

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Crucifixion* by J. Sparrow-Simpson and J. Stainer

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THE Queen has accepted the dedication of a Jubilee Anthem, written by Dr. J. F. Bridge, and has approved of its being included in the Jubilee Service to be held in Westminster Abbey. The Anthem was performed some time ago before the Queen at Osborne by part of the Abbey Choir, under the direction of the composer. It will be published by Messrs. Novello, Ewer and Co. shortly.

ON the 21st ult., a Concert was given at the Lecture Rooms, Stoke Newington, by Miss McDonnell and Miss Kate Milner. The vocalists were Miss Florence Monk, Miss Susetta Fenn, Miss Kate Milner, Mr. Sinclair Dunn, Mr. Lovett King, and Mr. H. Prenton. Miss McDonnell and Miss Farries presided at the piano. A long and well selected programme gave much pleasure to the audience.

MISS LYDIA DAVIS gave her second Concert at Bolingbroke Hall, Battersea, on the 18th ult. The artists were Madame Wilson-Osman, Miss Hellaby, Miss Lydia Davis, and Mr. Tom Maude; and the work, Howell's Cantata "Song of the Months," was effectively rendered by Miss Lydia Davis's Choir. Mr. Knott, A.R.A.M., was an able Conductor.

MR. ALFRED PROBERT gave his first Annual Ballad Concert on the 7th ult., at Myddleton Hall, Islington, assisted by Miss Amy Sargent, Miss Ethel Harwood, Miss Annie West, Mr. M. Ryan, Mr. Alfred Probert, Signor Villa, Mr. Ernest Probert, and the Arion Glee Club; pianists, Mr. Churchill Sibley and Mr. Alfred Cox.

THE Stratford Musical Festival, for the encouragement of the study and practice of music, is announced to be held in the Town Hall on April 30 and May 2. Competitions in the several branches of the art are set forth in the prospectus, as usual; and the distribution of prizes, concert, &c., will take place on May 3. The judges are Messrs. Fountain Meen, Ebenezer Prout, and Frederick E. Walker.

THE Kyrle Choir, under the direction of Mr. F. A. W. Docker, have recently given the following performances:—On January 26, "The Messiah," at St. Augustine's, Bermondsey; on the 2nd ult., "Elijah," at St. Stephen's, Poplar; and on the 16th ult., "Samson," at Christ Church, Watney Street. Mr. E. H. Turpin accompanied on the organ on each occasion.

IF it be true, as reported, that the manager of La Scala has failed, the disaster should, probably, be ascribed to "Otello," which has killed every other attraction of the season. Till that opera was brought out, people reserved themselves for it, leaving the theatre empty. The two performances since given can have gone but a little way to make up for lost ground.

SPECIAL Services will take place at the Church of St. Marylebone on each Thursday evening in Lent. Dr. Stainer's new Cantata, "The Crucifixion," was performed at the opening service on the 24th ult., and will be repeated on the 10th and 24th inst., and April 8. A selection from Gounod's "Redemption" will be sung on the 3rd, 17th, and 31st inst.

HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN has graciously accepted a copy of the Jubilee Cantata "The Victorian Age," set to music by Mr. J. L. Roeckel, the words by Mr. F. E. Weatherly, M.A., lately published by Messrs. Curwen and Sons.

MR. CARL ARMBRUSTER completed his interesting course of lectures on "Modern composers of Classical Song" at the Royal Institution, on the 19th ult., the attendance throughout having been a very good one, and the lecturer's discourse meeting with much appreciation.

DR. A. H. MANN has written a Jubilee Te Deum for orchestra, organ, and chorus, which will be performed at King's College, Cambridge, and also at Beverley Minster, in both cases with orchestra.

As a report of the death of Mr. A. Fowles is in circulation in England, we are requested by him to state that he is living, and principal bass at the New American Church, Avenue de l'Alma, Paris.

BACH's "Passion" (St. John) will be given with orchestral accompaniments, at Holy Trinity Church, Stroud Green, N., on three evenings in Lent—viz., 16th, 23rd, and 30th inst. The admission to the church will be free.

THE second performance of Verdi's "Otello" took place on Sunday, the 13th ult., the composer being present. It is described as of better quality than the first, and as received with acclamations. Verdi once more obtained the highest honours at the hands of his countrymen.

WE understand that Sir Arthur Sullivan's Cantata "The Golden Legend" will be performed twice in Berlin during Holy Week, under the composer's direction. It is hoped that Madame Albani may be induced to sing in it.

GOUNOD's "Mors et Vita" will be sung at St. Stephen's, South Kensington, on the Friday evenings in Lent, at eight o'clock, with orchestral accompaniment. The harp accompaniment will be played by Mr. Cheshire.

FOR the forthcoming Jubilee of Her Majesty, we are informed that Dr. Bradford is writing a Sacred Cantata, entitled "The Song of Jubilee," for solo voices, chorus, orchestra, and organ.

WE are pleased to be able to state that Mr. Carrodus, who left England for Monte Carlo, at the end of January, has returned much benefited in health, and will at once resume his professional duties.

REVIEWS.

The Crucifixion. Words selected and written by the Rev. J. Sparrow-Simpson. Music by J. Stainer. [Novello, Ewer and Co.]

WHEN Dr. Butler preached his memorable sermon on the beneficent influence of music, in September last at Gloucester, he probably had no idea that he was indirectly pleading for the foundation of a new style or school of sacred composition. That our cathedrals and churches should be more extensively utilised than formerly for musical performances—or rather services—is a proposition with which all, save those who still retain antiquated prejudices, will agree. But then the question arises—what kind of works should be selected for gatherings specially intended for the "common people"? In the nature of things, performances of standard oratorios with full orchestra and a large choir, can only be given at infrequent intervals, and though the most rigid musical purists could not object to selections rendered with only organ accompaniment and a miniature chorus, yet a feeling of regret that the masterpieces of the great composers should be presented with maimed rites is inevitable. The logical conclusion is, therefore, that works specially written for the services of song now being organised on all sides should be invited, and a new field for the exercise of our leading composers' abilities thereby opened up. As a type of what such works should be, Dr. Stainer's "Crucifixion" will naturally command attention apart from its own intrinsic merits. Structurally, it is as simple as possible. Only two solo voices are required, a tenor and a bass, and no orchestra is needed, the accompaniments being specially written for the organ only. As in the Passions of Bach, hymns are introduced in which the audience or congregation can join. Lastly, "the performance will probably not extend over forty minutes in duration, thus giving an opportunity for a suitable address if thought advisable." The work is described as "a Meditation on the sacred passion of the Holy Redeemer," and Mr. Sparrow-Simpson's book follows the lines of the first part of Gounod's "Redemption," except that there is no prologue. We fancy the influence of the French master may be traced in the nature of the text. The language of Scripture is frequently utilised, but by no means closely followed; and, speaking generally, the lines are characterised by extreme pietism and glowing sentiment, especially in the hymns. As an example of the author's fervid style, we quote a few lines from a hymn entitled "The Mystery of the Divine Humiliation":—

Once the Lord of brilliant seraphs,
Winged with love to do His will,
Now the scorn of all His creatures,
And the airm of every ill.

* * * * *
From the "Holy, Holy, Holy,"
We adore Thee, O most High,
Down to earth's blaspheming voices,
And the shout of "Crucify."

Cross of Jesus, Cross of Sorrow,
Where the blood of Christ was shed,
Perfect man on thee was tortured,
Perfect God on thee has bled!

But though Mr. Sparrow-Simpson is intensely earnest, he never degenerates into the objectionable realistic style adopted by some hymn writers of the present day, and there is nothing in his book to offend either churchman or dissenter. Turning to the music, the first feature which strikes our attention is the singularly happy union of artistic feeling with simplicity. Dr. Stainer has fully studied the capacities of ordinary church choirs, and yet has contrived to impart a flavour of high-class musicianship to almost every number. A brief survey of the score will serve to confirm this statement. After a few bars of introduction in C sharp minor, the tenor commences the narration, which quickly yields to No. 2, "The Agony." In this the Redeemer is personified by the bass soloist, the chorus responding in beautiful though subdued accents. The narration is then resumed in a kind of accompanied Recitative, full of melodic interest and happy turns of harmony. Especially effective is the use of the "Neapolitan sixth," at the words "scourged Him." In the next number, entitled "Processional to Calvary," we are specially reminded of "The Redemption." The points of resemblance are the key, A minor, and the mixture of instrumental writing with chorus and soli. But whereas Gounod's March is designedly brusque, that of Dr. Stainer is tender and sad for the most part, and after an effective climax it dies away *pianissimo*. Passing over Nos. 4 and 6 (narration) and No. 5 (the hymn quoted above), we come to a somewhat remarkable tenor air "King ever glorious." In this, the key and measure are changed every few bars, and yet the music is not in the least patchy. The climax is really fine, and, well sung and accompanied, this solo could not fail to make a marked impression. The next important number is an unaccompanied chorus, "God so loved the world," which is extremely well written, though perhaps it is less original than the foregoing. From here to the end the music increases in interest. After an expressive "Litany of the Passion" for the choir and congregation, there is a beautiful duet for the soloists "So Thou liftest Thy divine petition," which Spohr might have signed. The composer has here surpassed all his previous efforts, but he has yet something finer in reserve. This is virtually the final chorus "From the throne of His cross," a piece strongly rhythmical, and written in plain four-part throughout, yet intensely expressive. The earnest pleading character of the music at the words "O come unto Me," is even more striking than Gounod's treatment of the same or similar lines. After the Narrator has described the closing scene of the awful tragedy, the work ends with a hymn "All for Jesus." To assert that Dr. Stainer's Cantata—for so we suppose it must be termed—will be in extensive demand, is to utter a perfectly safe prediction. Structurally, technically, and artistically, it is precisely suited to its purpose.

Introduction and Allegro for the Organ. Magnificat and Nunc dimittis in E flat. By W. G. Wood.
[Weekes and Co.]

MR. WOOD might have given his organ piece a less modest and indefinite appellation. It is virtually an overture, or the first movement of a sonata, being in strict form, and worked out with considerable elaboration of the subject-matter. The themes are well contrasted, and the general style is modern, yet broad and dignified. Somewhat too long for a church voluntary it would make an extremely effective item in a recital programme. The qualities noted above are also found in the setting of the evening canticles. It is eminently church-like and yet flowing and melodious, and may be briefly described as one of the best services which have come under our notice for some time.

Les Mendelssohn-Bartholdy et Robert Schumann. Par Ernest David, Lauréat de l'Institut.
[Paris: Calmann Lévy.]

IN REFERENCE to M. David's volume, the reviewer has a disagreeable but perfectly straightforward task to perform, that of exposing a very gross case of wholesale and unacknowledged pilfering. The chapters on the Mendelssohn family consist of copious extracts from the letters and

family records published in 1879 by Mendelssohn's nephew, Herr Sebastian Hensel, strung together by a slender narrative largely borrowed from Sir George Grove's admirable article, and supplemented by a translation of Mr. Henry Chorley's account of his last meeting with Mendelssohn given in his volume "Modern German Music." This last loan is acknowledged—not so the liberal extracts to which M. David has helped himself from Sir George Grove's article—with the exception of one anecdote. Where M. David introduces any original matter he is generally incorrect. Thus he confuses Sarah Austin with Jane Austen, speaks of Mr. Chorley as the editor of the *Athenæum*, and gives the following apocryphal illustration of Mendelssohn's dislike of national airs, on page 95. "Il ne fit usage qu'une seule fois de mélodie populaire, dans le but de flatter la reine Victoria: c'est dans la fin de sa symphonie écossaise, dédiée à cette princesse, et même cette unique tentative n'est pas très heureuse; car cette mélodie ne s'accorde en rien avec ce qui la précède: elle arrive on ne sait pourquoi et déconcerte l'auditeur. Mendelssohn n'a adapté cette mélodie à sa symphonie que pour justifier le titre d'*Écossaise* qu'il lui donna." As if, apart from the incorrectness of the statement, the whole work was not redolent of the Highlands! In these chapters on the Mendelssohn family, however, M. David has some lingering shreds of compunction as to the duty of acknowledging his sources of information. But when he comes to deal with Schumann he casts all shame aside and has palmed off as an original "biographical study" of that composer, a close translation—barring a few gratuitous blunders—of Herr Spitta's article in Grove's Dictionary. There is no word of acknowledgment from beginning to end of the article, but at the conclusion of the whole book, he has had the sublime assurance to print the list of Schumann's works "d'après la liste dressée par M. Philipp Spitta pour le 'Dictionary of Music and Musicians' de Sir G. Grove," as though in proof of his honesty. Here again, as in the case of Mendelssohn, M. David's meagre additions to his loans are generally irrelevant or incorrect. Such a work suggests curious reflections on the morality of the author, his poor opinion of the intelligence of his readers, and his sovereign contempt for the castigation that is sure to befall him at the hands of his more scrupulous colleagues.

FOREIGN NOTES.

THE following anecdote anent the origin of Verdi's new opera, recorded in the *Corriere del Mattino*, may be given a place in these columns: "Verdi," says the journal quoted, "was first induced to undertake the composition of 'Otello' on the occasion of his 'Messa da Requiem' at La Scala, for the benefit of the sufferers by the inundations at Ferrara. The next day he gave a dinner to the four principal solo singers, at which were present several friends, among them Signor Faccio and Signor Ricordi. The latter laid siege to the Maestro, trying to persuade him to undertake a new work. For a long time Verdi resisted, and his wife declared that probably only a Shakespearian subject could induce him to take up his pen again. A few hours later, Faccio and Ricordi went to Boito, who at once agreed to make the third in the generous conspiracy, and two days after sent to Verdi a complete sketch of the plan for the opera, following strictly the Shakespearian tragedy. Verdi approved of the sketch, and from that moment it fell to the part of Giulio Ricordi to urge on the composer and the poet by constant reminders. Every Christmas he sent to Verdi's house an 'Otello' formed of chocolate, which, at first very small, grew larger as the opera progressed. Verdi did not wish to include choruses in his opera, but yielded to the fact that they were indispensable in the present condition of operatic art. It was he, also, who desired that the opera should open with the tempest."

Signor Arrigo Boito, the composer of "Mefistofele," whose opera "Nero" still awaits completion, is said to be engaged upon another operatic work founded upon the story of "Hero and Leander."

A new opera "Jacopo," by the Maestro Leonardi, is to be produced next season at the Apollo Theatre of Rome.

Herr Angelo Neumann, the energetic *impresario*, is preparing—at the instigation, it is said, of the music-publishing firm of Lucca, at Milan—for an operatic tour through