Review

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The Language of the Flowers. Suite de Ballet, by Frederic H. Cowen. I. Pianoforte Solo. II. Pianoforte Duet. [Metzler and Co.]

It was a happy thought that led Mr. Cowen, in view of a series of orchestral concerts, to compose this work for the purpose of relief from the gravity of more serious things. In his most sanguine moments, it may be, he did not expect for the Suite de Ballet such a success as it met with. The little pieces were presented as trifles, but the public saw in them very much more than trifling talent. Charmed with their grace and fancy, amateurs became enthusiastic about them, and the result was not only a repetition performance, but two arrangements, one for pianoforte solo, another for pianoforte à quatre mains.

The Suite, we need hardly say, is called "The Language of the Flowers" because each piece aims to be a musical expression of that which a particular flower is supposed to signify. The idea is a pretty one, and lends no little charm to the music. A general motto is prefixed to the set:—

Youth that ne'er grows old,
Dwells with Nature and her flowers, and Beauty sleeps
In her most green recesses.

This furnishes the sentiment of the whole, and looking for an evolution of beauty, we pass to No 1, "Daisy," typical of innocence, and having as its motto Burns's well-known line: "Wee, modest, crimson tippit flower." This is an Allegretto scherzando in G major, 6-8, dainty and delicate as to theme, and accompanied for the most part by chords on the first, second, fourth, and fifth quavers in each bar. The style and character of the movement is decidedly uncommon, while the simple elegance of the subject harmonises with what we, perhaps, ought to call its "poetic basis." No. 2, "Lilac," expresses the first emotions of love, and is prefaced by the lines:

I dreamed that love
Should steal upon the heart like summer dawn,
Soft, gradual.

A fragment of the "Daisy" theme preludes this number, and is followed by an Andante in F major, 3-4, having as its principal feature a two-part "song without words," most unpretending, yet, withal, most expressive. Once or twice the Andante rises to passion, and is very effective when at that altitude, but its general purport is subdued, not to say sad. The technical merit of the movement is considerable, one or two enharmonic transitions being especially happy; but an orchestra is needed to bring out the full charm of its structure, as well as to lend it the advantage of colour. No. 3, "Fern," deals with fascination:—

She's outwardly
... all that entrances,
Nor is it in our power to uncharm it.

We have here a Moderato in B flat, common time, well adapted by its light and tripping character for pianoforte use. The movement is singularly erratic and wilful, like some pretty child of wayward tendencies, spoiled by admiration. At first the short, detached phrases wander off into many keys, but they eventually combine into a light-some flow of sound that, when properly brought out, charms as does the tinkling fall of a tiny fountain jet into its basin. No. 4, "Columbine," expresses folly:—

Yet Folly ever has ...
... a trifling air.

The particular folly here suggested would seem to be that of a carnival, for the music leaps and rolls and tumbles about with a sort of lumbering recklessness quite true to the conventional merriment of such a season. The movement is a Presto in C major, 3-4 time. Following it comes a Gavotte, "Yellow Jasmine," typifying elegance and grace:—

We were charmed,
... for the beautiful was there
Triumphant.

And the beautiful is here also beyond question. A more delightful thing of its kind modern music cannot show. It is a musical embodiment of the quaint and somewhat formal grace that characterised the dances of the "good old times." No wonder the audience at Mr. Cowen's concerts encored it as often as the chance was afforded them. Last of all comes the "Lily of the valley," indicating the return of happiness. This movement opens with a fragment of the Folly theme, and consists mainly of a

pretty subject in waltz rhythm (E flat, 3-4), followed by a second subject in A flat, and relieved by a reference to the passionate episode in "First Emotions of Love." Developed at some length, the finale ends, with propriety and effect, a series of pieces the success of which will, we trust, induce Mr. Cowen to write others similar in character. Music that is pure and good, and also likely to be popular, cannot have too high an estimate set upon it.

The Great Musicians. Edited by F. Hueffer. Schubert. By H. F. Frost. Weber. By Sir Julius Benedict.
[Sampson Low and Co.]

THE series of biographical sketches, now in course of publication by Messrs. Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, has recently been increased by the volumes named above. Within the compass of such works we cannot expect more than an outline of the subjects on which they treat; but it is due both to Mr. Frost and Sir Julius Benedict to say that they have turned the space allowed them to good account, and presented as complete a record of their heroes' lives as circumstances allowed. The materials for a Schubert biography are not profusely scattered about, and Mr. Frost was obliged to draw with a liberal hand upon the very unsatisfactory work of Dr. Kreissle. He has, however, not neglected the few other available authorities, and his book is useful because giving Schubert's life-story succinctly and consecutively. At the end Mr. Frost makes some interesting observations on the music of Schubert, a catalogue of which is appended.

Sir Julius Benedict's life of Weber—dedicated by permission to the Queen—consists of his well-known and interesting lecture upon the master in an expanded form, and with considerable additions of new matter. It had long been felt that Sir Julius's lecture should be committed to the safe custody of print, since no one living could speak with more authority respecting a good deal of Weber's artistic career than his favourite pupil and friend. In its present book-form the lecture is very welcome, and will probably go down to posterity as a standard work within the range to which it is confined. Sir Julius has neglected nothing of importance in Weber's life, while the entire narrative is made attractive by great and, under the circumstances, surprising grace of style and purity of language. The appended catalogue of Weber's works is valuable to the English reader because containing translations of Otto Jahn's descriptive and critical observations upon each Opus. This alone is worth more than the price charged for the entire book.

The Watchword. *Would you ask my heart?*
Kings and Queens. *The silent tide.*

Four-part Songs. Words by Mary Mark-Lemon.

The Rhine-raft Song. *The Song to Pan.*
In April time.

Four-part Songs. Words by Frederick Enoch.
Composed by Ciro Pinsuti.

[Novello, Ewer and Co.]

SIGNOR PINSUTI has so long been known as a composer of some of the most artistic and refined vocal music that the publication of this group of Part-songs would need but little more than a record of the fact, with an assurance that they "fully sustain his reputation," were we not convinced that many in the list are (at least in dramatic feeling) far above anything he has yet written for a choir. "The Watchword" is a highly characteristic composition; for although simple in construction, it is a perfect little story; and, if well sung, could not fail to produce a powerful effect. The movement of the "armed men" out of the city gates, in the first verse, is exquisitely contrasted with the watchings of the "maidens true," in the next verse, which is in the tonic minor, both ending with the impassioned phrase "Each for himself, and Allah for all!" Then in the third and final verse the riding back of the thinned band of warriors, their broken lances telling of the past struggle, is deeply pathetic, the watchword again raised by the victors forming a fitting climax to a tale both the words and music of which are touched by a truly sympathetic hand. "Kings and Queens" has a bold and melodious theme, with a charming modulation, not only striking in itself, but thoroughly expressive of the words. The smooth writing