Review

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Reviews.

The Temple. An oratorio. Words selected from the Bible. By H. Walford Davies (Op. 14).

[Novello and Company, Limited.]

There is something appropriate in Dr. Davies's choice of subject for his new choral work, written for this year's Worcester Festival. He is, as most of our readers already know, the organist at the beautiful old church of the Inner Temple, within the round chapel of which sleep many of the Knights Templars of old, an Order which I believe received its name from the efforts of its knights to tear the Temple of Jerusalem from the grasp of the Saracens. Yet when I heard that this clever young composer had chosen, for the central idea of his new choral work, the inception of The Temple by David and its building by Solomon, my first thought was, 'How is it possible to invest such a subject with musical and human interest, without which an Art-work is foredoomed to dullness?' On further thought, however, the possibilities of the subject opened up, and I rather expected that the composer had made his work a vehicle for the painting of a picture of Oriental magnificence.

David, 'the sweet psalmist of Israel,' has always been an object of affection to the musician, while the personality of Solomon is one that stands out boldly through the mists of the dim, forgotten past as the archetype of the Oriental monarch; a king famed, even in those days of prodigal luxury, for his supreme magnificence, yet, in his moods of repentance before God, as abjectly humble as only an Oriental can be; a man thoroughly imbued with a belief in himself as an instrument in the hands of the God he worshipped, yet, in his philosophy, as pessimistically pagan as an Omar Khayyam or any other of the numerous Oriental philosophers. Many others among the old Judaic kings seem unreal and shadowy personalities, but there is a reality and a consistence of characterisation about the Biblical narrative of Solomon's reign that compels belief and holds one's interest, so much so that we can almost believe the claim of Menelik of Abyssinia to be a direct descendant of the son of Solomon and Balkis, Queen of Sheba. So one would hardly have looked upon it as out of place had Dr. Davies presented us with a glowing piece of Oriental picture-making, brilliant with local colour, setting to luxuriously exotic music words which tell of the most magnificent piece of work achieved by this most magnificent of Oriental monarchs. Yet the composer has not allowed himself to be led into what many an English critic would consider a pitfall to be avoided, but has rather chosen a form for his work that is, I believe, much more acceptable to the majority of British ears and susceptibilities, I mean the much more austere and rigid mould of the 'oratorio'; for 'The Temple' is oratorio pure and simple. For the most part Dr. Davies's effects are produced by fine though rather complex choral-writing, interspersed with narrative and arias for the solo voices.

The very first page of 'The Temple' (which, by-the-way, is labelled Op. 14) shows us in what direction the composer's tastes lie. After four *fortissimo* chords the soprano solo begins the 'Choral Overture' with the words 'Let all the earth fear the Lord,' the six-part chorus joining in with the words 'Let all the earth stand in awe of Him.' So is the 'atmosphere' fixed; the work is to rely on its choral treatment for its effect, the orchestra being evidently intended to take second rank, a *modus operandi* which will come as a relief to many who dislike the tendency in many choral works of to-day to make the voices accompany and explain, as it were, the complex and emotional writing for the orchestra. After this impressive opening the overture starts off with a phrase for the basses—

Ex. 1. *Allegro.*

of which much use is made later on, serving as the nearest approach to *leitmotiv* that the work affords. After

contrapuntal treatment for some forty bars, the chorus enters with a setting of the words of the fine old hymn, 'Before Jehovah's awful throne.' After the first verse has been given out, somewhat in the manner of a chorale, the orchestra is entrusted with what may stand for the second subject of the overture, commencing thus—

and evidently a phrase intended to be suggestive of the Divine power, the chorus entering afterwards with the words 'His sovereign power,' &c. On these two subjects the whole of the dignified overture is built.

No. 2 is divided up between the soprano solo (Narrative) and semi-chorus, the words dealing with David's desire to build a Temple, the word of God, through Nathan, forbidding him to do so, and the prophecy that one should come after him by whom the work should be effected. Then we have a long and impressive prayer of David for help, set as a baritone solo and followed by a soprano solo and chorus, treated *a capella* and of great simplicity.

This is followed by No. 5, wherein the soprano solo tells how David assembled the princes of Israel and the mighty men, and acquainted them with his former desire, how its fulfilment had been forbidden, and how his son Solomon had been chosen in his place to bring his idea to fruition, the sopranos and contraltos of the chorus breaking in several times with the words 'Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, glory and strength.' To this succeeds David's appeal to the mighty men for help, and the rejoicing of the people when this is offered 'willingly'.

Then comes what to many will seem the best number of the work, 'The Song of Thanksgiving' (No. 6), an elaborate and impressive number, for chorus and baritone solo, beginning in this strain:—

BARITONE SOLO.
Ex. 3. *Allegro maestoso.*

Space forbids one to go into a detailed account of this imposing number, and neither the time nor place is suitable for anything like criticism, but I would merely point out the massive choral writing and the freedom of the contrapuntal treatment, as also the pathos of the solo 'But who am I?' &c., followed by the beautiful but complex 'Give unto the Lord,' written for semi-chorus

and soprano and baritone solos. This leads back to the first subject (Ex. 3), now elaborated into a fine contrapuntal finish for chorus and semi-chorus. Then, after a short solo, 'And David died' and a kind of 'Elegy' for orchestra alone, entitled 'Solemn Interlude'—

Lento maestoso.

a soprano solo, 'Lord, into Thy hands I commend my spirit,' brings Part I. to a hushed conclusion.

Part II. commences with a narration—for chorus and soprano solo—of the building of the Temple by Solomon, and the placing therein of the Ark of the Covenant.

No. 11. is a chorus for tenors and basses labelled 'Andante Marziale' and of a strongly marked rhythmical character. It is a setting of the words 'We will go into the tabernacle of the Lord,' commencing thus—

Andante marziale.

and followed by a double chorus, 'O give thanks unto the Lord.' The situation, though not the music, is strongly suggestive of 'The Procession of the Ark' in Mackenzie's too rarely heard 'Rose of Sharon,' and we would have pardoned Dr. Davies here if he had allowed himself a little local colour as did Mackenzie in his work; but the composer has evidently set his face strongly against such treatment, deeming it, perhaps, to savour more of the opera-house than the cathedral, so that we have to be content with a thoroughly English setting of the words, a setting that once more proves the abundance of the composer's technique, rather than the exuberance of his imagination. However, the chorus is a fine, massive one, as are all the choruses in the work, and evidently Dr. Davies's tastes lie strongly in the direction of this kind of work, so that it were mere hypercriticism to find fault when the work is so well done.

This chorus is followed by a soprano solo, No. 13, 'It came even to pass,' in the middle of which we have what looks like a dramatic piece of tone-colour accompanying the words 'The house was filled with a cloud,' though, not having the orchestral score before us, it is impossible to quite gauge its effect. It is certainly dramatic in the shortened score. Following this comes Solomon's prayer (No. 14), beginning 'O Lord God of Israel,' a number marked by great earnestness of expression. It is of great length and broken up by a quartet at intervals singing, as though in parenthesis, 'Hear thou from Heaven,' after which the whole work finishes with another massive chorus 'King of kings! Lord of lords!' in which much use is made of the first subject of the overture (Ex. 1). This number is of elaborate proportions, and after working up to its climax at the words—

Firm as a rock Thy truth shall stand,
When rolling years shall cease to move,

we have, by way of Epilogue, a setting of the words 'Howbeit, the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands,' the oratorio finishing *pianissimo* with the words 'Know ye not that ye are the Temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you.'

To sum up this rather discursive though inadequate analysis, we have in Dr. Walford Davies's new work an impressive and scholarly composition, imbued with deep

earnestness of purpose, and never for one moment calculated to outrage the susceptibilities of an English oratorio-loving audience, yet, by its sound musicianship and clever, massive contrapuntal writing, calculated to call forth the admiration of the musician. Although the complexity of the choral-writing will place it beyond the efforts of the average choral society, it is a work that should receive numerous hearings, and one must congratulate the composer on having written, and the Worcester Festival authorities on having secured the first hearing of, a work worthy to rank beside the best works that have been done on the same lines by British composers. While we have young men like Dr. Davies who can write in this manner, we need have no fear of the traditions of English choral-writing dying out, traditions of which we are all so justly proud.

The Roll Call of Westminster Abbey. By Mrs. A. Murray Smith (E. T. Bradley). With illustrations and plans. [Smith, Elder and Co.]

The daughter of Dean Bradley is favourably known by her excellent 'Deanery Guide to Westminster Abbey,' the sanctuary of which her father has been the guardian since the death of Dean Stanley, twenty-one years ago. The unusual opportunities she has had of investigating on the spot, and in gaining access to the archives of the venerable fane, have resulted in the mass of information contained within the covers of this interesting and historically valuable volume. The authoress not only takes her readers round about the resting places of the remembered and the unremembered dead, saying so-and-so is buried here, but she furnishes us with details of their lives and the part they played in the history and the well-being (in some cases the ill-being) of their country. That 'The Roll Call' is a very long one, the index to the book at once bears testimony.

Of the twenty-five chapters into which Mrs. Murray Smith divides her volume, that treating of the musicians who sleep the long sleep of death within the walls of the Abbey or in its precincts, naturally attracts our attention. Most of the names are household words, e.g., Purcell (the inscription on his monument as here quoted needs a little correction), Handel, Henry Lawes, Blow, Croft, Clementi, Sterndale Bennett, and others. Mrs. Murray Smith does not profess to give *all* the names of those who are buried in the great Walhalla of Westminster, but in regard to the musicians, we venture to suggest, in the certainty of a new edition, the addition of the familiar names of John Banister, Pelham Humphreys, the Rev. Luke Flintoft (composer of one of the most beautiful of minor chants), J. P. Salomon, Haydn's friend, and Jack Wilson, said to have been Shakespeare's tenor. And should there not be a complete list of the Abbey organists who are therein interred? These names and those referred to above might at least be given at the end of the chapter, with dates and the locality of their graves. By this means the 'Roll-Call' would become more useful, not only as a guide-book, but as one of reference. A few slips of the pen may be pointed out by way of friendly correction. Purcell's grave was restored at the instance of the late Henry F. Turle, a son of the Abbey organist, who, by-the-way, was never Dr. Turle; Sir John Hawkins was the author of a *history* of music, not a musical *dictionary*; and Dr. Burney's Account of the Commemoration of Handel, held in 1784 (the first Handel Festival), appeared in 1785, not 1704. These are, however, as spots on the sun, and we feel sure that so fascinating and well-illustrated a volume will find a host of delighted readers.

Nights at the Opera. Wagner's 'Lohengrin.' By Wakeling Dry. [Alexander Moring. The De La More Press.]

This is one of a series of attractive little volumes which merit a welcome. The author, whose style is very readable, divides his handbook into five chapters—The Maker of the Music, The Story of the Swan-Knight, The Presentation of the Opera, The Characters represented, and Music and Story side by side. The result is a companionable *multum in parvo*; but in a future edition the tiny facsimile music examples should be type-printed and thus be made clearer.