

Review

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THE MUSICAL TIMES,

And Singing Class Circular.

MARCH 1, 1871.

BEETHOVEN.*

By HENRY C. LUNN.

DR. FERDINAND HILLER in his Essay, "Quasi Fantasia," which commences this volume, says, "The year 1749 brought us Goethe; 1756 Mozart; 1759 Schiller; and 1770 Beethoven. Thus, within the short space of twenty-one years, four of the greatest poetic geniuses were born—four men of whom not only the German Fatherland, but all mankind must be proud." This is written by a German, and expresses the national estimate of the real place of the great composers of the world. But have we yet advanced to any such opinion in this country? True, it may be, that we pride ourselves upon our love for the most important compositions of Beethoven; and some people there are, even amongst musical amateurs, who have arrived at a due comprehension of their wondrous beauties; but after all, with many, this admiration, of which we hear so much, is a mere fashion, and nothing that is a mere fashion comes from the heart. "Genius it is," says Dr. Hiller, "that gives us, if but for a few short hours, that which the believer awaits with earnest hope in another and a better world;" and if we believe that a poet, in the truest sense of the word, is one who embodies the highest and noblest thought in the language of his nature, then must we rank Beethoven, not only amongst the greatest composers, but amongst the greatest poets the world has yet seen. Admitting, however, that some such feeling as this is gradually gaining ground with a small portion of the English public, what progress has it made with painters, sculptors, literary men and statesmen? What Englishman, eminent as a creator in any of the so-called "Fine Arts," will admit that an equally eminent creator of music is on a level with himself? What British statesman will boldly advocate the necessity of recognizing music by the same governmental assistance which is accorded to other arts and sciences? Ignorance in music is at present scarcely considered a reproach to the mental capacity of our native "great men," the few who admit the power of the art being the exception, and not the rule. Germans may rank Goethe, Mozart, Schiller, and Beethoven, on an equality; but before any such feeling can prevail in England, a knowledge of the most profound musical works must become more general, and the lives, thoughts, and high aspirations of their composers must be read and studied, more especially by those who, from their position in the world of art, necessarily exert an intellectual influence over the general public.

It is with a sincere conviction of this fact, that we cordially welcome any healthy addition to the literature of the art. The translations of German works bearing upon music and its professors, recently published in this country, have already done something towards educating many persons to a higher appreciation of the compositions of the great masters, and of the nature of the men who

produced them. The correspondence of Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Bach, and others, may now be had at most of our circulating libraries; and many idlers at the sea-side linger over Mendelssohn's letters, as over the last new novel. Biographies, too, are slowly but surely informing the music-loving public how the most eminent composers lived for their art, and of the manner in which their labours have too often been but coldly repaid by a world which they have done so much to ennoble and refine. But many there are who love to get all this information in as concise a form as possible; and as it is better that people should read a small book on the subject than none at all, any person who will undertake the task of condensing the matter contained in the larger works, confers a real boon upon society. The volume before us may be recommended with confidence as an excellent specimen of what the author candidly announces in his preface—"a slight *résumé* of the principal events in the master's life from the works of Schindler, Ries, and Wegeler, and more especially from Marx and Thayer." It is carefully written; and, although showing the fervour of an artist, the style is free from that inflated bombast so often observable in works of this class. The sketch of Beethoven's ancestors goes far back enough for the purpose; and it is well said, that the Viennese admirers of the composer who could not imagine that his aristocratic tendencies were compatible with a plebeian origin, must have been sorely downcast when they found that his parents were a tenor singer of the Electoral Chapel, and the daughter of the head cook to his Grace the Archbishop of Treves. The desire of young Ludwig's father to imitate the Mozarts by exhibiting his precocious son in public for money, no doubt contributed a great deal to lay the foundation of an irascible and obstinate temper which, with all his good qualities, he could not in after life shake off. When only five years of age, we are told, the boy was kept at the pianoforte morning, noon, and night; and "many a time was the little Ludwig seen in tears, standing on a raised bench before his pianoforte, thus early serving his apprenticeship to grief." Had all this drudgery been forced upon the child for any artistic purpose, the harshness resorted to might have been partially forgiven; but unfortunately the truth is too well known, that the sole object of such relentless conduct was to use up the genius of the son to pay for the intemperate habits of the father. Luckily, however, it was seen that, even for this purpose, it would be necessary to seek some better instruction; and although under Pfeiffer and Van den Eeden he no doubt gained some knowledge, it was not until he was placed with Neefe (who notwithstanding that he was somewhat cold and formal in his teaching, evidently discovered the possession of exceptional power in his young pupil) that his talents were really directed into the right channel. The early part of the composer's life seemed doomed to be sorrowful. At thirteen years of age he was nominated officially to a post he had long occupied in reality—that of assistant organist to his master Neefe, who, in the service of the Elector, Max Friedrich, found his duties press too heavily upon him, having not only to play the organ, but to direct an operatic company, which was supported by the Elector. The death of Max Friedrich, however, rendered Beethoven's services no longer necessary; and as it is known that he looked for-

* Beethoven. A Memoir, by Elliott Graeme; with an Essay, by Dr. Ferdinand Hiller, of Cologne. London: Charles Griffin & Co.

ward to the salary of this new office as a means of partially helping his mother in the support of her increasing family, and that his father was now an irreclaimable drunkard, it may be imagined that the future presented to the young artist was indeed a gloomy one. That he acted as nobly in this emergency, as he did in after years, when the care of his profligate nephew pressed heavily upon him, is proved by every record of the time. For upwards of a twelvemonth he materially contributed to the support of the household—most probably by giving lessons—and it was not until his appointment as assistant organist to the new Elector, Max Franz, with the annual salary of a hundred thalers, that he again breathed an artistic atmosphere. His journey to Vienna, where he played before Mozart—improvising upon a given theme so wonderfully, as to excite the admiration of the master—gave an impetus to his ambition, which must have been sadly checked by his sudden return to his own home, where he only arrived in time to be present at the death-bed of his mother, whom he evidently clung to with the most ardent affection. We have little doubt that his visit to Vienna, where Gluck, Haydn, and Mozart were then resident, had been a long cherished dream; and that he had been gradually saving up money from his small earnings for the purpose. That all his means were thoroughly exhausted, even before he left that city, may be seen from the following passage in his letter to M. de Schaden, counsellor at Augsburg: "With regard to your extreme kindness and friendliness in lending me three carolines in Augsburg, I must beg you still to have a little indulgence with me, as my journey cost me a great deal, and here I have not the slightest prospect of earning anything. Fate is not propitious to me here in Bonn."

We linger with much interest over the early days of Beethoven, because we there see how his better nature was blighted, even in his boyhood. Whilst he was yearning for parental love, he was tyrannised over by a drunken father, who, for his own selfish purposes, almost bound him to his pianoforte, and actually for the time succeeded in making him detest an art which he was formed by nature to glorify. His fondness for his mother seemed the only solace of his youth. In the letter to M. de Schaden, already quoted from, he writes: "Ah! who was happier than I, so long as I could still pronounce the sweet name of mother, and heard the answer! and to whom can I now say it? To the silent images resembling her, which my fancy presents to me." and this is the man in whose nature, it has often been said, sympathy with others existed not: strange, indeed, does it seem that we are only just beginning to understand that during his whole life, he was earnestly seeking after that affection which, by some fortuitous chain of circumstances, he seemed destined never to obtain: "Educate your daughter carefully," he says in a letter to Frau von Streicher, "that she may make a good wife. To-day happens to be Sunday, so I will quote you something out of the Bible—'Love one another.'"

It must have been a sad parting, when Beethoven took leave of the Breuning family, Count Waldstein, and many others, who were gradually appreciating his wonderful talents, and went for the second time to Vienna, for the purpose of studying

under Haydn. We can readily imagine that, with such a master, the young and enthusiastic artist believed that he should develop his powers in the most legitimate manner, and that Haydn would take the utmost interest in his progress. From some cause, however, we know that this was not the case; and that a coldness sprang up between them which seems almost unaccountable. When, therefore, on Haydn's departure from the city, Beethoven placed himself under the instruction of Albrechtsberger, it may almost be said that he really commenced anything like serious and systematic study. That he worked hard under the strict discipline of his new teacher is the more creditable, seeing that his genius soon convinced him, that many of the rules laid down as infallible had been written by pedants for the sake of keeping the art within the narrow limits in which they had found it. And yet, innovator as the young student was, even at this time, who can gainsay the truth of these remarks, selected from scribbles on his Exercises in Thorough-bass, published after his death by the Chevalier von Seyfried?

"Time goes on; and what sufficed for one age, appears to the next a woeful shortcoming. Let me not be supposed to advocate an impertinent contempt of the great principles of art, *which are unchangeable*; I would only say that as time advances, art also advances in many things. Invention and fancy must not be denied the rights and privileges of which schoolmen, theorists, and barren critics would gladly deprive them."

How this feeling actuated him in the production of his finest works, is shown by the reply he gave to a friend, who, speaking of his second and third "Leonora" overtures, remarked that "an artist must create in freedom, only giving in to the spirit of his age, and be monarch over his own materials."

"Granted," replied Beethoven; "but he must *not* give in to the spirit of his age, otherwise it is all over with originality. . . . Had I written them (the two overtures) in the spirit that prevailed at the time, they would certainly have been understood at once; as, for example, the Storm of Kotzeluch. But I cannot cut and carve out my works according to the fashion, as they would fain have me do. Freshness and originality create themselves, without thinking about it."

At Vienna, the friendship of the Baron von Swieten and Prince Lichnowski tended much towards placing him in a good position with the leading families of the city, and also incited him to develop his powers as a composer; for Prince Lichnowski, especially, was a man of artistic and cultivated taste, and many of Beethoven's works were performed for the first time at his residence. We have already said that in everything, save the pursuit of his art, the composer appeared destined to encounter obstacles which fall to the lot of but few. At the height of his success, that worst of all maladies to a musician, incurable deafness, removed him from society, and so utterly crushed his mind for the time that, in a letter to Wegeler, he writes, "If I had not read somewhere that man must not of his own free will depart this life, I should long ere this have been no more, and that through my own act." To add to his misery, his two brothers, Carl and Johann, resolved to build up their fortunes by negotiating themselves with the music publishers for the sale of his compositions, and there is every reason to suppose that they reaped a very handsome sum for their disinterested exertions. At

all events, we know that Johann became so intoxicated with his wealth and position, that on one occasion he sent in a card to Ludwig, on which was inscribed, "Johann van Beethoven, Land Proprietor," which was immediately returned to him by the composer, with "Ludwig van Beethoven, Brain Proprietor," written on the other side.

We do not here intend to enter upon any critical analysis of Beethoven's works. The cold annotators upon his compositions who were nurtured in the severe school preceding the career of so grand a genius, and the deeply imaginative and enthusiastic modern writers who endeavour to discover the profoundest hidden meaning in every passage he wrote, may be equally liable to error. The age of opponents and partisans must die off, before so original and daring a thinker can be correctly estimated; and that we have not arrived at that time in England, may be proved by the fact of his colossal Mass in D being still attacked when presented in this country, whilst in Germany it is ranked amongst the sublimest efforts of his genius.

It is probable that many of the facts we have mentioned in the course of our extracts and remarks upon Mr. Graeme's Memoir—a book rendered doubly valuable by the addition of Dr. Hiller's excellent essay—may be known to a large number of our readers; but although, as we have said, we must still class some of his later works amongst the "music of the future" in England, there is no reason why his character should be judged at that indefinite period; and we have, therefore, seized upon every opportunity of showing how that misanthropic and gloomy state of mind, which gradually grew upon him, was thoroughly opposed to his real nature. That he was constantly struggling with his malady, and anxious that the world should judge him as he really was, is evidenced in many of his communications to his most intimate friends, and especially in the document addressed to his brothers, in which he formally disposes of his property, some sentences from which we extract:—

"O ye, who consider, or represent me as unfriendly, morose, and misanthropic, how unjust are you to me! You know not the secret cause of what appears thus to you. My heart and mind have been from childhood given up to the tender feeling of benevolence, and I have ever been disposed to accomplish something great."

"Born with a passionate, lively temperament, keenly susceptible to the pleasures of society, I was obliged at an early age to isolate myself, and to pass my life in loneliness."

"My brothers, Carl and —, as soon as I am dead, if Professor Schmidt be still alive, beg him, in my name, to describe my disease, and then add these pages to the history of my malady, that, at least so far as possible, the world may be reconciled to me after my death."

That these words may speak to the hearts of the thousands who appreciate his works, must be the earnest wish of all who honour and revere the name of Beethoven.

JOULE'S ANTHEM BOOK.

In the article on "Clifford's Anthem Book," in the February number of the *Musical Times*, the list of "collections of value," should have included the above-named book. But the omission at that time affords an opportunity for speaking specially of the claim which the work has to being considered a

collection of merit. In the first place, it is considerably larger than any other existing, and being arranged upon a good plan, is well fitted for general use. The number of anthems includes nearly all the settings daily sung, specially written to certain words, as well as many adaptations, which are frequently employed in many of the places where choral service is the ordinary custom. It is equally available for choirs with a large, as well as for those with a limited repertory, for such as encourage ancient and modern original compositions as for those that are content with mere adaptations.

The collection is now twelve years old, and the great number of anthems added since its publication would, if a new edition became necessary, probably swell the book still more; not by adding much to the biographical notices, for there are very few composers who have written much since that time that are not mentioned, but by the addition of texts that have not been before set to music, and by the insertion of some of the words of older anthems that have been revived into use. The preface shows the compiler to be a scholar and a good churchman; and the biographical notices are in the main correct, interesting and carefully brought together, and a careful examination will prove the book to be as useful as an anthology of scriptural passages, as it is valuable as a collection of the words of anthems.

CRYSTAL PALACE.

THE two movements from Mr. Henry Gadsby's Symphony, produced at the Saturday Concerts at this establishment, although fragments of a work, which can only fairly be judged in its entirety, are good enough to merit praise on their own account. The *Larghetto* is melodious and skilfully instrumented, and the *Scherzo* shows much inventive power, which appears to have been trained in the right direction. A prominent feature in the selection of music during the past month, was the fine performance of Mendelssohn's Concerto in D minor, by Madame Schumann; and we must also record the decided success of a new soprano singer, Madame Cora de Wilhorst, who especially in a cavatina from Meyerbeer's "Il Crociato in Egitto," displayed an excellent style, and considerable dramatic power. One of the most interesting of the great orchestral works was Spohr's Symphony, "Die Weihe der Töne," which, although perhaps scarcely fulfilling the grandeur of purpose which the subject demands, is unquestionably a composition of the highest character, and played as it was by Mr. Manns's carefully trained band, can never fail to ensure a welcome. The concerts have been, as usual, excellently attended.

THE ORATORIO CONCERTS.

THE performance of Bach's *Matthew Passion* music on the 15th ult., at St. James's Hall, was a worthy inauguration of the third season of these excellent concerts. The interest awakened by the presentation of this sublime work at the Oratorio Concerts last year, seems to have strengthened, as we anticipated, on its repetition; for not only was the room crowded in every part, but rarely indeed have we seen so many eminent artists assembled; and considering the deeply sacred character of the composition, it may fairly be said that the enthusiastic applause with which it was received throughout was indeed a hopeful sign of the effect which such music, so finely performed, and so patiently listened to, cannot fail to produce upon an intelligent audience. It is happily now unnecessary to enlarge upon the manner in which Bach has treated a subject which it were