Review

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Summer. A Cantata for Female Voices. Written by Edward Oxenford. Composed by Franz Abt. [Novello, Ewer and Co.]

THE charmingly fresh and sunny verses of Mr. Oxenford have received so sympathetic a setting in the work before us that we venture to predict for it a popularity even beyond any of the many Cantatas for female voices contributed by Franz Abt to the fast increasing repertory of drawing-room operettas. Apart from the tunefulness of the opening chorus, "The morning sun is rising," the suggestive character of the accompaniments throughout evidences much real dramatic power, and most happily initiates the nature of the subject chosen for musical illustration. Preceded by a brief duet, a pastoral song for soprano—a model of melodious simplicity—occurs; and this is followed by a chorus, the three parts in which flow throughout in loving company, accompanied only with placid and appropriate harmonies. A Recitative, for mezzo-soprano, leads to a Chorus and Duet, for soprano and mezzo-soprano, both of which may be commended not only for their musical attraction, but for the excellent manner in which they express the feeling of the words. In the Recitative and song for contralto, the accompaniment grows into importance, and the storm is well depicted throughout the solo, the calmness of the succeeding Chorus forming an effective contrast. A Choral piece, descriptive of sunset, concludes the Cantata, and leaves a similar impression upon the listener to that which is called up by a walk in the country on a lovely summer evening.

FOREIGN NOTES.

AMONGST the musical events abroad during the past month, the first performance, at Brussels, of Wagner's "Die Meistersinger" necessarily occupies a prominent place in these columns. For many months past, as our readers will remember, this important *première* has been looked forward to with eager interest by music lovers of all shades of opinion. In our October number of last year, we ventured upon the following remarks concerning the expected event:—"We shall not be at all surprised if Wagner's 'Die Meistersinger,' truly and essentially German as that work is from beginning to end, will, after all, prove to be the herald of a general acceptance of the poet-composer's works in France, where so much foolish opposition is even now being exhibited in some quarters to the dead master, on account of his nationality. A representation of this masterly picture of honest German Philistine life during the middle ages; Shakespearean in spirit, and supported musically by all the subtleties of Wagnerian art, is . . . in course of preparation at Brussels, with a French version of the book from the pen of M. Victor Wilder . . . Our neighbours across the Channel are gifted with a quick perception and appreciation of the truly national in works of art, and the new French version of Wagner's 'Meistersinger' having once been successfully brought out in Belgium, the production and intelligent appreciation in the French capital of one of the artistic masterpieces of all ages will, we venture to predict in the interests of Frenchmen themselves, follow as a matter of course." Since we penned these lines some important steps have already been taken in French quarters towards the realisation of the prediction contained therein. During the last few weeks, performances of the entire music of the first and second acts of "Tristan und Isolde" have been given by the indefatigable conductor of the Chateau d'Eau Concerts, at Paris, M. Lamoureux, with the most unqualified success. More remarkable still, a journal, devoted exclusively, and even fanatically, to the propaganda of Wagnerian art, and aided by the pens of some very able and distinguished French writers—the *Revue Wagnérienne*—has (as stated in our last issue) been started in the French capital, with presumably a very fair chance of material support on the part of the public. Nor are these merely isolated instances of the rapidly growing tendency in France to favour the once so much-hated Bayreuth reformer.

A crowded audience assembled to witness the first performance of "Les Maîtres Chanteurs," on the 7th ult., at the Théâtre de la Monnaie of Brussels. Numerous foreign critics, amongst them the representatives of the

leading French press organs, testified by their presence to the importance attaching to this representation, which, prepared as it had been with infinite care and minute attention to all its details by the directors, MM. Stoumon and Calabresi, is generally admitted to have scored a signal success. Something of the enthusiasm which Wagner himself was wont to infuse into the spirit of even the most humble participants in the performances of his works seems to have pervaded the *personnel* of the theatre, which henceforth may justly pride itself upon having been the first to present Wagner's music-drama in the French language. In furnishing a few quotations from the most reliable journals connected with the art, we must give precedence to *Le Guide Musical*, the leading organ in matters musical in Belgium. This journal has for some time past prepared its readers, in judiciously written articles, for the present event, and in its most recent numbers it gives vent to a most refreshing (if, perhaps, somewhat premature) enthusiasm regarding the ultimate universal triumph of Wagner's art. It is evident that, at all events in this quarter, what used to be called the "music of the future" has become a very present and active principle. *Le Guide Musical* is full of praise concerning the performance as a whole, and the leading artists engaged therein—viz., MM. Seguin (Hans Sachs), Durat (Pogner), Soulaacroix (Beckmesser), Jourdain (Walther), and Madame Caron (Eva), the latter being, however, considered scarcely well suited for the part. The journal quoted sums up its criticism of the performance with a hearty "*Bravos à tous!*" The French press, though it does not exhibit the almost youthful enthusiasm of its Belgian contemporary, is nevertheless inclined to be laudatory, both as regards the performance and the merits of the work itself. Thus M. Adolphe Jullien in *Le Français* makes use of the following expressions: "Within this national and picturesque framework, Wagner has created a delicious musical comedy, where grace and poetry, pedantic science, and true inspiration are represented, and placed in opposition to each other with a dramatic force and an art altogether incomparable. The audience, too, though at first taken aback, soon acknowledged by its plaudits the presence of genius." Similar eulogistic reports are contained in *Le Progrès Artistique*, and, as a matter of course, in the new *Revue Wagnérienne*. On the other hand, there is no lack of antagonistic voices proceeding from the opposition camp. It is certainly curious to compare the above glowing *résumé* of the merits of "Die Meistersinger," considered as a music-drama, given by *Le Français*, with such observations as "This strange piece . . . is the most curious dramatic *olla podrida* imaginable." "I applaud his (Wagner's) veritable *chefs d'œuvres* . . . but these 'Maîtres Chanteurs'—Ah, they produce an indigestion," made use of by M. Leemans in *L'Art Musical*. Still more severe is the criticism furnished in *Le Ménestrel*, from the pen of M. Arthur Pougin. This eminent musical *savant* has devoted some six columns of that leading French music journal to the demolishing of the poet-composer's only humorous Opera, which appears to him anything but humorous, however, but solemnly dreary almost from beginning to end. If humour there be, it is—well, *l'humour allemand*. M. Pougin's strictures are, however, directed as much against the overbearing attitude of the ultra Wagnerians, as against the work under notice, "*cette œuvre colossale et d'une digestion terrible*." His observations are both interesting and instructive, as emanating from a very able and not unfairly biased representative of the strictly classical school in France. The opinion of this critic as to the want of dramatic interest, and the utter absence of the humorous element in "Les Maîtres Chanteurs," has brought M. Kufferath, of the *Guide Musical*, again to the fore, and he, in the last number but one of that journal, compares Wagner's work with some of the most subtle Comedies of Molière, and undertakes, moreover, to explain to his Paris *confrère* the combined satire and humorosity of the various situations. We have read M. Kufferath's spirited article with much pleasure. At the same time we cannot but think that his ardour in the cause he so ably represents has in this instance led him too far. It is proverbially an unsatisfactory thing to have to explain either a satire or a comic situation. "Wenn Ihrs nicht fühlt, Ihr werdet's nicht erjagen"—if you do not *feel* it, you will search for it in