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HUGO WOLF AND THE LYRIC.

BY ERNEST NEWMAN.

II.

While admiring Wolf's justness of verbal accentuation, however, we must beware of supposing that this in itself could make any composer a fine lyricist. Now Wolf has set the model, almost any one with an ear for what I have called the delicacies, as distinct from the mechanics, of scansion could imitate his virtues in this respect; but that of itself would not make his songs interesting. As with all the other elements of a musical tissue, the device, the technique, counts for nothing if the idea is not inspired. Anyone can accent a lyric with due regard to the verbal values, just as any musician can write counterpoint of a sort; but whether we shall listen to either of them depends entirely upon what they have to say. It is because I believe Wolf to have said a larger number of beautiful things in the lyric, and a greater variety of beautiful things, than any other composer before or since, that I rank him above all other song writers. In psychological range Brahms—I mean, of course, the Brahms of the lyrics—cannot compare with him for a moment. As I have already tried to show, Brahms as a song writer moves within a very narrow emotional orbit, describing much the same kind of people time after time in much the same general terms. He is moreover addicted to *clichés* both of feeling and of idiom, and singularly timorous in his handling of the many new problems of form that confronted the lyricist of his day. Whatever may be urged against Wolf, no one can say that he exhibits a single one of these defects. The most cursory examination of his songs will convince any one that his vision embraced a far wider arc of life than Brahms', that he had a keener eye for not only the differences between human types but for the differences between individuals of the same type—lovers, for example—that he is infinite in technical resource, and that hardly two songs of his out of the two hundred have anything like the same external form or the same inner methods of procedure. The mere look of the printed page is enough to establish this last point. He is as personal in his emotions as in his technique. He breaks away from the peculiar vein of sentiment that had dominated the German song more and more since Schumann, and that sometimes weakened in Brahms into something dangerously near not merely sentimentality but mawkishness.

To myself, the variety of his forms, and the fertility of resource he shows within the frame of each of them, are particularly grateful after a course of Brahms, who, as we have seen, is too often content with a more or less conventional embroidery of the simple forms of folk-song. Upon the expressive side of Wolf's songs I do not wish to enlarge here; all that I can say on the subject I have already said in my book on him. But on the point of form a good deal more

can be said than is written there. Within the small sphere of the song, Wolf exhibits an architectonic faculty that, I dare to say, has not its superior in the whole history of music. No music could be surer in its sense of balance, in the knowledge of when to cease or to continue; no music conveys more surely the impression that it inevitably *had* to begin just here and end just there. Whether these beginnings and endings are curt or extended, you feel that in that particular song it had to be just so and could not possibly be otherwise. Equally admirable, equally eloquent of the big mind that visualises the whole work of art at a glance, sees the whole in all the detail and each detail in reference to the whole, is the certainty with which each new touch is introduced here and there in melody or accompaniment, that seems to flash a momentary high light on this word or that without disturbing the unity and inevitableness of the thematic development. This betokens not only quick psychological perception but a consummate sense of form and a consummate mastery of technique. His excellence as a technician has never been fully appreciated in this country, while the more academic technique of Brahms has been the subject of excessive eulogy. A case in point is Brahms's song 'An ein Bild' (Op. 63, No. 3), to which Sir Charles Stanford devotes a couple of pages in his admirable book on 'Composition'—in general the wisest book on that subject that I have ever met with. Sir Charles, I venture to think, over-praises the technique of that song. The lyric tends, I think, a little to the sentimental, as so many of Brahms's songs do; but I do not wish to stress that point here, as the song as a whole is undoubtedly moving. In form it has some of the characteristic Brahms defects, such as the duplication of the final phrase of each stanza merely because a really expressive point has been scored by the duplication of the final line of the first stanza. None of the following four repetitions of this device has any real justification in the poem; it is one of the many illustrations I might give of Brahms's obsession with a device that has been brought into being simply by something in the first verse of the poem, and his tendency to rely on mechanical repetition instead of beating out a new form in obedience to the changing moods of the verses. But let that also pass. The point with which I am more immediately concerned is that the song, on purely technical grounds alone, does not deserve the admiration Sir Charles Stanford asks us to give to it. The poem is concerned with an exile who looks fondly on the picture of his beloved, that evokes in him the memory of the youthful days when they were near each other. 'The idea of the picture,' says Sir Charles, 'pervades the whole song persistently, and is suggested by all sorts of variations of the opening vocal phrase, which are apparently independent of the voice part and perfect in themselves, while the melody runs along without undergoing a single modification to fit the permutations and combinations in the pianoforte part. The result is that the listener feels the

influence of the picture subtly pervading the whole song without his knowing why.' The 'picture' theme is that heard in the second and third bars of the accompaniment :

In the fourth, fifth, and sixth bars it appears in the bass in augmentation :

In the seventh bar it appears in partial diminution :

In the ninth and tenth bars it appears partly in diminution, partly in augmentation, over a new figure :

Now so far from all this indicating any great resource of technique, it seems to me—dare I say it?—rather infantile ; such manipulations as this of a one-bar thematic fragment are within the scope of any intelligent student to-day. But apart from this, the objection to them is that while—speaking in general terms—they may keep before the hearer's mind the idea of the picture, they add nothing to the emotional effect of that idea, nor do they confer on the idea any real variety. No one will allege that one's conception of the picture, or of the psychology of the protagonist of the song, is emotionally affected in the slightest degree by whether the motto theme is in augmentation or diminution. All this is mere scholastic device, something that lies only on the surface of the song, or at best penetrates merely the tenth of an inch below its surface. It has a certain amount of academic interest, but what it adds to the emotional force of the song is out of all comparison with the technical effort put forth. A great deal of the latter is wasted, and to that extent is bad art. Sir Charles Stanford himself admits that 'though the ingenuity of the pianoforte part is astounding [it is hardly that, by the way], no casual hearer would notice that there was any complicated writing at all unless his attention was directed to it'; while 'a first-rate musician might accompany this song at first sight without noticing all these ingenuities until his attention was

called to them.' What is that but a confession that Brahms has given himself a good deal of unnecessary trouble? And when 'the casual hearer' has his attention directed to the 'complicated writing,' is the emotional appeal of the song intensified for him? I think not. He may take a greater pleasure in watching Brahms's technique at work, but the pleasure, like the technique itself, is of the scholastic order. Apart from the slight reinforcement the general idea of 'the picture' gets from the persistence of a certain motto theme, the first stanza of the song is emotionally neither a penny the better nor a penny the worse for all Brahms's academic ingenuity. At least as intense an effect—perhaps one more intense—could easily have been got by other means. And as the song goes on, the scholasticism becomes even more futile. The motive is worked out with splendid continuity in the bass of the fourth verse ; here the device has value, because it drives home ever more persistently the conception of the persistence of the picture in the speaker's mind. But when Sir Charles Stanford invites me to admire the succeeding pianoforte interlude (which may be skeletonised thus) :

in which, at A, the theme appears in inversion, I regret I cannot respond. The writing is moderately interesting in itself, but I deny that the inversion of the motto theme here adds anything whatever to the emotional effect of the song. Brahms, as so often happens with him, is simply writing instrumental music under the guise of a lyric. A hearer either notices that No. 5A is an inversion of No. 1, or he does not. If he does not, Brahms's stroke has miscarried. If he does, he is interested in it solely as an abstract device, not for any intensification it may convey of the dominant mood of the song, not for any new light it throws on the stage of the lyric at which we have now arrived. As a matter of fact, this inversion could have been introduced with equal propriety anywhere else. It is not inevitable, predestined to appear at that particular time and in that particular place ; and to that extent it is bad art. It is one more illustration of the truth that Brahms—I will not say did not attain to, but had no conception of, the subtler delicacies of the lyrical form. Sir Charles Stanford speaks of the accompaniment to the song as being a wonderful specimen of the art that conceals art. Quite so, but it is not a lyric art.

Compare now with this song one of Wolf's that proceeds upon a similar economy of thematic material,—the 'Denk' es, o Seele' of the Mörike set. The poem may be crudely paraphrased thus :

1. A fir-tree is growing in some wood or other,
a rose-bush in some garden. They are
destined, O soul, to grow over thy grave.

2. Two black horses are grazing in the meadow :
they gallop back merrily to the town.
They will slowly draw your dead body,
perhaps before the iron is loosened that I
see flashing on their hooves.

The poem has the extraordinary concentration one is accustomed to in Mörike. It was this concentration that endeared him to so superb a master of concentrated lyrical form as Wolf, as it no doubt deterred previous song-writers from setting many of his lyrics. The whole song is based on one sinister rhythmic figure,—that of the opening bars of the accompaniment :

the rhythm being preserved also in the melodic motive that immediately follows :

When the voice enters, the essence of the rhythm is maintained while the singer speaks of the fir-tree and the rose-bush :

Not only the basic rhythm of the song, but the theme just quoted, is used to suggest, by a slight transformation, the gambolling of the horses in the meadow in the second verse :

This works up excitedly to the culminating point of the poem, and then, as the words speak of the horses bearing the body to its grave, the phrase undergoes an expressive rhythmic and harmonic transformation :

During the course of the little song, the bare rhythmic figure quoted as No. 6 is put to suggestive uses that are worthy of Beethoven. Thus in the middle of the first stanza the horror that is in store for us—a horror of which there is no hint in the opening words—is foreshadowed first of all by an unexpected modulation that has an extraordinarily sinister effect, and then by the clothing of the rhythm in gloomy harmonies :

A similar effect is made when the voice ceases at the end of the second verse,—an effect greatly intensified, however, by the sudden hush that falls upon the music :

The suggestive force of this rhythmic figure increases even in the half-dozen bars of postlude that have still to come; it is now like the beat of a heart that has been awed almost to extinction:

The song, short as it is, is overwhelming in its effect; in all music it would be hard to find more power packed into sixty bars,—it is certainly impossible to find it in the whole field of the German lyric. Technically it is perfect,—not a note too few, not a note too many, with everything growing out of the one tiny germ. Its superiority, on the technical side, to such a song as Brahms's 'An ein Bild,' resides in the fact that its technique is always subservient to the *lyrical* form, and a heightener of the *lyrical* effect. Many of Brahms's thematic modifications in 'An ein Bild' are dictated merely by the *abstract* musical sense: they do not grow inevitably out of the emotion of the song, and they might be altered or eliminated, or added to here and there, without the emotional content of the music as a whole being affected in the least. But in 'Denk' es, o Seele,' every stroke tells; while fascinating the musical sense and completely satisfying one's desire for close thinking and logical unity, each stroke means something *poetically*, and each of them could only have been thought of in connection with that particular line of that particular poem. This is *lyrical* form, *lyrical* technique, raised to a power of which Brahms never had any conception.

Wolf's own command of form came in part from the intense ardour of his conceptions,—the white-hot imagination instantaneously fusing the poem into a rarer form of the same metal, yet without any sacrifice of its original substance—in part from a technique that is quite dazzling in its ease and certainty. He was a born technician,—in particular a born contrapuntist, but a contrapuntist of the living, not the dead kind. How much he learned from the schools I do not know—very little I should imagine, for his schooling, in the bookish sense of the term, ended while he was still hardly more than a child. But his was the quality of mind that, like Bach's and Wagner's, is able to extract the maximum of experience from the minimum of actual teaching. His mind was naturally a contrapuntal one,—that is to say, almost every melody it conceived trailed along with it, above or below, some other melody that was equally full of meaning. He himself has told us how he progressed much more slowly with the scoring of his opera 'Der Corregidor' than he had expected, owing to new counterpoints flowing unbidden from his pen in every line. It was a mind prone by

nature to think in several musical dimensions at once. Hence he was inevitably led to the form of lyric in which the voice is not simply a bird standing on a perch,—as it is in the song with the ordinary vamping accompaniment—or a bird swaying in harmony with the movement of the sea beneath, but never touching the water—as it is in the song with the ordinary harmonic accompaniment—but a bird floating on the surface of the sea, now dipping its wings in the water, now soaring high above it, and always giving the impression that it is one in very nature with the element in which it lives. This was Wagner's ideal of the relation between melody and harmony. One of the subtlest of his pieces of imagery is that,—in 'Opera and Drama,'—in which he compares the ordinary melody to a raft that merely lies on the surface of the water, while the melody of profound meaning,—say one of Beethoven's—is as a boat, that indeed shows above the surface of the water, but owes its grace, its majesty, its security to the fact that much of it is embedded in the water, far below the surface. Wagner was not referring to polyphonic music, but simply to melodic music of the profounder kind; but his analogy applies perfectly to such polyphonic music as that of Wolf's songs. Here, too,—to vary the image with which I began—the voice-part is like a boat that is in the waves and of the waves, and yet distinct from them, responsive to every ripple, and indeed a not fully living thing when taken out of this its element, yet making in conjunction with this element a whole of beauty and suggestion that neither boat nor water could attain to alone. It is a mistake to isolate one of Wolf's vocal melodies and say that compared with a melody of Schubert's it is not beautiful. It *is* beautiful, but its beauty is of another order. One might as well close one's ears to the beauty of the music to the words 'Nie-wieder-erwachen wahnlos hold-bewusster Wunsch' in the love duet in 'Tristan,'* on the ground that neither the soprano nor the tenor part, taken alone, is the sort of melody one could go about humming as one hums the melody of Schubert's 'Ave Maria' or 'Hark, hark, the lark'; but all the same the passage in 'Tristan' is one of the supremely beautiful things of music. The effect is not in any one part, vocal or instrumental, but in the ravishing effect made by the intimate fusion of them all.

It was towards a fusion of this kind that Wagner's music was always tending, but without always attaining it. If we were disposed to be hypercritical, we could say that very often,—as in the 'Liebestod,' for example—the music has been conceived in terms first of all of the orchestra, and the voice has been added afterwards, not always in a way that seems inevitable. The astounding thing in Wolf's great songs is that while the pianoforte part is as independent, as apparently self-sufficing, as the orchestral tissue in the 'Liebestod' or the

* Page 142 of the English score: 'Ne'er daunted by daylight's beam be our undying dream.'

'Good Friday music,' and the vocal part is handled with a metrical and accentual freedom beyond anything we meet with in Wagner, the two parts not only fit perfectly as mere music, but fulfil every demand of the poetry without any abdication of the superior rights of music. The voice will suddenly break off here, or enter unexpectedly there, or prolong certain syllables by syncopation, or weave cross-rhythms with the pianoforte part; yet all is done with such ease and naturalness that we cannot imagine the words being phrased otherwise. The skill is consummate; yet strictly speaking it is not skill,—in the sense that a problem has been deliberately posed and deliberately solved—but is the instinctive outcome of a vision that has embraced all the elements of the picture at one glance, and intuitively found the one right expression for them. Wolf can manipulate virtually the one accompanimental figure throughout a song, yet remain the master of it from first to last. He will maintain vocal uniformity with this figure so long as there is nothing in the words to suggest a change; but the moment such a suggestion comes, the change is made with almost uncanny certainty, and yet without the slightest disturbance of the general flow of the theme. It is not merely thematic transformation of a very fine kind, but thematic transformation that in transit, as it were, picks up this word or that and momentarily poses it in just the high light it needs, or flecks it with just the colour that will give at once musical and poetical poignancy to it.

I forbear to illustrate this point by quotation, because to do so would be acting like the man in the old Greek story who, having a house to sell, carried a brick about with him and exhibited it as a specimen of the house. But I recommend the reader to study such a song as the 'Die ihr schwebet um diese Palmen,' from the 'Spanisches Liederbuch,' and observe the art with which the vocal melody is adapted to the flowing accompaniment figure that runs through the song (representing the swaying of the palms in the wind),—how aptly, for instance, the word 'Qual,' in the line 'Ach nun im Schlaf ihm leise gesänftigt die Qual zerrinnt,' falls upon just the interval than can give it the necessary poignancy, and how, again without interfering with the main motive, quite a new and more acrid colour is imported into the song at 'Grimmige Kälte sauset hernieder.' These things sound very simple in the telling, just as it seems very simple that in the second subject of the fifth Symphony Beethoven should introduce the rhythm of the 'Fate' theme; but the effect is pure genius. Or examine again the 'Im Frühling,' from the 'Mörke Lieder,' and notice how perfect is not only the 'declamation' but the poise of the voice on this note or that, and how beautifully calculated seems each entry of the voice, whether along with the accompanimental phrases, at the end of them, or in the middle of them. But the technique is different in almost every song; and not one of these several techniques could be employed by anyone else in any other song, as

one might easily employ, for instance, such a technique as that of Brahms's 'An ein Bild.' I repeat that in the opinion of those who have studied him, Hugo Wolf is a master of form and of resource beside whom it is simply impossible to place the Brahms of the lyrics.

Occasional Notes.

On November 13 a service in MUSIC AT THE memory of Lord Roberts, who LORD ROBERTS died in November, 1914, was held MEMORIAL at St. Margaret's, Westminster. SERVICE. The anthem, 'How blest are they,' by Tchaikovsky, and an old Russian setting of the 'Te Deum,' were sung, both items being unaccompanied. A 'Marche Solennelle,' by Felix Borowski, was played. The fact that Russian music was used in connection with a national tribute paid to the memory of one of the greatest of British soldiers called forth a protest from Sir Charles Stanford, who wrote to *The Times* as follows:

Did the authorities of St. Margaret's, Westminster, wish to give a very practical illustration of Mr. Balfour's dictum, 'We British have always taken a gloomy joy in self-depreciation' on Saturday last? They commemorated our most famous modern British soldier by a specially-announced selection of Russian music. We yield to no country in our appreciation of and admiration for Russian composers, but, on such an occasion as this, there are considerations of fitness and of decency, which should have prevailed within a few yards of the grave of Henry Purcell.

We have seen no answer to this well-founded complaint. But it should be stated that Mr. Felix Borowski was born in Westmorland, and is the son of B. B. F. Borowski (a Pole, who was naturalised here forty-four years ago), and an English lady from whom he inherited his musical gifts. Felix has never been in Poland or Russia.

ANOTHER In the *Church Times* of November 19 JUST appeared an article by Mr. Martin PROTEST. Shaw protesting vigorously against the choice of music at the Cavell Memorial Service at St. Paul's Cathedral, and pointing out the anomaly of using Funeral Marches by alien composers, when long since dead or of other than alien enemy nationality. This view we believe to be shared by many people. It is not mere Chauvinism, or even sentiment. It is a natural feeling for the fitness of things, and we hope that it will be considered by those responsible for the organizing of memorial services.

MUSIC AT THE The programme of music per- LORD MAYOR'S formed during dinner by the band of the Royal Regiment of Artillery BANQUET. (conductor, Mr. E. C. Stretton, R.A.) was as follows:

The Inauguration March ...	Homewood Crawford
Overture 'Mirella'	Gounod
Melody 'Rosemary'	Elgar
Reminiscences of the Savoy	Sullivan
Ronde Nocturne 'Veilleurs de Nuit'	Bosc
Cornet Solo 'Romance' Homewood Crawford	
Selection 'Merrie England' Edward German	
Scherzo Idylle 'Pastourette'	Gauwin
Suite of Serbian Dances	Sistek
Ballet 'La Belle au Bois Dormant' Tchaikovsky	
Selection of English Airs 'The Rose'	Myddleton
Tarantelle 'La Danza'	Rossini