The Great Composers. No. XX. Glinka

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musical agencies on a basis with which that spirit accords. There is here no idea of protection to native talent at the general expense. That amounts to a very different thing with which we have no sympathy. Neither is there any question of preferring native incapacity to alien ability, which would be a foolish and suicidal course. But, taking a leaf from the book of our German friends, we would give the foreigner no chance against a native of equal gifts, and we would use up all our own talent for the purpose of making English music thoroughly homogeneous, root and branch. Such only is the true and practical course, seeing that nationalism in music is a great and important fact.

THE GREAT COMPOSERS

BY JOSEPH BENNETT.

No. XX.—GLINKA.

THE present number of THE MUSICAL TIMES contains some remarks upon nationalism in music. With that article may fitly be associated the beginning of a sketch of Michel Ivanovitch Glinka, the most national of composers; the founder of a Russian school, and the initiator of an artistic development which may, and probably will, exercise an immense influence upon music in general. The materials of the sketch will be taken from Glinka's memoirs of himself; from M. Octave Fouque's admirable biographical study of the Russian composer, and from other trustworthy sources.

As a rule, Music draws her greatest sons out of the ranks of those in humble life. For a Haydn she goes to a village bailiff, for a Mozart, to the house of an obscure teacher of her own art, for a Beethoven, to the dwelling of a still more obscure singer in a Court chapel. "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called." Glinka was one of the exceptions. His family belonged to the Russian aristocracy, and had for generations been settled in the government of Smolensk. Some of the name were wealthy, as well as titled, and the brother of Madame Glinka was not only able, but disposed, to keep a band of musicians attached to his household. Glinka's father, however, had not an excess of worldly goods. The village of Novospasskoïe belonged to him, it is true, and he kept the state of a country gentleman in the midst of retainers and serfs. Nevertheless, the retired army captain was not a Cræsus, and, when he indulged in home festivities, the borrowing of his relative's orchestra always suggested itself as a needful measure of economy.

Michel Ivanovitch came into the world on May 20, 1804, at the village above named. He was a delicate child, nervously sensitive to the last degree, and often ailing. On account of this, perhaps, the future composer passed under the care of his paternal grandmother, an excellent old lady who nearly killed her charge with kindness, and, animated by the best intentions, did all she could to perpetuate his feeble health. The winds of heaven were not allowed to blow upon the precious child; the temperature of his room was regulated as though it were that of an orchid-house; beyond its walls young Michel was a moving bundle of furs; he had everything he cried for, and as he pretty often demanded confectionery his digestive organs were impaired with promptitude and despatch. Early training of this kind produces a hypochondriac, and Glinka's autobiography shows that such was the result in his case. It is curiously verbose on the question of health, and largely taken up with what Dr. So-and-so said and did, and how Dr. What's-his-name said and did something very different, with a consequence equally barren of good.

Young Glinka's sensitiveness quickly manifested itself as that of a musical nature. The singing of the church choir profoundly impressed him, and one of his childish amusements was the imitation of church bells upon brass basins which he arranged with some approach to a scale. But the boy's great delight came with his uncle's orchestra, when those musicians visited the lord of Novospasskoïe. On one occasion, Michel being then nine or ten years old, a clarinet quartet by Crusel was played with an effect which, for a time, completely dominated the boy's heart and intellect. It is said that he could think of nothing else, that he passed some days as in an ecstatic dream, and that, when his drawing-master reproached him with inattention, he exclaimed: "Music is my soul." The influence of his uncle's orchestra had another result—one much more lasting and important. It was the custom of an evening for two flutes, two clarinets, two horns, and two bassoons to perform Russian national airs and folk-melodies. The receptive nature of young Glinka thus became steeped in the character and colour of the beautiful tunes belonging to his native land, and thus, we may reasonably suppose, he received his first impulse toward a course afterwards pursued by him so far and with such good effect. Who of those about the lad could have guessed that, as the family musicians played the familiar strains, they were helping to create a composer destined to lay, upon the basis of his country's national music, the foundation of a national style, and place Russia on the road towards the front of recognised artistic nations? Yet so it was. The echoes of those performances in the mansion at Novospasskoïe will go down the "ringing grooves of time."

It was not to be expected that Michel Ivanovitch would keep his hands off the instruments. During the family festivities, the son of the house was more often in the orchestra than among the company, but happily, the father did not oppose his boy's preference. There was, of course, no thought of a musical career. After the manner of his class, young Glinka would go into the service of the State, and spend his life in the discharge of routine duties, relieved, perhaps, by a good deal of fiddling. With this end in view, he was taken to St. Petersburg, at the age of thirteen, and entered at the school for the children of the nobility. He resided at a *pension*, with three comrades, under the care of a governor, who seems to have encouraged rather than hindered the study of music. Be this as it may, young Glinka received permission to furnish his room with a grand pianoforte, upon which he made rapid progress. The boy was quick all round. He soon made himself master of Latin, French, German, English, and Persian, studied zoology and geography with ardour, and after a while was appointed a sub-teacher in arithmetic and algebra. Glinka left the St. Petersburg school at the age of eighteen, duly qualified to take service under government, but for this he was in no hurry. We next hear of him two years later, when the state of his health made advisable a resort to some sulphur baths in Circassia. He dilates largely in his memoirs upon this first journey south, where all nature assumed a new aspect to one brought up upon the uninteresting plains, and amid the forbidding physical conditions of Russia. At the close of his "cure"—which, by the way, was not a cure—Glinka returned to his father's place at Novospasskoïe. What he did there may best be told in his own words:—

"I resumed the study of music with new ardour. Twice a week we received friends, and on each occasion the orchestra played. I prepared these evenings in the following manner: I made each artist, with the exception of the best, rehearse apart

till he had not one false or doubtful note. I could thus study from the beginning the methods of orchestral masters. Next I judged the general effect, myself directing the performance, violin in hand. When the piece ran smoothly, I stood aside and heard it at a distance. Here are the principal pieces in our *répertoire*: Among Overtures, 'Medea,' 'L'Hotellerie Portugaise,' 'Lodoiska,' 'Faniska,' and 'Les Deux Journées' of Cherubini (the first two were my favourites); 'Joseph,' 'Le Trésor Supposé,' and 'L'Irate' of Méhul; 'Don Giovanni,' 'Die Zauberflöte,' 'La Clemenza di Tito,' and 'Le Nozze di Figaro' of Mozart; 'Leonora' (in E) of Beethoven; among Symphonies, Haydn in B flat, Mozart in G minor, Beethoven in D. The overtures of Rossini were not yet played."

Well may the mouth of a young musician water as he thinks of this noble Russian lad, able thus to command the services of an orchestra, to whom—as no doubt the players were serfs—his slightest word was law. Glinka had a "good time" under the paternal roof, and felt, perhaps, that he could thus go on for ever. But it became necessary to enter upon a career befitting his station, wherefore, in May, 1824, the young man, being then twenty years old, left his native village to take post as assistant secretary in the Ministry of Roads and Communications. We cannot imagine a more uncongenial place, as far as the work went, but happily there was not much of it. "The salary was good," says one biographer; "the labour slight, the responsibility nil." On these accounts, Glinka put up with his fate; doing so the more cheerfully because many of his fellow officials, and of the society into which he was thrown, were ardent musical amateurs, to say nothing of the fact that all the concerts and operatic performances of the capital were open to him. Having plenty of time on his hands, Glinka now began to study music under Carl Mayer, who, having measured the talent of his pupil, would accept no pay for services rendered. "You have too much ability," he said, "for me to go on acting as your professor. Come to me every day and we will make music together." Previously, however, Glinka had taken some lessons from John Field, of whom he writes in his Memoirs:—

"Although I did not hear him very often, I still remember (Glinka wrote at the age of fifty) his playing, which was at the same time gentle and strong, and marked by admirable precision. One might say, not that he struck the keys, but that his fingers fell upon them like great drops of rain spilt in pearls upon velvet. I do not share—and here I believe myself in agreement with all music-lovers who have heard Field—I do not share the opinion of Liszt, who one day said to me that he found the playing of this master to be 'sleepy.' No; Field's playing was not sleepy; on the contrary, it was often bold, capricious, unexpected. He simply took care not to let his art descend to the level of charlatanism; his ideal being very far from thrashing the keyboard, after the manner of pianists who are now the fashion."

Mayer exercised a good influence upon his friend and pupil. "He taught him," writes M. Fouque, "to distinguish the divers kinds of music, to prefer the true classics, and to interpret them correctly and simply, without exaggeration or affectation. Mayer was not a pedant, but an artist. This was why his pupil loved him so. An ordinary pedagogue could have done nothing with Glinka, who carried so far his horror of teaching and learning by routine as to give up studying harmony, under a former master, after receiving one lesson on intervals and their inversions. He composed, nevertheless, and Mayer agreed to be his guide. But at that time, he tells us,

his theoretical notions were so vague that more often than not he took up his pen knowing neither where to begin, nor how to go on, nor where to end."

Glinka's musical labours, and his light duties at the Government office were, happily for him, not much disturbed by the events which attended the accession of the Emperor Nicholas. Every reader knows that those events comprised an insurrection in the capital, and its sanguinary suppression by a man not given to half-measures, when there was a question of having his own way. The educated youth of St. Petersburg were, as usual, well to the fore, not only in the streets, but on the road to Siberia. Often was Glinka reproached for not throwing in his lot with the cause which Nicholas stamped out—for the time. "You have no serious purpose," his friends would say, "you waste your time on unworthy frivolities." But the assistant-secretary was not to be caught. He showed himself at the office day by day; made music with Mayer as often as possible, and allowed revolutionaries and governments to fight out their quarrel as they thought best. All the same he had a terrible fright, concerning which we read in the Memoirs:—

"On the morning of December 14, we, that is to say, the son of our old sub-inspector at the *pension*, and myself, went out early. We walked towards the Winter Palace, and soon saw the Emperor come forth. The majestic and imposing figure of our sovereign remains deeply graven on my memory. I saw him that day for the first time. Pale, with a somewhat melancholy air, his arms crossed upon his breast, and walking slowly, he came towards the mob and said 'Children, children, disperse.' My friend and I remained some hours in the Place, and then, being hungry, I went to Bactourine's. Happily for my life or, at any rate, for my limbs, that I did so, for shortly afterwards the sound of musketry was heard. Somewhat later, the cannon spoke."

"A few days passed and then, in the middle of the night, some one knocked at my door. I opened it to Colonel Varenzof, a staff-officer attached to my department, who, in a tone admitting of no reply, ordered me to follow him immediately to his Highness's house."

"Imagine the stupor of a man scarcely awake, and not knowing of what he was charged. Fancy that among the insurgents were men with whom I had been very intimate. I experienced then, though for a very short time, the sensation of fear. My heart was frozen; my spirit dropped down to my toe-nails. I dressed quickly, and, on the road to the residence of the Duke of Wurtemberg, brother of the Empress, I begged the Colonel to tell me of what I was accused. He reassured me in a word: Kuchelbecker, a former governor, was mixed up with the conspiracy. Two of his nephews, who were my relatives, had fled. The police were after them, and desired assurance that they were not hidden in my house. Introduced to the presence of his Highness, I calmly explained in French, of which language I had great command, that my cousins, sons of a gentleman-of-the-chamber to the Grand Duke, and educated at Government cost were well-disposed young men. He heard me favourably and dismissed me."

No more than thus slightly and indirectly was Glinka ever involved in the domestic troubles of his native land.

Having composed many Romances, and such like, for the piano, our hero was now to essay a more ambitious flight. Amateur musical and dramatic performances were then much in vogue at the houses of the Russian nobility, and when on a visit to General Apoukhine, near Smolensk, Glinka wrote a

Cantata, having the accession of Nicholas as its subject. In the performance of this he took the part of Genius, wings on shoulders and torch in hand. With regard to the music we read in the Memoirs:—"The music was truly dramatic; that is to say it exactly fitted the sense of the words." The young Russian's success as composer and artist in this piece may have had something to do with his next important step—resignation of the post under government. At any rate, command of his entire time enabled the young noble to enter fully into the artistic diversions of society. What these were may best be gathered from his own account:—

"At the end of August, 1828, Galitzin (afterwards well known in London), Tolstoi, other young men, and myself conceived the idea of giving a public serenade upon the water. We took two vessels, and illuminated them with Venetian lanterns. In one were the organisers of the *fête*; in the other the trumpets of the Chevalier Guards. On the poop of the first was a piano, with the aid of which I accompanied and directed the chorus. I recall the excellent effect produced by Tolstoi's tenor voice in the Romances. The chorus 'Sonnez, sonnez,' from Boieldieu's 'La Dame Blanche,' was very well executed. After each piece the second vessel burst into fanfares. Instruments with keys and pistons had not yet been invented, and the ear did not suffer the false and discordant sounds which now irritate. A mazurka of Count Wielhorski, written specially for trumpets, made a strong impression upon me. Later on I composed the Slavsia in "Life for the Czar," for plain trumpets, and if it were possible to-day to form an orchestra like that which took part in our serenades, it is certain that that *Finale* would have a great effect."

"The *Abeille du Nord* spoke of our serenade, and this success tempted us to go on. We soon gave a representation to Prince Kotchoubey, President of the Council of the Empire. We were sixteen young fellows, and we had an orchestra, with Mayer at the piano. Dressed as a woman, I played *Donna Anna* in a translation of Mozart's 'Don Giovanni'; then I improvised at the pianoforte."

"We gave another performance at the Palace of Tsarsko-Sélo. A serenade of mine was sung, also some couplets, with chorus, which I had composed to words by Galitzin. Ivanof sang the couplets; the chorus was confided to the choir of the Imperial Chapel, of which Ivanof himself was a member."

"From there we went to Marino, in the government of Novgorod the Great, two hundred versts from St. Petersburg. At the house of Princess Stroganoff I played *Figaro* in 'The Barber of Seville.'"

A pleasant picture of Russian cultured life is here revealed. It may be doubted whether in any other country at that time—certainly not in England—young patricians were found giving themselves up to artistic endeavour in the fashion of Glinka and his fellows.

Our composer now had a desire to travel, and especially to visit Italy. This his father, ordinarily so gracious, forbade with firmness, till a convenient medical man discovered "a quadrille of diseases dancing in his body," and ordered him at once to seek a warmer climate. The paternal interdict was forthwith removed, and Glinka, accompanied by the tenor, Ivanof, set out (April 25, 1830) for the "land of song." The travellers made straight for Milan, where Glinka, enchanted with all he saw, fell into a state of chronic enthusiasm. He speaks rapturously in his Memoirs of the magnificent Cathedral, the purity of the heavens, the black eyes of the ladies,

and the elegance of their costume. He, in turn, soon became a *persona grata* with society in the Lombardian capital. He made many friends, especially among the fair sex, and it is a suggestive fact that he gave up, at this time, his habit of dedicating compositions to individuals, which "gave rise to tittle-tattle and caused jealousies." He composed a good deal, by the way, but mostly confined himself to working up into fantasies, serenades, and such like the melodies of Rossini, Donizetti, &c. During Glinka's stay in Milan "La Sonnambula" was produced at the Scala, with an effect which the Russian describes:—

"This work, awaited with impatience, produced, despite its faults, a prodigious effect. Towards the last Pasta and Rubini, who played the leading parts, sang with veritable enthusiasm in their desire to support Bellini, whom they preferred before all. In the touching *Finale* of the second act they really wept. It was indeed a singular experience to see, in full Carnival, everybody breaking down and crying, on the stage and all over the house. I had a place in the Russian Ambassador's box, where my compatriots and myself shed a reasonable quantity of tears."

Glinka began taking lessons in counterpoint at Milan, under Professor Basili, while his friend Ivanof studied singing under Bianchi. But the young noble found routine work as difficult and uncongenial as ever. He could see nothing satisfactory in poring over the rules which Basili considered as the essence of musical life, and it is to be feared that master and pupil did not get on very well together. In October, 1831, Glinka was at Naples, whence, leaving Ivanof to take lessons from Nozzari, he returned to the North of Italy, and resumed his gay Milan life, ultimately travelling to Berlin for the purpose of visiting his married sister. He has himself summed up the results of his Italian trip:—

"I was often ill, but I had also much enjoyment, and received many poetic impressions in that land. My frequent intercourse with the singers of the first and second order, as well as with excellent amateurs, gave me an insight into the practical details of the vocal art. I learned to write well for the voice in hearing Nozzari and Madame Fodar—artists who advanced singing to the highest degree of perfection. . . . As for my attempts at composition during this period, I fancy that they were bad enough. I made useful reflections upon that branch of my art, but the works I wrote to please my Milanese friends—they were very obligingly published by Ricordi—served to show me that I had not found my line, and that I could never be sincerely Italian. Home sickness forced upon me, little by little, the idea of composing Russian music."

Upon the sentence last quoted, M. Fouque makes some very appropriate remarks: "In effect, it is from this time that we see him tormented by the thought of creating a national school of music for his own country. Strange law of contrast! It is at Milan, under a sky so different from his own, in face of nature with a foreign aspect, before the monuments of an alien civilisation, surrounded by Italians, who, however, were fond of him—it is there that he feels Russia in his inmost soul, and is a Northerner to the very marrow."

On his way to Berlin, Glinka passed through Vienna, heard Strauss's orchestra, and wrote a Cracovienne under the force of its inspiration. On reaching the Prussian capital, he put himself under Dehu for harmony and counterpoint. But the national music of Russia was more to him than exercises. It haunted him day by day.

(To be continued.)