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REVIEWS.

Le Roi de Lahore. Opéra en cinq actes, de Louis Gallet et J. Massenet. [Paris: Hartmann.]

SOME time ago, before there was a thought of producing Bizet's "Carmen" in this country, we directed the attention of our readers to that remarkable work. We do not say, as regards this matter, *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*, but it is a fact, nevertheless, that the Opera was brought out at Her Majesty's Theatre not long after. We accept the omen for M. Massenet's "Le Roi de Lahore," and shall not be at all surprised if next season the second most successful recent production of French dramatic composers make its appearance on our stage.

It would be superfluous to inform our readers who M. Massenet is, and what claims his work presents because he has written it. We know something, at least, of his music in this country; we have had the man amongst us, and experience of both music and man has excited a desire for more intimate acquaintance. Let us then without further preface pass to the Opera which, by the way, is having an enviable career of success even upon the jealous stage of Italy.

The scene is laid in the "gorgeous East," what time some Mussulman conqueror threatens Lahore with fire and sword; and the curtain first rises upon the space before the temple of Indra, whither flock crowds of people to invoke the god's protection. These sing a charming, expressive chorus, in which no special attempt is made at "local colour," and are answered by the high priest, *Timour* (bass), with reassuring words. "If your king will not fight," he declares, "Indra will war upon the invaders." Thus comforted, the people enter the temple and leave *Timour* face to face with *Scindia* (baritone), the chief minister of state. *Scindia* has come to seek *Sita* (soprano), his niece, who resides in the temple, and whom he would now remove to his own house at the bidding of an unholy passion. *Timour* resists the demand; but when he is informed that a young man obtains secret admission to the temple and, as the lover of *Sita*, meets her in the very shadow of the altar, his anger is roused, and he willingly consents to an interview between the uncle and niece that the truth as to this matter may be extorted. The duet for the two men is highly dramatic and vigorous, though marked by the simplicity and naturalness of style that characterise the whole work. We now enter the temple, and hear the priestesses in melodious, unaffected strains encourage *Sita* to meet her exalted relative. Their little two-part chorus, with interspersed solos, is charming, and in M. Massenet's most pleasing style. Then follows a duet for the minister and his niece, wherein he pleads his love; but *Sita*, whose character is one of delightful *naïveté*, tells her uncle of the mysterious intruder who has won her heart, and to whom she must be faithful. Enraged at his disappointment, the minister sounds the sacred gong (a reminiscence of "Norma"), the priests and people rush in, and before them all *Sita* is denounced as faithless to her vestal vows. In this scene M. Massenet shows considerable dramatic power. His music easily adapts itself to the varying moods of the characters concerned, and the climax is led up to with much judgment. Now comes a stormy and exciting *ensemble*. *Timour* stirs up the wrath of the multitude against the young girl, and is answered with a fierce clamour for her instant death. In the midst of it *Sita* speaks. She is willing to die, but pleads that there may be no stain upon her good name, for she has not violated her sacred oath. As she concludes, the evening song of the priestesses rises from the depths of the temple, and *Scindia* bids her join in it if she be innocent, and reveal the name of her lover. This she refuses. Again the people cry for her blood, and while they do so a man, who emerges from a secret door in one of the pillars, exclaims, "No! *Sita* belongs to me. Let her live." It is the king! *Tableau*. A massive *ensemble* follows in which the conflicting emotions of the actors are expressed after the traditional manner and with great effect. At its close, *Timour* reproaches the monarch with the profanity of his love, threatens him with divine vengeance, and bids him expiate his offence by marching

against the invader. This the king promises; the priest consents to bless the union of *Alim* and *Sita*, and the act ends with a fervid war-cry.

The second act takes place in the king's camp, where, during the absence of the army, which has gone out to battle, slaves dance and play. *Sita*, anxious for the result of the conflict, takes a superstitious interest in a game of chess between two of her guard, and has a presentiment of evil when "black" wins. She has not long to wait for its confirmation; but meanwhile, influenced by the calm beauty of the evening and her own happy love, she sings, with her maid *Kaled* (mezzo-soprano), in tender and charming strains of the joy which is hers. Here M. Massenet, although suggestive of Gounod, is at his best, and has produced music certain to be popular wherever heard. But now comes a dreadful awakening from a pleasant dream. The army, defeated and broken, rolls back in a tumultuous mass, throwing away its weapons, and declaring that the king is slain and all lost. Seizing the opportunity, *Scindia* offers to take the place of the fallen monarch, and lead the soldiers—back to Lahore. He is accepted, but at that moment *Alim* appears pale and wounded, reproaches his troops with their cowardice, and offers to put himself again at their head in the field. The soldiers refuse point-blank; the king may go, they will not. Observing this, *Scindia* informs the monarch that his reign has ended, and his own day of revenge come; for had he not loved *Sita* and been deprived of her? Infuriated, *Alim* bids one and another arrest the minister, but not a hand stirs; and the scene closes as the warriors mockingly bid their whilom leader go on fighting if he likes it. Throughout this prolonged *ensemble* M. Massenet rarely flags. He is at times somewhat coarse in his effects, but may plead the nature of the situation in excuse. We think, however, that the element of contrast is wanting, the want being made the more conspicuous by the fact that *Sita* stands doing nothing while the fate of her lover is decided. Left alone together for a time, *Sita* and *Alim* sing an impassioned duet—of comfort on the one side, shame and agony on the other. The king's distress reaches its climax when he hears the soldiers approaching with cries of "To Lahore," and he dies as the armed rabble stream across the stage. At the bidding of *Scindia*, *Sita* is carried away, and the curtain falls as the body of the monarch is left alone on the plain.

The third act takes us to the Gardens of the Blessed in the Paradise of Indra; and a celestial march and chorus of happy spirits, followed by a ballet, affords the most complete contrast to the strife and tumult that have gone before. The ballet music, let us add, is ingenious, and includes a genuine Hindoo melody, with five variations of the most characteristic description. At its close *Alim* is seen approaching the throne of the god. "Who are you that smile not?" demands *Indra*. *Alim* tells his story, and pleads to have his life renewed for *Sita's* sake. The deities think him a fool, but the request is granted nevertheless; and a solemn "incantation" recited by *Indra*, and responded to by the celestial choir, confers again the gift of human life. But *Alim* is no longer to be King. He will re-enter earth as a humble man, but bound to *Sita* by a common fate, and doomed to die with her. Gladly the destiny is accepted, and his song of joy dominates the hymn of the spirits, with which the act closes. Here, also, M. Massenet shows his love for broad and striking effects. He is never so happy as when using all the resources of voice and orchestra, but it must be owned that, apart from the desirability of greater relief, he does this well and never fails to hit the mark.

When the curtain next rises we see *Alim* asleep upon the steps of his own palace, and hear in the far distance the celestial voices continuing their incantation. Presently the man restored from the dead wakes to the bliss of life, and also to a consciousness of his situation, for a group of officers discourse within earshot upon the splendour of *Scindia's* coronation. Then his thoughts turn to *Sita*; he recalls the scene in the desert, and at last rushes towards the palace frantically exclaiming: "It is I, *Sita*, come to reclaim thee." In this solo there are some charming passages, but, for the most part, it is a little overdone and wanting in spontaneity. But now *Scindia's* coronation procession appears to the strains of a pompous march,

and a sonorous chorus in unison. Elated, the new king anticipates his union with *Sita* in really graceful as well as passionate periods, and then moves towards the palace. But as he mounts the steps, *Alim* stands above him, calm and threatening. Stupefied with terror he, his guards, and the people shrink back, whispering their fear to each other in a most dramatic chorus. Then the stranger speaks in the name of *Alim*, who will pardon the usurper and leave him in possession provided *Sita* be restored. "Seize him," exclaims *Scindia*, but the guards again recoil as the intruder haughtily declares "I am *Alim*, your king." The priests thereupon proclaim him a madman, and the people, taking up the words, ask that mercy might be shown. An unduly prolonged and very noisy *finale* ends at last by *Timour* declaring that the deity had spoken through the insane intruder, and that *Sita* must be given up. But at that moment *Sita's* train appears amid cries of "Behold, the queen," and a significant reference to the popular voice on the part of *Scindia* brings down the curtain.

Once more we are in the temple of Indra, whither *Sita* has fled rather than enter the nuptial chamber of her new lord, and where she intends to die rather than be unfaithful to the memory of her love. In fervid strains she calls upon the deity to receive her soul, and is about to put an end to life when the chants of the priestesses arise from the depths of the edifice. "It was at this time he used to appear," she muses, and *Alim* steps out of the pillar while the words are on her lips, but she sees him not. At last he calls her, is recognised, and all the bliss of the situation then finds expression in a duet of remarkable intensity and corresponding effect. This ended, the lovers are about to escape by the secret door when *Scindia* appears on its threshold. Now we see the heroic side of the woman's character. Imperiously she bids the usurper make way for his king, and not dare to lift his blood-stained hands against them. For answer *Scindia* summons his guards and then, despairing, *Sita* stabs herself. Folded in each other's arms, while the usurper stands by terror-stricken, the lovers renew their glad song of happiness; the temple opens, there is a sound of celestial voices, and in the distance can be seen the Gardens of the Blessed with Indra waiting to receive his children. As they die together so together do their spirits approach the throne while the curtain falls.

We need not add much to this description. The reader must see at once that "Le Roi de Lahore" has a highly dramatic and exciting story, and that its capacity for stage effect is immense. True repose and contrast are both wanted, but the interest is never likely to flag in any serious degree while the music, characterised by directness of purpose and a rare power of expression, is always in accord with the story, and often charming in its beauty. Should "Le Roi de Lahore" be produced in London, we risk little by predicting its success.

Musikalische Charakterköpfe. Ein kunstgeschichtliches. Skizzenbuch von W. H. Riehl. Vol. III.
[Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta, 1878.]

JUST twenty-five years ago the world of amateurs in Germany was most agreeably surprised by the appearance of a volume bearing the somewhat awkward title of "Musikalische Charakterköpfe," and containing a series of historical and critical "sketches" of musical composers chiefly of the earlier romantic schools. Sketches they were, inasmuch as the painter frequently contented himself by giving merely the scanty outlines of individual portraits; but by a masterly arrangement of the historical background these outlines stood forth on the canvas with a boldness and distinctness which at once raised the "sketches" into the rank of pictures complete in themselves. There were few readers then who did not feel that a new and striking method of treating the subject had been inaugurated. The intercommunication and mutual influence existing between music and social and moral life was here, for the first time perhaps, historically considered—if only on a very limited scale—by the light of composers who (to use a German phrase) have helped to "make an epoch" in the history of the art. Fascinated by a vivacious yet solid discourse, the reader was enabled to follow the rise and progress of certain phases of musical thought, to observe their formation into distinct schools, whose influence upon general culture

and whose connection with social and even political events were here set forth with striking force and brilliancy. It was impossible for even the most sceptical to peruse this volume without feeling that music was not merely the plaything of the idle or the isolated art of undefined emotions having no practical bearing upon the intellectual development of man. We are speaking, let it be remembered, of twenty-five years ago. If since then the practical and educational value of music has come to be more generally admitted, if even here and there efforts are being made to include the study of its history as an element of musical education, the fact is to no mean extent due to the stimulating influence of writings such as Herr Riehl's masterly essays.

The first volume of "Musikalische Charakterköpfe" being so followed by a second, of equal merit and interest, the author has himself supplied the standard by which to measure the present third volume which forms the subject of our review. This standard, as we have seen, is a very high one; and if, therefore, our exacting demands are not fully realised when we come to apply it in the present instance, it does not by any means follow that this new series of character-studies does not form a very valuable contribution to musico-historical literature. A writer of Herr Riehl's comprehensive grasp of mind and critical taste cannot fail to set new ideas in motion or to revive old ones worthy of a resuscitation. Whatever of praise, therefore, we may have to bestow or fault to find ought to be meted out in a spirit of deference due to those who have rendered exceptional service in the particular sphere of their activity. In the first place, then, we miss in the new series of "character-portraits" almost throughout the very element which has distinguished their predecessors; they appear no longer artistically arranged pictures; they have become more true to the indication contained on the title-page, being in fact "leaves from a sketch-book." Many of these leaves, indeed, quite recall the peculiar charm possessed by the older volumes. Thus in "Zwei deutsche Capellmeister" we have two most engaging parallel portraits, drawn from life, of representative types of that interesting and meritorious, yet frequently undervalued, musical being known as the German Capellmeister. Again, in "Der Sänger des deutschen Commercibuchs" full justice is done to the genial composer of songs near akin to the *Volkslied*, Albert Methfessel; although in the course of his characterisation the author, to our thinking, lays too much stress upon the merits of the German *Lied* of some seventy years ago at the expense of its modern representative, seeing that it is owing in the first place to Franz Schubert that the German *Lied* has obtained the strong wings which fitted it for its subsequent international flight. The songs of Schulz and of Reichardt, for instance, are undoubtedly interesting from an antiquarian point of view, but they have served their turn otherwise, and their claims to a revival are considerably less strong than are those of the period immediately preceding that of the great lyrical singer just referred to. In the sketches entitled respectively "Viotti und das Geigenduet" and "Franz Krommer," Herr Riehl's predilections for chamber music, and his special devotedness, in an executive sense, to the violin, have led to very interesting and instructive analyses of the distinctive merits of the two composers for stringed instruments. The last mentioned, "Franz Krommer," will be introduced for the first time to the great majority of readers; yet he was the author of no less than sixty Quartetts and half as many Quintetts, most of them of considerable musical value. Two more essays remain to be enumerated, the most important of the present series as regards subjects, and the opening and concluding one respectively in the volume. The former of these, entitled "Die beiden Beethoven," is a double-faced portrait of the great giant in music as represented by the two chief opposing parties of the present day; the one revering in him the mightiest of symphonic tone-poets, the other professing to discern in the master's calling in of the human voice in the "Ninth Symphony" his deliberate abandonment of abstract instrumental music, and each claiming their portrait of Beethoven to be the only correct one. Much golden truth may be gathered from this thoughtful contribution to a controversy of which the end is as yet very