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Author(s): M. D. Calvocoressi

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AND SINGING-CLASS CIRCULAR.

JUNE 1, 1912.

DR. CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS.

BY M.-D. CALVOCORESSI.

Among French composers of to-day, none has enjoyed so long or so glorious a career as Dr. Camille Saint-Saëns, none has displayed so great and so manifold an activity, and none (except, perhaps, M. Massenet) is as popular in his own country and abroad. And, it should be added, none is more fully entitled not only to the praise of those who admire him without restriction, but to the respect of those whose musical ideals happen to be different.

Nature, indeed, has been generous with Dr. Camille Saint-Saëns, endowing him not only with intellect and talents, but also with energy, buoyancy, and an inexhaustible capacity for work. He was born in Paris, October 9, 1835. Having had the misfortune to lose his father (who was from Normandy; his mother was from Champagne) early, he was brought up by his mother and a great-aunt. From his earliest childhood he evinced a great liking for music, and extraordinary musical capacities. It is told that before having completed his third year, he received from his great-aunt his first lessons in pianoforte and in musical theory; * and that at the age of five he could play at sight, faultlessly, Grétry's music in pianoforte scores, and had begun to compose small songs with pianoforte accompaniment. He himself relates, in his 'Essay on the multiple resonance of bells,' that he was gifted with a very discriminating musical ear: 'Often, one would strike common household articles of any description; candlesticks, glasses, &c., and ask me to name the note thereby produced; which I always did without the slightest hesitation.'

He soon became acquainted with the principles of orchestral music: a friend of the family having made him a present of a copy of Mozart's 'Don Giovanni' in orchestral score, he used to study it daily with the utmost eagerness. † At the age of seven, he began to receive pianoforte lessons from Stamaty, and to study harmony with a little-known but earnest and cultured musician named Maleden. On May 6, 1846, at the Salle Pleyel, he appeared for the first time in public as a pianist, performing Mozart's Concerto in B flat and works by Bach, Handel, and Beethoven. The following year, he entered Eugène Benoit's organ class at the Paris Conservatoire (in this class he obtained the second prize in 1849, the first in 1851) and began to study composition with Halévy. It is to be presumed

that despite his youth, he—naturally enough—found Halévy's teaching uncongenial to him: for he followed the course during a few months only.

In 1852 he entered the competition for the 'Prix de Rome,' but without success. He was to renew the attempt, though to no better purpose, in 1864, just before reaching the limit age of thirty.

The same year (1852) his first published work—a set of three pieces for the harmonium—appeared; and his 'Ode à Sainte-Cécile' (unpublished) obtained the first prize at a competition opened by the Société Sainte-Cécile, and was performed with great success. In 1853 the same concert Society—which rendered many services to musical art in France at a period when concerts were few and poor—performed his first Symphony (Op. 2, E flat), which he had submitted without disclosing himself as its author (a device to which he had recourse more than once, probably from the conviction that works known to be written by young French composers were foredoomed). The work was received with great favour.

In 1853 also, he became organist of the church Saint-Merry, Paris, and occupied this post until 1858, when he was appointed organist of la Madeleine, one of the most important parishes of the capital. At the age of twenty-six he became pianoforte professor at the Ecole Niedermeyer (where among his first pupils was M. Gabriel Fauré, his junior by ten years). During all that period he composed sedulously, producing a fair quantity of music—symphonic, instrumental and vocal; and he played a great deal in public, deservedly achieving fame as a virtuoso. His playing was, and has remained, remarkable for purity, perspicuity, and ease; the only qualities not displayed by him were poetic intensity and fervour.

In fact it is not only as a pianist that he reveals a certain coldness, an imperturbability greater than one is wont to meet with in musicians, who are, as a rule, the most excitable of artists. Some twelve years ago, passing under review the composer's fertile career, M. Romain Rolland aptly remarked that 'he is tormented by no passion; nothing whatever alters the lucidity of his mind.' His favourite motto, as expressed in his book 'Harmonie et Mélodie' (1885), is: 'Avoid all exaggeration and strive to maintain the entirety of intellectual health.' To this motto he has remained unswervingly true—a fact which no doubt helps to account for the prosperity of his artistic career.

Even from this early date, and notwithstanding the fact of his failing to obtain the consecration awarded to all 'good pupils,' the 'Prix de Rome,' (a failure more regrettable for the records of the Conservatoire than for himself), his life runs smoothly; and his biographers have little to recount except sedulous labour, progress and successes. At times, it is true, he met with unaccountable opposition. For instance, though most classical in tastes and in deeds, he found himself branded as a dangerous anarchist. A critic once wrote that 'he ought to be condemned to

* Octave Séré: 'Musiciens français d'aujourd'hui,' Paris, 1912. The article in Grove's Dictionary adds the detail, that 'To this day the composer keeps the little old-fashioned instrument on which this dearly-loved relative gave him his first lessons.'

† C. Saint-Saëns: 'Charles Gounod et le "Don Juan" de Mozart' (Paris, 1893).

listen to Beethoven's symphonies: this would surely be to him an insufferable punishment.* His best opera, 'Samson et Dalila' (begun in 1868), was rejected by all Parisian directors, ultimately to find a champion in Liszt, who caused the work to be produced at Weimar in 1877. Other dramatic scores of his, 'La Princesse Jaune' (Paris, Opéra-Comique, 1872), 'Le Timbre d'Argent' (Paris, Théâtre Lyrique, 1877), were but moderately successful. Another opera, 'Etienne Marcel,' shared the fate of 'Samson et Dalila' in failing to please the Parisian directors. It was produced at Lyons (1879).

The composer had evidently sowed the seed of suspicion through enlisting among the champions of modern art. As early as 1871, the better to protest against the universal antipathy evinced toward living French composers, he associated with Romain Bussine in the foundation of the Société Nationale de Musique, whose object was to produce new works of the French school.† Moreover, being gifted with a most spirited pugnacity, he was never loth to defend his own and his brother-composers' cause in articles which stung adversaries to the quick.

But despite these and certain other hostilities, he was not long in finding recognition as a writer of instrumental music. His symphonic-poems, in which he so intelligently followed the example of Franz Liszt without slavishly imitating him ('Le Rouet d'Omphale,' 1871; 'Phaëton,' 1873; 'La Danse Macabre,' 1874; 'La Jeunesse d'Hercule,' 1877); his Pianoforte concertos (1858, 1859, 1869, 1877); his chamber-music (Quintette, 1858; first Trio, 1863; Pianoforte quartette, 1875), and also his songs and his oratorio, 'Le Déluge' (1875), met, in general rule, with success.

In 1875 he began the series of his triumphal journeys, going to Russia, and, the following year, to Austria and to England, where his music soon acquired a lasting favour. In 1881 he was elected Member of the French Institut, and thenceforward found the Paris theatres open to his works, as well as the concerts. 'Henri VIII.' was produced at the Opéra in 1883, 'Proserpine' at the Opéra-Comique in 1887. Then came 'Ascanio' (Opéra, 1890); 'Déjanire' (with incidental music, 1898; re-cast in opera form and produced at the Opéra in 1911); 'Les Barbares' (Opéra, 1901); 'Parysatis' (Arenes de Béziers, 1902); 'Hélène' (Monte Carlo, 1904; Opéra-Comique, 1905); 'L'Ancêtre' (Monte Carlo, 1906; Opéra-Comique, 1911).

Hardly any branch of musical art has been left untouched by Dr. Saint-Saëns; the catalogue of his works comprises music for the pianoforte, the organ, the harp, symphonic and chamber music of all descriptions, songs, choruses, cantatas, oratorios and church-music, incidental music, a ballet, operettas, operas, transcriptions and arrangements. He has completed and published Marc-Antoine

Charpentier's incidental music to Molière's 'Le malade imaginaire,' edited the score of Gluck's 'Echo and Narcisse,' and is the general editor of Rameau's complete works issued by the firm A. Durand et fils.

Besides, he is fond of dabbling in literature and science; he has written a book of poems ('Rimes familières,' 1890); farces ('La crampe des écrivains,' played at Algiers in 1891; 'Le Roi Apépi,' played at Béziers in 1903; 'Botriocéphale,' played at Béziers in 1908); an introduction to Dr. Félix Regnault's book, 'Hypnotisme et religion' (1897); essays on 'The phenomena of mirage' (Société Astronomique de France, 1905), and on 'The relationship of plants and animals' (*Nouvelle Revue*, 1905). His essays on musical and theatrical subjects—part of which collected in his books 'Harmonie et Mélodie,' 1885, and 'Portraits et Souvenirs,' 1899,—are numerous. But—a noteworthy lacuna—he has never written any work intended for the musician's practical education.

In an account of the opera 'Déjanire' (*Musical Times*, January, 1912), Dr. Saint-Saëns's peculiar position among French composers of to-day—that of a quondam leader of the progressive party become a leader of the conservative—has been alluded to and briefly commented upon. It is merely the outcome of his sturdy fidelity to his own ideals: he is nowadays exactly what he was at the outset of his career. One of his admirers, the late Hughes Imbert, has made the remark that 'he holds his own among the intelligent and independent spirits who did not fear to confront new ideas, but who were not daring enough to attempt capital reforms.'‡ Without lingering on the same writer's supposition that 'perhaps for that very reason his fame will be limited to his own century,' one may agree with this view, which accounts for his apparent change of front. In 1874, Dr. Saint-Saëns, for instance, wrote the following lines:

Music, nowadays, is barely completing an evolution. The tonality that had afforded a basis to modern harmony breathes its last; the major and minor modes reign no longer unchallenged; the ancient modes are asserting themselves anew, and subsequently the Oriental modes, in infinite variety, will invade art. All that will afford new elements to the exhausted melody; a new and fertile era will open. Harmony will undergo changes; rhythm—of which until now so little use has been made—will develop, and thus will a new Art be born. §

Events appear to have outrun his desire; for, although since 1874 music has progressed exactly as he had foretold, Dr. Saint-Saëns is no partisan of the ultra-modern schools. In fact, he has in a recent article (*Le Courrier Musical*, 1905) compared certain musicians of to-day to 'infuriated boars rushing through beautiful gardens and playing havoc with the most delicate flowers.'

* Saint-Saëns's 'Harmonie et Mélodie.'

† This Society still exists, and has given (May 18, 1912) its 393rd concert.

‡ 'Profils de Musiciens,' Paris, 1888.

§ *La Nouvelle Revue*. See also his discourse to the Institut in 1884, 'Le présent, le passé, l'avenir de la musique.'

He is not, however, superstitiously conservative. And certain of his opinions on ancient music are worth quoting :

To us Bach's scores are a new world, whose fauna and flora remain alike unknown. By flora, I mean the strange harmonies and the melodies, whose aspect is most unusual . . . The performance, in modern times, of Bach's or Handel's music is a mere chimera ; to attempt it is to provide delight for the erudites and bookworms only. Some people esteem that ancient music should be played not with a view to direct and complete æsthetic pleasure, but for educational purposes. Subsequently, beautiful and powerful works of art will appear, and be appreciated according to their merits.*

Dr. Camille Saint-Saëns, who received his Doctorship of the University of Cambridge in 1892, is grand-officer of the Legion of Honour, and wears a great number of foreign orders. He is a member of the Royal Academies of Belgium, Prussia, Sweden, and Spain.

Among the principal works not mentioned above should be named the Septette (Op. 65, 1881), the String Quartette (Op. 112, 1899), Violin and 'Cello sonatas, the third Symphony (Op. 78, 1886—with pianoforte and organ), the Cantata, 'La lyre et la harpe,' (Op. 57), written for the Birmingham Festival of 1879. A detailed catalogue of his productions would occupy several pages.

ORLANDO GIBBONS.

By H. ORSMOND ANDERTON.

Three periods stand out in history as the seasons of a rich efflorescence of the human spirit. These are (1) the 5th century B.C. (roughly speaking), from the battle of Marathon, in 490, onwards—that brilliant outburst of genius that crowned Greece with glory in poetry, sculpture, architecture, politics, and philosophy ; (2) the period of the Renaissance in Europe, dating from the fall of Constantinople in 1453 ; and (3) the Elizabethan period in England. And while it is only with this last that our immediate concern lies, it is well to bear in mind one thing that characterises all three alike. Not only do they produce in the present, but they feed upon the past. Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, used, as their daily bread, the Orphic poems ; and Homer was the Greek Bible, so to speak. The Renaissance was, of course, the return of man's spirit upon the forgotten things of long ago, the re-awakening of the influence of Greece. And the Elizabethan period was a sort of doubling back upon itself of this Renaissance. In fact, this taking up into the present of the spirit of the past is a necessary condition of all true advance ; and we of the present day—a day of rapid growth and vigorous life—should read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the work of the Elizabethan period. A nation, like an individual, suffers a loss of life if its memory lapse. It must take up the past, assimilate

it, and bring it into the vivid consciousness of the present. Spenser, the central figure of the new poetry, fed upon Chaucer ; yet it is only comparatively lately that Chaucer has received wider recognition. It is done at last in poetry ; it should be done also in music. We should make these madrigalists popular—not only to musicians, but in the wider sense. It would hardly be difficult. The thing of peculiarly happy augury for the present movement is the uprising among the artisan classes—the innumerable choirs, with the Festivals, exhibiting an astonishingly high standard of performance. This seems to suggest a healthy, natural growth when we remember that at the time when England led Europe it was precisely in this choral work. For though the writers of that period set instrumental music on its career, they were but pioneers in that : their chief excellence lay in choral music. A few words, then, may not come amiss on one of the chief figures of the time—Orlando Gibbons.

He was born in 1583, being forty years junior to his great contemporary, Byrd, though he died only a couple of years after him, in 1625. Tallis belonged definitely to an earlier generation, dying two years after Gibbons's birth. Bull and Dowland were contemporaries, and died in 1628 and 1626 respectively. When we add to these Farnaby, Wilbye, and Morley, and think of the company of immortals gathered in the 'Mermaid,' that happiest of taverns, in a 'London small, and white, and clean,' we can form some notion of the artistic climate of the time.

Gibbons was the son of a Cambridge Wait, and entered the choir of King's College in 1596, so that from the first he was brought up amid the surroundings of that Anglican Church for which he was to do so much. In March, 1604, he became organist of the Chapel Royal, and two years later took the degree of Mus. Bac. at Cambridge. In 1611 he took his share with Byrd and Bull in the publication of 'Parthenia,' a collection of pieces for the Virginals. About the same time (probably somewhat earlier) the 'Fantasias of three Parts' (for viols) appeared. In 1612 the 'First Set of Madrigals and Mottets of 5 parts, apt for Viols and Voyces,' was published. In May, 1622, he took the degrees of Bachelor and Doctor at Oxford, the anthem 'O clap your hands' being written as the exercise for the occasion. In 1623 he was appointed organist at Westminster Abbey, and two years later was summoned to Canterbury to write music for the reception of Henrietta Maria by Charles I. Here he died of an apoplectic seizure, and was buried in the Cathedral.

Such is a brief outline of his outward career : to his real life, his music, we must devote more space. His main work was, of course, choral. Of his position in church music Dr. Walker says : 'His primary difference from Byrd is that he owes nothing directly to Roman influences, but stands before us as virtually the "father of pure Anglican music." Tallis and others had, indeed, sometimes sacrificed artistic convictions in order to enable the

* 'Harmonie et Mélodie.'

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS.