Review

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Greenwich on the 25th ult., while labouring under temporary derangement produced by long illness. Though promptly taken out by Inspector Goode, of the Thames Police, life was extinct before he could be got on shore.

Reviews.

NOVELLO, EWER AND CO.

Nala and Damayanti. A Dramatic Cantata. By Sophie Hasenclever, for solo voices, chorus and orchestra. Composed by Ferdinand Hiller, Op. 150. The English translation by Natalia Macfarren.

If the great difference of opinion which exists as to the merits of so-called advanced music is for some reasons to be deplored, yet it is a sure and welcome sign that a certain amount of consideration and thought is now being bestowed on what was hitherto considered only worthy of contempt. Although in "*Nala and Damayanti*" Ferdinand Hiller has not rushed wildly away from all conventional ideas of musical form, yet as might be expected from his talent and long experience, he has produced a work far above the ordinary level. The reception of a dramatic Cantata such as this by the public, must to a certain extent depend upon the merits of the libretto, and good librettists are rare; but it must in fairness be stated that the librettist has to cater for a public whose appetite for fiction, even in such a small matter as a "book of the words" is ruled by an evervarying and unaccountable fashion. An unwholesome taste for a combination of romance and religion, is quite enough to account for the welcome accorded to the almost serio-comic words of Benedict's "*St. Cecilia*." How even the graceful music of the "*May Queen*" has so long existed without being divorced from the jaded story of Robin Hood, is a marvel. Mr. Barnett revived the dreamy mysteries of Coleridge's "*Ancient Mariner*," just at the time when a large section of the public rejoiced over songs set to absolutely meaningless, though rhyming words. Now that "*Silent seas*" and "*Albatrosses*" (attached to uncomfortably high notes) have had their day, we seem to be drifting into a region of Indian romance. Schumann has left us a "*Paradise and the Peri*"—a very fine work which deserves to be better known, yet Mr. Barnett has given us another; and we have before us a "*Nala and Damayanti*." Dr. Hiller might have fared worse as regards his libretto, for though not of a very substantial kind, it offers many capital points for musical treatment. The beautiful and pure Damayanti, daughter of King Bhima, is introduced, reclining in the palace garden surrounded by her maidens and in all the pomp and luxury of eastern magnificence. But some hidden grief is so plainly eating at her heart, that her attendants prevail upon her to relate, how she was led spell-bound to follow a flock of lovely swans, one of which more gorgeous than his fellows having drawn her steps to a sacred spot, announces the love of Prince Nala, beautiful and good. Bhima, thinking the time had arrived when his daughter should be wedded, proclaims a day for the appearance of her suitors at his court. In the mean time Nala on his way to his beloved Damayanti, is arrested by a vision of Immortals, who bid him tell her that she is too lovely and chaste for mortal man, and must prepare to be the bride of an Immortal. Thus charged to bear the message fatal to his happiness, he at length finds his loved one. Their joy at meeting is mutual, but, alas, soon marred by the decree of the Immortals, which true to his promise he tells: yet she still vows constancy to him alone. When the dreaded day arrives, the Immortal suitors and Nala present themselves, and Damayanti must make her choice. All are so resplendent, she cannot distinguish her beloved Nala, when the Immortals to reward her faithfulness vanish out of sight and leave Nala only, whom she with joy accepts as her lord. The introduction consists of a few plain chords, Andante mosso, followed by an Allegro grazioso, commencing,

this graceful theme with which the Introduction also closes, is nicely contrasted by another of a different character in A minor. The first seven numbers complete the scene of Damayanti and her maids in the garden, and include a really charming two-part chorus for female voices, (No. 2), linked by a clever recitative to an Allegro giocoso, the pretty theme of which runs through Nos. 3—4—5, enriched by light and varied accompaniments.

Also a soprano Song (No. 7) "Oft when noon is burning," so sweet and melodious that it will no doubt be often heard apart from the context. The chorus which welcomes Bhima's appearance "Hail Bhima" (No. 8), is bold and effective. Somebody marches somewhere of course; on the whole, therefore, it is a matter of congratulation that Bhima and his cortège are able to pace to the Temple during 22 bars "dolce." If the Temple were not conveniently close to the Palace, the repeats would be tedious. The prayer to Indra (No. 13), will depend for its effect upon the excellence of the performance more than any special detail. Nala's first appearance is ushered in by a dreamy recitative followed by most interesting music describing his interview with the Immortals. One characteristic passage is worth quoting.

The music given to Damayanti (Nos. 17—18) is full of variety, little phrases of pure melody being interwoven with sounds which express most vividly frequently changing emotions. While praying for a sight of her Nala, his almost miraculous entry at the moment is preceded by the following weird sentence.

The joy of their meeting followed by sadness when true to his vow, Nala gives the Immortals' message, finds in (No. 19) an apt representation, and for truthfulness of painting, is not surpassed by any portion of the work. Of the Finale (No. 20), it need only be said, that it will be found a climax well worthy of the Cantata.

It would be quite unjust to give a definite opinion on such a work until we have heard it with the instrumentation; not only are the vocal parts supported by rich orchestration, but the success of such a work as a whole depends largely on the continuity of idea, yet contrast of construction between the separate numbers. As to its general style, it may be said to remind us constantly of Schumann, rarely touching the unusual progressions of Wagner; but, nevertheless, fresh and vigorous, and with no lack of melody. No. 10 contains one or two phrases perhaps rather commonplace, No. 13 reminds us of Mendelssohn in many places, and elsewhere some progressions not entirely satisfactory will be found. But these small faults do not palpably reduce the general value of the whole, and it is easy to prophesy for it a lasting popularity. Before these pages have been scanned by many of our readers, "Nala and Damayanti" will probably have had as fine a rendering as tried performers and careful rehearsing can give it. We have little doubt what kind of verdict will be passed upon it by one of the best audiences in the kingdom.

Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy's Songs. Edited and in part translated by Natalia Macfarren.

WHEN we consider to what an extent vocal music is practised in this country—that it forms an item in the prospectus of all good schools, and that every young lady who has, or thinks she has, a voice, takes lessons in this accomplishment as a matter of course—it appears extraordinary that the songs which command the largest sale are written by persons who are, as a rule, utterly incompetent to produce a piece of music of any other class whatever. Of course all reflecting people must be aware that the vocal works of a composer who is worthy of the name, form but a portion of the compositions which he bequeaths to the world; a real artist sometimes giving expression to his thoughts by instruments, sometimes by voices, and sometimes by the two in combination. In confirmation of this, it may be mentioned that Schubert, who became popular as a song-writer, and retained that position for many years, even with musicians themselves, was afterwards discovered to have produced orchestral and solo instrumental works of a class worthy almost to rank with the compositions of the greatest masters. The fashionable patronage of the vapid effusions of those so-called "composers" of vocal music who have discovered the trick of writing exactly to the level of the uncultivated taste of the larger number of purchasers, not only gives undue prominence to many persons, whose names are scarcely ever mentioned in musical circles, but it keeps back the songs of those who wrote not for a day but for all time, and whose smallest sketch is superior to all that popular domestic trash, which is too often invested with a semi-religious flavour, to disarm criticism and conceal the poverty both of the words and music. Were we not convinced of this fact, we might indeed wonder how little is really known of the exquisite songs of Mendelssohn, with the exception perhaps of some half dozen which have somehow struggled into popularity. Many amateurs will be astonished to find that the volume now before us contains seventy-eight songs, a large number of which, although, as we have said, probably almost unknown in England, are quite as beautiful as those with

which everybody is acquainted. From so rich a collection it would be impossible to do more than mention a few of those which appeal irresistibly to our sympathies. The "Swiss Spring Song" (No. 6) is one of the most charmingly fresh melodies ever wedded to this tempting theme; the sparkling accompaniment lending an additional charm to the voice part, and the light phrases suggestive of the warbling of the birds, being interwoven with the melody in a manner totally unlike the conventional pianoforte twittering usually found in songs where any member of the "feathered choir" happens to be mentioned. No. 5, the "Evening Song," with its calm theme, accompanied with flowing quavers throughout, is just the little musical poem that we should imagine an intelligent vocalist would be delighted to recite to her home circle. "In Autumn" (No. 17), in Mendelssohn's favourite key, F sharp minor, has a tinge of pathos in perfect sympathy with the words, and is a proof, both in melody and harmony, what real effect can be gained by simple means. "Forsaken" (No. 21), in D minor, is another beautiful little song, placidly accompanied with some chords which materially heighten the expression of the voice part, the song closing with the harmony of the dominant in the accompaniment, which has the effect of lengthening out the mournful feeling of the final vocal phrase. The "Fairy Revel" (No. 28) is full of life, and commences with the pianoforte in the style of the composer's instrumental "scherzo" movements, the voice afterwards beginning *piano*, with the accompaniment in unison and octave. This song requires both a good vocalist and a good pianist to give it due effect. "The Hour of Dawn" (No. 37), in 3/8 rhythm, has a charming theme, to which an *agitato* accompaniment gives an additional vitality. Nos. 43 ("The Herdsman's Song"), 46 ("In a Gondola"), 51 ("A voice from the lake"), 53 ("Night Song"), 71 ("A bird is softly calling"), 76 ("The Maiden's lament"—a highly effective song, in B minor, with an unceasing semiquaver accompaniment), and 78 ("Thou who hast doomed man to die," originally composed for the Oratorio, *St. Paul* but replaced by "I will sing of Thy great mercy"), may also be mentioned as amongst the characteristic specimens of the composer's genius, although it is needless to say that, did our space permit, we might increase our list to an indefinite extent. Respecting Madame Macfarren's share in the preparation of this volume, we must say a few words. There can be no question that whoever undertakes to translate the words of these songs should be not only a German scholar, but a poet and a musician; and we may add that it becomes a somewhat delicate task to write new words to those compositions already identified with the verses of the late Mr. Bartholomew. That the present editress has shown all these requisite qualities may be at once seen by the faithfulness of the translation, the extreme adaptability of the words to the music, and the desire she has shown to retain the original English versions of Mr. Bartholomew wherever she could reconcile them with her own idea of the realisation of the composer's intention. Very many of the songs to which Madame Macfarren has supplied the translation go so excellently with the words that it almost appears as if the music had been originally written to them. Of course, in the well known compositions, even with those persons who really think the new words an improvement, there will be the difficulty of getting over the effect of first impressions; and, although we do not ourselves believe that in every case the new translations will supersede those of Mr. Bartholomew—which, with all their faults of occasional harshness with the music, are extremely skilful renderings of the original—we have no doubt that in the majority of instances they will be readily accepted. In the "First Violet," for example, the phrase "Flowers more gay deck its bed" is replaced by the words "Gay are the flowers, blue and red," which are surely easier to sing, and infinitely better suited to the music. Again, in the same song, the passage commencing with the holding F is difficult to sing to the words "The violet, the violet