Review

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Mary Stuart. A Cantata for ladies' voices.

Blessed is he. Let the Heavens rejoice. Anthems. By Gustav Ernest. [J. and J. Hopkinson.]

SINCE he secured a prize offered some years ago by the Philharmonic Society, Mr. Ernest has produced a fair number of compositions of unquestionable merit, but his name has not again come prominently before the public. His ladies' Cantata is founded on the escape of Queen Mary from Lochleven Castle, and the librettist, Mr. J. Stewart, "would respectfully submit that it will add greatly to the effective rendering of the Cantata if the charming dresses of the period are worn." With this we venture wholly to disagree; in the first place, it is uncomplimentary to the composer, and further, a cantata is not an opera, and the effect should be derived solely from the music. If this fails, no amount of "dressing up," as the children term it, will save the work. This remark applies emphatically to the present Cantata; the book is totally devoid of dramatic interest, and the verses are extremely feeble; but Mr. Ernest's music is expressive and well written, while difficulties with which young ladies' classes would be unable to cope are studiously avoided. Three solo voices and a three-part chorus are required.

The composer's Anthems show that he has made himself acquainted with the style in which English church music is written. They are both simple and pleasing examples, without much distinctiveness of character. Mr. Ernest, however, appears to be under the impression that the word "trouble" has only one syllable. He either gives it to one note, or, if to two, carefully slurs them. The error is quite unaccountable.

Offertoire in G. By John Francis Barnett. (Original Compositions for the Organ, No. 103.)

[Novello, Ewer and Co.]

MR. BARNETT commences with a *Poco maestoso*, noteworthy for some startling harmonic transitions, and leading into the principal movement, which opens quietly with a very melodious, flowing theme, *Allegretto ma non troppo*. Shortly, however, the *tempo* quickens, and we have a lively and somewhat agitated episode in C. Then the principal subject returns and an extended *Coda* brings the Offertoire to an end. If not remarkable for elaboration, Mr. Barnett's piece is unquestionably pleasing, and the very sparing use he has made of the pedals helps to bring it within the means of all ordinarily competent players. It will be remembered that the composer played this Offertoire at one of the Crystal Palace Concerts early this season, when it was very favourably received.

A Poet's Love. A Cycle of Songs. By R. Schumann (Op. 48). [Novello, Ewer and Co.]

SCHUMANN produced these now well-known songs in 1840. The poems were written by Heinrich Heine, and the whole cycle was dedicated to Wilhelmine Schroeder Devrient. The original words, together with a translation by Lady Macfarren, make this edition particularly valuable. There is no need to speak in detail of the sixteen songs which form the cycle, as they are fortunately familiar to students and admirers of Schumann throughout the world. The present beautiful and cheap edition will commend itself with special force to English musicians, both professional and amateur.

Wagner's "Parsifal": A Pilgrimage to Bayreuth, August, 1888. By N. Kilburn, M.B., Cantab.

[Bishop Auckland: Cummins.]

MR. KILBURN'S account of his visit to Bayreuth, and his impressions and comments upon the musical performance, may be read with interest, if not with pleasure, by all to whom the subject appeals with any degree of force. It was originally written for a local newspaper, but it is not unworthy of being rescued from a newspaper grave and issued in pamphlet form.

Romance in D, for Violin and Pianoforte. By Joseph L. Roeckel. [Weekes and Co.]

THIS composition, dedicated to Mr. Carrodus, is somewhat conventional in style, and at the same time the theme is by no means new. It is, however, interesting as a means for the display of the "singing" powers of the performer, and of his capabilities of deep expression.

Original Compositions for the Organ. Nos. 104, 105, 106, and 107. Pieces by Albert Renaud.

[Novello, Ewer and Co.]

WE have here a series of compositions by a French composer, whose name is not yet very familiar to English organists. The first glance shows that they are neither so brilliant as those of Wély and Batiste nor as elaborate and difficult as those of Guilmant. The first of the four numbers consists of a Scherzo Symphonique, a piece in D major, in ordinary minuet form, based on a lively theme, the rhythm of which is dominant throughout the principal section. It is perhaps too secular for a service Voluntary, but it would certainly please at a Recital. The next, a March Solennelle in E flat, is perhaps less pleasing, as the themes are wanting in melodic interest. No. 106 is called a Meditation, but it has nothing of the slow dream-like character generally associated with pieces bearing this title. On the contrary, it is piquant and fanciful, and if carefully registered could not fail to please. The last of the series is an Andante Religioso in D, 3-4 time, flowing and melodious, and if not particularly church-like, is at any rate not too secular. M. Renaud's efforts are noticeable for their welcome freedom from labour and dryness. The ideas are not always of first-rate value, but they are expressed in a thoroughly natural manner, which in itself is pleasing, and organists of ordinary capacity will find no serious difficulties with which to contend.

Overture to Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night." Composed by A. C. Mackenzie (Op. 40). Full Score.

[Novello, Ewer and Co.]

THERE is no need again to discuss the character and merits of this work, as to which connoisseurs and the public formed an adequately favourable opinion on the occasion of its first production at the Richter Concerts. We will only say that leisurely perusal of the score confirms an impression that the "Twelfth Night" Overture is one of the happiest effusions inspired by the genius of Shakespeare. In studying for the work Dr. Mackenzie caught the very spirit of the comedy, and has musically "hit off" the characters so well that it was hardly needful to label the passages with their names and sentiments. The Overture is eminently thoughtful and happy, while to all who have a sense of mingled humour and tenderness in art, it must ever be a source of enjoyment. The publication of the score now places this truly Shakesperian Overture in the hands of all who care for it, and it is to be hoped, as a measure of justice to a gifted composer and to native music, that the result will be its performance wherever an adequate orchestra exists. As an example of orchestration this may be accepted as an improving study, especially on account of the fact that the composer never falls into the error of using more means than are necessary for effect. The score is as clear as daylight, and in these days of overdoing, quite refreshing to look upon.

Six Christmas Carols. Edited by the Rev. James Baden Powell. [Novello, Ewer and Co.]

THE composers of these excellent Carols, Alfred King, J. E. Vernham, the Rev. J. B. Gray, and the Editor, have done their work well, and have produced a welcome addition to the stores of Christmas music. The three Carols by the Editor are especially good. There is all the quaintness of the older melodies with a specially attractive modern character in the themes, and they are so happily written that the ear must be dull indeed which would not be pleased by their vigorous simplicity.

The National Choir. Vol. I.

[Paisley: J. and R. Parlane.]

THIS is a collection of well-known songs, chiefly Scotch, interspersed with a few originals adapted for choirs, classes, and the home circle, with notes to the songs, historical, personal, and critical, and a Preface by Professor John Stuart Blackie particularly interesting to lovers of national melody. The various tunes are arranged in simple form by local professors, and the publication is one which deserves to be well supported by those for whom it is designed. It is well printed and remarkably cheap.