lincoln's Inn Chapel told me, they carried him in triumph round the concert-room on their shoulders. In 1836 he went to Leipzig to continue his studies, and there came under the immediate influence of Schumann and Mendelssohn.

That his abilities met with sincere appreciation is shown by the eulogistic way in which the former wrote of him in a musical journal he edited.

That Bennett's stay in Leipzig was a successful and even delightful experience, there is no room to doubt; it is, though, open to question whether it did not, to some extent, denationalize him as a musician. Men of his temperament and genius, are peculiarly open to exterior impressions, and going at an age of mental expansion and enthusiasm, everything that happened seems only natural. Blind ourselves, as one willingly would, the fact must be admitted that the German impress remained indelibly stamped on him during his whole life-time. It must in justice be remembered that when he was removed from Cambridge, at the age of ten, all essentially English thought, so far as music is concerned, became as a thing of the past.

[Pg 204] He returned to England to remain permanently, after a second visit to Leipzig, in 1842. He was appointed a Professor of Music at the Royal Academy of Music about this time, and was associated with that institution, where his memory is held in just veneration, until he died in 1875.

His work there, in conjunction with composition, became the main occupation of his life. His energies were not, however, wholly confined to it.

He was a pianist of the first order. Indeed, I was told, many years ago by a celebrated pianoforte teacher, that his technique, in exactitude, compared favourably even with that of Mendelssohn himself.

Soon after his final settling in London, he commenced a series of chamber concerts, and continued to present the classical masterpieces of this form of music for about twelve years. It was his enthusiasm alone that accounts for this fact, not public support, for that, he may be said never to have received, to any appreciable extent.

His style was, perhaps, too refined and his tastes too rigidly classical.

In this respect he was, if one may be permitted to say so, somewhat narrow in his outlook. For instance, he could not tolerate Chopin's music, and, as one of them told me, would not permit his pupils to play it in his presence.

He was of a retiring disposition, and the arts of public advertising were as objectionable to him, as they appear to be acceptable to many performers to-day. [Pg 205] Again, the rivalry of eminent foreign musicians and the conspicuous patronage they received in high quarters, which naturally aroused public interest in them, militated against his success, and so, feeling that the conditions were unequal, he withdrew from the arena. He was especially great as a player of Bach's music, to which he was intensely attached, and it may be at once admitted that he was entirely lacking in that emotional temperament, which seems to appeal so strongly to the feminine atmosphere that so frequently pervades the public concert-room.

He was essentially a player who most appealed to musicians. His personality must have been a fascinating one, for he aroused even passionate attachment in many of his pupils, and it has often been a source of interest to hear grey-headed men talk of his memory in the language of a lover.

His pianoforte music contains much that is both beautiful and original in style, the lovely sketches, "Lake," "Millstream" and "Fountain," being the best known and most popular.

The more important chamber compositions include a sestet for piano and strings, a trio, and a sonata for violincello and piano. In 1855, he produced his cantata, "May Queen," at the Leeds Festival, with great success. It contains much delightful music, and, like other of his works, the comparative neglect into which it has fallen, seems perfectly extraordinary. Nine years were to elapse before his great work, "The Woman of Samaria," was to appear at the Birmingham Festival. [Pg 206]

If it created no great sensation at the time, that may be accounted for by the fact that he studiously avoided sensational effects. It is, however, characterised by nobility of thought, religious feeling, and perfect grace of expression. Although seldom performed as a whole, the touching quartet, "God is a Spirit," is in general use, and remains a model of beauty and

simplicity.

This work, together with his overtures—especially the "Naiades" and "Paradise and the Peri"—and his pianoforte concertos in F and D minor, are the chief compositions on which his fame will principally rest.

Sterndale Bennett founded the Bach Society in 1849. His extraordinary enthusiasm for the works of the great master was a leading characteristic of his life, and was doubtless stimulated by Mendelssohn during his Leipzig days.

He was appointed conductor of the Philharmonic Society in 1856, and Principal of the Royal Academy of Music in 1866.

He was elected to the chair of music of Cambridge University in 1856, and was knighted by Queen Victoria in 1871.

It is difficult as yet to assign Sterndale Bennett's definite place in the history of music.

His genius, if not of the order that sways multitudes, was undoubted, and he seems to form, together with Samuel Sebastian Wesley, the connecting link between Henry Purcell and Sir Edward Elgar.

SIMS REEVES

> Birth—His precocity—His musicianly attributes—His protest against the "high pitch"—Sims Reeves in opera—Association with Macready—Reeves in Italy—Triumphs in that country—First appearance in oratorio—Doubts expressed as to his probable success—Scene of enthusiasm after "Sound an alarm"—The greatest interpreter of Handel—His idiosyncrasies—His high standard of art.

John Sims Reeves, one of the greatest tenor singers of whom the world has any record, was born in Kent on October 21st, 1822. His genius as a child was early evident. At an age when the average boy is found playing cricket on the village green, as should be, this one was playing the organ at a village church near by.

It is an interesting reflection that, whereas the majority of singers confine their energies to the development of the voice alone, Sims Reeves, from his earliest years, was bent on mastering the mysteries of music—such as harmony and counterpoint.

He succeeded to this extent, that he became a thoroughly sound musician.

In the consideration of his career, this point must ever be borne in mind.

Sims Reeves was not only a singer, but he was a fine and well-instructed musician, and any opinion that he might put forward was entitled to respect, not only from the singer's point of view, but that of a musician whose erudition was unquestionable.

So, when he raised his voice against the abominable pitch that had been introduced into the country through the instrumentality of a foreign, cosmopolitan musician, he had the weight behind him, not only of a distinguished singer, but of a musician perfectly able to maintain the position he had taken up, on grounds both reasonable and logical.

The fact that his opinion, however strongly put forward, had no influence, is not a matter for surprise. In that Victorian period, the English musician was practically an alien in his own country.

Although Sims Reeves was destined to become, perhaps, the greatest of oratorio singers, his earliest successes were made in opera. His "first appearance on any stage"[31] was at Newcastle, when he appeared as the "Gipsy Boy" in "Guy Mannering."

He was soon found, as would naturally arise, in London; Macready, the theatrical monarch of those days, and whose scene of operations was Drury Lane Theatre, attracting him.

Here, on the first occasion that presented itself, he made a success, that those gifted with any sense of perception, could easily see, indicated a great career, and the rising of a great sun in the firmament of music.

It was in Purcell's "King Arthur," and the particular number that was to make him famous was "Come, if you dare." In this connection, it is amusing to note the clashing of the artistic and managerial temperament; both, probably, at their highest expression. Macready insisted that the singer should address his adjuration to the warriors whom he was facing, with his back to the audience. The singer held an entirely opposite view, and wished to sing to the public. The fight was keen, and Sims Reeves apparently gave way.

On the night, however, he adopted an attitude that was not foreseen; pacing the stage sideways, he sang with his voice thrown at the audience, and threatening looks at the "supers," who were amazed at such an exhibition of liberty, and made a success that was not only great, but assured the management of a satisfactory issue to the adventure.

Macready, nevertheless, fined him £5 for disobedience!

He was from this moment recognised as a great singer.

Strong, however, in the consciousness of unusual gifts, he determined to test his powers on the Continent, and went to Paris. After a short stay there, he proceeded to Italy, where, after a few lessons from Mazzucato, he made his appearance as "Edgardo" in "Lucia di Lammermoor."

His success was great. The Italians, who have an abnormal love of the tenor voice, received him with acclamations, and his tour through the Italian cities was a triumphant progress. On his return to England, he was received as an "Italian" singer, and doubts were expressed as to his ability to sing oratorio music.

[Pg 210]

His first appearance in England, after his foreign experiences, was, again, in opera, as "Edgardo." Berlioz was conducting, and wrote thus: "Reeves has a beautiful voice, and sings as well as it is possible to sing in this frightful English language."

His first appearance in oratorio was made on February 10th, 1848, at Exeter Hall, in Handel's "Judas Maccabeus." All doubts were soon allayed as to his ability to interpret Handel's music.

It had been generally expressed that his success in opera made it improbable that he could succeed, to an equal degree, in gaining the affections of the English people in oratorio, their most loved medium of expression in music.

His success was immediate and triumphant. At the conclusion of "Sound an alarm," a scene of enthusiasm occurred that had never, previously, been known at an oratorio performance.

It set a mark on his career.

From that moment he was recognised as the greatest interpreter of Handel; and from that pinnacle of fame no subsequent singer has been able to move him. His popularity became immense. At every great music festival his appearance was regarded as a necessity, and, until his final refusal to sing at the artificial pitch that had been introduced by Costa, his interpretations of all the great masterpieces of oratorio music were looked forward to as things of national interest.

[Pg 211]

Sims Reeves was a great singer, and like most great artists, had idiosyncrasies. On one occasion, Sir Arthur Sullivan (then Mr., and a young man) went down to his beautiful place at Norwood, to play over the music written for him, in a forthcoming production. He heard it through, and then said, "My dear Arthur, the music is quite beautiful, but it would be difficult to say for what voice it was written." Certain passages had to be revised to suit him.

That this would, naturally, be done, all those who knew Sullivan's character would easily understand.

Sims Reeves continued to be, for many years, the idol of the British public, and it is only just to say that he deserved the distinction, being as he was, a man of sterling character, and one whose ideals were ever high.

MADAME NORMAN-NERUDA (LADY HALLÉ)

> Her Birth—Precocity—Learns the violin at four years of age—First of women violinists—Sensation at her first public appearance—Arrival in London—Plays at Philharmonic concert, being ten years old—Tour in Russia—Arrives in Paris—Arouses enthusiasm—Second visit to London—Memorable consequences—Association with Popular Concerts, directed by Arthur Chappell—Her great fame—Her character—Association with Hallé—Their memorable concerts—Experiences in England—Her position in musical history.

Wilma Neruda was born at Brünn, Moravia, in 1839. The family from which she came had been long famous in musical history. The story of her precocious genius reads, even to-day, as something akin to the marvellous. When she was about four years of age, her father, as the late Frantz Neruda told me, made her a miniature violin, more with a view to her amusement than with any contemplation of serious results.

[Pg 212]

It was not long, however, before he became conscious that in this little daughter, he possessed a treasure, and one that was likely to prove a moving element in musical history.

That his judgment was justified, events too have shown.

At that time, strange as it may seem now, the idea of a woman-violinist was not only foreign to public instinct, but was even contrary to the general sense of propriety!

Her fame, notwithstanding, rapidly increased in local circles, and it was not long before she was taken by her father to play before a great Church dignitary, not only to gain his patronage, but, through it, to allay any prejudice that might be aroused by so unusual a spectacle.

The interview was entirely successful, the Cardinal having heard her, saying, "One whom God has so blessed should play ever to His Eternal Glory." Her progress was so astonishing that her father took her, in 1846, to Vienna, where she made her first public appearance, at the age of seven.

The sensation her playing produced was phenomenal, and soon all Europe was eager to hear the wonder-child.

A grand tour was the natural result, during which she performed in the principal cities of Germany, and arrived in London in May, 1849. On June 11th she appeared at a Philharmonic

concert, where she played a concerto by De Beriot, the child being then ten years old.

The enthusiasm with which she was received is a matter of history.

Her next important experience was a prolonged tour in Russia, of which she ever retained vivid memories. Many were happy, some lugubrious, and the one she most cherished was a cordial reception given to her by the Imperial family at St. Petersburg.

Her next scene of triumph was Paris. She arrived there in 1864, and made her first appearance at one of the Pasdeloup concerts—the most important organisation of the kind in France—with a success that was, as she often said in after life, perfectly bewildering.

It is not difficult to imagine it.

She was possessed of a technique that could hardly be surpassed, and a genius equally remarkable, a constitution that defied fatigue, and an enthusiasm that years of incessant work such as she was destined to experience, did not dull.

There is little doubt that her great powers were displayed, at this time, in their most dazzling splendour.

In May, 1869, Madame Norman-Neruda—as she had become known through her marriage with the Swedish composer—visited London again, and the event proved to be decisive, little as she thought it, as to her future career. She came to play at a Philharmonic concert, but was prevailed upon to stay through the summer, so that she should inaugurate, in the autumn, a new era in the history of the "Popular Concerts"—an institution that had been established ten years previously by the eminent firm of Chappell and Co., with the late Mr. Arthur Chappell as director. The main feature was the performance of classical chamber music.

The event may be justly described as historic. Her success was absolute and convincing. The fact that a woman was seen "leading" a quartet of performers that embraced the greatest players that Europe could produce, was one of intense significance.

One great result was not long in showing itself. The violin soon became fashionable in a girl's hands, and from a fashion it has degenerated into a rage.

To her lasting fame, Wilma Neruda was the first to demonstrate, under conditions that were often discouraging and sometimes forbidding, that a woman could, in this form of art, hold her own with the greatest of male exponents.

Madame Norman-Neruda was a woman of extraordinary strength of character. Austere in manner and of cold demeanour, as she undoubtedly was, in any direction that her sane judgment pointed out as worthy, she was capable of generosity that was, at once, spontaneous and noble.

Her most prominent characteristic was, I think, intellectuality. She could not, it must be admitted, "suffer fools gladly."

Had she desired a motto, a very appropriate one would have been "Odi profanum vulgus."[32]

 From that eventful year of her life, 1869, Madame Norman-Neruda spent the greater part of her time in England, devoting the spring and winter to the Chappell, Hallé, Philharmonic and other important concerts, with occasional visits to the Continent to play at functions of exceptional interest.

Her career in England is so well known that it is not necessary to dwell at any length on it here. Suffice it to say that her work was incessant, and that hers was, soon, a familiar figure on every concert platform throughout the length and breadth of the country. It is not difficult to imagine that the constant travelling would provide occasional and novel experiences; one of them Lady Hallé related to me.

She, with Sir Charles Hallé, was on her way, in the north, to fulfil an engagement, when a severe snowstorm came on, which soon hindered the progress of the train. They arrived at the place of their destination an hour after the time appointed for the concert. The snow was so deep on the ground that no conveyance was available, and there was no alternative to making their way, on foot, to the hall.

Once arrived there, Sir Charles proceeded to the platform to offer explanations to the patiently waiting audience. It was not necessary. Everything was understood, and he retired amid much cheering.

When Lady Hallé appeared she received such an ovation, doubtless expressive of sympathy and admiration, that as the concert progressed the unpleasant experience soon faded from her mind. Unhappily, however, an attack of bronchitis was the result; a form of illness that she suffered from, intermittently, for many years, and of which she eventually died.

Lady Hallé (by which title Madame Norman-Neruda came to be generally known in her latest years of residence in England, through her marriage with Sir Charles Hallé in 1888) was, notwithstanding outward appearances, not only capable of enjoying but engendering simple fun, as her friends well knew.

She was, for instance, full of joy and gaiety when Christmas-time was coming and the Christmas tree in near prospect. I do not think that Charles Dickens himself exceeded her in love for that

beautiful and touching festival. It was then that she gave full vent to a nature that teemed with kindness and generosity. Few who were privileged to see it could forget the suppressed excitement with which she led her guests, family and household, to the room where the Christmas tree was ablaze in all its glory. On it was sure to be found some present, large or small, for every one.

One Christmas I well remember, I had recently returned from America, where I had acquired the habit of drinking iced-water.

My refusing claret had been a constant source of banter from Sir Charles and Lady Hallé, and more boisterous expressions from my friends, Ludwig and Waldemar Neruda, Lady Hallé's sons, on the occasions of my dining with them.

My present proved to be a purse. When I took it, Lady Hallé called out, clapping her hands, "Open it." This, of course, we did. It contained a Swedish gold coin, and a sheet of notepaper on which was written, "The future Mrs. Ernest Ford. The secret revealed. Why Mr. Ford became a teetotaler!" [Pg 217]

The incident is quite trivial, but it certainly gives a glimpse into the character of a truly great and noble woman, that would be little suspected by those who knew her only as an outstanding figure in public life.

It is only natural to suppose that Lady Hallé was a constant recipient of appeals for advice from young aspirants, eager to emulate, in however humble a degree, her career.

She was ever open to them, and her judgment, sane and tried, was freely at their disposal. The last years of her life were, unhappily, darkened by the deaths of her two sons; that of the former, tragically, on the Alps; the other, after long suffering, in Brünn.

If for no other achievement, Wilma Neruda would go down to history as one of the notable women who indicated a new career for her sex. But she did more. She left behind her a fame that time itself will not easily efface. [Pg 218]

SIR CHARLES HALLÉ

> Interesting features of character—Early life in Paris—Giants of musical history—His reception by them—Ignorance of German music in France—Intercourse with Cherubini—Establishes chamber concerts—Personal friendships made in Paris—Arrival in England—Settles in Manchester—Establishes subscription chamber concerts—His first great venture—Manchester concerts—Association with Madame Norman-Neruda—Great results—Qualities as pianist and conductor—His musical sympathies—His remarkable character—A personal reminiscence—His permanent place in history.

Of the many thousands of German musicians who, since the days of Handel, have made their home in England, Charles Hallé was, from many points of view, the most interesting personality. He was a man of culture, and his varied experiences in many countries, which he sometimes would describe delightfully to a circle of friends, naturally added to the interest that his charm of manner, and known greatness as a musician, always inspired.

When he left his native town of Hagen, in Westphalia, in 1836, for that, in those days, Mecca of musicians, Paris, he must have felt supreme confidence in his powers, although only seventeen years of age, knowing that he would find there rivals as formidable as Chopin, Liszt and Thalberg. This did not deter him. He had been used to playing in public from infancy, had known nothing but success; his pianoforte playing as a child still had evoked the wondering praise of no less a man than Spohr, and, probably, knowing that his style was so essentially different from that of these great artists, he determined to make the daring venture. [Pg 219]

He made it successfully. He was received with great kindness by every one, but especially by Cherubini. This great musician, who was then head of the Conservatoire, took the greatest interest in the young German pianist, whom he constantly invited to his house, and never seemed to tire of hearing him play the Beethoven sonatas which, strange as it sounds now, he was hearing, as Sir Charles Hallé told me many years afterwards, for the first time.

Indeed, I have often heard Sir Charles speak of the astonishing ignorance of German music, even that of Beethoven, which existed in France at that time.

It proved to be, however, a fortunate thing for him, since, as soon as he had established his chamber concerts with the express intention of introducing the best of German classics of this description, he not only quickly gained a clientèle of cultured amateurs, but they speedily became a rendezvous of the most celebrated musicians in Paris.

The success of these concerts continued to increase until 1848, when the revolution forced him to seek shelter for his wife and children in England.

The years that Sir Charles Hallé spent in Paris were memorable ones in his life. Not only did he enjoy the friendship of Chopin, Georges Sand, Listz, Thalberg, and others of great fame, but there, too, he met Richard Wagner who was, at the time in poverty, ekeing out an existence, by means of drudgery that is painful to think of. [Pg 220]

Among the many friendships that Sir Charles made there was one, in particular, that he greatly prized, and which was destined to last a life-time—that of Stephen Heller, perhaps the most popular writer for the piano known to lady amateur pianists, at least of the past generation.

Soon after arriving in England, Sir Charles Hallé settled in Manchester, where the large German colony resident there at once rallied to him. He, immediately, commenced a series of chamber concerts, on the same lines as those he had established so successfully in Paris; the subscriptions were eagerly taken up by his compatriots, and it was not long before they were firmly established on a financial basis; and this, together with the teaching connection that he speedily gained, proved sufficient to relieve him of any financial anxiety.

These things, however satisfactory, by no means satisfied either his ambitions or his energies, which were prodigious.

He gave pianoforte recitals in London, Manchester and Bath—in which city he once thought of taking a house—which soon became regular institutions.

It was not long before he organised a permanent orchestra in Manchester, to be followed, so soon as it was on a firm basis, by a permanent choir.

Thus were started the "Manchester concerts," later to become known, and widely celebrated, as the "Hallé concerts."

It would be difficult to over-estimate the services that Sir Charles Hallé rendered to England, through this medium alone. As year followed year, so did one masterpiece after another find its way to Manchester, to meet the reception that only these northern enthusiasts know how to accord. To them, whether it were the work of a modern master, or a hitherto unknown work of Handel, the result was ever the same, granted that it touched their highly emotional sensibilities.

The firm establishment of this great and justly celebrated institution, was the act of his life that was fraught with the most lasting consequences, and the one that will, in all probability, live longest in public memory.

After his death, in 1895, Dr. Richter was, an interregnum passed over, appointed to fill his place.

The long association, musically, of Sir Charles Hallé, and the great violinist, Madame Norman-Neruda (who in after years became his wife) is too well known to need dwelling on. Suffice it to say that their joint recitals became, in course of time, annual features in the musical events of every town of importance throughout the country. Sir Charles Hallé had an absolute genius for organisation, as the many and great undertakings, so successfully carried through, and so permanent in their character, prove. He was not only the moving spirit in them, but, wonderful as it is to think, he attended to the minutest details of them all, and, in doing so, probably eclipsed the efforts of half-a-dozen ordinary secretaries.

He was a great pianist and a great conductor. His temperament was inclined intellectually, rather than in the direction of emotion. This was, doubtless, the reason that gave rise to the popular impression that he was cold and unsympathetic in disposition.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. That his tastes, so far as music is concerned, were rigidly and unyieldingly classical, there is no room for doubt. His sympathies were not, as regards modern developments, elastic. One great charm of his character was absolute honesty.

For instance, he never believed in an English School of Music.

"Englishmen? Yes," he once said to me, "Great soldiers, great poets, great statesmen, but—musicians, no. You lost all that when Purcell died."

Had he lived till to-day, I have not the slightest doubt that he would have changed his views on the subject; but, after all, he was only voicing a very generally held opinion.

With the extreme developments of modern times he was not altogether in sympathy, and I should think that same conservatism, would fairly express his attitude on the subject of musical progress.

Sir Charles Hallé was a man of superb physique, and his health right up to the end was wonderful, considering the strenuous life he led.

I remarked to him one day, "It seems to me perfectly extraordinary, seeing that you must spend at least half your life on the railway, that you escape trouble with your nerves. What with the incessant hurrying to catch trains——" He interrupted me with, "Ah, but you see, I never do that. I make it a rule to be at the station twenty minutes before the train starts. It is to that fact I attribute my immunity from nerves, as you express it."

I, shortly after this conversation, had practical experience not only of this, but of another remarkable feature in the life of a truly remarkable man.

I never knew anyone so absolutely intolerant of doing nothing. Rest was to him, emphatically, change of occupation. For instance, I have known him, when on a Sunday morning he had no pressing work that called for his attention, to devote his time to the making of a score of a string quartet from the parts that the performers had been using, shortly before, while rehearsing for the next day's "Monday Popular concert."

One can only characterise this as a very superfluity of strenuousness.

My other experience happened in this manner: Sir Charles was on the point of performing, at Manchester, a little known, in fact, entirely neglected, oratorio of Handel's, "Theodora," and he asked me to go down there with him and hear it.

[Pg 224] The invitation was one that, I, naturally enough, accepted with keen pleasure, anticipating as actually happened, a very pleasant and interesting experience.

Exactly at the appointed time (Sir Charles had been particularly insistent on this point) I was on the platform, at Euston, and found him pacing up and down in front of the train. Directly he saw me, he motioned to the guard, who unlocked the door of a reserved compartment, which we immediately entered. It had been scarcely relocked, when he produced a pack of cards, and we, at once, proceeded to play the old German game of "sechs-und-sechzig," of which he was very fond.

When, twenty minutes or so later, the train steamed out of the station, we were both so absorbed, that neither of us noticed the fact, and it was only after we had gone a considerable distance on our journey, that I, at least, realised it.

Sir Charles Hallé's leisure time was so limited—the railway carriage was, to all intents and purpose, his office for conducting business correspondence—that he had little opportunity for playing games, so, with characteristic forethought, he seized upon the occasion, and I am glad to know, quite enjoyed the experience.

I well remember how surprised we both were, when we found ourselves in Manchester. It was, certainly, the shortest of such journeys that I can remember.

The performance of Handel's oratorio was to me a memorable one, not so much on account of the music, [Pg 225] which in comparison with that of the "Messiah," "Israel in Egypt" or "Judas Maccabeus," seemed rather uninteresting, the magnificent singing of the choir and soloists, or the splendid playing of the orchestra, as the absolute enthusiasm displayed by Sir Charles Hallé in its direction.

The music seemed to arouse all that was masterful and compelling in him. His personality dominated everything, and I never saw him on any other occasion so obviously moved as he was that night. His love of the music of Handel was, from his earliest years, passionate, as that of Beethoven, and, in a less degree, Berlioz, became in later years.

On the way back to his house, observing that he showed evident signs of fatigue, I forbore to speak, but he suddenly said, "Well, what do you think of it?" I replied, "Sir Charles, it was perfectly splendid, and, if not a liberty, may I say, that your conducting was simply magnificent?" The words read, in print, perhaps, exaggerated and extravagant. I can only say that I simply voiced my feelings at the moment.

He leaned back in the carriage, saying:

"Thanks. That is something," and after a pause, "The work has been long and—arduous." However, on arriving at his home, he soon regained his usual serenity, when, after a light supper, he lit a cigar.

In the course of conversation, I said, "Will you tell me, Sir Charles, if it was simply the result of philosophical reflection, or some incident, that made you determine on the 'twenty minutes before the train' rule?" [Pg 226]

He replied, "It was, certainly, the result of an accident that occurred to me, many years ago, in Manchester; but at the same time, I think there is much philosophy in it. I was being driven to the station to catch a train to the north, with a band rehearsal and concert before me. My carriage suddenly stopped, and, looking out to see what was the matter, I found that, owing to some work on the road, we were hopelessly blocked. I seized my bag, and running all the way to the station, was just in time to enter the train as it was starting. In fact, had the guard not recognised me, I should have lost it."

"Well, Sir Charles," I said, "with such possibilities constantly facing you, it was, as Sam Weller said to Mr. Pickwick, 'the prudentest resolution as you could come to.'"

"It has," he answered, "made all the difference between misery and comfort, in such a life of incessant travelling as mine." We continued talking into, I am afraid, the early hours of the morning, when an old domestic entering the room, on some pretext or another, Sir Charles who was just commencing, "However, there was one occasion," immediately rose from his chair, and saying, "it is late, we must go to bed," made preparations for that event. The story was never told.

On the return journey, the same game occupied our attention, Sir Charles remarking as we entered our compartment, "Now, I am going to win back what you got from me coming down." The feat was not a considerable one, [Pg 227] but the zest with which he threw himself into the effort, the absolutely boyish joy he exhibited, was a thing that I can never forget. He did not succeed. When, saying "good-bye" to him, as he entered his carriage, after our arrival in London, he remarked, "But I am going to get that half-crown back; you will see."

Sir Charles Hallé was, in every sense, a remarkable man. Judged from any standpoint, he appears as one destined to make his mark in history.

As a pianist, on no less an authority than Hans Von Bülow, he is to be regarded as one of the greatest exponents of Beethoven.

As a conductor, his memory is equally secure. That the scene of his greatest achievements happened to be England, is, as we know, a matter of accident. But it is equally certain that wherever fate had decided that his lot should be cast, his name would be carried down in history, as a man of great endowments, noble character, and one of those whose existence enriches humanity.

SIR ARTHUR SULLIVAN

His disposition—His early days—As a student at Leipzig—Return to England—The "Tempest" music—Results of its performance—Definite plans as to the future—As song writer—Punch and one of them—A house of noted hospitality—Association with Gilbert and D'Oyly Carte—First result—The Savoy operas—"Ivanhoe"—His powers of work—The oratorios—The "Martyr of Antioch"—"The Golden Legend"—His strong character—His critical genius—A personal incident—A story of Sir W. S. Gilbert—His great place in the histof English music.

Sir Arthur Sullivan's disposition was a happy one—in other words, it was bright and sparkling. Blessed with a sense of humour that enabled him to look out on the world with invariable cheerfulness, he passed his days in an atmosphere of serenity that might well be the envy of all who knew him. It was only natural, for he was a veritable child of fortune.

Most men, and, emphatically, most musicians, have to experience years of struggle or strenuous work, before they attain to fame, or, in the jargon of the day, "arrive."

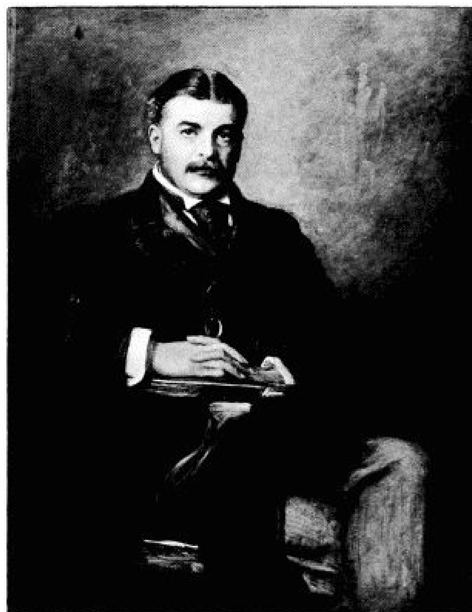
Not so, Arthur Sullivan.

The fates took too much care of him to subject their favourite to anything so unpleasant or distressing!

His childhood was happy; at school he was a universal favourite, and as a student at Leipzig, he passed some of the most pleasant years of his life.

When he returned to England in 1861, he brought with him several manuscript compositions, one of which proved to be a veritable torch that was destined to light his way to fame—and fortune. It was his music to Shakespeare's "Tempest."

He was, of course, well-known in musical circles through his being the winner of the Mendelssohn scholarship, so there was no difficulty in arranging for its performance. This took place at the Crystal Palace, under the direction of the late Sir August Manns, in April, 1862.



Sir Arthur Sullivan.

Its success was instantaneous and extraordinary. In fact, it must be admitted, on looking at it to-day, that the enthusiasm it aroused seems not a little in excess of its merits—considerable as they were. He became, at one stroke, famous, and no one was more astonished at the sudden notoriety he had acquired, than himself.

He, if ever one did, had "greatness thrust upon him." Fortunately it did not spoil him, for his nature was eminently a sane one.

Even as a young man he had made decisive plans as to his future. He had come to the definite conclusion that teaching was incompatible with composition, and therefore, resolved upon trying to compose in a manner calculated to catch the public ear, and thus, while making an income sufficient for his needs, still have time to devote himself to more serious efforts. That he

successfully carried out his resolution is a matter of history, for such teaching as he did, was confined to a few only, of pupils who appeared to be of exceptional promise. Even this did not last long.

The medium through which he made his appeal to the general public was song-writing, and, one must allow—such is the advance in musical education—that compared with songs that achieve great popularity to-day, like those of Landon Ronald, Arthur Somervil, Sir Charles Stanford and others, many of them possess little distinction.

Others, such as "Orpheus with his lute," are on the contrary, worthy of place in the highest rank. His greatest achievement in this form of art, written at a later period, was "The Lost Chord," which not only attained world-wide celebrity and an enormous circulation, but is full of poetic interest and instinct with genuine inspiration. [Pg 230]

It was written one night, while sitting at the bedside of his dying brother.

It may be mentioned that, perhaps, the earliest that promised to bring any really substantial result was one called "Meet me once again."

Its sale, already large, was greatly increasing, when it suddenly stopped, owing to "Punch" producing a parody of it in a picture representing the excitement of a number of cats, on hearing a man singing "*meat* me once again," as it was rendered. The caricature was neither clever nor in good taste, but it was a serious thing for the composer, as it meant the loss of a considerable income, while still a young man, and not earning as many hundreds as he did thousands of pounds in after years.

At that time the paper was far different from the brilliant and refined "Punch" of to-day.

In those days the puns of F. C. Burnand were preferred to the wit and humour of W. S. Gilbert. But then, "Punch" rejected the "Bab Ballads"!

Arthur Sullivan was born in 1842.

His first popular success in the sphere, in which he was, afterwards, to win universal fame, was made in 1875, when he produced, in conjunction with W. S. Gilbert, the extravaganza, "Trial by Jury." He had made tentative efforts, on two or three occasion, of a similar kind, but this one proved, with the utmost clearness, his exceptional ability in this direction, and obviously indicated a future path for him. [Pg 231]

In those days there were two people in London of noted hospitality, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Lewis (the latter was an elder sister of Miss Ellen Terry, and herself a distinguished actress; she was known to a former generation as Miss Kate Terry), and it was at their house that these pieces were first presented. On the occasion of this particular performance, the late Mr D'Oyly Carte was present, and to his happy idea to get the author and composer to collaborate on a work of larger scope, and his undertaking to produce it, that the combination of the three remarkable men, who were destined to make so much history, is due.

"The Sorcerer" was produced at the Opéra-Comique Theatre, London, on November 17th, 1877. It was altogether too new in style, bewildering in its humorous absurdities, and unlike anything previously seen, to achieve pronounced popularity, but it convinced the public that a new force had arisen in the theatre-world and, gradually, it attracted a sufficient following to permit of 175 consecutive performances. Incidentally, it may be mentioned that it was in this piece that the late Mr. George Grossmith laid the foundations of his great fame as an actor, and that Mr. Rutland Barrington established his lasting popularity, in the part of the "pale young curate."

If "The Sorcerer" left the question of permanent success to this new school of theatrical art to some extent in doubt, the next production, "H.M.S. Pinafore," absolutely dispelled it, the success being immediate and triumphant. [Pg 232] It quickly spread to the great colonies and America, where the excitement it produced exceeded anything previously known in the history of the stage. At one time it was being played at upwards of a dozen theatres, simultaneously, in New York alone. Performances on board a real ship were given; performances solely by negroes, and in fact, of every kind that ingenuity or excitement could suggest, were common features in the extraordinary craze it aroused. "H.M.S. Pinafore" was succeeded by "The Pirates of Penzance," "Patience" (during the run of which it was transferred to the Savoy Theatre, meanwhile built by Mr. D'Oyly Carte), and the many others with names that are too familiar to need recounting. It may, perhaps be permissible to say that of them all, the two of most outstanding merit were "The Mikado" and "The Yeoman of the Guard." If Sir Arthur Sullivan's often avowed wish to establish an English school of Light Opera has not been realised to the extent he would have desired, its temporary eclipse having to be acknowledged, yet it is to be greatly hoped that there will be found, and that, too, before long, men both willing and able, not only to follow, but improve on the lines of healthy artistic traditions he and Sir William Gilbert so happily laid down.

With the composition of "Ivanhoe," Sir Arthur Sullivan entered the lists as a writer of Grand Opera. If his success was not complete, I think that the circumstances with which its career was indissolubly connected, go a long way to account for the fact. In the first place, it was subjected [Pg 233] to the intolerable strain of 168 consecutive performances.

No possible chance of making alterations that only public performance can point out, with certainty, as desirable or necessary, was accorded to the composer, since its even temporary withdrawal would have involved the closing of the newly-built opera house and, under the circumstances alluded to in another chapter, made the continuance of the scheme a matter of doubt.

Had the conditions been different, I do not doubt that Sir Arthur Sullivan would have made a great and possibly vital change in the work. One of the most persistent and justifiable criticisms brought against it was its demonstrably unevenness in merit. Any musician with the least critical faculty would recognise its truth. For instance, the second scene of the second act should have been entirely eliminated. It was unworthy of the work and the composer. It was forced, theatrical, and destitute of spontaneity or inspiration.

That a man of such acumen could fail to recognise it is impossible; as a matter of fact, he once told me that the scene spoilt the act which, it may be said, with this exception, contained the most splendid music in the opera.

It is inconceivable that, had he found the opportunity, he would not have composed an entirely new one. To give credence to this opinion, I may mention that he made an important alteration, in the short time at his disposal, before it went to Berlin for performance. So short, indeed, that he [Pg 234] asked me to do the necessary scoring for the orchestra that the alteration involved.

Another criticism often levelled against "Ivanhoe," was that it was occasionally reminiscent "of the Savoy"—implying that the high standard imposed by Grand Opera was not consistently maintained. This was, doubtless, suggested by the popular "Ho! Jolly Jenkin." In this connection, I will at once say that Sir Arthur Sullivan, himself, anticipated this objection, as the following words will show. It was typical of him, when he had an important work in view, to delay its commencement to the last moment. The result was that, once begun, he was obliged to work with incredible energy and persistence to effect its completion at the stipulated time. It was so on this occasion.

The night was as constant a watchman of his work as the day.

I had been engaged by the publishers, Messrs. Chappell and Co., to make the pianoforte arrangement from the full score, and, at Sir Arthur Sullivan's request, I used to drive down to his residence from the Savoy Theatre, where I was at the time conducting, after the evening performance, to take away any pages of the score that might be completed. I generally arrived about midnight. On one occasion, as I entered his study, he said to me, "I want you to hear something," and went to the piano and played this particular song. When he had finished I [Pg 235] remarked, "Sir Arthur, why, it will be an immense success," and he replied, somewhat with a sigh, "Yes, I think it would; but it won't do. I can hear them now saying, 'redolent of the Savoy.'"

He then continued that he was going to attempt another setting before finishing work for the night.

I, naturally enough, as those who know the song, will agree, urged, as far as I could, that it should be retained. I don't suggest that this, in any way, affected his decision; I merely state the facts. In the event, as is known, he kept it in.

"Ivanhoe" contained, as I believe, and as many highly competent critics have affirmed, some of the finest music that Sir Arthur Sullivan ever wrote.

The soliliquy of the Templar, and the great scene between Rebecca and the Templar in the castle of Torquilstone (with both these characters the composer was in intense sympathy) represent Sir Arthur Sullivan's powers at their highest expression.

The opera, however, proved to be the one important event in his career that did not result in the complete and absolute success to which he had, for so many years, been accustomed.

If Sir Arthur Sullivan gained his fortune in the theatre, as is quite certain, it is equally incontrovertible that he attained his great fame in the concert-room, and, moreover, through the medium of his sacred works, or, perhaps I should say, works dealing with sacred subjects. [Pg 236]

His first important contribution to purely sacred music was the short oratorio, "The Prodigal Son." Although evidence of immaturity may be occasionally detected, the music shews the firm grasp he had on the technique of composition, and the influence of religious feeling is strongly apparent, as indeed, may be said of all his works of this description.[33]

Produced at the Worcester Festival in 1869, it achieved a success that augured well for his future efforts in this region, which he had evidently chosen as the one most appealing to his genius and temperament.

After an interval, during which he produced, among other interesting compositions, the overture "Di Ballo"—a work full of sparkling and original music, which he scored, it may be said, at a time of great physical suffering—his oratorio, "The Light of the World," a work on much larger lines than its predecessor, was given to the public as the principal attraction of the Birmingham Festival in 1873. Although its reception by the audience was flattering enough, it cannot be said that it aroused any enthusiasm among the critics.

In fact, it aroused considerable controversy, some maintaining that so far from being an advance on, it lacked the admitted promise of "The Prodigal Son"; while others were equally pronounced in their views as to its superlative merits. [Pg 237]

Although subscribing to neither opinion, I cannot but think that the former contained more truth than the latter. That "The Light of the World" contains much that is beautiful is not denied, but that it contains some that nearly verges on the common-place, cannot, I am afraid, but be admitted. It has fallen into desuetude for many years now.

In a short summary of Sir Arthur Sullivan's career, as this must, necessarily be, I have to leave unrecorded much that is both interesting and important.[34] I content myself, therefore, with some reference to those works upon which his fame, so far as serious music is concerned, will chiefly rest.

"The Martyr of Antioch" was produced at the Leeds Festival in 1880. It was an event of particular significance in his life.

The continued successes of his Savoy comic operas, and the popularity gained by his songs, had begun to make a decided effect on the public mind, which was rapidly losing count of the other side of the versatile composer—that of more serious import. It was, then, with no little interest and speculation that the production was awaited.

The result exceeded the most sanguine hopes of his friends and admirers. Its reception was veritably triumphal, and at once re-affirmed his position as the leading English composer of his time. [Pg 238]

Any doubts that might have been felt by the audience assembled on this memorable occasion, were soon dispelled. The splendid chain of choruses with which the work opens—once interrupted by the hauntingly beautiful, and purely original song, "The love-sick damsel"—immediately convinced them, not only that the composer was, in no sense, shorn of his powers as a writer of serious music, but that they had discovered him in a vein of virile strength, of which he had, previously, scarcely given warning.

From that moment, the work was not only assured of success, but, as it progressed, enthusiasm increased to such an extent, that at the conclusion of the finale, to the success of which the magnificent singing of that great artiste, Madame Albani, predominatingly contributed, a scene of excitement occurred that only those who witnessed it could adequately imagine. Of the many numbers that contributed to this result, those that most readily spring to the memory are the strenuous, and, again, highly original "Io Pæan"; the charming "Come, Margarita, come"; and, above all, the one that will probably live, when the others are forgotten, the noble hymn, of the type which Arthur Sullivan may be said to have made his own, and which is so frequently sang on occasions of national mourning, "Brother, thou art gone before us"; of them all, this remains as the grandest monument. [Pg 239]

The years immediately succeeding the production of "The Martyr of Antioch" must, I think, have been the happiest of the composer's life.

The illness from which he occasionally suffered from early manhood, had not taken sufficient hold on him to prevent his thorough enjoyment of life and all its various attractions, and so, with abundant means and ample time at his disposal, he was able to enjoy, with complete serenity, any recreation or amusement that appealed to him. His happy temperament prompted him to take the advantages that good fortune had thrown in his way, and to this I attribute the fact of his being able to reach even the moderate age to which he attained.

In this way the years passed rapidly, continued successes at the Savoy ever augmenting both fame and fortune, until, when the calls for another work of serious importance from his pen began to assume an importunate form, he had scarcely realised how much time had elapsed since

"The Martyr of Antioch" was composed.

In answer to the urgent request of the committee, Sir Arthur Sullivan undertook to write a work for the Leeds Festival of 1886, and accordingly, turning to the experienced skill of Mr. Joseph Bennett to supply him with the "book," he, at length settled himself to the composition of "The Golden Legend."

The subject was exceptionally well chosen to draw upon his well-known power of dramatic writing. The poem of the great American writer, Henry W. Longfellow, from which Mr. Bennett arranged his libretto, is full of picturesque and fanciful imagination, and furnished the composer plentifully with scenes that enabled him to exhibit his genius at its greatest strength.

The prologue was the medium of displaying his descriptive, as was the epilogue of his choral writing, at its best, and what this conveys can only, perhaps, be fully appreciated by the skilled musician. I need only say that they were masterly displays. A striking feature in the work, is the quaint and original manner in which the character of Lucifer is portrayed. The music, with which he is invariably accompanied is of a semi-sacred character, contrapuntal in construction, but which is, at once, grotesque and eminently fitted to mark the sardonic humour of the character that Longfellow so powerfully painted.

The numbers that are, probably, the most popular are those for the soprano and contralto, "My Redeemer and my Lord," "Virgin who lovest the poor and lowly," and the hymn, "O gladsome Light."

The reception accorded to "The Golden Legend" on its presentation, like that of "The Martyr of Antioch," was enthusiastic in the extreme. It has retained its popularity, and is usually conceded to be his masterpiece. It is sung wherever the English language is spoken.

Of the many great singers who were associated with the composer in these productions, I might mention the names of Titiens, Trebelli, Albani, (Madame) Patey, Sims Reeves, Edward Lloyd and Charles Santley.

In character, Sir Arthur Sullivan was broad-minded, tolerant, sympathetic and generous. In tastes, he was decidedly eclectic, for they ranged from the æsthetic ones of literature and painting, to the more prosaic of racing and cards. Whatever happened to be the subject of interest at the moment, was sure to command the enthusiastic attention of his ever active brain.

Once, however, started on some important composition, nothing was allowed to interfere with his complete absorption in it.

Doubtless, this was a leading factor in his success, or, at least, one of very great importance that directly tended towards it. The process was, undoubtedly, an exhausting one, for it constantly happened that after the completion and production of such a one, a more or less prolonged period of rest and diversion of thought was necessary to bring him back to his normal state of healthy activity.

One great attribute he was unquestionably blessed with, and that was the power of throwing off his mind, completely, any thought of music, once he had accomplished any given task. In fact, when he was not actively engaged with it, music was seldom a subject of conversation with him. Of this I have had convincing proof. Some years ago, I was spending a part of one winter with him, at his villa on the Mediterranean. During the whole time, I can only remember two occasions on which he spoke of it; the first initiated by him, the second by me. We were reading in the drawing-room one evening, after dinner, when he suddenly turned round to me, and said, "What do you say, Ernest, to playing a Schumann symphony? I have an arrangement for four hands here." I naturally acquiesced, and his dwelling affectionately over many of the passages, the profound knowledge he displayed as he talked of Schumann's genius, and his intensely interesting comparison of it with that of Schubert, remain with me as a memorable experience.

The other occasion was of a very different character.

I was walking with him one day, on the road to Cap S. Martin—walking, it may be said, was not a form of recreation to which he was much addicted. The weather was glorious, and Sir Arthur in high spirits, thoroughly enjoying his unwonted exercise.

Seeing him in this mood, I said, "Sir Arthur, I should like to make a bet with you."

He turned to me, and laughingly replied, "Well, if the amount is not quite beyond my resources—a franc?—*quel soulagement!*—then go on."

"It is that I tell you your favourite Savoy opera, and that you don't tell me mine."

He walked on for a few minutes, and then said, "I think I must say 'The Yeoman of the Guard.'"

"So far, I have won," I remarked.

Again, after a little while, he continued, "I should not be surprised if it were 'Princess Ida.'"

I called out, "Sir Arthur the bet is off," handing him, at the same time, a slip of paper, on which I had previously written these two titles.

The incident led him to speak of various reminiscences in connection with the Savoy Theatre, one of which, I remember, he told me with great zest and evident appreciation.

Considerable exception had been taken to the title Mr. (later Sir William) Gilbert had chosen for one of the operas, "Ruddygore." The author professed to see no objection to it, but eventually announced to the composer that he intended to change it. He did. He renamed it "Rudd-i-gore."

Sir Arthur Sullivan left many and great claims on the gratitude of his countrymen. In the sphere of light opera, he enormously advanced the standard of taste.

Those of his songs that achieved great popularity, whatever may be thought of them now, were immensely superior to any that had previously gained the ear of the "man in the street." I am, of course, referring to those which make more frank appeal to the less cultivated lovers of music; "Orpheus with his lute," "The Lost Chord," and others of similar type, being in an entirely different category.

Through "The Martyr of Antioch" and "The Golden Legend," Sir Arthur Sullivan not only convinced English people, who were able to learn the lesson, that an English composer was capable of arousing their highest emotions, but, incidentally, indicated the road that led them, in after days, to their pride in, and appreciation of, "The Dream of Gerontius."

FOOTNOTES:

[31] "Life of Sims Reeves," by Sutherland Edwards.

[32] In this connection, these words might well be translated, if not quite literally, as "I dislike common-place people."

[33] Shortly before his death, waking from a period of torpor, he recognised one of his faithful servants sitting at his bed-side crying. "Don't cry," he said. "I am quite happy, knowing I shall soon see my dear mother again."

[34] He was a sufferer from periodical attacks of severe pain throughout his life.

CHAPTER X

GENERAL SURVEY

Facilities for hearing music—Opera an exception—Sir Henry Wood—Dream of Gerontius—Sir Frederick Bridge—Ballad concerts—Ballad singers—Madame Clara Butt and Mr. Kennerly Rumford—Chamber music—Mr. Arthur Chappell and the Monday Popular Concerts—Salome—Question of the censor—Recognition of merit in distinguished musicians—Examination craze—Government enquiry suggested—Musical criticism—Disadvantages of anonymity—The great Festivals—Costa and the Handel Festival—Brass Band Contests and the North of England—Music halls of the past—Theatre of Varieties to-day—English composers—A suggestion—Closing words.

England, to-day, is second to no country in the world as regards facilities for hearing good music, under conditions that are both favourable and tending to attract even the least ardent devotees.

The exception must, however, be candidly made of opera, which, at present under ideal circumstances is offered at Covent Garden theatre, it is true, but at a price that is quite beyond the means of the average individual, and then only during a few months that constitute the London "Season."

It would be premature to write of the experiment now being made by Mr. Hammerstein, interesting as it is, but it is one that calls for sympathy, and the willing aid of all lovers of opera.

It is certain that the opportunities of hearing orchestral music now presented to Londoners, are on a scale that would have made their forefathers pale with amazement.

To Sir Henry Wood this is largely due.

His achievements, to which allusion is made in another chapter, not only opened the eyes of those gifted with a true sense of the trend of events, but furnished the occasion that permitted of the indication, on the part of the dwellers in the metropolis, to seize with eagerness on the boon offered to them, not only under conditions that were artistic in the best sense of the word, but at a cost that need not affright those least blessed with worldly endowment.

This applies, of course, more particularly to the Promenade concerts, which are given nightly at the Queen's Hall in London, for two months or more during the late summer and autumn, and conducted by Sir Henry Wood.

The London Symphony Orchestra, the New Symphony Orchestra, and last, but by no means least, that venerable society, the Philharmonic, give concerts, both winter and summer; those of the last-named being confined to London, while the two former place their services at the disposition of the country at large.

On the subject of concerts in general, it is not necessary to dwell at length. If London is in advance of the provinces in respect of her orchestras, the north and midlands are immensely in advance of the metropolis as regards their choirs, there being none in the south to compare with the Festival-choirs of Leeds, Birmingham, Sheffield or Bradford. It is to the great English Festivals that we must look for stability in the position of oratorio, for it must be admitted, there have been obvious signs, at least in the south, of fading interest; the popularity of concert arrangements of popular operas, as evidenced by their continual use at the concerts of our choral societies, being, perhaps, the most significant sign. [Pg 246]

The stimulus afforded by the periodical great provincial music Festivals—the excitement provided by the prolonged preparations that are necessary, being a healthy accessory—goes to keep the interest alive in this noble form of art, not only in the immediate vicinity, but far and wide of the cities in which they take place.

The appearance of "The Dream of Gerontius," and the hold it took on the imagination of the people (the picturesque combination of genius in the persons of Cardinal Newman and Sir Edward Elgar, being a feature of striking interest) went to arrest what was, unquestionably, a disquieting tendency.

A tribute to the splendid work of Sir Frederick Bridge and the Royal Choral Society at the Albert Hall is, however, due, not only on account of the merit of the performances, but to the consistently high standard that is maintained in the selection of works for representation. Oratorio, and oratorio in its noblest embodiment being the ever-present consideration.

Photo. Elliott and Fry.

Sir Edward Elgar.

[Pg 247] The concerts that make the most direct, simple, and probably most successful appeal to the masses, are those devoted to ballads. They are universal throughout the country, and from the Royal Albert Hall, to the concert-room on the pier of the smallest sea-side resort, are always in evidence.

Although series of them on an elaborate scale are given in every important town in the kingdom, perhaps those at the Albert Hall and Queen's Hall, in London, under the respective directions of the renowned firms of Boosey & Co., and Chappell & Co. (Mr. William Boosey, director) are the most universally known, and they may be justly regarded as typical of such entertainment at their best. There is not the slightest doubt that, as regards the standard of artistic taste, this class of concert has in recent years made great progress. It is not long ago that songs without the slightest pretence to any musical value attained to immense popularity, and when a scream at the end of one of them, on a note known as high F, would draw volumes of applause on the panting and highly gratified singer.

Happily those days are either numbered, or in the quick course of becoming so.

To-day songs of great beauty are being constantly produced, and appreciated at their true worth. The art, too, of ballad-singing has immensely improved, as those whose memories can carry them back thirty years gratefully recognise, when they hear such past-masters of their craft as Madame Clara Butt and Mr. Kennerley Rumford.

[Pg 248] The song writers who have attained to the greatest popularity in England, are mainly English—men and women.

The cult of classical chamber music is not one that appeals very strongly to the average English music-lover; it is rather to the enthusiast or the foreigner, that its purveyors must appeal for support. But that there are large numbers of both these classes in London is proved by the success with which the late Mr. Arthur Chappell carried on for so many years, those celebrated

concerts known as the Monday and Saturday "Pops."

Since those days, the golden days of chamber music, so far as England is concerned—the days of Madame Norman-Neruda, Joachim, Piatti, Madame Schumann and Charles Hallé—its interests have been mainly watched over in London by the historic firm of John Broadwood and Sons.

That the standard of taste in every branch of music has risen enormously in this country during the past few years none will be found to deny; but, nevertheless, I cannot regard without suspicion the apparent outbursts of enthusiasm, on the part of the average English opera-goer, for such a work as Richard Strauss's "Salome"; they appear to me altogether artificially contrived.

That the critic, saturated with music at its highest development should hail with joy a work so well calculated to act as a stimulus to his highly-tried faculties, I can quite understand, but, that the less-trained intellect of the average opera-goer could grasp, with any appreciable understanding, at a first or second hearing, the tremendously complex music that is here presented, is quite beyond comprehension, or credence. [Pg 249]

Yet foreign newspapers reported that the music was received in England with extraordinary enthusiasm. One may be, I think, justified in doubting the value of the sources from which the information was derived. In many instances the music of Richard Strauss has been claimed to be an advance on that of Richard Wagner.

I do not think that one in a thousand English musicians would admit the claim.

The question of the censor has been much in evidence of late, and it is not to be wondered at, seeing the eminence of many of those in opposition to the continuance of the office, that public opinion has been shaken in its old-time confidence in his decisions. So far as music is concerned I think there is little of which one may with reason complain.

It would be absurd to expect from any official, however distinguished, the gift of infallibility. When "Samson et Dalila" was inhibited, there was undoubted reason in cavilling at the decision, for, after all, the story is one that might be taken from heathen mythology, and has no religious significance whatever.

With "Salome" the case is quite different. The poem by Oscar Wilde, was founded on an incident recorded in the New Testament. This fact in itself was quite sufficient to make the censor hesitate to permit its public performance, knowing, as he would, that it was calculated to wound the feelings of, and arouse justified resentment among, thousands of religious people in England. After all, England is a Christian country, although London does not declare the fact in its highest manifestation. Viewing the trend of events to-day, the sense of unrest, the prevalent feeling of doubt and uncertainty, and the craving for excitement satisfied in however questionable a manner, I think the existence of an official who has the power to cry "halt!" in the important matter of stage performances, is a thing for which we should be profoundly grateful. [Pg 250]

It must be borne in mind that the position of those responsible for giving advice on such delicate questions, must be extremely difficult, and therefore commands from all who are capable of taking an unprejudiced view, sympathetic consideration.

One of these, the official recognition of merit in distinguished musicians, is, probably, not one of the easiest to deal with, and this, perhaps, explains to the man in the street some of the amazing decisions (one would almost hazard the thought of sardonic humour in some harassed courtier as the mainspring) that have at times, been arrived at. For instance, it may be observed that, whereas many Englishmen—professors of universities, administrators of great schools of music, historians of mark, and authors of theoretical books of immense importance—have been passed by, foreign composers of music that has not the slightest claim to serious consideration, have been the recipients of honours equivalent to those awarded to a General, on the conclusion of a successful campaign. [Pg 251]

A prominent feature of present musical life in England, and one that has only come into existence in recent years, is the amazing passion for examinations that has seized on old and young alike, all over the country. That the influence is largely for good will, I think, be generally admitted, but that there are objections, and grave ones too, I shall speedily show.

The craving to be able to put some mysterious-looking letters after their name, has become a positive mania among those whose occupation, mainly, is that of teaching music in its humbler spheres. The result is that institutions of all kinds, good, bad, indifferent or altogether worthless, have been springing up all over the country with a view to satisfy this longing and, *inter alia*, take benefit by the fees that are willingly paid by the applicants, who may be said, veritably, to be numbered in thousands.

I am afraid they little know, poor people, how absolutely indifferent the public have gradually become to this matter of certificates of efficiency. People, in fact, have become so accustomed nowadays to see a whole string of letters after a person's name, which in ninety cases out of a hundred have no significance to them whatever, that, beyond flattering the vanity of the individual, the use of letters authorised by these self-appointed institutions has no effect. The least educated could hardly be deceived by them. [Pg 252]

That certificates from such places as the Royal College of Music, Trinity College, or the Royal Academy of Music are valuable to the young teacher, there is not the slightest doubt, but that the

fact of similar ones being positively showered on young people from one end of the land to the other must, unless something is done, soon darken the prestige and lower the value of even these, I think there can be little question.

A government enquiry into the whole question is decidedly needed, for it must be remembered that the general public have neither time nor inclination to solve the intricate question of the relative value or importance of the letters placed after the names of such crowds of people in these days, and, naturally, harm must accrue to those who have passed legitimate examinations and obtained recognised degrees that are witness to their competence.

That examinations by approved persons are both desirable and even necessary it is needless to insist on.

In the years immediately following on 1880, I held the position of senior teacher in a school of considerable importance, and, becoming sensible of the solemn farce of annual examinations by teachers of their own pupils, that had been the custom of many years past, I suggested to the authorities that they should engage an examiner from one of the principal institutions. I was, accordingly, desired to go to the Royal Academy of Music and see whether that body would entertain the proposition.

I was informed that there was no machinery for such purposes, but that the matter would be placed before the committee. In the event, the late Mr. Walter Macfarren came down. In the following year, I approached the Royal College of Music, with the same object in view, and had an interesting interview with the late Sir George Grove.

He expressed himself as being highly interested in the idea, announced his intention to accede to the request, and asked if I had any preference as to the member of his staff he should select. I replied that the school authorities would prefer to leave the question, absolutely, to his discretion.

We were fortunate enough to have the services of Mr. (now Dr.) Eaton Faning placed at our disposition. The result was all that could be desired, as the prestige of these great institutions would, naturally, presage.

I mention these facts merely to illustrate the extraordinary rapidity with which the examinational system has spread over the country.

If the true advance of the spirit of music in England correlate with the energy that is displayed in this particular direction, one can only be thankful for the evidence it presents, even though incidents in connection with it may justly give occasional cause for uneasiness.

But that there are other and striking indications that afford indubitable proof of increasing interest on the part of the public in everything to do with music in England, the public press of the country conclusively proves.

It may be safely said that where, thirty years ago, one short paragraph dealing with the subject was thought sufficient to meet all requirements, the leading journals of to-day devote two or three whole columns to satisfy the demands of their readers.

In this connection, the subject of musical criticism naturally obtrudes itself, and it may at once be said that one of the most satisfactory features in modern musical life is its general fairness, and the entire absence of savagery that was so prominent a feature in it in days of not long ago.

To read the effusions of so fine an old musician and writer as J. W. Davidson, simply makes one feel stupefied. Wagner was to him as nothing but typical of the Evil One. Chopin was nearly as bad, and the language he used concerning them both is calculated to make one's hair stand on end.

Those were days when the old order was just beginning to give place to the new, and the critics of the old school fought for their principles with a tenacity, and even ferocity, that can only excite admiration, if tempered with surprise, in these times of laxity of purpose.

But, after all, they were genial souls at heart, and the words written to-day were, evidently, expected to be forgotten to-morrow.

For example: many years ago, when quite a boy, I had the pleasure to spend an evening in the company of one of them, then an old man. He was pleasant, communicative and evidently fond of indulging in reminiscences. In the course of the conversation, I said, "I can never understand what caused you to write so virulently about ——" He interrupted me with "Did I? I don't remember." This was staggering, since I had often been told of the sensation his articles caused at the time. It irresistibly brought back to my mind, and I recall it with all reverence, that wonderful sketch by Anatole France, of Pontius Pilate, in his old age at Baiæ: "Jésus?... Jésus de Nazareth?... Je ne rappelle pas." They were days of hard striking, with the confident expectation of receiving a like return.

In the case of Chopin, his nature was altogether too sensitive to enter upon warfare of this kind. He simply suffered. With Wagner, it was entirely different. His nature was combative, his pen vitriolic, and he was a skilled controversialist. No critic ever entered into conflict with him without carrying away distinct evidence of the fray.

It must be said in justice, that whatever the vehemence of expression, or the open and unabashed

hatred of the ideas he condemned, the critic of those days avowed himself, and stood out, fearlessly, to meet any reprisals that his words might subject him to.

In this I say frankly my sympathy goes out to him. To-day, it must be conceded, that musical criticism is on a distinctly higher plane. But, while cordially admitting the inspiring and thought-compelling material that constantly emanates from the pens of the distinguished men who represent the foremost journals of London and the great provincial cities, one has got to record the fact that the pall of anonymity is over it all.

From every point of view this seems most regrettable. It is as unfair to the critic who writes, as to the public that reads.

The signed article not only adds weight to the views expressed, but enhances, and most justly, the reputation of the writer, through the publicity it extends to his name.

As things are at present, the public are kept entirely in the dark as to the authorship of the criticism they read, and, therefore, have no means of knowing what precise importance need be attached to it.

It may be written by the eminent and experienced chief musical representative of the journal, or some callow youth making his first efforts in a difficult, and, it must be admitted, often a very thankless occupation.

The public know nothing. I think, however, that among the immense majority of readers, whatever may be put forward, is usually accepted as the reasoned view of the paper in which it appears.

It is then, obviously unfair to public and critic alike, and if to them, what is to be said of the person criticised? He is the one who suffers most, and, what is more, has no means of retaliation.

Judged from any point of view, anonymity in criticism, seems to me to be absolutely indefensible.

The question is an old one, I admit, but it is none the less serious for that, and comes readily to the pen and the memory.

That the critic, in the long run, is in the ascendant will be granted, but when he, in the person of Lord Brougham, attacked Byron, or through some less powerful channel, attacked Keats, thereby bringing down the magnificently expressed scorn of Percy Bysshe Shelley, he did not come off with his accustomed success.

The criticisms were ephemeral, the replies immortal. One may venture upon a wish that more such offences should be perpetrated, could similar results be certain of arrival. At any rate we owe to them Byron's "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers," the first work which revealed his genius to the world, and made himself conscious of it, and the still greater "Adonais," of Shelley.

In the rush and flurry of musical events to-day, it is naturally impossible for one representative of a paper to record, much less criticise them, and this fact often leads to things that, if inevitable, are none the less regrettable. I have in my possession two issues of a prominent London paper. They contain critical notices of a certain orchestral work. In the first, it is written of in terms of high appreciation, among others, the word "remarkable" being applied to it. In the second, it is alluded to in language that makes one wonder not only that an educated gentleman could find it in him to put pen to, but that a sub-editor could be found to pass it.

It would often appear as if the modern editor valued literary ability in his colleagues, rather than critical acumen. If the idea is a correct one, it would largely account for such inconsistencies.

So large a body must necessarily include men of varied powers, varied educational endowments, and, probably, of various races; from the highly-cultured leading critic of the great daily journals, down to the cosmopolitan writer, whose other occupations seem strangely inconsistent with the exercise of so fine an art.

The gratitude, however, of all English musicians should go out to the eminent men who, daily, portray so vividly the strangely-moving panorama of music, as it faces us all to-day. People who live in serene atmospheres may not realize their work at its true value, but that it is of powerful and far-reaching influence, there is no room for doubt.

The great festivals of England are among the most important features in the musical history of the country. Their influence is for good in whatever direction you seek. They provide the composer with the most perfect means that human effort can devise, to render his ideals into actual effect. They give the soloist every incentive to the highest efforts. They create that subtle atmosphere which inspires chorus, orchestra, conductor and all, to supreme achievement.

I do not include the Handel festival among them. The peculiar characteristics that go to mark its unique position in the world of English musical history, are decidedly antagonistic to the artistic ideals that are the very life and soul of the others. This festival cannot, I think, be, in any sense, interpreted as a sign of advance in the art of music, on the part of the English people. It certainly provides the pleasurable excitement of a week in the metropolis, interspersed with music, to the many hundreds of enthusiastic choral singers who flock to the Crystal Palace from, practically, every part of the country.

This, added to the fact that it attracts countless thousands of people, whose only musical

experience it often proves to be, certainly proclaims it as an agency for good.

But, judging it solely from an artistic point of view, and with no desire to use undue emphasis, the amalgamation of a chorus numbered by thousands, and an orchestra of appalling size, the brass instruments (mostly called into requisition by Costa, and having no place in Handel's original scores), and those of percussion being in terrible evidence—cannot, as it seems to me, be regarded in any other light than the simple glorification of noise.

That there was an element of genius in the original conception of the idea is not to be denied, and the picturesque combination of such masses of people would naturally appeal to the imagination of such a man as Sir Michael Costa, gifted as he was, with a sense of things on a grand and imposing scale.

Of the success that attended the festivals from the beginning, and has been conspicuous to the present day, it is only a matter of justice to relate, and to the great conductor who was for so many years its embodiment, such a tribute as the fact involves, is unquestionably due.

Indeed, after his death, many and ominous were the doubts openly expressed as to the capability of any other musician to take his place with success.

However, the late Sir August Manns, who was elected to succeed him, speedily put an end to any uneasiness on the subject. Since his decease Sir Frederick Cowen has, with equal success, carried on the traditions.

A feature of special interest, in that it affords convincing proof of the love of music existing among the masses of wage-earners, particularly in the northern counties of England, is the popularity of brass-band contests, it being borne in mind that all the performers belong to that class.

The final exhibitions generally take place at the Crystal Palace, and it is an inspiring sight to watch, not only the whole-hearted enthusiasm with which the players throw themselves into their work, but the equal excitement of their respective followers who flock to the south to witness them.

It is safe to say that the decisions of the examiners are awaited with as breathless interest, as is displayed while the result of the final cup-tie, of Association football, is in doubt. While not claiming for them too high a position as artistic manifestations, it can only be regarded with a sense of true admiration, that the comparatively little time that their arduous occupations leave at their disposal, is spent by the men to such a purpose.

The pieces chosen for performance are, frequently, not only classical, and thereby demanding high qualifications of fine discernment, but of sufficient difficulty to require considerable technical skill on the part of the players. It does not call for much consideration to realize the sustained endeavour necessary to meet such requirements. Enthusiasm tempered by a refinement that is extraordinary, all things being considered, characterises the best efforts of the successful competitors.

If evidence were wanted to prove the ever upward trend in everything that has to do with art, one of the most striking features of the times, the Variety Theatres, surely, can offer it, and, on a scale that, perhaps, could not be equalled in any other direction. It seems only yesterday that such a thing as the following quotation narrates, took place in one of them. Although I did not witness it, I well remember the indignant outcry it called forth.

"As an indication of the vulgar and repulsive, I recall a performance given in one of these halls which was said to represent an incident that actually took place in one of the Indian Frontier wars. In a charge by a Scottish regiment, the Piper, while sounding it, was dangerously wounded, but continued to play until his regiment was lost to sight.

"For this act of valour he received the decoration of the Victoria Cross, the most coveted distinction in the British Army.... Yet in order to attract the morbid curiosity of the crowd, this scene was enacted with every attempt at verisimilitude."

It is impossible to think of such a disgusting spectacle taking place in one of these theatres to-day. The music hall of those not remote days, together with the type of manager such performances indicate, is a thing of the past. Instead of offering attractions to the lowest tastes, the authorities frequently appeal to the highest, and invariably only to those which the average individual may honestly indulge.

The greatest actors and actresses of every country in the world are constantly to be seen, and the Drama and the Variety Theatre are in complete agreement, instead of, as formerly, contemptuous on one side, and resentful on the other.

So far as music is concerned the change is equally marked, as may be realized when Sir Edward Elgar is found conducting one of his own compositions at the Coliseum. This must certainly be regarded as an epoch in the history of music in England, as well as that of the Variety Theatre.

Although unable to take the roseate view of the position of native music in England that is often expressed by a few prominent writers in the Press, I think it will be generally agreed that there are many signs, at once indicative of hopefulness and, already, great and assured progress.

There are others, however, that, shut one's eyes to them as one would, cannot be ignored, and

are, certainly, less satisfactory.

Disunion among any communion is generally disastrous, but I am afraid it has been a fatal fact in the history of English musicians.

The writing, for instance, of a parody by one, of the work of another, seems to me to be a policy of sheer negation. It neither enhances the reputation of the one, nor impedes the upward progress of the other. The ostentatious patronage of the foreign, at the expense of the equally skilled native, musician, is again a sign that does not induce a feeling of hopefulness.

To create a national school of English music which, notwithstanding the raptures some writers have indulged in, simply does not exist, a policy of a definite nature is needed.

That there exists a band of brilliant and original English composers to-day, is a matter of heart-felt congratulation, and one that gives rise to hopes that, but a few years ago only, would scarcely have been justified.

That their influence is already great and will, before long be still greater, as adverse influences lose their power, is a matter of thankfulness.

At the present time, however, a sense of cohesion seems to be lacking.

One might express a fervent wish that a series of conferences, the members restricted to English composers, might be held under the presidency of Sir Hubert Parry or Sir Edward Elgar, with a view to propagate authoritative advice to those in whose hands the training of the future generation of English composers is entrusted.

There is, surely, much to go upon. The noble school of ancient English Church music, and the national folk-music in which England is exceptionally rich, form a firm foundation on which to build.

Dvořák indicated the lines on which to found an American school of composition, by writing a symphony based on national melodies, and instinct with the spirit of the people. Will not some of the young English composers, in their days of youth and enthusiasm, emulate so splendid an example?

England was musical once upon a time; and bids fair to be so again, in the highest and noblest sense that the word can convey.

England was "merrie," once upon a time; and, if the early days of irresponsible gaiety can never return, she may well be happy in the prospect of a noble art restored to her.

In that firm faith, I close these pages.

INDEX

A

	PAGE
Albani, Madame	238
Amateur Bands	144
Antiphony	94
"Army Quadrilles"	140
B	
Bach Society, established	206
Balfe's "Bohemian Girl"	182, 183, 196
Balfe's "Rose of Castille"	184
Ballads	23, 247
Ball, John	43
"Basoche"	192
Beecham, Mr. Thomas	181
Benedict's "Lily of Killarney"	184
Bennett, Mr. Joseph	196
Bennett, Sir William Sterndale	99, 110, 201
Beringer, Oscar	112
Birmingham	112
Birmingham Choir	245
Bizet's "Carmen"	195
"Blest Pair of Sirens"	102
Blow, Dr. John	64
Bodda-Pyne, Madame	184

Boosey & Co., Messrs 247
Boyce, William 88
Bradford Choir 246
Brass Band Contests 260
Bridge, Sir Frederick 246
Broadwood & Sons, Messrs 248
Bunn, Alfred 182
Burns, Georgina 187 [Pg 266]
Buononcini 83, 106
Butt, Madame Clara 247
Byrd 6, 39, 43, 53

C

Calvinism and Music 69
Calvin, John 76
Carl Rosa 186
Carte, Mr. D'Oyly 189
Casals, Señor 118
Catch 37
Cathedrals and Music 118
Censor, The 249
Certificates 252
Chappell & Co., Messrs. 247
Chappell, Mr. Arthur 248
Charles II. and Opera 177
Choirs, Provincial 245
Chopin 254, 255
Church and Drama 4
Church and Music 2, 68
Church Music 264
Clive, Mr. Franklin 192
Comic Operas 193
Composers, Early English 47
Composers, Status of 18
Costa, Sir Michael 110, 115, 259
Counterpoint 95
Cowen, Sir Frederick 260
Criticism, Anonymous 256
Crotty, Leslie 187
Crystal Palace Concerts 132

D

Dance Music 21, 27
Davies, Mr. Ben 187, 192
Davidson, Mr. J. W 254
De Reszke, The Brothers 179
"Der Ring des Nibelungen" 179
Diction, Importance of 121 [Pg 267]
"Don Giovanni" 178
Douland 39
Drama and the Church 4
Dvořák 264

E

Education, Musical 93
Edwardes, Mr. George 194
Elgar, Sir Edward 199, 262
Elgar's, Sir Edward, advice 104
"Elijah" 163
Elizabeth, Queen, and Music 2, 29, 31
England, Opera in 176
English Music, Sources of 11
English Opera 180
"Esmeralda" 188
Examinations 251

F

Faning, Dr. Eaton 253
Festivals 258
"Flying Dutchman" 187
Ford, Thomas 40
Foreign Influence 29

Foreign Teachers in England 103
French School of Opera 179

G

Games and Music 22
Gaylord, Julia 187
Gerardy, M. 118
German Music 103
Gibbons, Orlando 6, 9, 39, 43, 57
Glee 37
Gounod's "Faust" 195
Grove, Sir George 100, 253
Guildhall School of Music 100
Guiligni 179
Gye 178 [Pg 268]

H

Hallè, Lady 211
Hallè, Sir Charles 136, 218, 248
Hammerstein, Mr. 196, 199
Handel 83, 106, 153
Handel and Opera 178
Handel Festival 258
Harmony 95
Harrison, Mr. William 183
Harris, Sir Augustus 179
Haydn and the Orchestra 126
Henry VIII. and Music 33
Hersee, Miss Rose 186
Hill, Miss Lucille 192

I

Instrumental Music 43
Instruments, Early 13
Instruments, Musical 43
Italian Chorus and Mendelssohn 123
Italian Opera 176
Italian Singers 120
Italian Training 120
"Ivanhoe" 190

J

Jackson, William 90
Joachim 248
Jullien 140

K

Kent 90
Kirkby-Lunn, Madame 180

L

Lablache 179
Leeds Choir 245 [Pg 269]
London Symphony Orchestra 245
Ludwig, William 187

M

Maas, Joseph 187
Macfarren, Mr. Walter 253
Macfarren, Sir G. A. 99, 185
Macintyre, Miss Margaret 192
Mackenzie, Sir Alexander C. 99, 185
Madrigal 37
Malibran 178
Manchester 112, 139
Manns, Sir Augustus 132, 260
Mapleson 178
Mario 179
Masque, the 34
McGuckin, Mr. Barton 187
Melba, Madame 179, 121
Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto 195
"Merrie," When England was 29
Messager, Andrè 192

"Messiah," The 158
Minstrels, Early 18
Moss, Mr. Hugh 191
Monks and Music 6
Moody-Manners Company 186
"Morning Hymn" 42
"Morning Post," Quotation from 196
Morris Dance 21
Musical Comedies 193
N
New Symphony Orchestra 143, 245
Niccolini 179
Nilsson, Christine 178
Norman-Neruda, Madame 211, 248
Notation 12
Novello & Co., Messrs. 90
[Pg 270]
O
Opera, English 180
Opera, Essentials for Success 197
Opera, History of 176
Opera in England 176
Opera, State Aid for 193
Oratorio in England 150
Orchestral Music 125
Orchestral Music in London 245
Organ, An, in Sixth Century 44
Organ, Development of the 45
Oudin, Eugène 191
P
Palestrina 6
Palliser, Miss Esther 192
Parepa, Madame 186
Parry, Sir Hubert 100
"Parthenia" 27, 28
Patti, Adelina 178
Philharmonic Society, The 125, 245
"Philip Vanderdecken" 187
Piatti 248
Pitch fixed by Costa 115
Players, Strolling 2
"Pops" 248
Promenade Concerts 139
Purcell 9, 45, 60
Purcell and Opera 176
Puritanism 29, 69
Puritans, The, and Opera 177
Pyne, George, and James Kendrick 184
Pyne-Harrison Company, The 184
Pyne, Minto 184
Pyne, Miss Louisa 183
R
Reeves, Sims 179, 207
Reformation, Effect on Music 2
[Pg 271]
Restoration, The, and Music 80
Richter Concerts 131
Richter, Dr. 179, 180
Rivière 140
"Robin Hood" 185
Ronald, Mr. Landon 101, 144
Round 37
Royal Academy of Music 98
Royal Amateur Orchestral Society 145
Royal Choral Society 246
Royal College of Music 99
Royal Italian Opera 179
Rumford, Mr. Kennerley 247
S
Salmond, Mr. Norman 192

"Salome" 248, 249
"Samson et Dalila" 249
Santley, Sir Charles 179, 186
Schumann, Madame 248
Secular Music of Thirteenth Century 20
"Senta" 187
Sheffield 112
Sheffield Choir 246
Smith 178
Sontag 178
Spohr 109
Squire, W. H. 118
Stanford, Sir Villiers 185
Straus, Richard 181, 248
State Aid for Opera 193
Sullivan, Sir Arthur 86, 190, 227
"Sumer is icumen in" 40
Sunday Concerts 144
Symphony Concerts 139
Symphony Orchestra, The London 142
T
Tallis 6, 9, 48, 96
"The Creation" 160
"The Dream of Gerontius" 173, 246
"The Golden Legend" 168
"The Last Judgment" 166
"The Redemption" 168
"The Silver Swan" 39
"The Woman of Samaria" 110
Thomas Arthur Goring 188
Tietjens, Therese 178
Turner, J. W. 186, 187
V
Valleria, Alwina 187
Variety Theatres 261
Violin, The 13
W
Wagner 179, 254, 255
Wagner Festival, The 131
Wallace's "Lurline" 184
Wallace's "Maritana" 183
Wesley, Samuel 91
Wesley, Samuel Sebastian 91, 184
Wilde, Oscar 249
Wolff, Johannes 112
Wood, Sir Henry 116, 139, 245
Y
York, Josephine 187

THE LONDON AND NORWICH PRESS, LTD., LONDON AND NORWICH

Transcriber's Notes

Changes to the text have been limited to typographical errors only and are listed as follows:

Page 9: changed "Bryd" to "Byrd" (Of Byrd we have written.)

Page 45: changed "harpischord" to "harpsichord" (... harpsichord and organ music, ...)

Page 58: changed comma to sentence-final period (... the great, but not too amiable, Mr. William Byrd.)

Page 67: changed "Calvanistic" to "Calvinistic" (—Effect of Calvinistic teaching—)

Page 70: changed "Calvanistic" to "Calvinistic" (... in those early

Calvinistic times ...)

Page 72: changed "Calvanist" to "Calvinist" (... the constant influx of Calvinist refugees ...)

Page 72: changed "Calvanist" to "Calvinist" (... the spread of Calvinism ...)

Page 87: changed "eminates" to "emanates" (... the country from which it emanates ...)

Page 105: changed "fanatacism" to "fanaticism" (... a period if of less fanaticism, a not less fatal indifference ...)

Page 106: changed "unforgetable" to "unforgettable" (... words at once typical of him, and unforgettable.)

Page 108: changed "continously" to "continuously" (... the influence of the Court continuously exercised ...)

Page 120: changed two instances of "Reszké" to "Reszke" (... Jean de Reszke, Charles Santley and Edouard de Reszke.)

Page 169: changed "Protestanism" to "Protestantism" (... the feelings and aspirations of German Protestantism.)

Page 176: changed "Ondin" to "Oudin" (—"Ivanhoe"—Eugène Oudin—)

Page 188: changed "chose" to "choose" (... and I will choose the one that was, ...)

Page 196: changed "bann" to "ban" (... others would ban such operas altogether, ...)

Page 216: changed "Halle's" to "Hallé's" (... Ludwig and Waldemar Neruda, Lady Hallé's sons, ...)

Page 222: suspected typographical error "sane" may have been intended to read "same" (... I should think that same conservatism, would fairly express his attitude ...)

Page 243: added missing opening quotation mark (He renamed it "Rudd-i-gore.")

Page 251: changed "gradua-ally", where hypenated across lines, to "gradually" (... how absolutely indifferent the public have gradually become ...)

Page 270: changed "Eugene" to "Eugène" (Oudin, Eugène 191)

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