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The Teaching of Composition

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In reply to 'J. H.' as to Lord Crofton, composer of the hymn-tune 'Crofton,' Dr. Grattan Flood sends us the following information:—

'Baron Crofton (Edward Henry Churchill Crofton), third holder of the title, was born October 21, 1834, and succeeded his father, December 27, 1869. He is a keen musician, and is one of the vice-presidents of the Irish Folk-song Society (London). He composed his well-known hymn-tune "Crofton" in 1884, not long after the hymn was written by Miss Dorothea Frances Blomfield—now Mrs. Gurney. This is still the popular hymn "O perfect love," and was written in 1883 for the marriage of Mrs. Gurney's sister. The tune was published in the revised edition of the Irish "Church Hymnal" in 1893, as No. 596, and is there named "Crofton." In the same volume appears another tune by Lord Crofton entitled "Roscommon," set to the words "Stand up, stand up for Jesus," words by Rev. G. Duffield, D.D. (written in 1854), who died July 6, 1888.'

THE TEACHING OF COMPOSITION.

TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE MUSICAL TIMES.'

SIR,—Your article on this subject seems to call for some comment from me, not because my name is mentioned, but because your writer (whose name I should gladly have seen appended to his essay) appears to have gone astray on one very important point. He says that both the methods of teaching which he correctly summarises must 'minimise the value of the personal equation in any student'—in fact, that all imitation on the part of a student must tend to make him a mere parrot. Waiving for the moment the inquiry which rises to one's lips as to what method of instruction your critic would deem preferable to those he regards with distrust, I must proceed to risk offending my numerous past and present pupils by emphatically declaring that all pupils at first are parrots and nothing else. Was your critic not a parrot too, when in his mother's arms he was taught to say 'da-da' and distinguish it from 'ta-ta'? Has your critic ever seen the first attempt of a composition student? Apart from mere crudeness of technique it is always so banal and aimless as to reduce its poor creator to despair. Indeed, indeed, originality does not proceed from within, but from without. Can you tell me of any composer, *except a very bad one* (curious paradox!), who developed an immediate individuality? Every composer worth sixpence has begun by being a feeble and pale reflection of his contemporaries. Is there a glimpse of Beethoven in even his first six published works? Is there a glimpse of Wagner in his first three operas? Is not early Chopin just Hummel and water, or early Grieg very bad Schumann? Apart from the fatal critical comparison of every new young man's new work with the works of the supreme masters, I do not think that people ever look upon him with the light of common-sense. 'Why, in heaven's name,' groans the conductor, 'can't these young fools write playable passages for the orchestra?' Does he think the composer is clumsy on purpose? The results of his lack of skill are far more agonising to him than to anyone else. The cause is that he knows he will not be listened to unless he goes one better than Strauss, and so, alas! he tries. 'Why,' demands an exasperated public, 'can't he give us a *tune*?' Simply because he knows that if he did he would be laughed at. I only know one young man who has had the courage to imitate Sullivan and German, and though he promises to eclipse both he is having a sad time of it at present. The average young composer of to-day tries hard to be incomprehensible, because he thinks that is the only way to be respected by the world. And I am afraid he is right; but it is very difficult to be incomprehensible if you have been well taught.

But when I hear one young composer imitating Strauss, and another imitating Debussy, it doesn't annoy me at all: I know it is only a phase in his development, and wait for it to pass. You cannot really suppose that a man *wants* to go through life imitating others. When he has found out how it is done he will (if he has the chance) pass on to other stages. Anyhow, I do not expect—and no one has any right to expect—that he will really show individuality till he is at least thirty-five. Beethoven and Wagner did not find themselves till they were forty, and Verdi not till sixty.

Only, of course, our young men never get beyond their 'first period,' before the end of which they all have to subside into pianoforte teachers.—Yours faithfully,

F. CORDER.

Royal Academy of Music.

OPERA IN ENGLAND.

TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE MUSICAL TIMES.'

DEAR SIR,—In your last issue a great deal was said about opera in England, and for years past the small amount of support given to opera has been cited as a proof of the unmusical condition of the nation. The reasoning of Mr. Cecil Forsyth as to the cause is interesting, but very inconclusive. May not the want of support arise from the fact that English people do not appreciate music in that form. Many people do not go to grand opera, because they prefer music by itself or drama by itself.

Lovers of orchestral music are not by any means all opera lovers, and the great increase in the support given to music in that and other forms, shows that England is not so unmusical as the support given to the opera would seem to indicate.—Faithfully yours,

WALLIS A. WALLIS.

Obituary.

We regret to have to record the following deaths:

HERMANN WINKELMANN, the first Bayreuth Parsifal, on January 19, at the age of sixty-two, at Maur, near Vienna. He was a member of the Vienna Hofoper for nearly twenty-five years.

EDMUND SINGER, in Stuttgart, at the age of eighty-three. He succeeded Joachim and Laub as Konzertmeister at Weimar, and was the companion of Liszt in many of his musical tours. He was the last of the 'Weimaraners.'

'EARLY ONE MORNING.

BY FRANK KIDSON.

The origin of this song, with its pretty tune, is involved in some obscurity, but the following notes carry its history further back than the article in last month's *Musical Times*. The first trace of the melody I can find is in a small, oblong manuscript book of airs belonging to the Folk-Song Society. When sent to me for examination and identification before purchase, I felt satisfied that the book was in the handwriting of Malchair, the Oxford musician, who assisted Dr. Crotch in the compilation of his 'Specimens of various styles of Music' (c. 1806), for the MS. contains a number of pieces afterwards embodied in Crotch's work.

The air in this manuscript stands thus, headed by the following note: 'From the singing of a poor woman, and two female children, Oxford, May 15th, 1784':

I reproduce the above by kind permission of the Folk-Song Society.

There can be but little doubt that the ballad singer was singing a folk-song—in all probability 'Early one morning'; but Malchair did not consider it of sufficient importance, or had no opportunity to take this down. Chappell remarks on the great popularity of this song and air among servant girls from all parts of the country, and points out that the song itself varies very much. He indicates where different versions of the words are printed, all of these sources being of the song 'Garland' type of publication. He further tells us that the version then (and now) sung was partly written