

Johannes Brahms

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St. Asaph Diocesan Choral Festival was held on June 2 in the Cathedral, when Mendelssohn's 42nd Psalm ('As the hart pants') was sung by the united choirs numbering upwards of a thousand voices. The solos were sung by the Cathedral choir, and a small band, with the organ, furnished the accompaniments. Dr. Kendrick Pyne, organist of Manchester Cathedral, was at the organ, and Mr. W. E. Belcher, Cathedral organist, conducted.

The thirty-fourth Annual Festival of the London Gregorian Choral Association took place in St. Paul's Cathedral on June 9. The processional hymns were 'Lord, we love the habitation,' to the melody of 'Tibi Christi, splendor Patris,' 'Lift we now our hearts,' set to music by Dr. C. W. Pearce, and 'Father of Souls' set by Mr. Arthur Henry Brown. Tallis's responses were sung to strict Plain-song, and the anthem was Gounod's 'Sing praises unto the Lord.' Dr. Warwick Jordan presided at the organ.

The following papers on Church Music are announced to be read at the Church Congress to be held in Liverpool during October next:—

- (a) The Congregation and the
Choir Dr. H. Walford Davies
and the Rev. C. H.
Hylton Stewart.
- (b) The Music of the Services—
Chanting Dr. A. M. Richardson.
Hymn-singing ... Dr. Basil Harwood.
Services and Anthems Dr. Varley Roberts.

During the absence of Mr. Alfred Hollins in Australia his gifted young pupil, Miss Gladys Dewar, is taking the services at St. George's United Free Church, Edinburgh, and is winning golden opinions by the efficient discharge of her deputy duties.

Mr. J. H. Maunder's sacred cantata 'Olivet to Calvary' was admirably performed at the Presbyterian Church of England, Elliston Street, Jarrow, on June 12, under the direction of the organist of the church, Mr. R. Oliver Elwen.

'The Methodist Hymn Book' has now been issued. We hope to notice this important contribution to Wesleyan service-music next month.

ORGAN RECITALS.

Sir Walter Parratt, St. George's Chapel, Windsor (Annual private recital to the Eton boys)—Fantasia in G major, *Parry*, and Prelude in the form of a Minuet, *Stanford*.

Mr. James M. Preston, St. George's, Jesmond, Newcastle-on-Tyne.—Fantasia in D, *Silas*.

Mr. W. Prendergast, Winchester Cathedral.—Toccata in C, *Sweetlinck*.

Mr. C. H. Moody, Ripon Cathedral.—Overture in C, *Thomas Adams*.

Mr. John Waddell, Holy Trinity, Richmond.—Sonata in the style of Handel, *Wolstenholme*.

Mr. S. Wallbank, Parish Church, Wilsden, Bradford.—O Sanctissima, *Lux*.

Mr. Alfred W. V. Vine, Tewkesbury Abbey.—Meditation in an old Gothic church, *Silas*.

Mr. F. E. Wilson, St. Lawrence Jewry.—Triumphal March, *Lemmens*.

Mr. W. Wolstenholme, St. Mary Magdalene, Hucknall Torkard.—Andante cantabile in D, *E. J. Hopkins*.

Mr. H. Matthias Turton, The Coliseum, Leeds.—Passacaglia in D minor, *Buxtehude*.

Mr. A. H. Tocknell, St. Mary's, Barrow Gurney.—Adagio in F sharp minor, *S. S. Wesley*.

Mr. P. Bonfield Akers, Millard Avenue Baptist Church, Chicago.—Marche Pittoresque, *Ernest R. Kroeger*.

Mr. F. Isherwood Plummer, Congregational Church, Southport.—Spring Song, *Hollins*.

Mr. H. Randall, St. Nicholas Church, Longparish.—Pastorale in E, *Lemare*.

Mr. Fred Gostelow, St. John-the-Baptist, Southover, Lewes (Dedication of new organ).—Scherzo symphonique, *Guilmant*.

Mr. George Grace, Holy Trinity, Taunton.—Cantilène and Verset, *Dubois*.

Mr. W. Henry Maxfield, St. John the Evangelist's, Altrincham.—Offertoire de Sainte Cécile, *Grisson*.

Mr. Lloyd Hartley, Dawes Road Baptist Church, Fulham.—Grand Chœur in D, *Guilmant*.

Mr. Stephenson, St. Barnabas, Hove (Dedication of the organ).—Two choral preludes, *Brahms*.

Mr. Alfred Bentley, St. Lawrence Jewry.—Intermezzo, *Chipp*.

Mr. Chastey Hector, St. Michael's Church, Handsworth—Sonata in D flat (Op. 154), *Rheinberger*.

Mr. Frederick Huxtable, St. Matthew's, Morningside, Edinburgh.—Prayer and Cradle Song, *Guilmant*.

ORGANIST AND CHOIRMASTER APPOINTMENTS.

Mr. Maurice E. Cooke, Parish Church, Mirfield, Yorks.

Mr. W. Meacham Haley, Ram's Episcopal Chapel, Homerton.

Mr. G. F. Hardesty, St. Stephen's Church, Hampstead.

Mr. Francis Henry Harper, All Saints' Parish Church, Wandsworth.

Dr. A. Eaglefield Hull, Parish Church, Huddersfield.

Mr. Montague F. Phillips, Christ Church, Wanstead.

Mr. H. J. Roxburgh, St. Alban's Church, Nottingham.

Mr. Samuel Rushton, Parish Church, Corfe Castle.

Mr. William Snow, Jun., Waterloo Road Church, Wolverhampton.

Mr. Clement K. Stuchbery, Wesleyan Church, Askew Road, Bayswater.

Mr. F. M. Taylor, St. Antholin's Church, Nunhead.

JOHANNES BRAHMS.*

Johannes Brahms! The man's name is like his music, broadly euphonious, strong and dignified. A composer with such a name could not produce trivialities. If one only thinks the matter over, is there not a certain close connection between composers' names and their music? Could the bearer of that weightiest, noblest, greatest name in music, Johann Sebastian Bach, have provided 'additional numbers' for 'musical comedies' if he had lived in London in the twentieth century? Imagination boggles at the thought. The units of Hans von Bülow's musical trinity—Bach, Beethoven and Brahms—are pretty accurately summed up in the stern and noble names which they bore.

Herr Kalbeck's great biography of Brahms—of which the first volume of 500 pages has recently been published—bids fair to become another addition to the series of exhaustive biographical and critical works for which German writers are noted. We shall be disappointed if it does not eventually prove as valuable in its way as Spitta's 'Bach,' Pohl's 'Haydn,' Jahn's 'Mozart,' and Niecks's 'Chopin.' Our author possesses many of the qualifications required for his task—his enthusiasm is unbounded; his knowledge seems more than adequate; his love of painstaking research is quite touching, and his candour might be embarrassing were it not so refreshing. That he is a partisan goes without saying. Admirers of Liszt and his devotees, and lovers of programme-music generally, may wince under the terrific strokes of Herr Kalbeck's two-edged sword when he goes forth to do doughty deeds for his hero's greater glory. Good hater of programme-music à la Liszt though he be, he never wearies of reading meanings and programmes into Brahms's own sonatas, serenades, and quartets, while on the other hand he knows how to distinguish between Liszt

*Johannes Brahms: Max Kalbeck. Erster Band, 1833-1862. Wiener Verlag, Wien und Leipzig. London: Breitkopf and Härtel.

the composer, for whom he has no affection, and Liszt the noble, captivating man and undisputed king of pianists. Taken as a whole, and making allowance for our author's bias and occasional indiscretions, the book is of great value and uncommon interest. The *Lehrjahre* and *Wanderjahre* of the young lion-hearted and lion-maned genius are described in great detail and with fascinating newness of information. The 'blond Johannes' is shown to us as a lovable creature. Much is already known of Brahms the man and master, and nothing but what redounds to his credit. The child in his case was the father of the man. Greatly as the man's sterling character has been admired, it is impossible, after reading Herr Kalbeck's volume, not to feel similar admiration for the youth.

Biographies have hitherto been all but silent regarding Brahms's mother—born Johanna Henrika Christiane Nissen. We now learn that she was the senior of her husband by no less than seventeen years, having been born in Hamburg in 1789; that with her married sister she kept a small shop—a so-called 'Dutch warehouse'—in the Ulrikus Street, Hamburg, where buttons, needles, thread, and linen goods were sold to the 'ladies' of the lowly neighbourhood. Christiane was not blessed with good looks, a pair of beautiful, soulful blue eyes excepted. A weakling from her childhood, she was compelled, as the result of disease, to limp through life. But within her frail body there dwelt a sturdy soul and a strong character. She not only supervised the household arrangements of the 'establishment,' but undertook the responsibility of looking after some rooms on an upper floor, let out to 'single gentlemen.' Hither came one Johann Jakob Brahms (born June 1, 1806, in Heide), a flügelhorn player in the Hamburg Civil Militia, in quest of board and lodging. He was made very comfortable, learnt to admire the blue-eyed, sweet-natured Christiane's womanly qualities, and committed a foolishness which, to quote our author, eventually turned out to have been a stroke of genius—the militia musician married Christiane on June 9, 1830. When a daughter was born to them, the little household quitted the shop in the Ulrikus Street and moved into the Bäckerbreitergang; but this abode proving too expensive, papa Brahms had to content himself with three small rooms in one of the darkest, narrowest lanes in one of the lowest, dirtiest quarters of the old Hansa town. Here, on May 7, 1833, near the haunts of thieves and vagabonds, in a room compared with which Beethoven's humble birthplace in Bonn seems an airy, comfortable hostel, the genius was born who has brought greater and deeper happiness into the lives of the genuine Brahms-lovers who know how to appreciate him, than almost any other composer, Bach and Beethoven perhaps excepted. The rooms actually occupied by the Brahms family cannot unfortunately be ascertained. The great master himself used to point to the left tenement on the first floor of the ramshackle abode in the midst of misery, and the testimony of contemporary dwellers in the house seems to confirm his view. However, as all the floors in the building are similarly divided into three-roomed tenements, Herr Kalbeck hesitates to accept these suggestions and rumours for facts.

Frau Brahms, we learn, was gifted with a remarkable memory, which enabled her even in her old age to learn by heart the whole of Schiller's poems. She was devoted to poetry, quick-witted and inventive, her hobby taking the form of designing original patterns for needlework; she was an adept at making the finest embroideries, and generally she seems to have been superior in intelligence to her young husband. There can be no doubt that it was from her the little 'Hannes' (as he was called at home) inherited his

great qualities of heart and mind. Hannes was a puny child, though he was spared all the usual ills that children are heirs to. Up to the age of fourteen he was however afflicted with nervous headaches that tortured him for hours and days together. In after years he could boast that he had never had a day's real illness throughout his life. At the age of ten he was run over by a cab, when he narrowly escaped being killed, one of the wheels going over his chest. For six weeks he was an invalid.

As a little child he was shy and highly strung. A barefooted street-arab himself, he rarely joined his fellow street-gutterites at play, though he is said to have listened with rapt interest and delight to the songs with which they accompanied their games. He would neglect his favourite toys—tin soldiers fascinated him especially, even in after life—and quit the most engrossing game directly he heard his father practise one of the numerous instruments of which that worthysire was more or less master,* and he remembered without difficulty any scraps of tune that came his way. Papa Brahms could not afford the luxury of a pianoforte; moreover, he had a bandsman's contempt for all 'mechanical' instruments. Little Hannes, on the other hand, displayed such a hankering after the keyboard that his father reluctantly took him to the house of a colleague who owned the coveted instrument. The boy soon convinced his papa that there was no need to teach him the notes. Looking away from the keyboard and out of the window, he named correctly any note that was sounded, so that his astonished father threatened him with dire punishment for merely 'guessing.' The little man had invented a system of notation of his own before he knew that such a thing existed!

Herr Kalbeck gives interesting particulars about the boy's first teacher, Otto Friedrich Willibald Cossel, and reproduces in facsimile the earliest known example of Brahms's writing. This is a New Year's letter in which the eight-year-old 'dutiful pupil' sends his 'beloved teacher' good wishes for 1842, thanks him for his kindness in getting him on so well in music, apologises for occasional laxity, and promises to do better in future.

It seems that we have to thank Cossel for frustrating a project which might have completely ruined the career of the budding genius. After the lad had created a sensation, at a concert in 1843, by playing a difficult pianoforte Study by Herz and joining his father and colleagues in Beethoven's Wind Sextet, an enterprising concert agent proposed taking the prodigy on tour to America. Not unnaturally the boy's parents greedily swallowed the golden bait that was dangled before their eyes, and it cost Cossel a great and real sacrifice to avert what he knew to be the worst possible danger that could threaten his gifted pupil's future. He decided reluctantly to part with the boy to whom he had become greatly attached, and to place him into worthier hands. Under the pretence that he could teach him nothing more, he pressed little Hannes upon the attention of the famous Eduard Marxsen, and, after many fruitless attempts, finally extracted the desired promise from that excellent but unwilling master before the parents had come to terms with their would-be 'manager.' As a result, and because the boy's people recognized the importance of allowing Hannes to study with so distinguished a teacher, the proposed tour in the land of dollars came to naught.

A. J. J.

(To be continued.)

* Johann Jakob Brahms is credited with protesting to a certain fault-finding conductor that 'a pure tone on the double-bass was a mere accident!'