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Handel and Bach: Part I

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JANUARY 5, 1885.

H. C. BANISTER, Esq.,

IN THE CHAIR.

HANDEL AND BACH.

BY PROFESSOR SIR G. A. MACFARREN.

PART I.

THIS year, on whose threshold we are now standing, is a notable date in musical history, notable by reflection of the past, and let us hope notable in the manner in which that past will be commemorated. It is 200 years since Handel and Bach were born. The Greeks, Egyptians, and Chaldeans insisted on the relationship supposed to exist between music and astronomy. They counted the seven planets as representative of the seven notes. Fiction lies at the root of this supposition, since then the earth was regarded as the centre, and the sun as one of the planets revolving round it. But supposing the idea to be metaphorical, it may give license to another figure of the same kind. I will suppose these great men who have been named to be double stars, influencing a planetary system that yielded, on the principle of gravitation, to their attraction and repulsion. The planets which surround those double stars are the men whose works they studied, or they rivalled, or surpassed. George Boehm, an organist and composer for the organ, was resident in the town of Luneberg where the youthful Bach spent three years. Buxtehude, the Dane, who for long resided in Lubeck, was visited by Handel and by Bach. Fuchs lived through their time, and his "*Gradus ad Parnassum*" was the authority for counterpoint throughout Germany for an entire century. Johann Kasper Kerl was a notable composer of the period. Reinhard Keiser was the man who established a national opera in Germany, several years later than English opera had been instituted; but, by his multitudinous productions, and by the assistance he gave to other composers, he advanced theatrical music in his country to a very prominent state of perfection, and laboured also in the service of the church with very admirable effect. Kuhnau is notable as having been the first German to apply the term "*sonata*" to an instrumental composition, extending the plan of such a work very largely from the first pieces ever so defined, namely, the organ com-

positions by Gabrieli, in Venice, in the last portions of the sixteenth century. Mattheson was the friend of Handel's youth, he was a composer, singer and historian. Muffat, father and son, were two great notabilities of the period. Pachelbel was still more famous than they, and it is to be supposed that his writings had a very large influence on the style of Bach. Rheinken was admired, not alone for his written compositions, but for his remarkable power of improvisation on the choral tunes of the Lutheran Church. Telemann was in several instances placed in rivalry with both our composers; and Walther was the fellow townsman for many years of Bach, whose intimate friend he was, and one who left many biographical particulars with regard to him. There must also be considered three very famous Italian violinists, two of whom were in Germany, and one still remaining in his own country, but exercising a very large influence on the development of music in Germany. These were Albinoni, Vivaldi, and Corelli.

If you accept this fancy of the musical planetary system, you will be perhaps indulgent of another. The chemical and electrical phenomena that have induced the geological formation of the earth, may be presumed to have some correlation with the natural influences which work on the spiritual as powerfully as those do on the material composition of the universe. The fact that these two great men worked together, and that they only followed by a very brief period another man, who may well be counted a third of so illustrious a party, who lived ten years through their lives—I mean Henry Purcell—it is fair to suppose that there may be some influence at work that affects the higher mental powers, and that induced at that particular period such an exceptional organisation as resulted in the genius of each of these three men.

Comparison is not criticism, and in speaking of these men, who have many things in common, one would rather use disparison to point out the incidents in which their personal characteristics, their artistic powers, and their biographical careers differed; but if one will not compare, one may make a parallel of the incidents of their lives. Handel was born in Halle, now a university town, but the university was not founded until a few years after the birth of our master. It is also a cathedral town, but does not possess a cathedral of remote antiquity, for the building dates from somewhere about the period of our Henry VIII. The composer was born on the 23rd of February, though strangely that date is mis-stated on his monument as the 24th, but some persons who have been diligent and careful in research have proved that the 23rd was truly his birthday, and the 24th his baptismal day, it having been the custom at that period to baptise a child on

the day after its birth. It was in that year which according to the New Style is counted 1685, but on the tombstone in Westminster Abbey is stated to have been 1684. This perhaps needs a word of explanation. At the period when the Old Style prevailed the year began in March, so that the names of the months then accorded with their positions in the year. September, October, November and December were the seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth months, while January and February were the eleventh and twelfth, consequently, on that particular day in February, Handel was born in the year then reckoned as 1684, but in the New Style, which threw the first of the year back to January, instead of March, it corresponded with 1685. His father was a physician, who looked upon our beautiful art of music with disdain. He considered that it was a fair amusement, but no occupation for an intelligent and respected citizen. He had taken long to mature this view on an important subject, for at the time of Handel's birth, the father was sixty-three years old. That fact was curiously stated or mis-stated by a biographer, some five or six-and-twenty years since, who begins his book by saying "the father of Handel was sixty-three years old when he was born." The mother of Handel was then thirty-five. As a smallest child his disposition for music was already evinced. It is not shown by what means he obtained the placing of a spinet in an attic or loft. The spinet itself has a very faint sound, and this sound was deadened by weights on the lid; the spinet was at the top of the house, and the boy could go to it and try his musical experiments without being over-heard by his father. At seven years old, he learnt that his father, the doctor, was to visit an elder son, the child of a former wife, who was in the service of the Duke of Saxe Weissenfels, and the little boy, Handel, wished to accompany him. He was refused, was persistent, ran after the lumbering travelling coach, protesting that he must go, until at last his father relented, and carried the urchin with him. In the Duke's chapel the child found his way to the key-board of the organ, and to the surprise of everybody, played in such a manner as to show that he had already obtained some mastery of the finger-board, and it was on the persuasion of the Duke that then the physician allowed his son to be thoroughly trained in music.

Now, let us look to the infancy of the other star of our musical firmament. He was born twenty-six days later than Handel, in Eisenach, another town of the Saxon territory, a town interesting in musical history as having been the gathering place of the Minnesingers, when they assembled for the tournaments of song which in the thirteenth century were held in the Wartburg, a castle of one of the Saxon

Princes, which overhangs the town. This castle of the Wartburg is also interesting as having been the place of protection of Luther when he came from the Diet of Worms, and was pursued by the opponents of the Reformation. There he was screened, there he made his translation of the Scriptures, and, after ten months, found opportunity to pass into the world again. Thus there is a religious as well as a musical association with the town of Eisenach, and the castle of Wartburg. The father of Bach and his twin brother are said to have been so much alike in figure, in face, in voice, and in manner, that their two wives knew them not apart except by their dress. The family of Bach had been notable in our art for 200 years, and continued for almost another century most strongly to represent music throughout all the district of Thuringia, and the surrounding portions of Germany. The earliest of the family of whom is any record is supposed to have fled from some religious persecution in the early part of the sixteenth century into Hungary, and to have returned when matters were quiet into the district where his sons, and their several sons and grandsons, generation after generation, practised music. These many cousins had the habit of assembling at a particular period every year, and it is said that upwards of 300 of them, all having family relationship, all being musicians, and all of them bearing the name of Bach, have sometimes met together. The occasion of their meeting was to compare their musical productions of the year, and to perform such of them as were practicable. The father of Bach was especially a violinist, hence it may be thought our infant composer heard very much of the violin, and doubtless practised it himself. The mother of Bach died before he was ten years old; in seven months his father married again, and, two months after the marriage with the second wife, himself died, so that in the year 1695 Bach was an orphan. He was taken then into the protection of his elder brother, Johann Christoph. One remarkable point throughout the annals of the family is the very frequent use of the name of Johann. There was obviously no scruple or hesitation about applying to several brothers this same name, so the father of our great Johann Sebastian was Johann Ambrosius, his brother was Johann Christoph, a nephew of whom, the elder brother of Bach, was also Johann Christoph. He probably continued to Sebastian any musical education which had been begun by a kind of natural inheritance; but he seems to have had a very remarkable reticence as to the manner in which he would pour forth his instruction. Music printing was very little practised at that period, and the multiplication of copies of musical works was principally made by hand. The elder brother possessed a book with some choice speci-

mens of the compositions of the time, which Sebastian desired to study. His brother forbade him a sight of the book, declaring that it was far too advanced in character for his comprehension. It was locked up in a closet with a trellis-work door, and Sebastian on moonlight nights put his small hand between the breaks in the trellis; the MS. was happily unbound, and so he could roll up the sheets and draw them forth. He took them to the moonlighted window and copied the music; but having such sparing opportunity as the full moon afforded, the task occupied him for a year. At its conclusion, the brother discovered the transcript and took it from him, and the boy did not recover it until many years afterwards. When Bach was fifteen, namely, in the year 1700, he aimed at independence, and proceeded to the not remote town of Luneberg, where he was admitted to the community called the *Matin Singers* of St. Michael's Church. Here was given an education in literature as well as music, and he studied Latin, and, as far as was within the possibilities of the place, organ playing, particularly making the acquaintance of Boehm, to whom I have already alluded, from whom it may be supposed that he received counsel.

Throughout this period let us look at what was the work of Handel. He was placed under Zackau, the organist of the cathedral, and almost instantaneously developed such remarkable ability as to excite the surprise of every one who met him; nay, even in that early period, before he was eleven years old, his master declared the boy had learnt all that was within his power to teach. After very urgent persuasion, his father consented that young Handel should go under the care of a relative to Berlin. Thither he went, was taken to Court, and became the admiration of all who heard him; but more than that, he became the object of jealousy to an Italian composer, who afterwards became his rival in London, but was then a mature man engaged in the Court of Prussia in the capacity of composer—Giovanni Bononcini. Another of Handel's subsequent rivals, Ariosti, was likewise in Berlin at the time, and showed as much kindness and encouragement to the boy as the other Italian displayed the reverse. The Elector of Brandenburg was so much pleased with the boy's manifestation of talent that he proposed to send him under proper protection to Italy, to continue his musical studies; but his father, having an independent spirit, withdrew him from Berlin, and would not allow him to accept this seemingly valuable proposal. In the course of young Handel's twelfth year, his father died. It appears that then he must have worked on under the direction of Zackau, having acted as substitute for him when other avocations took him from the cathedral duties. This in so young a child is itself a matter for admiration. Then

one Johann Christoph Schmidt, by a few years Handel's senior, made his acquaintance. He was not a musician, but he seemed to have the power of perceiving, if he could not emulate, the talent of our young hero. He attached himself to him, used to accompany him to the organ gallery, perhaps to draw his stops, perhaps to turn his pages, perhaps to walk with him home after the Cathedral Service; but, as is to be noticed in other instances of satellites of men distinguished in society, Schmidt attached himself to this boy at the time, and anon renewed his acquaintance and became the associate of his later life. Handel at this time was in constant intercourse with Telemann, whom I have named. In 1703, the year at which we had arrived in the history of Bach, when he left the school at Luneberg, Handel went to Hamburg, where was a flourishing opera under the direction of Keiser. There he met with Mattheson, who introduced him to the musical manager, from whom he obtained an engagement to play in the band. Mattheson had to sing in an opera of his own composition, the subject being "Anthony and Cleopatra." It was the custom then to accompany throughout the recitatives, and largely also in the rhythmical music, upon the harpsichord, in addition to the instruments of the band; and it was the composer's office, when present, to accompany his own work. But this of course was incompatible, in the case of Mattheson, with his singing the character of Anthony, and he therefore deputed Handel to take his place at the harpsichord on the first representation. The story was so arranged that the hero of the opera died in the second act. In the third act Mattheson came down and insisted on the seat as the accompanist of the recitative. Handel said, "I am here for the evening, and shall not quit my place." The performance went through, but when the two left the theatre a strong altercation took place between them, which resulted in their drawing swords, and a duel, which would have ended fatally but for the peculiar good fortune that the sword of Mattheson broke upon a large coat button of Handel's. Think of the value of a coat button! We owe to that coat button all the compositions which are known, and loved, and respected of the mighty master. We should have had no Italian operas, no oratorios, no suites of lessons, no concertos but for the happy fortune of his having a coat with large buttons.

We come now to a particular point in the history of Bach, namely, that he was engaged in the year 1703 as one of the members of the band of the Duke of Saxe-Weimar to play the violin. But before the year was out an appointment as organist was open at the small town of Arnstadt, to which he went rejoicing in the opportunity to exercise his ability on a larger scale than playing a ripieno violin in the

orchestra. In the year following his appointment there an elder brother, another Johann, Johann Jacob, accepted an engagement to play the hautboy in the military band of the famous Charles XII. of Sweden; and on the occasion of his departure, Bach wrote a capriccio to present to him as a farewell gift. It had been previously in two notable instances exemplified, that instrumental music might be made the medium for expressing or depicting feeling totally independent of sound. Buxtehude produced seven pieces, each of which pretended to represent the character of one of the seven planets, a curious metaphysical problem, the working of which is difficult to conceive. Kuhnau had produced a series of pieces, each entitled after some incident in Scripture history, and each pretending, so far as might be, to tell the story. Bach's capriccio runs thus: the first movement represents the endeavour to persuade his brother to forego his journey; the second represents the perils that he may encounter on the way and in the army; the third shows the grief of his relations at his persistence in his object; the fourth shows their bidding him farewell, finding that he would yield to no entreaty; the movement called *aria di postiglione* is chiefly constructed on the sounds of the post horn, and the finale is a double fugue, in which there is a subject and counter subject representing respectively the sounds of the post horn and the grief of the abandoned friends. This is almost the single instance in which avowedly we have any humorous expression from Bach, but there may be traced in many of his compositions such a spirit of humour as I feel to be indispensable for the completion of the character of every great artist. The man who can only be serious, or can only be devout, who knows not how to smile, or to draw forth the pleasantries of others, never attains to the highest standing in any one of the arts.

From Hamburg, Mattheson and Handel in company went to Lubeck on a strange quest. Buxtehude had grown old, and proposed to resign his office of organist, which he had filled with great recognition, and which made him an attractive centre for musical pilgrimages from many parts of Germany. They went to enter in friendly competition for the post; but when they arrived, they found this strange condition, that the person who should be appointed to the office of organist must marry the daughter of the retiring representative, a lady who was many years older than either of the young men, and if one may believe the notices that are left, was neither in person nor temper of an attractive character. The two aspirants to the organ aspired not to the love of the lady, but returned to the theatre at Hamburg and resumed their places, sometimes in the practice of composition, and sometimes in the band. In 1706, Bach

followed them to Lubeck on the same errand, found the same condition, and retired with the same dissatisfaction. It is very notable that at this period, when we have only heard of a strangely fanciful composition of Bach, Handel was writing four German operas, "*Almira*" being one (it is needless to recite all the other names), and not only these four German operas, but a setting of the Passion of our Lord. It had been ever since the Reformation a custom, instituted by Luther, in all the Reformed churches, to have a celebration of the Passion with a recital of the history. This was an appropriation by the Reformed Church of the prior use of the Roman Church. In the first instances, the musical portions of this Service were of the most simple character, being limited to the Plain Song; but by degrees this class of composition was largely developed, by interpolating arias with modern verses, by swelling the extent of the work with many of the Chorals—the songs or hymns which every child in North Germany has to learn, and which may be sung by them at a moment's notice, both words and notes. Keiser made one such setting of the Passion, and Handel, also, at this period wrote one.

In the year 1706 Handel went, under the auspices of some perceptive patron, to Italy, produced an opera in Florence set to Italian text, went thence to Venice, and subsequently to Rome, and to Naples. In Venice he met with Domenico Scarlatti, a son of the famous Alessandro, who was greatly renowned as a player on the harpsichord; and at the urgent request of many music lovers of the city, a competition was arranged between these two famous players, Handel and Scarlatti, each of whom played to the utmost of his skill, in accordance with the use at that period, which extended until our own century, not only prepared pieces, but improvisations, and at the close of their contest shook hands, and each congratulated the other on being his superior; thus was the friendship of these two men expressed in their mutual emulation, and in their mutual admiration.

During this while, great complaint was made of Bach's performances, that he so largely ornamented the hymn tunes in his accompaniment as to mislead the singers, and that with his contrapuntal involvements he veiled the tune so that it was impossible to sing to his playing. This may have probably induced his ready retirement from the town of Arnstadt, and his proceeding to Mühlhausen. Possibly a larger salary may have been likewise a temptation. Be this as it may, his going to Mühlhausen in 1707 was coincident with his marriage with his cousin, Maria Barbara Bach. It is remarkable that, throughout his organ compositions, there are no directions for registering the organ; remarkable, because tradition declares that he had extraordinary taste

in the choice of stops, and extraordinary power in combining them, and there are intrinsic indications in the music again and again, in the organ compositions of Bach, that variety of stops was designed, although not expressed. He seems to have entertained remarkably free views as to the treatment of the organ, in so far that while at Mühlhausen he had to make a specification for the erection of a new organ on which he was to play, and among other peculiarities in the arrangements of this organ, he required a peal of 24 bells, certainly something unusual in organ structure, and we may see from that that he entertained at any rate a very liberal sense of the application of the organ. From all this we may count that his style, even when expressed in vocal music, took its rise from organ practice, and from his construction of music expressly for that instrument, and his study of the works of the organists who have been named. After one year at Mühlhausen, he was engaged to go back to Weimar, not in the character of violin player, but as court organist and music director, and there it was that he wrote the first of his Church cantatas, and there it was that he made the friendship of Walther. In the course of the years when he had dwelt successively in the other towns that have been named, he used to make many pilgrimages—on foot necessarily, because of the inconvenience of carriage conveyance and the total absence of means to pay the fare—to the places where remarkable and famous organists exercised their talents, especially to Hamburg, where Reinken was organist of one of the chief churches. In 1717 he made such a journey to Dresden, where Marchand, a French organist and clavecinist, had gained the ear and held the admiration of the Court, and with him Bach was invited to enter into competition in an open trial of skill. Unlike Handel and Scarlatti, however, these two rivals never met, for the Gallican fled the city on the morning of the day appointed for the musical joust. In the same year Bach obtained a change of office; he went to the city of Anhalt-Köthen, where he was appointed kapellmeister, that is to say, supreme director of the musical arrangements of the place. Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Köthen was a true lover of the art, and the chamber music of his Court was made of very great importance, but the chapel service afforded no musical opportunity. This introduced an entire change in the method of Bach's working for a time. He wrote then for combinations of instruments particularly. In this period it may have been that he produced the many pieces he wrote for the violin, the construction of which is in itself an evidence that he must have had such powers on the instrument as very few of our contemporaries possess. With Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Köthen he would often make journeys, and on these journeys, when

periods of rest were come, he would exercise his ability in compositions where no opportunity of reference to any kind of instrument was possible.

Let us now look at Handel for a while. He returned from Italy, he went to Hanover, where he obtained an engagement as kapellmeister to the Elector, and there met with another musical celebrity, the Abbé Steffani. After having been there but a short time, he received invitations to come to England to compose music for the projected Italian opera in London. Hither he came in 1710, and undertook to compose the opera of "*Rinaldo*," which still has some claim on our attention, from its containing the often repeated air "*Lascia ch' io pianga*." This opera was written so quickly, that the author of the Italian text apologised in his preface for imperfections on the ground that he could not supply the composer with words quickly enough for him to set them to music. The opera had an enormous success, Handel was received at Court, and when he left, after some twelve months' sojourn in our capital, it was with entreaties that he should revisit this country. After being at home in Hanover for some while, his desire for greater publicity, greater splendour of surroundings, and greater opportunity than the town of Hanover could afford, induced him to return to England. The Elector, it is supposed, took some offence, not unnaturally, at the desertion of his officer. In 1714 Queen Anne died; the Elector of Hanover became our George I., and when he came to his acquired kingdom, Handel was no longer received at Court; but the husband of one of the King's mistresses, Baron Kilmansegg, devised a scheme to bring him again into royal favour. There was to be a pageant in the year after the King's accession, a water pageant, in which the royal barge, with a large train of accompanying water craft, was to accompany the King from Westminster to the Tower, and it was planned that Handel should engage a band of musicians, place them in another barge, compose music for them to play, and that this barge should cross and recross the procession, so that the King should be constantly within hearing of the music. This music pleased him so well that he took the composer once again into his favour. We owe, perhaps, something to the King's favour of Handel; but we must bear in mind that the King brought with him his own countrymen, and that the Court was a German Court. The courtiers and the Royal Family could not speak English, there were no performers here who could sing in German, and therefore was established on firm ground the Italian opera, which has been perhaps an example, perhaps a hindrance to the growth, of English music in all subsequent time until our own generation. In 1716 the King returned on a visit to Hanover, and Handel went in his suite, and

while there he wrote a second setting of "The Passion," interspersed, as the other had been, with secular verses. On his return to London, he accepted an engagement from the Duke of Chandos, who had a splendid mansion at Whitechurch, or Little Stanmore, a village some half-dozen miles down the Edgware Road. The Duke entertained all persons whom he could attract to his mansion of literary and other artistic celebrity. The building had been designed by the chief architect of the time, Italian painters were brought there to decorate the walls and the ceilings, and Pope, Gay, Humphrey, Hughes, and the choicest wits of the period were constantly there, where Handel was officiating as organist when wanted. A little later, was devised a scheme of opening an Italian opera at the King's theatre at the Haymarket, which went by the name of the Royal Academy of Music, and Handel was appointed to go abroad and engage singers for this undertaking. In the course of his journey, he visited his native town of Halle. This was in 1719, and Bach hearing that he was there, and living about sixteen miles distant in Anhalt-Köthen, walked to Halle for the sake of offering his homage to the other great musician of the time, but arrived there in the after part of the day on which Handel had left in the morning.

After one of his journeys with his patron Prince in 1720, Bach reached home to find that his wife had been buried a week, having died in his absence, and he had no notice or intimation until he reached his own homestead. By her he had had seven children, of whom four survived. It was but in the exercise of music and the education of these children that he could find solace for his loss. He went, however, in the course of this year once again to hear the famous Rheinken in Hamburg, who was then very closely verging on 100 years of age, and he went not only as a listener, but upon invitation played upon the organ which Rheinken owned. He played to the admiration of all who were by, and most especially of this great master of the particular art of improvisation, who at the end of an hour's performance exclaimed, "I thought this art would die with me, but I find in you it has a more powerful representative than I." It seems to have been, as was instanced in the case of Bach's father, a fact bordering on the impossible for any of the family to remain long in celibacy, and so in a year and a half after the death of Maria Barbara, Bach again married, and the second mate of his heart and his home was Anna Magdalena, the daughter of a trumpet player. She had a fine soprano voice, and great aptitude for music. Bach composed much for her express use and for that of his children by his former wife, especially Friedmann and Karl Philip Emanuel. A book exists which has on the cover in gold

letters the three initials of his wife, "A. M. B.," and it holds, in his own writing, pieces of gradually progressing difficulty for the wife and her stepsons to practise, some exercises in harmony and counterpoint worked in the handwriting of the wife, and some instructive comments. In this book appear some compositions that have become known in connection with larger works, especially some of the preludes of the famous collection, "The Well-Tempered Clavier." This work was completed at about the period at which we have now arrived. Bach was a very remarkable originator with reference to executive music. Previous to his time the thumb and fourth finger were not used in harpsichord playing, or, if ever, only in very exceptional passages. The thumb had to rest on the frame of the instrument, and the other fingers, sometimes each overlapping the other, were employed to play successive passages. He introduced first of all in Germany—though co-incidentally with him, François Couperin introduced the same innovation in France—using the extreme fingers in playing on keyed instruments. Up to the time of Bach all instruments had been tuned upon pure temperament, so that the key of C had satisfactory because truthful intonation; but every sharp or flat that was introduced in the music disturbed the propriety of the scale, and thus it was only in the keys most approximate to the key of C that music could be played or tolerated. Bach instituted the use of equal temperament. He preferred to the harpsichord the clavichord, an instrument which would yield to the pressure of the player a different quality of tone; whereas the harpsichord was incapable of inflexion of sound. This clavichord, Bach used to tune with remarkable rapidity. Hence his writing a collection of twenty-four pieces, one in every major and minor key, to prove the application of his equal temperament, and to prove the application of his new method of fingering. In all these pieces he distinctly aimed at an expressive style of playing; so the records I have had the opportunity of consulting aver. Hence it must be radically wrong, as some persons maintain, upon the ground that the harpsichord would not yield louder or softer tones, to play the compositions comprised in that collection with an inflexible, even quality of tone. It must have been the intention of the author that the tone should be varied to the utmost possibility of the player's touch, and the powers of the clavichord diversified according to the expression and suggestion of the music. We find, I believe, internal evidence of this where there are no written records. In the preludes, especially, there is a necessity for a modified expression from phrase to phrase, and from section to section of each piece.

It was in 1722 that the post of organist in Leipsic became vacant by the death of Kuhnau. The Town Council were

slow in filling his place; some persons who were chosen declined the office, Telemann especially, because he would not consent to combine with the musical duties those of teaching the boys of St. Thomas's School Latin. In this case it was urged upon Bach by his friends that he should apply; but he held the office of kapellmeister, which is the highest musical dignity throughout Germany, and in going to the School of St. Thomas he would have been cantor, a word which has scarcely a parallel in our English usage, but that denotes a functionary very far lower in general esteem than the kapellmeister, and he was to be organist of the two Churches of St. Thomas and St. Nicholas, but to bear no remarkable title in consequence. However, a consideration of his family necessities, of the higher salary, and of the broader field for the exercise of his ability as organist and composer, induced him to apply for this post, and with a view to distinguish his first entrance on office, he composed his setting of St. John's version of the Passion; but as this was to be performed in the Passion Week, and as he did not receive his appointment until May, it could not be publicly produced in the year of his entering office, 1723. It appears that the work was given in the ensuing year, and it is surmised that the desire to have it ready for the preceding year would account for some appearance of haste in the compilation of the text, and in the composition of some portions of the music; especially it is supposed that Bach must have taken some old libretto and have altered this himself, possibly to improve it, but certainly to fit it more for his use. We have now established him in his permanent residence at Leipsic, where he remained generally at cross purposes with the authorities who appointed him. They seemed to have no power of perceiving his remarkable merit, and to have made constant complaints of his inefficiency in the particular functions to which they required his attention, among others his teaching of the boys of the school Latin, and his superintending their general education, his preparing music for all public occasions, and his working rather as a journeyman than as a musical artist.

His music must have appeared under very large disadvantage, for the solo parts the soprano and alto voices were sung by the boys of the school, or else by men who had high falsetto voices. Such voices have gone very much out of use; perhaps for the effect of music we may be glad it is so, but possibly many of you may call to mind the somewhat strange sound of a very high piercing voice coming from a very large burly person, for most of the falsetto singers were men of deep bass voices, particularly vigorous, with smiling faces, and with this artificial, let us call it, or false voice, as it is technically named, they would sing the soprano or alto

parts. You may perhaps remember one particular instance, which may be cited exceptionally as having given a true musical colour to the caricature performances of the kind, in our old friend John Parry, who would represent a singing lesson, giving the part of the master in his own natural voice, and in a thin falsetto tone would signify the pupil. Such was the material at the command of Bach for the performance of very expressive solo pieces. Now it appears to have been his view throughout, that music for Divine Service must not be representative of the personal feelings of those engaged either in witnessing or in executing the performance; so to distinguish the sacred character from the secular entirely, and to make a marked line between what should be written for the theatre and chamber and what was written for church performance, the organ part was always very largely in excess of power above that of the voices and other instruments, and very special attention was given to the performance of this organ part. Whereas in England, when choral performances were instituted, the idea prevailed of making the voices predominant, and the organ and the bowed instruments and hautboys subordinate to them. This may in a large degree account for the differences that occur in the compositions for the Lutheran Church, and those which were made for English use in the oratorios of Handel. We find that two styles of recitatives were in use, one for the theatre, which must be declamatory, and which was to be sung strictly as written; and another for the church, which could be more melodious, partaking of the character of what is called *arioso*, if not rhythmical at any rate always with a graceful flow, and this was, generally speaking, to be ornamented by the singer. Bach exceptionally wrote his recitatives as he would have them sung, and as composers of the present day write recitative. The alleged unalterability of his written notes must, however, give way when strange words are adapted to them in translations of the text, in which a larger or less number of syllables necessitates changes in the musical phraseology. His organ part was to be melodious, but not to consist of florid counterpoint; it was to produce an amplitude of tone, but not a diversity of parts. In writing for the orchestral instruments, Bach differs very materially from Handel. One finds that however many instruments are employed by him, with rare exceptions every instrument has a separate melody; however many voices, every voice has a distinctive part of its own. One finds that in Handel the bass part is often the only written accompaniment to the voice, and it was left to the player on the harpsichord or the organ to complete the musical effect by filling up the harmony perhaps with contrapuntal figures, perhaps with merely sustained chords; but always it appears to have been Han-

del's use to make the accompaniment wait upon the voice part, support and nourish it; whereas in the instance of Bach, it appears to have been his practice to give ascendancy to the organ accompaniment. In the performance of his works in church, there were not separate solo singers, but the singers of the chorus stood forward when a solo passage was to be rendered, and sang it, and some fine effects may perhaps have resulted from this. In those pieces where a solo voice is alternated with the chorus, the chorus being divided to make what in our Church is called an antiphonal effect, the choristers on one side may have accompanied the solo voice belonging to the opposite choir, and thus have introduced naturally such a separation of tone as must have enhanced the effect of both. Let us notice further of the orchestration of Bach, that he for the most part begins a piece with a particular selection of instruments—perhaps hautboys and bassoons, perhaps flutes (and among the hautboys those several instruments of the class which have now become obsolete), or perhaps bowed instruments; but that he will employ the whole of this choir of instruments throughout the entire number, making in fact the same sort of effect with his band as an organist will make who draws out the stops of his choice at the beginning of a piece and holds them throughout that piece, and when he goes to the next piece changes his quality of tone. In the instrumentation of Handel, on the contrary, we notice that, in the songs especially, the violins rarely have to accompany the voice, but the accompaniment is left to the bass part with such harmony as is played upon the harpsichord, and the violins come in interludes to vary the effect and to contrast the vocal quality of tone.

Handel, all this while, was engaged in his duties for the Italian opera, and in intervals of that engagement wrote for the Duke of Chandos, and for private performance at the Duke's mansion, firstly the English oratorio of "Esther," subsequently a secular work on the same plan, the serenata of "Acis and Galatea." These were given privately, both in the year 1721. In the same year he produced Italian operas, and from time to time always did so. It was not until 1732 that these two works came to a public hearing, and this was because some speculators obtained copies of them, and gave public performances from which Handel himself obtained no benefit, and he was thus to some extent driven to public production for the sake of the profits which might come to him. Accordingly, at the King's Theatre was produced the oratorio of "Esther"; but people at that time seem to have had strong scruples as to religious propriety, therefore, though the work is written in dramatic form, being to a great extent a translation of Racine's tragedy, it was expressly

announced that it would be given without scenes and action. When "*Acis and Galatea*," which is also in dramatic form, was produced, it was announced that it would be given after the same manner as "*Esther*," that there should be a scene depicting an arcadian landscape, and that the singers should be dressed in suitable clothes, but that there should be no action; and thus they sat in rows and sang the whole of that impassioned music with books in their hands as though they were performing a Church Service. The success of these two works induced in the following year the production of "*Deborah*," which is a remarkable compilation of previous compositions of the author, having in it some adaptations of pieces from Latin psalms he had written in Italy, and other single numbers that were to be found in earlier compositions. From this we might suppose that it was brought together in some haste. In the same year as that was produced, 1733, "*Athaliah*" was written, and publicly performed at Oxford on the occasion which is now called Commemoration, but which then was called Public Act, and in consequence of the great effect which this work made, the University offered to Handel the degree of doctor of music. He declined the intended honour, feeling, it must have been, that if in his works he could not command respect from the world, his title would draw nothing to him. Thus we have Handel with the degree which must ever glorify him, of having been the composer of those great, those matchless oratorios, but without the frippery of the title before his name. Nay, let me quote the words of Charles Dickens on some occasion when he said "the great composer had an everlasting handle to his name."

The Italian opera did not succeed so fully as was anticipated by the nobility who instituted it. Naturally the patronage of our German King gathered together all the nobility round about him; there was then a quarrel between the King and the Prince of Wales, which rose to such a height as to induce advertisements in the public newspapers that whoever attended the levees of the Prince of Wales would not be received at Court. Now the Prince of Wales and his friends instituted an opposition opera to that in which Handel was concerned, he having become the manager of the theatre on his own account, no longer the agent of the Royal Academy of Music, and the partizans of these two opera houses were each so zealous to overthrow the other, that every possible means were exercised to carry out that intention.

I am very prudently advised that I am drawing too largely on your patience. The subject is inexhaustible; it is only the treatment which fails. I must ask your indulgence for saying less than I should have said on the subject, and

perhaps with the privilege of resuming it on some future occasion. I will but say that in this bi-century year of the birth of Handel and Bach, it will be becoming in every musician to help in the occasions that are offered of doing justice to these celebrities of the art. It is usual to speak of these men as immortal, but in what is their immortality? In their influence on art, in the reverential love that we entertain for them and their works, and in the bequest of this reverence to those who are to come. In the interim between the death of those two men and the present time, art has undergone a large modification. I heard in this room, two months since, some most intelligent remarks on the evolution of art. Let us see how art has been evolved from the works of these men. We have from the suites of Bach and Handel, and from many preludes of Bach, found an evolution into the modern sonata and symphony. We have found also from the dramatic character of Handel's music has been evolved the opera as we know it in perfection. From that there have been aberrations, but let us distinguish between evolution and abortion. So long as music flowers forth into larger and larger manifestations of the same principles, greater and better things are evolved; when it departs from those principles, which have been slow in their development and guarded in their application, art loses the character of art and becomes caprice and extravagance. If we regard these men as deities, we do injustice to them and to ourselves. They were human, they have their faults, and we shall appreciate them most truly if we sift their faults from their virtues. No one can admire the consecutive sevenths which are often to be met with in the part writing of Bach; no one can admire the occasional mispronunciation of English that occurs in the work of Handel; but, whereas such things would be conspicuous features in the compositions of any one of us were we to write them, they are so surrounded by the glorious beauties which constitute the main portion of these men's productions that we are dazzled and unable to see the less desirable portions. The year has come when the experience of two centuries has given us the opportunity to know and to judge our great heroes, and let us be the conservators and transmitters of the homage that is due to Handel and Bach.

The CHAIRMAN.—I feel sure you will all agree with me that, seeing that our lecturer has been compelled by the lapse of time to shorten that which he would have said to us, it would ill become me, and I think it would ill become any of us, to occupy any time with any remarks with respect to the paper we have listened to. For so interesting a *resumé* of the biographical and historical side of music at the time

of the birth of these two great men, and for the admirably clear manner in which the parallel stories have been related, I feel that we are all greatly indebted to Professor Macfarren, and I ask you all to join with me in giving him a hearty vote of thanks for the interesting paper we have heard. I hope at some future time he will be able to say that which he has been compelled to leave unsaid this afternoon.

The vote of thanks was carried unanimously, and a similar vote of thanks was passed to the Chairman, on the motion of Mr. J. D. COLERIDGE.

(For continuation of this Subject, see p. 63.)