Notes on Some Forgotten Symphony Composers: C. Ph. E. Bach, Dittersdorf, and Ignaz Pleyel

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no less fit, and the choir was one about which any conductor and any town might boast. It would be invidious to single out any special point of excellence when all reached the high-water mark; but the unaccompanied strains of *Nun danket* ('Let all men praise the Lord') greeted the ear with a peculiar beauty that will not soon be forgotten. 'Athalie'—of which, it may be observed, the overture was composed by Mendelssohn in London, during his visit of 1844—had not, we were informed, been sung by the Society for some twenty-five years, therefore the music was much less familiar to both band and chorus than the earlier work which formed the first part of the programme, but the March of the Priests made its usual effect. It only remains to be said that Dr. Coward conducted with that exuberance of spirit which characterises everything he takes in hand, including

MR. BEN STOCKS,
PRESIDENT OF THE HUDDERSFIELD CHORAL SOCIETY.
(Photograph by Mr. John E. Shaw, Huddersfield.)

his baton. He is evidently the right man in the right place as conductor of the Huddersfield Choral Society. Long may it flourish under his invigorating sway!

Huddersfield, like other cities and towns, is to be congratulated on its Choral Society officers:—Mr. Ben Stocks, the President, and Mr. J. Eagleton, Secretary, as chiefs, though yeoman service has been rendered by Mr. William Harrop, Mr. J. A. Wrigley, J.P., and Mr. J. J. Grist, members of the committee. In the course of a pleasant chat (after the concert) at the Borough Club—located in the very house in which the Parratt family resided—Mr. Ben Stocks relates the story of his early music-makings in Huddersfield forty or fifty years ago. It was then the custom to meet for a feast of song, on the Friday nearest the full moon, in various neighbouring towns and villages. The

method of conveyance from place to place was 'Shanks's mare,' and a walk of eight miles over the hills to get to the rendezvous was a mere nothing to those enthusiastic music lovers. Places like Honley, Brighouse, New Mill, were visited in rotation; and it was a common experience, for instance, to walk to New Mill on a Saturday afternoon, have 'a good sing,' then supper, leave the place of rehearsal at about eleven o'clock, walk home in the moonlight, and yet be at church at 9.30 on the following (Sunday) morning, ready for rehearsal, and as fresh as cucumbers!

No less enthusiastic is the honorary secretary of the Society, Mr. John Eagleton, who, like Mr. Ben Stocks, is a fine specimen of an amateur musician and a sturdy Yorkshireman, yet genial withal. A native of Huddersfield, Mr. Eagleton joined the Society forty years ago. Six years later he was placed on the Committee, and, since 1872, he has been the ever-alert Secretary. History says that Mr. Eagleton has not been altogether unacquainted with burnt cork; but in 1870 he took up the more serious study of the bassoon. He and Mr. Cyril Spottiswoode are the only amateur double-bassoon players in this country and Mr. Eagleton has played his monster instrument at the Handel Festivals, and at several London concerts. With such a trio of able officers as Ben Stocks, John Eagleton, and Henry Coward, and with such splendid singers as those who form the chorus, the Huddersfield Choral Society bids fair to sustain the reputation of the West Riding of Yorkshire as the Home of the Oratorio.

DOTTED CROCHET.

NOTES ON SOME FORGOTTEN SYMPHONY COMPOSERS:

C. PH. E. BACH, DITTERSDORF, AND IGNAZ PLEYEL.

By PROFESSOR NIECKS.

The Programme of Professor Niecks's Fourth Historical Concert, 'Some Forgotten Symphony Composers,' given at Edinburgh on February 19th, contained the following interesting introductory remarks.

To recall the forgotten, or, rather, to disinter the buried, is profitable in more than one respect. It enables us to realise tastes, styles, and personalities of the past better than the most graphic of descriptions can do, enables us to learn the lesson that older forms may be different phases without being lower stages of development, and enables us to prove the fact that many things shelved are worthy to be brought forth again.

C. PH. E. BACH (1714-88), the son of J. S. Bach, he whom Haydn and Mozart called their father, was a cultivator of the 'gallant' style (so-called in contradistinction to the contrapuntal and fugal style), and one of the chief developers of the modern sonata. As a composer of sonatas he is better known than as a composer of symphonies. From 1741 to 1776 the master composed, however, as many as eighteen symphonies, five of which were printed in his life-time, and four of these reprinted in 1860. Characteristic of C. Ph. E. Bach's works are liveliness of imagination and variety of form. The masterly Symphony in D, among others, illustrates this strikingly. It consists of three movements—the first a well-developed, spirited *Allegro di molto*, the second a short, singing *Largo* of only twenty-seven bars, and the third a nimble, by no means long, *Presto*. The unconventionality of the composer comes out in the continuity of the work (the first movement leads into the second, the second into the third); it comes out

in the keys of the movements (D, E flat, D); and in the thoughts, form, and instrumentation. In the first movement we have highly developed, but freely treated modern sonata form, in the last movement, freely treated modernised old sonata form.

IGNAZ PLEYEL (1757-1831), a pupil of Wanhal and for five years of Haydn, was one of the most popular composers of his time, and enjoyed such a reputation that when Salomon brought Haydn to London in 1792, to be the principal attraction at his concerts, the directors of the Professional Concerts engaged Pleyel for their concerts as a counter attraction. Master and pupil in becoming rivals remained friends. Pleyel was neither a man of genius nor an imposing personality, but a musician of great talent who had mastered the craft of his art and knew how to write pleasingly and effectively. Neither his form nor his matter requires comment—both are obvious.

CARL DITTERS VON DITTERSDORF (1739-99), another very popular composer, gave to the world not only a great number of symphonies, string quartets, and other instrumental compositions, but also oratorios and operas. One or two of his comic operas are still occasionally performed in Germany, some of his string quartets have been recently revived, and in 1899 there were printed at Leipzig six programme and two other symphonies, an overture, and a divertimento for orchestra. We are concerned now, not with his symphonies in general—of which he is said to have written about eighty—but with his programme symphonies, the best produced before Beethoven. They are twelve in number, were composed in 1783-85, and are based on scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, indicated by a verse or two placed above the movements. Three of these symphonies were printed during the composer's life-time, three of the unprinted were discovered at the Dresden Library in 1896, and the fate of the other six is still unknown. The form of these compositions, although sometimes influenced by the programme, adheres as a rule to the lines of absolute music, to those of the Haydn-Mozart period. There are always four movements, or rather divisions—one in first-movement sonata form (not, however, always the first), one a minuet, one an orthodox slow movement, and one of a different disposition, mostly with several changes of *tempo*. Of material tone-painting there is not a very great deal; and what there is, is artistic.

Much foolish programme music has been written, but still more foolish criticism has been written on programme music. You have only to misinterpret the intentions of the composer, or to dwell upon a subordinate detail as the main feature, and infinite scope for ridicule will present itself to you. Of Ditters von Dittersdorf's twelve symphonies, one is based on the well-known story of Actæon, who surprises Diana bathing, and is by the angry goddess changed into a stag, and then hunted and torn to pieces by his own dogs (*Metamorphoses* III., 144-252); and another is based on the less-known story of Latona and the Lycian peasants, which can, however, be told in almost as few words. The mother of Apollo and Diana, persecuted by Juno, comes to a lake in Lycia, and is about to slake her thirst, when rustics, gathering bulrushes, forbid her, and not only remain deaf to her entreaties, but even insult her. To revenge herself she transforms them into frogs (*Metamorphoses*, IV., 313-381). Now, does Dittersdorf make the impossible attempt of telling these stories? Nothing of the kind. What he does is this. He merely illustrates certain situations of the stories musically, just as artists of the pencil, burin, and brush do pictorially without blame and hindrance from any one. The first symphony illustrates: in

the first movement, Actæon and his companions hunting; in the second movement, Diana, surrounded by her nymphs, bathing in a sylvan stream; in the third, Actæon surprising Diana; and in the fourth, Actæon fleeing, pursued and killed by his dogs. The second symphony illustrates: in the first movement, the simple ways of the rustics, both rude and idyllic; in the second, the beseeching words of Latona, and the brutal refusals of the peasants; in the third, their churlishness and jeers; and in the fourth, Latona's appeal to heaven (*Adagio*), and rage and curse, 'Live, wretches, ever in the pool' (*Vivace*), and, in conclusion, the croaking of the frogs. What, however, will strike the hearer immeasurably more than the indication of croaking (by the horns) towards the end of the latter symphony, and the yelping of dogs in the first and last movements of the former, is the freshness, expressiveness, and beauty, often, indeed, exquisite beauty, of the pictures represented by the composer in the several movements.

The programme consisted of the following four symphonies, played by an orchestra of twenty-six players selected from the Scottish orchestra (leader, Mr. F. Siegl), and conducted by Professor Niecks:—

I. CARL DITTERS VON DITTERSDORF (1739-99):

The Transformation of Actæon into a Stag. No. 3 of the Symphonies after Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (composed about 1783-85).

- (a) Allegro, 6-8.
*Cum juvenis placido per devia lustra vagantes
Participes operum compellat Hyantius ore.*
... sated with the chace, Actæon stood,
And hail'd his comrades wand'ring thro' the wood.
- (b) Adagio (più tosto Andantino), C.
*Hic dea silvarum venatu fessa solebat
Virgineos artus liquido perfundere rore.*
Here Dian lov'd to cast her cares aside,
And bathe her virgin body in the tide.
- (c) Tempo di minuetto, 3-4.
Ecce nepos Cadmi.
Thither Actæon wanders.
- (d) Finale, Vivace, C.
Dilacerant falsi dominum sub imagine cervi.
On ev'ry side the ruthless blood-hounds pour'd,
And mangling tore their metamorphos'd lord.

II. CARL PHILIPP EMANUEL BACH (1714-88). Symphony in D major (1776).

- (a) Allegro di molto, C.
- (b) Largo, 3-4.
- (c) Presto, 3-8.

III. CARL DITTERS VON DITTERSDORF (1739-99):

The Transformation of the Lycian Peasants into Frogs. No. 5 (in the now printed, No. 6 in the original order) of the symphonies after Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

- (a) Allegretto non troppo Presto, C.
*... agrestes illic fructuosa legebant
Vimina cum juncis gratamque paludibus ulvam.*
... certain hinds stood by
The lake, collecting water-lilies, weeds,
Twigs of pale osier, rushes, sedge, and weeds.
- (b) Adagio, ma non molto, 2-4.
Quem non blanda deae potuissent verba movere?
What heart could eloquence like this withstand?
- (c) Minuetto, 3-4.
Hi tamen orantem perstant prohibere.
Yet with abuse, and rude assault beside,
The heartless monsters drive her from the tide.
- (d) Finale—alternately Adagio, 3-8, and Vivace, ma moderato, C.
Vox quoque jam rauca est.
Hoarsely they croak.

IV. IGNAZ PLEYEL (1757-1831):

Symphony in C major (composed about 1790).

- (a) Allegro assai, C. | (c) Minuetto, 3-4.
- (b) Andante grazioso, 3-8. | (d) Allegro assai, 2-4.