

Handel's Messiah: Preface to the New Edition. I

Author(s): Professor Prout

Source: *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, Vol. 43, No. 711 (May 1, 1902), pp. 311-313

Published by: Musical Times Publications Ltd.

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3369304>

Accessed: 13-06-2016 10:39 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://about.jstor.org/terms>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Musical Times Publications Ltd. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*

painted by West; and a bust of Handel by Roubiliac—the same artist who designed the famous Vauxhall statue, now in the possession of Mr. Alfred Littleton, was made—are among the other numerous art-treasures in the Hospital. Hogarth's punch-bowl may also be seen, and there is a letter from Charles Dickens, dated 'February 26, 1840,' in which he regrets having to give up his pew in the chapel, by reason of his removal, 'as we miss it [the service] very much,' he says. Handel's tuning-fork, oil paintings of Weber (by Cawse), and Sir George Smart as a young man—the two portraits discovered by Mr. Davan Wetton—add interest to a very interesting collection of art possessions.

Further consideration of the history of the music at the Foundling Hospital Chapel—including the performance of Gounod's 'Redemption,' under Mr. H. Davan Wetton's careful direction, on the 15th ult.—must, by considerations of space, be held over until next month; but full acknowledgment must not be deferred of the facilities afforded to us through the kindness of Mr. Robert Grey, Treasurer, Mr. W. S. Wintle, Secretary, and Mr. H. Davan Wetton, Organist, in the preparation of this article on the music of the Foundling Hospital.

F. G. E.

(To be continued.)

HANDEL'S MESSIAH: PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION.

BY PROFESSOR PROUT.

I.

So many editions of Handel's greatest and most popular oratorio exist that the appearance of a new one seems to require some explanation. To give such explanation is the object of the present Preface.

There are two chief reasons which have induced the publishers to decide upon issuing a new and revised edition of the 'Messiah.' These are—first, the corruptness of the text of all existing editions,* and secondly, the unsatisfactory condition of the additional accompaniments in general use. Each of these reasons it will be necessary to discuss in some little detail.

It is extremely doubtful whether any other great musical work exists, the text of which is in even approximately so corrupt a condition as that of the 'Messiah.' Only those who have carefully collated the published editions, whether of the full or vocal score, with the original manuscript (now readily accessible through the photolithographed facsimiles), or with contemporary transcripts made by Handel's amanuensis, Christopher Smith, can have the least idea either of the number or character of the mistakes which are to be found in many movements.

* It is probable that the edition prepared by the late Dr. Chrysander for the German Handel Society will contain a correct text; but this edition, though stated to be in the press, is still unpublished at the time these lines are written.

This will be seen when, later in this Preface, the text of the present edition is discussed.

The deplorable condition of the existing text is not difficult to account for, though the explanation is hardly to the credit either of the critical acumen or the care of successive editors. The earliest edition of the score, published for the first time in a complete form by Randall and Abell, the successors of Walsh, and known as the Walsh Edition,* is, like most of the first editions of Handel's works, extremely incorrect. Arnold's edition, which was the next to follow, appeared in 1789, and is little more than a reprint of that which had preceded; the internal evidence proves clearly that it had never been collated with the original manuscript. Subsequent editors have, with hardly an exception, copied from these early editions, or from one another. Of all the numerous editions consulted in the preparation of the present volume, not a single one is even approximately correct in its text. Surely it is high time that musicians should at least have the opportunity of knowing what Handel actually wrote!

The other reason for a new edition is the unsatisfactory state of the additional accompaniments commonly used. Into the general question of the necessity for additional accompaniments it is not needful to enter at great length. It must however be pointed out that, from various causes, it is all but impossible in the present day to reproduce the effect of one of Handel's oratorios as it was given under his own direction. The balance of chorus and orchestra is, owing to the growth of chorus singing and the great size of our modern choral societies, absolutely different from what it was in Handel's time; the composition of the orchestra itself, and therefore its tone-quality, are not at all the same; the organs in our chief concert-rooms are far larger; and the harpsichord, to which Handel allotted so important a part in the accompaniment of his songs, has vanished altogether from the orchestra. That, under quite exceptional conditions, it is possible to give an approximate reproduction of Handel's chorus and orchestra was proved by the performance of 'Alexander Balus,' given at the Conference of the Incorporated Society of Musicians at Scarborough, in January, 1900; but the attempts made from time to time by our musical societies to give Handel's music as he meant it to be given must, however earnest the intention, and however careful the preparation, be foredoomed to failure from the very nature of the case. With our large choral societies, additional accompaniments of some kind are a necessity for an effective performance; and the question is not so much whether, as how they are to be written.

The additional accompaniments to the 'Messiah' used in this country, and I believe also abroad, are those known as Mozart's, for

* Schoelcher, in his 'Life of Handel' (p. 273), gives 1768 as the date of the first complete edition of the 'Messiah,' but it appeared in the year 1767.

which, as will be seen directly, he is only partially responsible. During the later years of his life, Mozart wrote additional accompaniments, at the request of Baron von Swieten, to four of Handel's works: 'Acis and Galatea,' 'Messiah,' 'Ode for St. Cecilia's Day,' and 'Alexander's Feast.' From the autograph catalogue of his compositions, which he kept from February, 1784, till within a few weeks of his death, we learn that he arranged the 'Messiah' in March, 1789. The work was published in 1803 by Messrs. Breitkopf and Härtel, but unfortunately not in the state in which Mozart had left it. Johann Adam Hiller, a musician of much repute in his day, and the first conductor of the celebrated Gewandhaus concerts at Leipzig, had already made an arrangement of the oratorio, and much of his version (or, to speak more accurately, 'perversion') was incorporated in the published score, which bore the title 'F. G. (*sic*) Händel's Oratorium Der Messias, nach W. A. Mozart's Bearbeitung'—*i.e.*, after (not 'in') Mozart's arrangement. As bearing upon the wording of this title, it is worthy of notice that the full score of Mozart's arrangement of 'Alexander's Feast,' also published early in last century, bears on the title 'mit neuer Bearbeitung von W. A. Mozart' ('with new arrangement by W. A. Mozart').

The credit of the first discovery of Hiller's participation in the so-called Mozart score is due to the late Professor E. F. Baumgart, of Breslau, who, in an article which appeared in 1862 in the *Niederrheinische Musikzeitung*, showed that the song 'If God be for us,' in the distorted form in which it appears in Mozart's score, was copied without alteration from Hiller's arrangement of the 'Messiah,' mentioned above. The question has since been fully investigated by Julius Schäffer, of Breslau, and the results will be found, by those who wish to go into the question, in his two elaborate articles on the subject in Nos. 43, 44 of the *Musikalisches Wochenblatt* for 1881. There is no longer room for the least doubt that the score attributed to Mozart was considerably altered and touched up by Hiller; and we now see why it was described on the title as 'after,' and not 'in' Mozart's arrangement.

The next question to be considered is: How much of the published score is Mozart's, and how much is Hiller's? As Mozart's autograph has disappeared, this point cannot be decided with absolute certainty; yet it is quite possible to form an approximately correct opinion on the subject. The autographs of Mozart's arrangements of the three other works by Handel—'Acis and Galatea,' 'Alexander's Feast,' and the 'Ode for St. Cecilia's Day'—are all in the Royal Library at Berlin, and the full scores of all of them are now published. I have carefully collated every page of these scores to ascertain, by comparing them with Handel's originals, what was really Mozart's method of procedure;

and I believe I cannot be far wrong in assuming that everything in the 'Messiah' score to which nothing analogous can be found in the genuine Mozart arrangements may be safely attributed to Hiller. The more important of these will be referred to in the detailed account of the revision of the text to be presently given; some of the worst of them are always omitted in performances of the oratorio in this country.

Not the slightest disparagement of Mozart's unsurpassed genius is intended when I say that, even after eliminating everything that could possibly have been added by Hiller, Mozart's score of the 'Messiah' cannot be considered wholly satisfactory. In the first place, the text is very incorrect. This was, under the circumstances, inevitable; because the only score published at the time that Mozart made his arrangement was that of Walsh, which, as has been already said, is full of bad mistakes. This will appear later in the collation of the text. As most of these mistakes were not *obviously* wrong, and, even if they had been, Mozart had no means of access to the original manuscript, he is not to be blamed for incorporating them in his edition. In any case, one result has probably been the perpetuation of some of the corrupt readings; for it is only natural that these should be copied by later editors, who would assume that so great a master as Mozart was not likely to be wrong.

A more serious blemish in the Mozart edition is that, in many of the solo passages which are accompanied by a more or less fully figured bass, the harmonies are not filled up. If there is one thing which may be considered certain with regard to the performance of Handel's music, it is that such passages were intended to be filled up either on the harpsichord or organ—generally the former. This we know, not merely from tradition,* but from the very fact of the basses being figured. In Handel's autographs figures are somewhat sparingly used, and are mostly omitted when the harmony is obvious; but in the printed editions a much fuller figuring is given. It is absurd to suppose that editors or printers would have taken the trouble to indicate the harmony if none was intended to be supplied. In a large number of such passages, Mozart omits to add anything. In 'But who may abide,' twelve bars are left with only two-part harmony; in 'Rejoice, greatly,' seventeen bars; and in 'But Thou didst not leave,' thirteen bars, or very nearly one third of the whole air. The same thing is to be found in the other works which Mozart arranged. It is possible that he intended the harmonies to be filled up on the piano; for Jahn, in his 'Mozart' (vol. iii., p. 219, of the English translation), tells us that at the oratorio performances given by Baron von Swieten in his palace, Mozart conducted, 'and young Joseph Weigl accompanied on the piano.' There is, however, no hint of a pianoforte, or of any keyed instrument, in any manuscript of the scores which Mozart arranged.

* See 'Proceedings of the Musical Association,' 1885-86, pp. 39, 40.

It is unnecessary to dwell upon the fact that Mozart (or possibly Hiller) has given a large part of the choruses 'And he shall purify,' 'For unto us,' and 'His yoke is easy' to solo voices, because in this country these movements are invariably sung as Handel intended. But attention must be called to the quite arbitrary alterations which Mozart makes in the instrumentation. In the chorus 'Their sound is gone out'—the only movement of the oratorio which has independent parts for oboes—Mozart has given the oboe parts to clarinets; while in the air 'How beautiful are the feet,' Handel's violin part is transferred to a flute for a considerable part of the movement. Still worse, Handel's brilliant and most effective trumpet parts in 'Hallelujah' and 'Worthy is the Lamb' are either cut out altogether (as in the opening of the last-named chorus) or so modified as to absolutely destroy their character. Jahn says that there were no players in Mozart's day who could manage them. Whatever may have been the case in Germany, it is quite certain that there are many players in England who can be safely trusted with them—excepting for an occasional high note, such as the upper D in the second bar of 'Worthy is the Lamb.' In this edition, therefore, Handel's trumpet parts have been restored, with a few slight alterations where they are written very high.

It has been already incidentally mentioned that Mozart's score is never heard exactly as printed—at least, not in England. This is in some degree a source of the confusion that exists; for there is no uniformity in the modifications that are made, and conductors, especially in the provinces, are frequently much troubled by the discrepancies in the orchestral parts. The edition by the late Robert Franz, published in 1885, might have remedied this, had he not hampered himself too much by too close an adherence to Mozart. On the title he describes his score as 'founded on Mozart's, with the necessary completions.' It is true, he has filled up the harmony in most of the passages left empty by Mozart; but, besides such points as his allotting the first part of 'He shall feed his flock' to a soprano, instead of to a contralto, according to Handel's later arrangement (seen in the Dublin score), and the retaining of the abridged and distorted version of 'The trumpet shall sound,'—two points which, apart from anything else, would prevent his edition from being acceptable in this country—his text is just as full of inaccuracies as Mozart's. Although in his preface he mentions the facsimile of the autograph as one of the sources of his edition, his collation of it, judging from the number of mistakes left uncorrected, must have been of a very cursory, not to say perfunctory character.

[Further instalments of Professor Prout's Preface will appear in these columns from time to time.—ED. M.T.]

Occasional Notes.

MANY HAPPY RETURNS OF THE DAY TO:—

Charles Lee Williams	-	-	-	May 1
Frederic Cliffe	-	-	-	" 2
Edmund Hart Turpin	-	-	-	" 4
John Christopher Marks	-	-	-	" 4
George J. Bennett	-	-	-	" 5
Thomas Tertius Noble	-	-	-	" 5
Edward H. Thorne	-	-	-	" 9
Jules Emile Frédéric Massenet	-	-	-	" 12
Albert Visetti	-	-	-	" 13
Arthur H. Mann	-	-	-	" 16
Eaton Fanning	-	-	-	" 20
W. E. Whitehouse	-	-	-	" 20
Joseph Parry	-	-	-	" 21
Emile Sauret	-	-	-	" 22
George F. Huntley	-	-	-	" 31
Fritz Hartvigson	-	-	-	" 31
Mark Hambourg	-	-	-	" 31

All the details of the music for the approaching Coronation of King Edward the Seventh and Queen Alexandra are now practically settled, Sir Frederick Bridge having submitted his complete scheme, which has been 'entirely approved of.' The music embodies works of English Cathedral writers covering no less a period than five centuries, beginning, as it does, with Tallis and Merbecke, and including the names of Orlando Gibbons, Purcell, Handel, Wesley, Smart, Sullivan, and Stainer. The music specially composed for the occasion consists of the Processional Anthem, 'I was glad,' by Sir Hubert Parry; an Introit, 'Be strong and play the man,' by Sir Walter Parratt, Master of the Musick to the King, to be sung immediately after the Crowning ceremony; and the Homage Anthem, 'Kings shall see, and arise,' by Sir Frederick Bridge, which will be sung during the time the Peers are doing homage to His Majesty.

Messrs. Novello are preparing a book containing the whole of the music which will be sung on the above auspicious occasion, and they will issue it at an early date. The Homage Anthem, specially composed by Sir Frederick Bridge, for the Coronation, will be published on the 8th inst.

Sheffield is to have the honour of furnishing the chorus for the State performance of the Coronation Ode, composed by Dr. Edward Elgar, at Covent Garden Theatre next month. This choice of Dr. Elgar's—who had a free hand in the matter of selection—is not to be wondered at, as Yorkshire is the county where choral singing flourishes *in excelsis*, especially in the city of Sheffield. In enlisting the aid of the Sheffield Festival Choir, the feelings of all separate musical organisations are spared; moreover, there is this advantage—that the Sheffield chorus will be rehearsing throughout the summer months, whereas other Yorkshire choral bodies are at that time of the year practically disbanded. The stage of Covent Garden will be untrodden ground for those 160 Sheffieldites, selected from the Festival chorus; but they will doubtless be on their mettle (to this extent they will feel at home) and, in spite of the name of their valiant chorus-master, they are sure to make a brave show. Dr. Coward and his faithful followers are to be heartily congratulated.