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ENGLISH MUSIC IN 1884.

By JOSEPH BENNETT.

It is unfashionable now to quote the poet Young, but, as I do not write for fashionable people, I will venture upon it here and run the risk of solecism. The poet Young, looking out upon the eternal arsis and thesis of creation—the everlasting swinging of the pendulum whose ticking registers eras—could understand it no better than the least of us. But, if he could not comprehend, he could describe, and subjoined are some lines which suit this present exordium:—

Look nature through, 'tis revolution all;
All change, no death: day follows night, and night
The dying day; stars rise and set, and rise;
Earth takes th' example. See, the summer gay,
With her green chaplet and ambrosial flowers,
Droops into pallid autumn; winter grey,
Horrid with frost and turbulent with storm,
Blows autumn and his golden fruits away,
Then melts into the spring: soft spring, with breath
Favonian, from warm chambers of the south,
Recalls the first; all, to reflowerish, fades,
As in a wheel, all sinks to re-ascend:
Emblems of man, who passes, not expires.

Intelligent readers, knowing that it is not my business to discuss the immortality of the soul, see at a glance why I have thus dipped into the "Night Thoughts." The phenomena of nature but put into gross and palpable forms the phenomena of mind, and the law of action and re-action, of advance and retreat, of growth and decay, is by no means confined to the region of physical forces. Students of history meet on countless pages with proofs of a fact which is as cheering in its way as the deduction drawn by Young from observation of the material world. Take any country conspicuous in the records of civilization and you will find its intellectual life chequered by alternate sunshine and shade, like a forest path. Now it is all splendour, and men look on in mingled envy and admiration; anon there is obscurity—the glory has departed to blaze elsewhere. Our own "island story" supplies illustrations. Mark how the Augustan age of Elizabeth followed hard upon the dark and terrible period which witnessed the old order of society change and give place to the new. "For, indeed," says Mr. Froude, in a magnificent passage, "a change was coming upon the world, the meaning and direction of which even is still hidden from us—a change from era to era. The paths trodden by the footsteps of ages were broken up; old things were passing away, and the faith and the life of ten centuries were dissolving like a dream. Chivalry was dying; the abbey and the castle were soon together to crumble into ruins; and all the forms, desires, beliefs, convictions of the old world were passing away never to return. . . The floor of heaven, inlaid with stars, had sunk back into an infinite abyss of immeasurable space; and the firm earth itself, unfixed from its foundations, was seen to be but a small atom in the awful vastness of the universe." From among the ruins made by this cataclysm sprang the glorious flowers of Elizabethan literature and poetry—aye, and of music; for then our country, always before as musical as the best, was itself the best, and could challenge Italy and the Netherlands, while as yet France was only creeping into the light, and Germany remained in the darkness of almost heathendom. By-and-by the splendour waned. There came a time of gloom, relieved only by the bright particular star of Milton's genius, this in turn giving way to the second Augustan age of Anne. Unhappily music did not revive. The most delicate and sensitive of the arts was smothered in the frippery and furbelows of the Restoration. Purcell died all too soon for music as for his fame; English talent—what there was of it—retired to the

organ-loft, and the foreigner, with his ready adaptability and his elastic principles, swarmed in to take possession of the land. He is here now, but—this is the moral of my exordium—the sun of native art is once more rising, the pendulum is swinging back through its vast arc, and those who stand in its way must not complain of the consequences.

Some one may remind me of the American saying, "Never prophesy unless you know." That saying is more flippant than sage. It would laugh away prophecy altogether, and reduce the universal world to the position of Mr. Micawber, who, instead of anticipating events and getting ready to control them, waited for them to "turn up," and then they controlled him. Besides, it is the highest exercise of the human judgment to interpret the signs of the times; find out the direction in which they point, and decide whether movements thitherward are to be helped or retarded. For such an end a man may stake his reputation as a far-seer, and risk his perspicacity on the current of events. I shall do so here, at any rate, and say that the turn of musical England is at hand. All circumstances point thereto, notably the barrenness of other countries. In Italy there is only Verdi—an almost extinct volcano; for Boïto and Ponchielli make no further mark as years go on, and are limited in the application of such powers as they possess. There are young musicians in France, but what they lack in solidity is made up not so much by brilliancy as by the eccentric and extravagant. As for Germany, a famous Teutonic *chef d'orchestre* said to me the other day, with a ring of sadness in his tones, "We have no one younger than Brahms!"

Most significant of all concurrent phenomena is the barrenness of Germany. It is as though Nature had exhausted herself by the productiveness of the two centuries that separate the birth of Bach and Handel from the time now present, and as though the land of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, of Weber, Mendelssohn, and Schumann, were now to lie fallow till after a process of recuperation. Such, indeed, must be the actual fact, if the actual fact accord with outward seeming and with the teachings of history. I cannot conceive that musical genius will vanish from the earth because Germany is, for the time being, played out. "The wind bloweth where it listeth," but it is always blowing somewhere. If there be a musical calm in one land, analogy teaches us that in another an artistic breath is so stirring as that those who listen hear a movement in the valley of dry bones. What nation, it may curiously be asked, will succeed to the pre-eminence of Germany? From the scope of this enquiry we may dismiss France and Italy. Each of these countries has an art suited to itself, but one which the world at large, so powerfully dominated by the various branches of the Teutonic stock, will never regard as other than a pleasing dialect of the universal language. The issue lies, I am disposed to think, with two races, the Slavonic and the Anglo-Saxon.

On many occasions I have pointed my readers to the interesting position now occupied by the Slavonian peoples. I have tried to awaken enquiry into, or rather speculation regarding, the influence which Slavonic music, distinct from all other in important respects as it is, must necessarily exercise upon the universal art, and the course of my present argument compels me again to touch upon the matter. Those of us who watch with intent and patient gaze the slow workings of a Providence in whose sight a thousand years are but as one day, have our eyes now rivetted upon a process supremely illustrative of the fact that history repeats itself. We watch

the concentrating strength in the East and North of another wave of humanity, destined to flow westward, whither the march of empire ever sets. At the same time, we see the Celts rapidly leaving the western fringe of Europe, where they have tenaciously clung to a land once all their own. The Teutons likewise are going, to renew the ancient struggle across the Atlantic. There are at this moment parts of Germany where the native inhabitants have shrunk to a small fraction of their former strength. Under pressure of circumstances, which I need not stop to describe, Germany is flinging herself bodily across the ocean, and if the population of the country grows it is rather by the influx of strangers than through natural increase. With such vast movements of humanity contention must ever be vain. No Chinese wall can bar their progress; no decree of Canute or Bismarck can stay the tide. Meanwhile, all along the line where Teuton and Sclavonian touch there is the chafing which precedes conflict. Here, however, I have not so much to do with the ethnographic, or the political aspect of the case just stated, as with the musical considerations involved. There are plentiful signs that Sclavonian art will precede the race itself into Western Europe. Already Sclavonian composers and executants have acquired influence far beyond the lands where their own people dwell. At the present moment, indeed, they outweigh their German rivals, and if their music be frequently marked by eccentricity or extravagance, this may be set down to the ill-regulated exuberance of artistic youth—a plea with which none can excuse the studied and painful boyishness of an artistic senility that tries to deceive the world and itself. I take the star of Anton Dvorák to be a luminary of meaning in the present musical firmament. It signifies the entrance into art of a fresh and vigorous race, emerged but yesterday from the twilight of semi-civilization and now looking about it for work upon which to exercise powers that may as yet be mostly rude but are certainly strong.

Among the Anglo-Saxons, as represented by the people of the Motherland, a very different state of things exists. With us no question of youth arises. But our musical position appears even more curious and interesting than that of the Sclavonic race. It is with us as though an old man, accomplished otherwise, had yet to acquire some element of ordinary knowledge.

Our national history furnishes an explanation, and one which stands apart from the question whether we are naturally a musical people. I am not going to pretend that England has any special gift of music. It would be vain to do so in the light of actual observation; but I do say, in the light of incontrovertible facts, that at one time our nation was abreast of the foremost in cultivation of and acquaintance with the art. No one will dispute this. Why, at a later period than the brilliant age of the Elizabethan madrigalians and church composers, did we drop behind till music fell into absolute disrepute, and its profession came to be regarded, like that of the actor, as the hall-mark of vagabondage? The query deserves an answer at length, but I can only point here to the influence of Puritanism and of greed for material wealth. These things almost annihilated English art, such branches of it excepted as minister to the evidences of wealth and flatter the vanity of its possessors. Puritanism came first, with an anathema on all enjoyments and pleasurable pursuits. Far be it from me to under-value the good which the sturdy spirit of Puritanism has done for England. I should be false to the teaching of history were I to join in the railings often hurled at it by ignorance, or by those who

merely repeat the shibboleths of society and flatter themselves on being, as they would say, *comme il faut*. But the tendency of all social, moral, and religious movements is to extremes, and Puritanism, in its zeal, failed to distinguish between things that differ. Music it crushed with the hand of iron that hurled Charles Stuart out of life and sent "Jezebel" back to her own country. Puritanism sang psalms—mostly through the nose, say its traducers—but it knocked organs into shapeless heaps of wood and metal, and branded all other musical instruments, all "light and galliardising airs," with the mark of the Beast. Seeing that Puritanism, at one time triumphant, has been influential in England ever since its rise, who can measure its effect in checking the development of music? To cite but one example, some men now living may remember that the retention of Psalmody in a large South-London chapel, was only secured by a compromise; those who conscientiously objected to the use of music being permitted to go outside while the exercise of praise went on within.

The extreme virulence of Puritanism had scarcely abated, when a new influence began to work against music. Over the whole country came the rage of empire, and that passion for wealth whence has sprung our enormous commercial development, with all its attendant circumstances, as, for example, the conquest of India. There was no time in those days for cultivating the gentler arts, and such knowledge as the people had gained of them in quieter years died out. We were filibustering over the globe; subduing Asiatics by fire and sword, and warring with every power that owned a colony, till the prize fell to the dauntless valour of an imperial race. In short, we were busy empire-making—a very absorbing pursuit. We went on, in a large national way, "adding house to house and land to land," till, as it seemed, the man who did not help the process by going into "business" or using a sword was a poor creature fit only to be looked down upon. Yesterday almost, the teaching of music in our schools was discouraged by public sentiment as taking up the time of boys with a lady-like "accomplishment." In all this I see nothing out of the usual order of things. The expanding, aggressive stage of a nation's life is not that wherein the arts flourish. Two things cannot be done at once: *Duos qui sequitur leporis, neutrum capit*. Hence the rule of history is to show that when a country has passed beyond the period just named it most fully expands all that is refining in its internal life. Often, indeed, artistic development takes place while the land is under the influence of political stagnation. "The study of art," said Guizot, "possesses this great and peculiar charm—that it is absolutely unconnected with the struggles and contests of ordinary life." When, therefore, those struggles and contests are no longer pressing, men turn to the study of art. They have, at such a time, the power to detach themselves from concerns of society and the nation that at other times hold them fast.

In dwelling upon the causes which, according to my view, operated for the decadence of English music, the purpose has not been altogether retrospective. I desire to connect them in the reader's mind with present facts of immense import and cheering character. These are two. First: The more intolerant and unreasonable spirit of Puritanism is passing away. I do not mean that England is becoming less religious. We are a religious people, and shall remain so, though dogmas change and "articles of faith" be less thought of than acts of faith. What I do mean is that even the classes of society wherein Puritan aversion to the graces and

refined pleasures of life has lingered most obstinately are modifying their attitude. Look, for example, at the advance of the "organ movement" in Scotland—an advance made over the prejudices of a nation not given to change. This phenomenon—so, indeed, it may be described—I take as signifying a general break-up of old habits of thought on the matter in question. Turning to the second point, it is to be observed that our nation has apparently reached a crisis in its history. The British empire is made, and public opinion seems more and more averse from enterprises tending towards its further expansion. In point of fact, an idea prevails that our limit of development has been reached, and that the task of the future will be to hold our own against rivals who started later in the race. The very existence of such a sentiment has an important bearing upon national culture of the arts. It points to a new direction of some part, at least, of the national energies. What that direction will be is, in a manner, determined by historical precedent; for only when Rome reached the zenith of her power did the arts move towards their highest development under the shadow of her eagles' wings.

Signs of the change just indicated are not wanting around us. We see on every hand a greater attention to music, the result of an altered estimate of its worth. The art is taught in our public schools, without apologies or shamefacedness. In elementary schools the money of the tax-payer is devoted to it, without raising a cry of indignation, while young men of a rank in life which opens to them a professional career show that they consider the profession of music honourable in the sight of all. These facts are significant, but more suggestive still is the abatement of the curious, though by no means mysterious, prejudice against English music and musicians which so long lay, a nightmare oppression, upon our national art. The prejudice still exists. A rooted thing of the kind is hard to tear up. But I believe that it is dying under the influence of fuller knowledge and a more enlightened view of music itself. Every stage of its decay will mark a stage in the advance of the art, and its end must naturally be hastened by the increase amongst us of talented composers and professors.

I should tax too heavily the patience which, perhaps, is already wearied were I to take up much space in proving that, as regards talented composers and professors, English music was never so fortunate as now. We have amongst us four composers whose good repute has recently conquered German prejudice against the art of what a young English renegade has just called the "barbarous land." Mr. Cowen's "Scandinavian" Symphony, Mr. Goring Thomas's "Esmeralda," Mr. Villiers Stanford's "Savonarola," and Mr. A. C. Mackenzie's "Colomba"—all have gained a footing in the country of Beethoven and Mozart. The consequences will, in the nature of things, extend far beyond themselves. The victory of these English compositions is "as the letting out of water." They have made a hole in the dyke, and the first few drops, unless fortune play us false, will be followed by a stream. At home the English composer is no longer looked at coldly by impressarii and Festival managers. He is run after and courted. As in the case of Mr. Mackenzie, if he cannot write an Oratorio for one Festival he is asked to promise for another three years later, while, as also in the case of the fortunate North British musician, we see him welcomed on the English lyric stage, and invited to show himself in Italian dress elsewhere. I cannot now undertake an examination of the personal claims made by each of our leading composers. That

task may better be discharged in a separate paper. But I would impress upon them a sense of the very grave responsibility under which they are placed by circumstances. To a large extent they have the immediate future of English music in their hands, and can secure for it success or failure as they please. Every amateur, therefore, is concerned in what they do, and has reason to implore their careful action towards the development of our art on a sound basis, and not on modern and unproven theories. My own anxiety as to this is great. I urge—nay, implore—our composers to conserve everything distinctively English, so long as it is not adverse to true progress, and to develop their art, as far as may be, along English lines. This applies especially to lyric drama. Germany, France, Italy have a lyric drama of their own, and though in England we possess nothing very definite to work upon, our composers should take good heed of what there is, and so build upon the sure foundation of national taste. Above all, let them avoid mere theorising by way of remedying actual defects.

There's too much abstract willing, purposing,
In this poor world. We talk by aggregates
And think by systems, and, being used to face
Our evils in statistics, are inclined
To cap them with unreal remedies,
Drawn out in haste on the other side the slate.

By avoiding this—by amending the old rather than devising the new—our composers may build us up an English art, and make themselves an everlasting name.

HANDEL'S ORCHESTRATION.

By EBENEZER PROUT.

(Concluded from page 260.)

I AM at length approaching the termination of my labours; for though there still remain for notice a large number of the oratorios, it will be readily understood that many of the special orchestral effects to be found in them will have been already met with in earlier works. It is true that even towards the close of his life Handel continued to make fresh experiments in instrumentation, and such, of course, I shall point out as I proceed; but as a whole I shall be able to get through the rest of the series far more rapidly than has often been practicable in the works of which I have already spoken.

The first work to be dealt with in this article—the "Dettingen Te Deum" (1743)—illustrates what I have just said. It is richly scored, for strings, oboes, bassoons, three trumpets, drums, and organ, and abounds in contrasts of colour; but I find nothing in it which has not been spoken of in preceding articles. I therefore pass on to "Semele," also written in 1743. In this work it is only needful to notice the effective orchestration of the introduction to the third act, in which the sleep of Somnus in his cavern is depicted by the moving figure in quavers for two violoncellos doubled by two bassoons, and the treatment of the drums. In two choruses of the first act, "Avert these omens," and "Cease, cease your vows," Handel uses the drums without the trumpets to represent the rumbling of the thunder-storm; and in the third act Jupiter's oath to Semele, which brings about her destruction, is followed by a peal of thunder, imitated by a drum solo entirely unaccompanied. It is worth noting that in these cases Handel has nowhere used the roll of the drums, as might have been expected, but has given the instruments passages of semiquavers. Similarly, in "Fixed in His everlasting seat" ("Samson"), at the words "His thunder roars," the drums have a figure of six quavers in the bar instead of a roll, which Handel seldom employs.