Correspondence.

AN ITALIAN BASS ARIA OF REMARKABLE COMPASS.

TO THE EDITOR OF ‘THE MUSICAL TIMES.’

Dear Sir,—Mr. Van der Straeten, in his interesting article under the above heading, quotes an example of a bass aria in a hitherto unnoticed opera by Ariosti entitled ‘La Fede ne Tradimenti.’ This aria is of exceptional compass (two octaves and a tone), and Mr. Van der Straeten asks who was the bass singer for whom it was written, or is there any record of the wonderful bass singer with such an extraordinary compass of voice?

I think it most probable that the bass singer who sang this aria was the famous Giuseppe Maria Boschi, whose compass must have been phenomenal. Chrysander tells us that Boschi sang the solo of ‘Euridice’ by Handel in Naples on June 16, 1708, and he quotes the following passage as an illustration of Boschi’s marvellous powers—two octaves and three quarters:

It is the more likely that Boschi sang the solo in Ariosti’s opera, as he certainly sang in several of the operas by Ariosti in London.

Let me take this opportunity to correct an oft-repeated error in regard to ‘Muzio Scevola’ as being composed by Handel, Buononcini and Ariosti. Mr. Van der Straeten quotes the false, and credits Ariosti with having collaborated in this opera, produced on April 15, 1721. It is now placed beyond any doubt that the three composers who were responsible for ‘Muzio Scevola’ were Filippo Mattei (Pippo), Buononcini, and Ariston, who respectively wrote the first, second and third Acts. Strangely enough, Ariosti completely disappears after the year 1728, and so does Boschi.—Yours very faithfully,

W. H. Grattan-Flood.

A MEMORIAL TO DR. WILLIAM CROFT.

TO THE EDITOR OF ‘THE MUSICAL TIMES.’

Sir,—Ten years ago there appeared in the ‘Musical Times’ (No. 691) a very interesting article on Dr. William Croft from the pen of the late Mr. F. G. Edwards, and with it two portraits; the first of which showed Master Croft in his chorister’s dress, as one of the children of the Chapel Royal, from a painting purchased by the trustees of the National Portrait Gallery in 1899. The other portrait is from a painting in the Music School at Oxford; it shows William Croft in his Doctor’s robes, and was probably painted in 1713, when he took his degrees there in his thirty-fifth year. He was by that time Master of the Children of the Chapel Royal, Compositor to Queen Anne, and Organist of Westminster Abbey; the writer of special music for occasions of high ceremony, and already of assured fame. The inscription on Dr. Croft’s grave in the Abbey was written by his great admirer Humphrey Wrayle Birch, and it may be considered somewhat laudatory; but when it says that ‘his celebrated works were commended by the sweetness of his manners, and even by his countenance,’ we look at these portraits and assert, for they have great gifts of grace.

The article is further embellished with views of the old manor-house at Lower Ettington, near Stratford-on-Avon, where William Croft was born; and of the church there wherein he was baptised, and where (as Mr. Edwards says) ‘he in all probability first heard the Service of the Church of England which he was afterwards to enrich with the fruits of his genius.’ This church is now a picturesque ruin; and its successor — ‘not altogether an edifice of ideal beauty’—to quote Mr. Edwards again—has, since he wrote, been replaced by a modern church, of which we will only say that the people who built it are very proud of it. Here in these latter days we Ettingtonians sing with a particular relish any of Dr. Croft’s music we can lay our hands upon, if it be not beyond our capacity. We could not but feel honoured when, at the burial of King Edward, not only were the opening strains of the service chanted to Croft’s setting, but that everywhere ‘O God our help in ages past’ was sung to that majestic English hymn-tune ‘St. Anne,’ composed by one who was born in this little Warwickshire village. Of ‘Hammer, or of ‘St. Matthew,’ I will not try to speak. But how fine a ring there is in Croft’s ‘48th,’ commonly sung on St. John Baptist’s Day, to ‘Lo, from the desert homes,’ but too good to be restricted to one day in the year. And ‘Ettington,’ which we are in parochial duty bound to value highly, finds here much acceptance to Charles Wesley’s words, ‘Let saints on earth,’ as appointed in the new edition of ‘Hymns A. and M.’

And now I come to the point of this letter. We have built a new church, and we want a new organ. When we get it, it is in our minds to have carved on the oak case, above the keyboards, ‘In Memory of William Croft, Doctor of Music, born at Lower Ettington, 1678, buried in Westminster Abbey, 1727;’ and when we are able to use the organ we hope to begin with a service and a recital in which this music is entirely his. The estimated cost of the instrument as we need it is £250, towards which we have been able so far to collect £105. Will not some of the many admirers of Croft’s music and personality send me donations towards this local memorial? I will gratefully acknowledge them both by post and in these columns?

Ettington Vicarage, T. H. Parker,
Stratford-on-Avon.

THE ‘EMPEROR’ STRADIVARIUS VIOLIN.

TO THE EDITOR OF ‘THE MUSICAL TIMES.’

Dear Sir,—I trust you may find room in your columns for a statement which I wish to make public on behalf of the present owners of the ‘Emperor’ Stradivarius, a violin which, for nearly forty years, has been in the G. Haddock collection.

The recent announcement widely circulated in the Press of this and other countries, that it was being exposed for sale, has led some journals to say that this valuable instrument was ‘coming under the hammer.’ The trustees do not wish the ‘Emperor’ to be exposed for sale at a public auction, and in view of the very numerous inquiries which have reached them from all parts of the world, I think it well to say that their wish is that this violin should not leave British shores.

A writer in The Times has suggested that it should be preserved, as a flawless specimen of the best art of Stradivarius, in one of the national art collections. It may be urged that the museum is not the place for a musical instrument; but the ‘Emperor’ being unique, it stands apart and does not come under the general rule that governs other fine fiddles, whose function is, of course, to delight mankind by being played upon in public by virtuosi.

The statement in The Times has been considered elsewhere, and it has occurred to the trustees that this may encourage the formation of a National fund for its purchase.

I may add that the owners would make a concession in the event of its being bought by the nation and preserved, like Paganini’s Guarnerius in the Genoa Municipal Palace, as a unique example of the great master of violin-makers.—I am, yours faithfully,

Edgar Haddock.

THE ORGAN AT ST. MARY’S,
WALTON-ON-THAMES.

TO THE EDITOR OF ‘THE MUSICAL TIMES.’

Dear Sir,—Having read the article which appeared in your June number on ‘The former organs at St. George’s Chapel with much interest, I wonder whether you or any of the readers of the Musical Times can give me any information respecting the organ at which I have the honour to preside, in St. Mary’s Church, Walton-on-Thames.

There is a local tradition that the organ was built by Father Smith, and that it came from St. George’s Chapel,