The Great Composers: No. XIX. Georges Bizet (Concluded)

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gave to English music one of its brightest ornaments; following thus in the wake of our contemporary, the *Echo*, which alone among the daily papers noticed the interesting anniversary. Bishop surely deserves the humble tribute of remembrance, if it can be said that a man who ministers purest pleasure has any claim at all upon those who benefit by his labours.

THE GREAT COMPOSERS

By JOSEPH BENNETT.

NO. XIX.—GEORGES BIZET (concluded from page 648).

IN 1872 M. Carvalho took over the direction of the Vaudeville Theatre, in order to make an attempt at reviving *Mélodrame*. With this object in view, he engaged Alphonse Daudet to write a play, and Georges Bizet to prepare the incidental music. The outcome was "*L'Arlesienne*"—a name which has become familiar through the genius of the young composer. "*L'Arlesienne*" was first performed in October, 1872, four months after the production of "*Djamileh*." As far as the music was concerned nothing could be worse than the arrangements made for its rendering. The orchestra, all told, numbered but twenty-six instruments—two flutes, a clarinet, two bassoons, a saxophone, two horns, drums, seven violins, one viola, five celli, two double basses, and a piano (!). With these resources Bizet had to manage as best he could, and the marvel is that he succeeded in recommending his music at all. But, as most English amateurs know, the incidental pieces of "*L'Arlesienne*" have real merit, and their beauty could not be hidden. The numbers comprise an overture-prelude, partly constructed upon a Provençal Noël, partly upon themes used later on, an *Adagietto*, *Intermezzo*, *Carillon*, and various choruses. Of these only the instrumental movements exist apart from their surroundings, but they have vitality sufficient to keep the memory of the play alive even in countries such as our own—where otherwise its name would scarcely have been heard. The work was carefully put upon the stage, but ran for no more than fifteen nights, much to the disappointment of the composer, who thought he saw once more the condemnation to oblivion of some of his best music. Happily he had not long to wait for comfort in trouble. M. Pasdeloup, struck by the merit of the instrumental pieces in "*L'Arlesienne*," performed the *Prelude*, *Menuet*, *Adagietto*, and *Carillon* at a Concert given in the *Cirque d'Hiver*. There they appealed to a more cultured audience than at the *Vaudeville*, and the result was a great success. From that time to the present the music in question has held a place among modern works having pretensions to classic rank, and, as a *Suite d'orchestre*, is likely to enjoy a long life.

Bizet's next important effort was the Overture "*Patrie*," composed for one of Pasdeloup's Popular Concerts, February 15, 1874. This has also been heard in England, but without receiving the favour bestowed upon the "*Arlesienne*" Suite. We cannot, however, pass over silently a little Suite previously written at the request of M. Edgard Colonne, who had started a series of Concerts at the transpontine *Odéon*. These pieces are, in effect, an orchestral adaptation of five numbers taken from an earlier work for the piano entitled "*Jeux d'Enfants*." The movements chosen were "*La Toupie*," impromptu; "*La Poupée*," berceuse; "*Trompette and Tambour*," march; "*Petit mari, petite femme*," duet; "*Le Bal*," galop. These the master scored for orchestra in his most attractive manner, and announced them in Colonne's programme as "*Jeux d'Enfants, petite Suite d'Orchestre*." The work had a cordial reception, and still further recommended the name of its

composer, who now began to see his music taken up with increasing frequency and favour. "*Patrie*" was played for the first time, February 15, 1874, at a Pasdeloup Concert. Its name was due to a whim of the Conductor, who refused to be content with Bizet's own description of the piece as a "dramatic overture." No doubt the change was a good stroke of business. It enlisted national feeling on the side of the music, and it suggested, in one word, what we are told was the intention of the composer. "When writing his dramatic overture," says M. Pigot, "Bizet had in view the misfortunes of the country, vanquished and delivered—the anguish of the terrible year. All the sufferings and sorrows which had sadly afflicted the patriot, strongly appealed to the imagination of the poet. He wished to sing of the mourning land so dear to the hearts of her children—the land mutilated and bleeding still; but he soon understood that sorrowful strains, the invocation of days of anguish and of tears, ill suit an era of appeasement. Then, by a poetic fiction, a happy substitution, touching as an allegory and full of lessons, he evoked the grand shade of agonised Poland, always vanquished, always rising again, the ineffaceable recollection and the sacred name of which live ever in the hearts of her scattered sons."

Following "*Patrie*" came "*Carmen*," the greatest of all our composer's works, and that which will carry his name farthest down the stream of time. This famous opera was produced on March 3, 1875, at the *Opéra Comique*, in presence of a crowd which included all of Paris that assumes to have any voice in the creation of public opinion. We need not stop to describe or comment on the piece. It has become the property of every amateur throughout the civilised world, and, though often presented, never wears out its welcome. More important is it to note that "*Carmen*" failed at the outset in winning the favour since secured so abundantly. This might have been expected, seeing that Bizet's music displayed novel features, broke loose from the classical French style, and showed a daring originality. French audiences, with all their quickness of appreciation, are intensely conservative, and "*Carmen*" came upon them like a shock. As the opera went on the public remained puzzled and cold. A few sympathisers ventured to applaud here and there, the quintet and the Toreador's song made a favourable impression, and the *Prelude* of the second Act was encored. Beyond this, approval did not go, the curtain falling upon what could be called, at best, only a success of esteem. *Après* M. Pigot observes:—

"I will not try to explain this incomprehensible behaviour of the Parisian public—the great public of 'first nights'; the artist-Paris which directs opinion and makes success. It is, indeed, inexplicable. About the fifteenth representation the work revived somewhat, but the unjust verdict of the opening evening, in great part confirmed by the press, could not be lived down. The receipts rose, but the public went to the *Opéra Comique* to see that which had been described as an immoral piece, so much discussed and so little admired. Thus '*Carmen*' painfully reached its thirty-seven representations."

M. Pigot continues, in a strain with which we are all familiar: "To comprehend such an attitude so obviously unjust, one must assume a momentary eclipse of taste—strange, inexplicable, but real phenomenon. Musical history affords several examples of this passing craze, this cerebral default of an entire people. We recall the fate, at Vienna, in 1788, of '*Don Giovanni*,' one of the greatest masterpieces of human genius. How shall we explain it, if not by the phenomenon just alluded to? Mozart, sad, discouraged, said mournfully, 'I have written

'Don Giovanni' for myself and two or three friends!' After mentioning some Italian examples, our author adds:—"But it is in France that, above all, we have the questionable privilege of these transient errors. We turn our backs upon sincere and spontaneous admiration. . . . How many sad recollections of this I could mention, but am content to evoke the great shade of Berlioz. For Berlioz as for Bizet the hour of justice comes slowly. Neither has attained a definite triumph. Bizet is dead, and carried to the tomb the cruel uncertainty of doubt. He did not enjoy, like his predecessor, the consolation of applause heard from beyond the frontiers; he perished before "Carmen" began the triumphal progress which, at last, made us open our eyes."

With "Carmen" the French master had done his work, though he knew it not, and looked forward to other achievements. The public were cold and indifferent, but he himself must have known that the Spanish opera had in it the stuff of which great things are made. He saw himself on the road to ultimate success, and his imagination conjured up a roseate future. Encouragement to this appeared without. "Carmen" was everywhere spoken of, not always with approval, it is true, but invariably with interest. It ranked among works of the day—among things not to be ignored. Bizet noted all this, and then came the blow which struck him down. He fell with his foot on the threshold of Walhalla; at the very moment when his star was soaring upwards towards the meridian; just as victory seemed to be within his grasp. On the morning of June 3, 1875, three months after the production of "Carmen," a rumour that Bizet had died some time during the previous night spread over Paris. His friends and admirers would not credit the news. It seemed too absurd, too cruel even for a malignant fate. Nevertheless, disquiet prevailed. While protesting that the report must be false, men went about enquiringly, dreading a confirmation of the fears they laughed at. Confirmation soon came, in the shape of a telegram, addressed by Ludovic Halévy to Camille du Locle. It said: "Most horrible catastrophe! Our poor Bizet died to-night." M. Du Locle posted the fatal paper on the doors of the Opéra Comique, and the public of Paris knew that France was the poorer by a gifted man, the measure of whose possibilities had never been taken, but who had in him the promise of glory for himself and his country. Next morning the journals came out with full particulars. The master had been stricken suddenly, in his residence at Bougival, and had passed away with little suffering. According to his friend, Guiraud, Bizet had been subject to angina from his youth. The disease became periodic; generally attacking its victim in the Spring. At such times the composer would shut himself in his room, and quietly await the surcease of his pain, which, as a rule, lasted three or four days. For a few years after his marriage he was comparatively free from the unwelcome visitor, but the anxieties and hard work connected with "Carmen" caused a relapse, and in May brought about an attack of longer duration than usual. At this season of the year Bizet and his family were accustomed to leave Paris for Bougival. He insisted upon doing so now, despite his illness. "We will go at once," he said, "the air of Paris poisons me." Go he did, and the first day in the country passed off well; the invalid enjoying a walk with his wife and the pianist, Delaborde. But the following night was a horrible one. The poor master, haunted by dreadful visions, oppressed to suffocation, and in pain, could get no repose. The medical man who was hastily sum-

moned did not, however, perceive danger. The same thing happened on the night following. They hesitated to trouble the physician a second time, but the symptoms became more urgent, and at last he was sent for. On his arrival, the patient lay calm and still. His wife believed him to be asleep. So he was, but the sleep was that which knows no waking. Midnight sounded at the moment, and in Paris they were dropping the curtain upon the thirty-third performance of the dead man's masterpiece.

The funeral rites were performed on June 5 at Trinity Church, in presence of four thousand persons. Padeloup's orchestra attended in a body and performed the "Patrie" Overture, the artists of the Opéra Comique assisted in the "Requiem," and Gounod, Thomas, Doucet, and Du Locle officiated as pall-bearers. There also were Guiraud, Massenet, Delaborde, Paladilhe, and a host of representative men, sincerely mourning the loss of one whose sun went down while it was yet day. At the close of the religious ceremonies, the honoured remains were laid to rest in the cemetery of Montmartre.

How, since then, "Carmen" has gone on from triumph to triumph, securing for Bizet a place among the world's masters, every reader knows. But this reconciles nobody to the early removal of one so well qualified to continue the line of dramatic composers, and secure for the lyric stage a new interest. Bizet's death, like the death of Mendelssohn, Schubert, Mozart, and Purcell, belongs to the mysteries of Providence, whose ways are not our ways, whose thoughts are not our thoughts.

KEY COLOUR

BY FRANZ GRÖENINGS.

(Concluded from page 653.)

WE have considered key colour relative to *stringed* instruments, which are either *bowed* or *pulled*; one more class remains, namely, instruments in which the strings are struck by *hammer-action*. Of these there are two kinds, one in which the hammers are forced against the strings singly through a finger motion, the other where they are moved wholesale by rotary action. As clearly as the *finger piano* proves the existence of relative key colour, so clearly does the *handle piano* demonstrate the non-existence of key colour in the abstract as generally advocated (except the regular up and down gradation, which is always understood, as I previously explained). Remove from the former instrument the keyboard, and from the latter the barrel (or pin-plank), and the remainder is the same in both—action, soundboard, strings tuning, case, &c. Any difference in effect must therefore emanate from the removed parts, or rather from the different way in which the force is applied to or through those parts. In the former it is very uneven for various reasons, whereas in the latter it is applied with a regularity so painful that it invariably makes one laugh, and with a force so equal throughout that even Rubinstein, who may charm thousands per week, would miserably fail, if he tried to rival, in that respect, our colleagues who are sent forth from the dépôts (in Clerkenwell principally) to delight millions daily. Both ways of moving the hammers are provided, and can be applied at will separately in some of Debain's instruments. Some years ago I tried the following experiment on one of them: I took two slides and dotted a few bars of the Old Men's Chorus and of the Soldiers' Chorus from "Faust" on the one slide a semitone higher than on the other; I then performed the same things on the same instrument in four ways, namely, in two different keys per handle, and the same per finger motion—the Old Men's