Wagner's Autobiography (Continued)

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Source: *The Musical Times*, Vol. 52, No. 821 (Jul. 1, 1911), pp. 437-441

Published by: [Musical Times Publications Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/907262>

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BASSES.—*Continued.*

Rothery, W. G.	Talbot, J. E.
Rube, Charles.	Taylor, Vernon.
Selfe, Claude R.	Thomas, W. H.
Sheddon, Rev. R.	Thorp, Frank W.
Shepley, D. Sutton.	Tinney, Charles E.
Shindler, Thos.	Tracey, H.
Sinclair, Dr. G. R.	Ulllyett, J. W.
Smart, Graham.	Vinden, E. L.
Southgate, Dr. T. Lea.	Visetti, Albert.
Stainer, Dr. Edward.	Waterman, T. H.
Stainton, L.	Watt, John.
Stewart, C. Hylton.	Wetton, Dr. H. Davan.
Stewart, Rev. C. H. Hylton.	Williams, Lucas.
Stracker, A. J.	Wilson, D.
Stubbs, George.	Wright, E.
Symes, Herbert W.	Yarrow, R.
Symons, H.	

Choir Secretary—Mr. Henry King.

Organist—Dr. Walter G. Alcock, M.V.O.

Assistant-Organist—Mr. W. J. Winter.

Assistant-Conductors:

Sir Walter Parratt, M.V.O., Mus. Doc.

Sir George C. Martin, M.V.O., Mus. Doc.

Joseph C. Bridge, Mus. Doc.

Director of the Coronation Music and Conductor-in-Chief:

Sir J. Frederick Bridge, M.V.O., M.A., Mus. Doc.,
Organist of Westminster Abbey, Gresham Professor of Music,
and King Edward Professor of Music, London University.

Music played by the Orchestra.

Fanfare	<i>J. E. Borland.</i>
Solemn Melody	<i>H. Walford Davies.</i>
Coronation March... ..	<i>Frederic Cliffe.</i>
Prelude (Reverie)	<i>Frederic H. Cowen.</i>
*An English Joy Peal	<i>A. C. Mackenzie.</i>
Schiller Fest-Marsch	<i>Meyerbeer.</i>
Coronation March (Revised)	<i>Edward German.</i>
March Solennelle	<i>Tschaikowsky.</i>
Huldigungs-Marsch	<i>Wagner.</i>
*Coronation March... ..	<i>Edward Elgar.</i>
Imperial March	<i>Edward Elgar.</i>

* Specially written for the occasion.

WAGNER'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

BY HERBERT THOMPSON.

(Continued from p. 370.)

The unhappy circumstances of Wagner's early and improvident marriage are told, and are in many respects even more tragic than one surmised. It is apparent that Minna Planer was not a fitting partner for him, and it was undoubtedly her pretty face rather than her character which attracted him. He, too, with his fiery temper and keen ambition, was anything but a comfortable spouse, and he acknowledges his shortcomings in this respect, as he does his wife's courage and helpfulness in all their terrible Paris time. The long and dangerous voyage from Riga to London (lasting three weeks!) is described with a vividness which proves how strongly it had impressed itself upon Wagner's memory. The week they spent in viewing the sights of London included a visit to the House of Lords, where Wagner witnessed a debate in which Lord Melbourne (then Premier), Lord Brougham, the Duke of Wellington, Lord Lyndhurst and the Bishop of London took part. The Duke, with his

grey beaver hat on his head and both hands in his trouser-pockets, accentuating by the movements of his body the points of his speech, which was delivered in a very conversational fashion, seems to have made a disillusionising but very pleasant impression on his hearer. Among the events in Paris may be mentioned a visit to Lablache, whom he sought to propitiate by writing an air which he could as Orovist sing in Bellini's 'Norma.' He was politely received, but, as in all his Parisian enterprises, he got no more lasting results than a 'polite reception.' We are told how he was reduced to perambulating the Paris streets in sole-less boots; and how, when the arrival of a parcel seemed to promise help, it turned out to be the score of the 'Rule, Britannia' overture returned by the London Philharmonic Society, on which seven francs postage was payable. As Wagner possessed no such sum as seven francs in the world, he could not take in the parcel, and his only copy of the score was lost to him. Possibly it was this score whose reappearance was rumoured some few years ago (see the *Musical Times*, 1904, p. 372). The lowest depth was reached when Wagner was commissioned to write a 'Méthode' for the cornet à pistons, an even greater indignity for an ambitious young composer than the concoction of arrangements from Donizetti's 'Favorita.'

Before leaving Paris he had come across the story of the 'Venusberg,' so when, on his way to Dresden, in the spring of 1842, he found himself in Eisenach, he visited the Wartburg, and found his way thence to the 'Hörselberg,' the reputed Hill of Venus, constructing in his mind as he walked a picture of the scene which he afterwards utilised for the third act of 'Tannhäuser.' There are some other interesting little details connected with this opera. In the summer of 1842, during a stay at Töplitz, he began the sketch, and as he was making his daily ascent of the Wostrai, a neighbouring height, he heard a shepherd piping a merry dance-tune, and incorporated the idea into the chorus of Pilgrims, but, when he came to compose it, could not recall the tune and had to invent one for himself. The 'popular' character of the march is explained by the fact of its being adapted from a little *pièce de circonstance* composed at a moment's notice to celebrate the return of the King of Saxony from a visit to England. The occasion is mentioned by Ellis, but is described in greater detail by Wagner, as are all the preparations for the production of the opera, including the long delayed scenery which was painted in Paris. About this time (1845) occurs the first mention of 'Die Meistersinger.' He was spending a summer vacation in Marienbad, and was full of ideas for 'Lohengrin,' but was warned not to occupy his mind with any strenuous labour. So he turned his attention to the Nuremberg Mastersingers, of whom he had been reading in Gervinus's 'History of German Literature.' He had been greatly taken with the name of the 'Marker,' and with his functions, and in the course of a country walk there came into his mind a comic scene in which Hans Sachs, the shoemaker-poet, should mark upon his 'last' the errors made by the 'Marker' in singing, by way of

revenge for the pedantic criticisms of the latter. This was the kernel of 'Die Meistersinger,' and he lost no time, in spite of medical prohibitions, in setting it down on paper. It was on another holiday, spent in Saxon Switzerland in 1846, that he began the composition of 'Lohengrin,' concerning which we have an interesting reminiscence. 'When I wanted to set to work at the first sketch of the "Lohengrin" music I was to my great distress beset by the Rossinian melodies of "William Tell," the last opera I had conducted, ringing incessantly in my ears: in my despair I hit upon an effectual method of counteracting this tiresome besetment, by singing with the utmost emphasis the first theme of the ninth Symphony—equally fresh in my memory—as I went on my lonely walk. This proved efficacious.' It is interesting to notice this same theme which, as we have seen, the lad Wagner found so significant, again playing a part in his artistic career. In composing 'Lohengrin,' by the way, he began with the last act, regarding 'Lohengrin's narration' as the germ of the whole work; just as he had done with Senta's ballad in the case of 'The Flying Dutchman.'

Though Wagner always refers to the great masters with respect, he inclines to be sarcastic about his contemporaries, and there is a suspicion of bitterness in his references to Mendelssohn, with whom he had, indeed, very little in common, and he seems to have arrived at terms of greater intimacy with Schumann, though of course they were by no means in perfect sympathy. They walked out together occasionally, and 'so far as was possible with a man so singularly chary of words, exchanged ideas on many subjects of musical interest.' Hiller was among his Dresden acquaintances, but references to him are always tinged with contempt. Liszt, Spohr, and Spontini he speaks of with cordiality, but they were almost the only musicians of the first rank who showed real sympathy with his aims, and, like all composers, he found it difficult to appreciate those of his colleagues with whom he was not in sympathy. He certainly gave frank expression to his dislikes, but after all the difference between him and other musicians in this respect is not so very great,—only some have the discretion not to give publicity to their opinions.

It was 'Rienzi' which proved, in a material sense, the turning-point in Wagner's career: it led him to Dresden, and made him famous, but he makes it quite clear that the success it then achieved was due to its least estimable qualities. The delight which the principal tenor, Tichatschek, experienced, was of a purely personal kind. He found his part vocally effective, and it afforded him an opportunity for wearing magnificent attire, so no wonder the rehearsals were accompanied by much enthusiasm. 'Specially favourite passages were greeted by the singers at every rehearsal with acclamation, and an ensemble in the third finale, which later on had unfortunately, on account of the length of the work, to be totally omitted, actually became a source of revenue for me. Tichatschek used to say that this B minor passage

was so beautiful, that one ought to pay something for it each time, and put down a bright silver groschen, calling upon the other singers to do the same; in the best of humour all added to the sum; when we got so far, it would be said, "Now comes the Neugroschen place," and Frau Schröder-Devrient, as she too must pull out her purse, declared that this study would make her absolutely poor. I received each time this curious "tantième," and no one suspected that this playful honorarium was often very welcome to me and my wife in providing our dinner.'

Another indication of the character of the success of 'Rienzi' is furnished by an anecdote Wagner tells of his brother Julius, who came over from Leipsic to one of the performances. As the brothers sat in a box in full view of the whole audience, Julius had been warned against making any demonstration of applause. He obeyed the behest till a particular evolution in the ballet roused his enthusiasm so much that he felt compelled to join in the storm of applause, and said that he could restrain himself no longer. Again, it was the ballet which won the interest of the King of Prussia (the first German Emperor), and in later years, when Wagner witnessed a performance at Darmstadt, he found that, while cuts were extensive and numerous, in the ballet repeats and extensions were found necessary! Considering that, he adds, it was just this ballet music over which he had bestowed least trouble, putting it together when at Riga in a few days, it must have been very galling to his artistic pride to find it met with the most enthusiastic approval!

But Wagner's was the 'Nie zufriedene Geist' which always yearns after something unattained, and it is to his credit that he never wrote down to the popular taste, but always in advance of it. His Dresden career as Royal Capellmeister was, as might be expected from one of his temperament, of increasing difficulty. He began by being the pet of the public, a favourite with the Court, and a friend of the Intendant, but before seven years he had estranged them all. The public were puzzled by the 'Flying Dutchman' and 'Tannhäuser'; the Intendant, Count Lüttichau, no doubt found him a difficult person to deal with, and he and the Court were not unnaturally offended at his democratic ideas, which led him to be identified with the 'May Rising' of 1849. He certainly took no such active part as has been ascribed to him: Mr. Ashton Ellis has proved conclusively that the worst charges against him are baseless, and from his own account, which goes minutely into the events of the three or four fateful days, he appears to have been only a spectator, and in a very slight degree a participator, in the affair. But he was certainly a sympathetic spectator, and his association with some of the ringleaders must have made him a suspected person, so that one cannot wonder if his flight was construed in the worst sense.

Even before this his position had become impossible. In the previous winter the Court had assumed a critical attitude towards his work as a conductor. On one occasion 'The Queen was of

opinion that in "Norma" I had "conducted badly"; on another that in "Robert le Diable" I had been "incorrect in my beat"; and for these offences he received official censure. Whatever weight one may attach to royal criticisms, there is no doubt that they count for much with a snobbish public, and in this case it must be admitted that, as the King provided the funds, he had a right to express his opinion as to the result. The singers, noting the royal disfavour, felt themselves in a position to withstand Wagner's wishes in regard to the repertory. His niece, Johanna (whom, by the way, he styles his brother Albert's 'step-daughter,' though dates seem to make his correctness herein doubtful), and the tenor, Tichatschek, joined forces in procuring the production of 'Zampa' and 'La Favorita,' finding the parts suited to their voices and the costumes effective. So Wagner had to conduct the opera which in Paris he had arranged for the cornet-à-pistons, and it, with 'Zampa' and 'Martha' (!), were the principal works he had to conduct during this his last season. One can hardly be surprised if a man of his temperament and leanings found the position intolerable.

After the crisis of the Dresden Revolution Wagner became a wanderer, not only during the period of his enforced exile, but up to the time (1864) when his reminiscences come to a close with the King of Bavaria's invitation. He had no official position and no settled income. His operas were but slowly and tentatively taken up, and even the small and fitful returns from this source were, with characteristic improvidence, anticipated. In 1860 we find him offering the 'Nibelungen' trilogy, of which only 'Rheingold,' the prelude, was completed, to Schott; and he adds, with delightful naïveté, 'In the event of Schott accepting my offer, I immediately formed a plan of spending the money thus unexpectedly acquired for the furtherance of my Paris undertaking.'

His childlike love of luxurious surroundings formed another source of embarrassment. Even in his Zurich days, he tells with amusing complacency how Minna arranged for him an ordinary deal work-table, covered with a green cloth and hung round with light green silk curtains, 'which gave uncommon satisfaction to myself and to everyone else who saw it.' His love of silk, satins, and velvet, by the way, may be traced to something more than a mere love of display, for his constant liability to erysipelas no doubt made his skin peculiarly sensitive to soft and delicate textures. After his early privations, one may forgive his inclination to what Liszt chaffingly described as his 'Kleine Elégance,' but one cannot wonder if such a man ran into debts which followed him in his wanderings, and multiplied exceedingly, nor does it seem so outrageous that, at a time when he sought for a peaceful retreat to compose his later works,—none of which could be brought to a hearing until the Bavarian King took Wagner under his protection,—he should have sought the pecuniary help of his friends and admirers.

Nor yet, when one remembers his struggles, can one feel much surprise at a tinge of bitterness which underlies his memories of these times, and is more perceptible here than in his account of his youth, his experiences of which, though still more painful, had grown so remote when he dictated these memoirs that he could speak of them with a certain detachment. Even his intimate friends and ardent supporters, Tausig and Cornelius, come in for an occasional lash. To Saint-Saëns, whom he met in Paris in 1860, he gives the strongest testimonial for his astonishing power for reading at sight the most complicated scores, and for a memory which enabled him to play Wagner's works—including even 'Tristan,'—with such clearness of detail that one would imagine he must have the score always before his eyes. But by way of a set-off to this warm tribute Wagner adds: 'Later I ascertained that this stupendous receptivity in seizing all the technical details of music was not accompanied by any remarkable productivity, so that when he made repeated efforts to appear as a composer I completely lost sight of him.'

The help of his influential friends he accepts as a matter of course, while from his own account of his treatment of Hanslick one cannot wonder if he made that critic an opponent whose attitude was embittered by strong personal feeling. It has often been said that the character of Beckmesser was based on Hanslick's personality, and Wagner, though he gives no countenance to this idea, implies that at any rate the cap fitted, for he gives an account of a reading of the 'Meistersinger' poem in Vienna, when Hanslick, who was present, showed great annoyance, and evidently regarded the whole poem as a pasquinade directed against himself. It certainly cannot be said that Wagner ever went out of his way to conciliate an adversary, and he often did not scruple to estrange a friend: his character was not, perhaps, a very amiable one, but he had at least the virtue of the courage of his opinions.

Among the most interesting episodes in the book are those which refer to the circumstances under which Wagner's works were composed. The introductory scene of 'Rheingold' was conceived under peculiar conditions. After a long and trying journey to Spezzia, followed by a sleepless night in an hotel, he took a long walk amid the pine-woods and, tired out, threw himself on a hard bed to seek for sleep which did not come to him, but, he continues, 'I fell into a sort of somnambulistic condition, in which I suddenly received the impression of sinking into a strongly flowing stream, the noise of which presently resolved itself into the chord of E flat major, which welled forth continuously, broken up in figures of increasing movement, but never departing from the E flat chord, which by its duration gave a sense of infinity to the element in which I was sinking. With the sensation that the waves were coursing far above my head I woke in affright out of my half-sleep.' This, he realised, was the prelude which had been forming itself, subconsciously, in his mind, and, instead of continuing his travels

in search of ideas, he returned to Zurich to begin the composition the clue to which had thus come to him.

In 1861 he was in Venice, and was persuaded to enter the Academy of Arts, where, he tells us, Titian's 'Assumption' made such a profound impression upon him that he felt his creative power renewed within him, and promptly set about composing 'Die Meistersinger.' On the journey to Vienna the musical ideas began to flow, and he at once planned with the greatest clearness the greater part of the overture. This was before he had written the text, to obtain material for which he had recourse to Wagenseil's famous book on Nuremberg and the Mastersingers, a copy of which he procured from the Imperial Library in Vienna. But though he set about this task with great avidity, he met with such obstacles that the opera was not completed at the time when he began his memoirs, for it was not till after his call to Munich that 'Tristan' could be performed, or the 'Mastersingers' and the 'Ring' completed. In the meantime, however, he had found it well to make his aims known by giving performances of portions of his as yet unknown works in concert form. At a concert in Leipsic in 1862 the 'Meistersinger' overture was heard for the first time in public. It was in the Gewandhaus; but the regular attenders of the subscription concerts made it a point of honour not to attend, and Wagner 'never saw a concert-room quite so empty on a similar occasion.' For another concert which Wagner gave in Vienna several concert-selections from the later works were prepared, and he got some of his friends to assist him in preparing the orchestral parts. In this connection we have an interesting incident: 'Tausig also introduced Brahms to me, recommending him as "a thoroughly good fellow," who, famous as he already was, would willingly undertake to share their work: to him a portion of the "Meistersinger" was allotted. He behaved indeed modestly and genially; but he was so quiet that he was often hardly noticed in our meetings.' These concerts met with much greater success, a matter on which Wagner had reason to congratulate himself, though here, by the way, the English translation misses the point of his remark. After mentioning the large audience at the third concert, he goes on to say that on this occasion he received a proof of the good taste of the public of Vienna in music, in that the by no means sensational prelude to 'Pogner's address' was encored; by running two sentences together he is made to find the proof of Viennese good taste in the large audience at his concert,—which would be natural enough to think, but indiscreet to set down in a book!

In Breslau he conducted a concert the distinguishing feature of which was that the audience consisted chiefly of Jews, a fact which suggests that Jews are above personal prejudice, seeing that this happened after the publication of 'Das Judenthum in der Musik!'

Of his visit to London in 1855 to conduct the Philharmonic Concerts, an episode which Mr. Ellis,

in his biography, has described with such wealth of detail, Wagner gives an interesting account, coloured of course by his individual and not very impartial views. He attributes most of the difficulties he encountered to Costa, who, from what one knows of him, would not be likely to favour a rival, and to J. W. Davison, whose thorough-paced devotion to Mendelssohn set very narrow bounds to his critical outlook. The account of these concerts has many amusing touches. In the analysis which Wagner wrote for the 'Lohengrin' prelude the words 'Holy Grail' and 'God' were very solemnly struck out as unfitting in the programme of a secular concert. Dr. Wylde, the conductor of the New Philharmonic Concerts, is described as a typical, chubby Englishman, exceedingly good-natured, but ridiculously incompetent, who had had some lessons in conducting from Lindpaintner, and had progressed far enough in the art to follow with fair success the orchestra, which, for its part, took its own course. Wagner's memory for English names is not always accurate: he writes of Dr. 'Wilde' and of a 'Mr. MacFarrinc,' whose overture 'Steeple Chase' seems to have found favour with Wagner, who admired its 'peculiar, wildly passionate character,' and enjoyed conducting it. The reference is, of course, to G. A. Macfarren and his 'Chevy-Chase' overture, concerning which an explanatory note might well have been added to the English translation. The London theatres Wagner found interesting; a fairy-tale extravaganza at the Adelphi appealed to his imagination, and some Shakespearean revivals had much to recommend them. The Sacred Harmonic Society's oratorio performances were, as may be imagined, less to Wagner's taste. He gives them credit for great precision, especially in 'Messiah,' and here, with some truth, he recognizes the real spirit underlying English musical taste, 'which' he finds 'is allied to the spirit of English Protestantism, so that such an oratorio performance meets with much more general appreciation than opera; and has, besides, this advantage, that an oratorio concert is so like a church-service that it almost counts as an attendance at church. Just as at church one sits with a prayer-book, one sees there in the hands of the audience the scores, which in a popular shilling edition are sold at the ticket office, and are followed most diligently.' As, however, Wagner goes on to say that his chief recollection of his stay in London is one of uninterruptedly bad health, of suffering from a succession of colds, it may well be that his experience was a jaundiced one, and it would be interesting to know whether his impressions were more favourable when he came, in 1877, as a composer who had won his way to fame and fortune. He ends his account of this episode by mentioning that, as a distraction from the task of instrumenting 'Die Walküre,' he took to reading Dante, 'whose "Inferno" acquired an unforgettable realism in the London atmosphere.'

For Paris, Wagner had a hankering rather strange in view of the painful disillusionment of his first visit. His long stay there in 1859-61, ending with the terrible fiasco of the 'Tannhäuser'

production, brought him very little further, and it is worthy of note that all his later works had been accepted in England long before they had been even heard in France. In 1882 all his operas, from 'Rienzi' to the 'Ring,' were given in London, and it was not till some years after his death that the reaction began in Paris from the time when Wagner was so unpopular that 'Lohengrin' was prohibited for fear of a popular tumult. Wagner tells with great spirit of his long struggle for the adequate production of 'Tannhäuser,' how from the first the Director, Alphonse Royer, insisted on the necessity of remodelling the second Act so as to introduce a ballet at the hour when it was expected by the opera-habitues, of the difficulty experienced in translating the libretto, of the painful and exhausting rehearsals, and of the incompetence of the conductor, Dietzsch. Finally, there was the uproar raised by the fine gentlemen of the Jockey Club, whose shrill whistles made the music inaudible, and who persisted with such determination that at the third performance, when the composer stayed at home, the proceedings were twice suspended by free fights of a quarter of an hour's duration! On this occasion the presence of a strong force of police conveyed the impression that order was to be maintained, but it turned out that they were there to ensure the safety of the 'Jockeys,' who feared reprisals on the part of those who wished to listen to the music!

Wagner had, however, some compensation in the many artistic friends he won at this time. Berlioz, as we know from his letters, did not conceal his delight at the failure of one for whom he professed some friendship, but whom he must have regarded as a dangerous rival. Gounod, on the other hand, though Wagner never pretended to admire his music, seems to have behaved with chivalry: 'It was reported to me that everywhere in society he spoke up for me with enthusiasm; he was said to have exclaimed, "Que Dieu me donne une pareille chute." As an acknowledgment I presented him with a score of "Tristan und Isolde," for his behaviour delighted me all the more, since no considerations of friendship had been able to induce me to hear his "Faust." Happily, as the way seemed for the time closed in Paris, it became open in Germany, for a grudging consent was obtained from King John of Saxony to Wagner's return to other German States, though that of his own home was still forbidden to him. He was now able to witness, for the first time, a performance of 'Lohengrin,' an event which took place in Vienna. It was on this occasion, by the way, that Hanslick sought for an introduction, and was, according to Wagner's own account, received so brusquely as to make any reconciliation impossible. It was in this way that Wagner himself contributed not a little to the acerbity with which the controversy surrounding his works was conducted.

Not the least interesting features of these frank memoirs are Wagner's accounts of his relations with the women who took an interest in his career. His first wife, Minna, though in many respects an excellent helpmeet, was notoriously without

sympathy for his artistic ambitions, but his friendships for Madame Laussot and Frau Wesendonck, though they caused many heart-burnings, seem to have been based on admiration for his genius. The latter affair is certainly minimised, for the published correspondence shows how deep was the feeling between them, and one can understand how Wagner, dictating to his second wife, Cosima, these recollections, did not incline to make too much of them. But there can be no doubt that, however liable to misapprehension, there was nothing to be ashamed of in the affair, to which those concerned had the wisdom to put an end before there was the possibility that sympathy could develop into passion. As for the Laussot episode, it reads like a chapter in a French novel: a jealous husband calling for the aid of the police, and a suspicious mother making mischief about nothing. Concerning the more delicate matter of his attachment for Cosima von Bülow, Wagner writes with a frankness which makes it difficult to believe he could have intended his autobiography to be published during her lifetime. We are made, by many allusions, to realise that their union was the result of a very gradual growth, for a long time hardly acknowledged even by themselves, but becoming in the end inevitable. Whatever judgment may be passed on this and other episodes in Wagner's career, one can only rejoice that there is no attempt to present only one side of his character, but that the shadows combine with the lights to give us a picture of a real human being, not the impossible hero of a common type of biography.

THE INTERNATIONAL MUSICAL CONGRESS.

LONDON, MAY 29 TO JUNE 3.

The long-prepared and much-discussed Congress organized by the British Section of the International Musical Society was by general consent admitted to be a brilliant consummation. In the first place the Congress Committee succeeded in gaining the confidence and substantial support of many leading men and societies in this country, and were therefore free from financial anxiety, and in the next place they succeeded in attracting many distinguished foreign musicians and in giving them a reception unmistakable in its cordiality. There were some difficulties in connection with the reading at the London University of the eighty-five papers submitted, arising chiefly from the physical limitations of the accommodation provided. But such dissatisfaction as arose was dispelled like the morning mist before the sun when the social functions and the numerous carefully-prepared musical performances began to take place.

The proceedings were initiated by an eminently-successful reception given by Messrs. Novello & Co. in their music room at Wardour Street. The guests came in almost overwhelming numbers (a full list is given below), and were soon in polyglot conversation with one another and their British hosts.