Some Present Aspects of Music: IV

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Art and Science, Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, 1893. He is a Corresponding Member, Istitúto Reale di Firenze, a Member of the Royal Swedish Academy (1898), and of other foreign societies. In 1895 he received the honour of Knighthood from the Queen.

In a little penny memorandum-book, first used many years ago, Sir Alexander has entered every one of his numbered and unnumbered compositions, the latter amounting to sixty. His Opus 1 is a Romance for pianoforte, published in Edinburgh. One of his earliest songs, "The song of love and death," was published by Novello, "and it is not a bad song either," the composer says. As he had heard nothing of the manuscript for two years, he wrote to his friend Berthold Tours, little knowing that he was musical adviser to Messrs. Novello, asking him: "Who is the man in possession at Novello's?" "I am the man in possession," replied Tours, "and from a pile of things left by my predecessor I have extricated your song." It was very soon afterwards published. Within the limits of our space it is only possible to record, in addition to those already mentioned, the more important compositions by Sir Alexander Mackenzie.

Choral Works.—"The New Covenant" (Glasgow, 1888), "The Cotter's Saturday Night" (Edinburgh, 1892), "Veni, Creator Spiritus" (Birmingham, 1891), "Bethlehem," 1894, "His Majesty" (comic opera, 1897).

Orchestral.—Scherzo (Glasgow, 1878), Scottish Rhapsodies, Nos. 1 and 2. Overtures: "To a Comedy," "Tempo di Ballo," "Twelfth Night," and "Britannia" (on "Rule, Britannia"). Incidental music to "Ravenswood" (Lyceum, 1890), "Marmion" (Edinburgh), and "The Little Minister" (Haymarket Theatre, 1897). "From the North" (three pieces for orchestra).

Concertos.—(Violin), Op. 32 and Pibroch; (pianoforte), "Scottish" (Op. 55).

In addition to his larger works, he has written numerous violin, pianoforte, and organ pieces; songs, part-songs, and anthems. His "Benedictus" for violin has attained great popularity. In connection with his Benedictus, Sir Alexander relates the following incident: "Last year, during the Jubilee festivities, a gentleman asked to be introduced to me, and on shaking hands with me he said: 'I want to know you; our band plays your Benedictus twice a week at Hong Kong!'"

THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF MUSIC.

Sir Alexander speaks in high terms of his staff of professors and of the students at the Academy. Speaking upon the subject of the Academy and of a thorough preparation for the musical profession, Sir Alexander says: "The curriculum is not only very thorough, but the range of music studied within those walls embraces all schools, ancient and modern. I have a very thorough belief in the value of systematic teaching under competent professors. The benefits attending the study of music in an Academy are akin to the education acquired at a large University, where a young fellow learns his classics and sits at the feet of

those who are his superiors in knowledge. A wild, hot-headed youth, permeated with the fantastic side of music, needs to be moulded into something like order; this we endeavour to do, and when he has, so to speak, subjugated himself to those principles of law and order which have guided the great masters of music, then he is fit to develop whatever originality he may possess."

It should be recorded that the initiation of the Examinations of the "Associated Board" is due to Sir Alexander. Being dissatisfied with the scheme of the Academy Local Examinations, he, in company with Mr. Thomas Threlfall, Chairman of the Committee of Management of the Academy, called upon Sir George Grove, in order to enlist the co-operation of the Royal College of Music in promulgating a more satisfactory system of examinations, the success and development of which have been attended with remarkably gratifying results.

"What new works have you now in hand?" we asked Sir Alexander before leaving his pleasant study, situated at the top of his house near the Zoo. "Well, I should like to do something in my lighter vein. And why not? Besides a one-act serious opera by my friend Fred. Corder, I have still a comic opera by B. C. Stephenson in my desk. My first popular success was a comic part-song for male voices, 'A Franklyn's dogge leped over a style.' However, I have just finished three orchestral pieces—Prelude 'Astarte,' Pastorale, and 'Flight of the Spirits,' for a stage performance of 'Manfred.' No one would dare to write an overture after Schumann's. And then what do you think of these words which I have just begun to set?" he asks, as he hands us a dainty book of verse by a living poet. "A capital idea," we reply, on glancing at the racy couplets. "In what form do you propose to cast it?" "A choral ballad," is the response—"different sections of the choir answering one another in telling the story. Yes, I think it will do," he adds with a cheery smile as we say "good-bye" at the conclusion of a pleasant chat with the composer of "The Rose of Sharon."

SOME PRESENT ASPECTS OF MUSIC.

IV.

In his noble Ode, William Collins describes the Passions as drawn to "Music, heavenly maid," by the sound of her shell. They—

Thronged around her magic cell,
Exulting, trembling, raging, fainting,
Possest beyond the muse's painting:
By turns they felt the glowing mind
Disturbed, delighted, raised, refined;—

till, "filled with fury," they snatched the instruments, and—

Each (for madness ruled the hour)
Would prove his own expressive power.

We all know how Fear, Anger, Despair, Revenge, and generally the more violent of the

crew acquitted themselves; and with what tender appreciation the poet dwells upon the expression of Hope, Melancholy, Cheerfulness, and Joy. Moreover, we all remember the closing invocation:

O Music, sphere-descended maid,
Friend of pleasure, wisdom's aid!
Why, goddess, why, to us denied,
Lay'st thou thy ancient lyre aside?

Where is thy simple, native heart,
Devote to virtue, fancy, art?
Arise, as in that elder time,
Warm, energetic, chaste, sublime.

Let it be noted that our poet draws a distinction between Music and the action of the Passions. It was not she that engendered fury, kindled love, but the Passions, playing upon her instruments. May we then conclude that in its essence, its primary state, music is apart from human feeling, though capable of giving utterance to it; in other words, that while music can be made the "language of emotion" it is not emotional of necessity?

In the invocation just cited, Collins clearly longs for a revival of primary conditions. "Return in all thy simple state," he exclaims. So William Blake, in another invocation:

How have you left the antient love
That bards of old enjoyed in you!
The languid strings do scarcely move,
The sound is forced, the notes are few.

It is curious to observe how far the poets generally refer to music as operating in spheres distinct from that of passion. There is, for example, the sphere of imagination, and Pope indicates it:

I seem through consecrated walks to rove,
I hear soft music die along the grove:
Led by the sound, I roam from shade to shade,
By god-like poets venerable made.

Dryden makes the world's grey fathers see a god in Jubal's shell; Keats asked for music dying; as a supreme delight, Milton "took in strains that might create a soul under the ribs of death"; and, in a well-known passage, the prose-poet, Carlyle, speaks of music as laying open "the infinite" to our gaze. Here obviously is no question of passion, but of the working of an attribute higher than an elementary and common endowment. Even when the poets do connect music and emotion, it is generally with reference to gentle effects and calming influences. Hear Shakespeare:—

In sweet music is such art,
Killing care, and grief of heart
Fall asleep, or, hearing die.

When griping grief the heart doth wound,
And doleful dumps the mind oppress,
Then music with her silver sound,
With speedy help doth lend redress.

Soft stillness, and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony.

Referring to a "wild and wanton herd"—

You shall perceive them make a mutual stand,
Their savage eyes turned to a modest gaze
By the sweet power of music.

Nought so stockish, hard, and full of rage,
But music for the time doth change his nature.

Most heavenly music!
It nips me into listening, and thick slumber
Hangs upon mine eyes.

Such quotations might be multiplied a hundredfold from the works of other poets:

Tennyson:

Music which gentler on the spirit lies
Than tired eyelids upon tired eyes.

Moore:

Oh! 'tis only music's strain
Can sweetly soothe and not betray.

Hogg:

Slight emblem of the bliss above,
It soothes the spirit all to love.

Among the prose-writers who bear like testimony is Luther: "Music is . . . the only art that can calm the agitations of the soul." Hazlitt: "It came upon my heart like the calm beauty of death; fancy caught the sound, and faith mounted on it to the skies. It filled the valley like a mist, and still poured out its endless chant, and still it swells upon the ear, and wraps me in a golden trance, drowning the noisy tumult of the world." I could easily fill these pages with extracts similar in purport.

It is certainly curious and significant that so many of our great writers in verse and prose regard music less as a stimulus to emotion than as a means of calming it; less as an exciting voice than as one which, "with most miraculous organ," speaks of peace. For them the art chiefly appeals to the "divine attribute of the imagination," or else calms the tempests of feeling.

But—here the poets may be dismissed—music has yet another function, which belongs to itself in its abstract forms. This is much less recognised than any other because apparent only to those who have some technical knowledge and perception. It is none the less real on that account. What musician is not conscious of intellectual gratification, and the pleasure that comes of order and proportion, when listening to such a work as Bach's Prelude and Fugue in G minor; or to Beethoven's Variations on a Theme by Diabelli, or to the closing movement of the "Jupiter" Symphony? In these and countless other cases there is no question of emotion. The enjoyment is purely intellectual, and for keenness, as musicians know, it suffers nothing by comparison with the delight which arises from forms less abstract. We have, then, three aspects of music—viz., those which appeal respectively to the emotions, the imagination and the intellect. So much for demonstration, and now for some very practical remarks.

The question is whether, at the present time, a due sense of proportion is shown in our cultivation and patronage of the three grand divisions of music. My own reply is distinctly in the negative. Let us take the case of what I have chosen to describe as intellectual music. Every close observer must admit that this form of the art has actually lost ground. I am old enough to remember a time when it enjoyed no small share of favour—when audiences heard purely abstract music with pleasure, and followed with more or less appreciation a contrapuntal

development. Some of us do so now, but we are the survivors of a musical public which has practically passed away and given place to another, trained, when trained at all, under different influences, and having, as it seems to us, a susceptibility in which we do not share. Within my experience of music, nothing is more remarkable than the changes just indicated. It may be in recollection that some of their causes, or what I take to be such, were pointed out in a previous paper, and they need not be discussed now. Enough that, what with public craving for nervous excitement, the inevitable result of our modern life; what with the abuse of the modern orchestra in ministering to that unhealthy appetite, and what with the preponderance among our enlarged audiences of persons imperfectly equipped for judging questions of art, the forms of intellectual music are almost set aside, or minister only to the pleasure of a small minority. Some time ago a dead set was made against the fugue. It would be uncharitable, perhaps, to suppose that many sneered at what they could not comprehend, but it is far more easy to believe that than to accept the idea that the "dead set" was made by persons of musical culture and perception. I know no other case of open and destructive hostility to music of this kind, but indifference, in such a case, is as fatal as virulent opposition, and unless a change comes the intellectual forms of our art will be given over by the living world into what it would call the dead hands of scholars. That prospect is distinctly lamentable.

In the domain of music appealing to the imagination—music, that is to say, which, like Beethoven's C minor Symphony, is emotional and suggestive, but indefinite, our present condition is by no means satisfactory. Not but what it has thousands of admirers, who welcome its masterpieces, and revel in their legitimate and exalting effect. All the same, slowly yet surely, this class of works is being elbowed out of favour by programme music, and by "up to date" compositions brave in the trappings of sensationalism. To my mind we have here the most alarming feature in the present outlook. Intellectual music, for many generations to come, perhaps for ever, will be the pleasure of the few. But works of the class now referred to should be the delight of every amateur who is out of leading-strings. Alas, they are not, and the very citadel of music is in danger, since by them the most precious interests of the art stand or fall. Are we, then, to conclude that imagination as a popular faculty is dead? Not at all. But every movement is made along the line of least resistance, and the activity of imagination ceases when the merely physical effects of music satisfy, as, also, when we are bound down to a "programme." The fear is that imagination, in this particular field of its legitimate activity,

will gradually weaken, and that we shall more and more lean upon the programmist, who so kindly saves us trouble, and, at the same time, saps our strength.

My preaching is vain of immediate effect, I know. He who remonstrates with the impulses of his age casts paper against the wind, only to find it blown back in his face. There are some who say, "Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone." That may be politic, but it is neither manly nor dutiful. The destiny of all things, humanly speaking, is shaped by victories in the war of opinion, and it is the business of every man who enters into the conflict to fight on, even though he stand alone as a "forlorn hope." This explains why I return again and again to the vital matter of present tendencies in music, and bid all whose ears my voice can reach to reflect upon the growing degeneration of taste and neglect of the high principles of art. What other course is open when we find the noisiest and most barbaric movement in a favourite symphony received with the greatest applause; when a mere eccentricity like Saint-Saëns's "Danse Macabre," sandwiched between masterpieces of Mozart and Beethoven, is awarded honours refused to them; when compositions that deal sensationally with repulsive subjects have a better chance of success than any other; when composers are busy with illustrations instead of creations, and when the process of composition itself is degraded to the art of a tessellated pavement? Of course, this is a passing phase. The law of change governs evil as well as good, and the tide ebbs as well as flows. It will do so the sooner in the present case the more those who are alive to the danger are earnest and persistent in warning. Probably not many of us will live to see Music once more clothed and in her right mind, after the present period of madness; but it is a comfort to know that such a result is not beyond the possible or even the probable.

JOSEPH BENNETT.

THE STRUCTURE OF INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC.*

By W. H. HADOW, M.A., B.MUS.

III.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT.

In the instrumental music of the eighteenth century design prevailed over expression; by Beethoven the two are held in equipoise; with the romantic composers the balance inclines on the emotional side. Hence an apparent paradox. In Beethoven's form the highest organisation of structure goes with the richest emotional content; in the romantic period music becomes more directly expressive, and yet, on the whole, its artistic value declines.

* The substance of three lectures, musically illustrated, delivered at the Royal Institution, February 12, 19, and 26, 1898.