The Rhythmical Sense and the Folk-Dance

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influence of folk-song. His opinions in this direction lead one to think, unwillingly it may be, that he has little if any sympathy with the future of native art or any wish to encourage its exponents. His recent article in the *Observer* (December 7) confirms this. Here are some of his remarks: 'The modern English school—whatever that may be, I know of no such "school" myself. . . . How encouraging and how complimentary to English musicians, dead and living! We used to have the effrontery to think that after some years of German hypnotism we found ourselves, and began to be ourselves, with the production of Parry's 'Prometheus.' Then again, *re* 'Vaughan Williams,' 'As a composer he hardly ranks beside men like Delius and Elgar, who do not care a brass farthing for any theories about folk-song.' I for one don't think that Vaughan Williams bothers about the 'theories' of folk-song. There is not much to 'theorise' about when you have the facts. This composer has saturated himself with the spirit of folk-song, and English music has gained thereby. Again, Mr. Newman says: 'It is pure delusion to suppose that a great work of art can be made by piecing together a number of folk-tunes.' I don't imagine that any 'Nationalist' is so deluded: the people who favour folk-song, and have studied it faithfully, know too much about organic unity and art-structure—as exhibited therein in its embryonic form—to entertain such a foolish idea. Again: 'The really great men are too full of ideas of their own . . . to have much time or inclination for making musical stews or hashes out of other men's ideas.' But surely on this basis the great masters have given us many 'musical stews and hashes,' and we have not objected to the menu! In the next sentence we are told that 'personality is the only thing that matters in a composer.' Of course this is so in every artist. I have always thought and held that in music the idea and its expression are one and the same thing—that either cannot exist alone. It was not what Handel borrowed, but what he made of it, that counted. Then, strangely enough, Mr. Newman pulls himself up, and, Balaam-like, turns from cursing to blessing: 'If he can give full expression to a genuine personality in folk-song idiom . . . well and good.' So that, after all, the still, small voice comes after the earthquake, and we are told it is not such a wicked thing to base our music on folk-song idiom if there is personality behind it. It does seem a great pity that a man of Mr. Newman's force and understanding should 'see red' when 'Nationalism in Music' comes in sight, and yet turn aside to err with the 'Nationalists,' who, as he says, 'think loosely.'

To sum up, at the present juncture, when we want to rouse people and satisfy their musical hunger, are we best going to do this by discouraging or encouraging them in their own native art? Is it to be taught or implied that we can best progress by leaving our own art to take care of itself and concentrating on universality, or by teaching the people that they have behind them a rich store of beautiful music of their own, worthy to be proud of, and that what England has done in the past she can do in the future? It seems to me the opposing forces meet on common ground on this crucial point: 'We will accept anything that is real music, whether it has a national idiom behind it or not.' Good; but the next point has to be answered: 'What, prior to 1914, was the average idea of *real* music, whence came it, and how was it fostered for so long?' We can answer this easily, and find the remedy.—Yours, &c.,

HAROLD E. WATTS.

THE RHYTHMICAL SENSE AND THE FOLK-DANCE

SIR,—Most musicians have witnessed with pleasure the revival of the Morris dance and the Country dance as demonstrated by the English Folk-Dance Society under the direction of Mr. Cecil Sharp. We have remarked 'How splendid and healthy for the people,' and—there most of us have stopped.

This Christmastide, however, I myself have been initiated into some of the—very simple—mysteries of the Country

dance, and it suddenly struck me how very neglectful all our music-teaching institutions have been in not at once recognizing the immense power for good, musically, we have at our very doors.

Our British students notoriously are sadly lacking in rhythmical sense; and we have elaborate schemes for ear-training, resorting to all kinds of makeshift devices for teaching this, the very foundation upon which all music is built—the rhythmical sense—instead of teaching it directly and inevitably by the only natural means, just by such Folk-dances. Nevertheless, it needs but little reflection to prove to us that musical rhythm has arisen, in the first instance, from the psychological effect of the walking stride and its modifications—the movements of running and dancing.

Hence we see how the widespread teaching of the delightful and health-giving movements of the Folk-dance would inevitably strengthen our position, musically, as a nation.—Yours, &c.,

TOBIAS MATTHAY.

High Marley, Haslemere, Surrey,
December 26, 1919.

THE ALTO VOICE

SIR,—In reply to your correspondent who last month asked what had become of the alto voice, and referred to its rarity, it is not without interest to note that in an old pamphlet of the performance of 'Messiah' at Bristol Grand Musical Festival for the Infirmary, on June 16, 1814, there is no mention of the contralto voice, as we now find it, in the cast for the performance. Instead, the male alto was used, a Mr. Garbett. There were two sopranos, including Madame Catalani; and in addition a boy's voice, with two tenors, one of whom was Braham. 'Behold, a Virgin' and 'O thou that tellest' were sung by the male alto, and the air 'He was despised' was sung by the chief tenor! 'He shall feed His flock' and 'Come unto Him' were classed as a duet, and sung by the boy, a Master Stansbury, and one of the sopranos. 'Their sound is gone out' was sung as a quartet by the boy, the alto, and a tenor and bass, then repeated by the chorus. The cast is a strange sidelight on oratorio singing a hundred years ago.—Yours, &c.,

Bristol,

F. K. LYNE.

December, 1919.

SIR,—I would be glad of a little space to reply to the letter of Mr. Plumtree on the alto voice. That there is a prejudice against the male alto I will admit, and also must agree that in days gone by there has been ground for such prejudice. The reason of this I think can be traced to the organists themselves, because in the old days an alto was not expected to be a soloist, and so long as he could sustain the alto part in chorus work he was considered satisfactory. But in these later days, when the important organist posts in Cathedrals are being held by young and enthusiastic musicians, there has been introduced into the service of the Church more modern and elaborate compositions, and the standard expected of the male alto has been considerably raised, with the consequence that there has been a great improvement both in range, beauty of tone, and musical ability in the type of man now coming forward. But it must be admitted that to a certain degree the prejudice still remains. I would therefore suggest to the organist who is blessed with a good alto, treasure him, for he is worth his weight in gold (there is no need to worry at this statement, for altos are usually light-weights). Give him plenty of work to do, and in the singers' jargon, don't divide all the alto 'fat' between the other parts until you have satisfied yourself that your alto is incapable of sustaining the 'fat' himself, otherwise his artistic soul will be so wounded that he will 'sicken and so die.' Let the demand in male altos be for good musicians, with good range along with purity and beauty of tone, and I am sure this type of man is procurable, for so superior a demand will ensure a superior supply, and unfair prejudice will die.—Yours, &c.,

'ALTO.'