The Ideas of M. Vincent D'Indy. II (Continued)

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grey mare is again cried, though in this case she is far more afflicted, being blind, minus one leg, and 'with a great hole in her ear.' In those days, apparently, sufferers from toothache did not pay a visit to the dentist, nor was the practitioner dignified by such a title. There was only one cure, and that was drastic: no such compromises as 'stopping.' The victim waited till he heard the cry 'Touch and goe! Touch and goe! Ha' ye work for Kindheart the toothdrawer? Touch and goe! Touch and goe!'—on which (unless the pain mysteriously ceased) he went and was touched—and touched to some purpose, we may be sure, in spite of the artist's ingratiating name.

It will be seen that these 'fancies' have more than a merely antiquarian interest. They are genuine slices of life, grave and gay by turn, and thoroughly characteristic of our race in their blending of the serious and the nonsensical. There can be no doubt that singers and audiences will revel in them.

THE IDEAS OF M. VINCENT D'INDY

BY C. SAINT-SAËNS, DE L'INSTITUT

(*Authorised translation by Fred Rothwell*)

(*Continued from March number, page 177.*)

II.

In the introduction of his book, M. D'Indy says the most excellent things about the artistic conscience, the necessity of acquiring talent as the result of hard work, and of not relying solely on one's natural endowments. Horace had said the same things long ago; still, they cannot be repeated too often at a time like the present, when so many artists reject all rules and restrictions, declare that they mean 'to be laws unto themselves,' and reply to the most justifiable criticisms by the one peremptory argument that they 'will do as they please.' Assuredly, art is the home of freedom, but freedom is not anarchy, and it is anarchy that is now fashionable both in literature and in the arts. Why do poets not see that, in throwing down the barriers, they merely give free access to mediocrities, and that their vaunted progress is but a reversion to primitive barbarism?

It is no longer necessary to know how to draw or to paint; things absolutely devoid of form—I dare not call them works—find admirers everywhere. Architecture attempted to follow this trend, but as houses must stand upright, and as they must be habitable, it had to call a halt along this particular path of folly. The other arts, finding nothing to hinder them, plunged forward in thoughtless delirium.

Fétis had foreseen the coming of the 'omnitonic' system. 'Beyond that,' he said, 'I see nothing further.' He could not predict the birth of cacophony, of a mere *charivari*.

Berlioz speaks somewhere of atrocious modulations which introduce a new key in one section of the orchestra while another section is playing in the old one. At the present time as many as three different tonalities can be heard simultaneously.

Everything is relative, we are told. That is true, though only within certain limits which cannot be overstepped. After a severe frost, a temperature of twelve degrees above zero seems stiflingly hot; on returning from the tropics, you shiver with cold at eighteen degrees above zero. There comes a limit, however, beyond which both cold and heat disorganise the tissues and render life impossible.

The dissonance of yesterday, we are also told, will be the consonance of to-morrow; one can grow accustomed to anything. Still, there are such things in life as bad habits, and those who get accustomed to crime, come to an evil end. . . .

It is impossible for me to regard scorn of all rules as being equivalent to progress, by which word we generally mean improvement. The true meaning of the word—*progressus*—is a going forward, but the end or object is not stated. There is such a thing as the progress of a disease, and this is anything but improvement.

The more civilization advances, the more the artistic sense seems to decline: a grave symptom. We have already said that art came into existence on the day when man, instead of being solely preoccupied with the utility of an object, began to concern himself with its form.

More and more at the present time does attention to utility assume the foremost place; we do away with all adornment and trouble ourselves nothing about form. The need to know is being substituted for the need to believe and to admire; and since what we know is insignificant compared with what we do not know, there is an immense field open to the human intellect. Nothing will ever again check the march of science, though this latter is deadly to faith and art. Faith defends itself with all its might, and it is able to make a prolonged defence; but what can art do? It languishes and dies wherever our civilization spreads its tentacles. No longer is it a necessity for us; it is a luxury that appeals only to the *élite*. Even the beauties of nature are attacked; animal species are massacred and disappear for ever; age-long forests are destroyed, never to be restored. The same thing happens to cataracts and waterfalls; nowadays we think of them as merely so much motor-power.

In dividing music into its three essential parts, rhythm, melody and harmony, M. D'Indy very judiciously accords the first place to rhythm. Let us therefore see what interpretation he puts on it.

What sets me at ease in discussing the ideas of M. D'Indy is the fact that, as he himself confesses, these ideas are very frequently not his own at all, but rather those of Hugo Riemann, a German.

Here we have an instance of the practice so often indulged in before the war—and not in music alone—of crossing the Rhine in our search after truth. Thus also Combarieu endeavoured to instil into our minds the wild and senseless ideas of Westphal, who wished to apply the principles of Greek scansion to the execution of the works of Bach, Beethoven, &c., which are in no way connected therewith. M. D'Indy gives us elaborate notes on Riemann, Hauptmann, Helmholtz, von Öttingen. . . .

When we hear successive sounds of equal duration like those of the metronome, one of the two has more intensity than the other; we can at will, M. D'Indy tells us, attribute to the more intense sound the odd numbers:

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.

or the even numbers:

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.

'The possibility we have of choosing by a mere effort of will one or the other of these inequalities, clearly proves that rhythm proceeds not from the sounds themselves but from a necessity of our own mind. . . .'

This is not the case; we are not able to choose. We may do so by a momentary effort, but that is

unnatural; and if the rhythm is prolonged, nature resumes her rights and the more intense sound is seen to belong to the odd numbers.

Robert Schumann, whose reason was not very clear—it is well-known that he died insane—took into consideration only his own will when he neglected the requirements of nature; along these lines he committed the greatest of errors.

One of his most characteristic aberrations is in the *Scherzo* of his famous Quintet:

Anyone not acquainted with this piece by actually reading the notes, but only by ear, hears it as follows:

The idea, as conceived by the author, is original and vivid; the result, to the uninformed listener, is a platitude. But what does that matter? It is Schumann, and so admiration is forthcoming all the same.

According to M. D'Indy, measure would appear to be the enemy of rhythm, 'and it is not unreasonable to think that, untrammelled in the future as it was in the past, *rhythm* will again hold sovereign sway over music, and free it from the servitude in which it has been kept, for nearly three centuries, by the usurping and depressing domination of misunderstood *measure*.'

Hitherto, however, it had seemed as though the invention of measure had been a step in advance. I appeal for confirmation of this view to all who have undertaken the task of deciphering old manuscripts of music, from which the measure bar was absent. Did it not create syncopation? Has it ever prevented the emphasis or accent from falling where it pleased? M. D'Indy claims that the first beat of the bar is more frequently than not a rhythmically feeble beat. I have not noticed this, but rather the contrary, I imagine. It would, however, prove that measure does not follow rhythm. Shall we have to return to the time when measure was not indicated? Certain bold innovators have attempted this, though without success. In the music of the Middle Ages, of which M. D'Indy gives instances and which are referred to under the name of plain-song, created before the barbaric invention of measure, I look in vain for rhythm; it is only absence of rhythm that I find.

Perhaps it is the same with rhythm as with so many things about which it is impossible to come to an understanding, because different meanings are given to the same word . . .

Let us pass on to melody.

In all melody, M. D'Indy (or is it Riemann?) assures us, there is a *preparation*, designated, I know not why, by the Greek word *anacrusis*.

Ah! *qu'en termes galants ces choses-là sont dites!*

How often have I made an anacrusis without knowing it, as M. Jourdain made prose!

In the *Adagio* of Beethoven's fifth Symphony, where we have the theme:

the first two notes are, I suppose an anacrusis. The amazing thing is that sometimes, when there is no anacrusis, it is taken for granted as existing.

Sufficient for the anacrusis when the phrase begins on a feeble beat. But what are we to say of the following way of presenting the famous phrase of the ninth Symphony?

The first bar, then, is nothing more than a preparation, and the melody really begins only at the second bar!

Do not the first and the third bars belong to the tonic, the second and the fourth to the dominant? When the tonic and the dominant are both present, is it not to the former that importance is attached? My entire musical sense rebels against the contrary interpretation, which seems to me a grave fault of style.

It is far worse in the first phrase of the Pastoral Symphony, which M. D'Indy presents thus:

and he remarks that this passage is generally 'interpreted with the most erroneous accentuation it is possible to give it, as follows:

a deplorable result of the tyranny of the measure-bar and of the antirhythmical teaching of the *soffeggio*.'

Now, this is how Beethoven wrote the theme:

The two detached notes, B and D, an indication which M. D'Indy has changed into a tie that extends right to the following C, naturally carry the accent on to this C. Consequently this interpretation is not the 'most erroneous possible'; it is the very one intended by the composer. Beethoven could not foresee the theories of M. Riemann and arrange his music in accordance with these principles. Is that a matter for regret?

I will not follow the author in his learned dissertations on plain-song, not considering myself competent in this direction, although I have had a great deal to do with plain-song during my long career as an organist. I will simply mention the comparison that is made—an original though very specious one—between the vocalisations of plain-song with those fine ornamental capitals seen in missals, and the same vocalisations characterized by demisemiquavers which conclude an organ piece by Sebastian Bach.

In the passage cited from this latter, I note an error that surprises me in so conscientious a writer as M. D'Indy: a *poco ritenuto* which the composer had not indicated. Throughout the entire 'Course of Musical Composition' we find these superfluous indications, unnecessary ties, and added nuances. The system of the perpetual *legato* did not exist at the time of Bach; the clavecin was incapable of expressing nuances, as also was the organ previous to the modern swell. This was not the case with other instruments or with the human voice, but the probable reason why nuances were not indicated is that they were not of the same importance as they are at the present time, when the nuance frequently forms an integral part of the idea; they were left to the whim of the performer. Why therefore impose arbitrary nuances on the artless reader, who naturally attributes them to the composer? This system, far too prevalent, whilst deserving of criticism in a serious edition, has nothing to do with a 'Course of Composition.' One may well wonder why M. D'Indy, instead of taking his quotations from the Peters Edition, which is concerned but slightly with the question of authenticity, did not have recourse to the magnificent edition of the Bachgesellschaft, which does not contain a single detail that is not true to the composer's manuscripts.

(To be continued.)

Occasional Notes

The arrangements for the first Congress of the British Music Society are now practically complete. The time-table appears in our advertisement columns, page 220. We have now received particulars of some of the music to be performed. The London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Mr. Albert Coates, will play Rimsky-Korsakoff's 'Cortège des Nobles,' Vaughan Williams's 'London Symphony,' Berlioz's 'Summer Nights' (soloist, Miss Agnes Nicholls), and Strauss's 'Heldenleben.' The inclusion of the foreign items, especially the last-named, may astonish some people, but we may remind them that the Society does not exist for the furthering of British music by the easy process of excluding that of Germany or any other land. The Society is doing good work for our own music by insisting on its fair representation side by side with the best of that from abroad. The all-British programme, save in exceptional circumstances, is a tactical mistake because it implies that our composers can make a good show only when they have the field to themselves. The best compliment we can pay them is to show our confidence in their ability to hold their own in the best of company. We need have no fear for the future if we prevent a return to the 'dumping' methods from which we have suffered so much in the past. The British Music Society does well to make its position clear in its choice of music for the Congress. Our composers have their best show in the choral side of the programmes, as is natural. The Hoime Valley Male Choir will sing nine part-songs by Elgar, Holst, Bantock, Coleridge-Taylor, and Walford Davies. Native works at the Chamber Concerts will be Elgar's Sonata for violin and pianoforte (Sammons and Murdoch), and Ireland's Rhapsody, Baines's 'Paradise Gardens,' and Frank Bridge's 'Fireflies,' for pianoforte (Murdoch). Mr. Gervase Elwes will give an English song recital, and the London and Philharmonic String Quartets will play native works. At Westminster and Southwark Cathedrals some fine old English music will be sung,

and at the latter a short recital of modern English organ music will be given. The whole scheme, both in regard to meetings and concerts, is striking in the amount of ground covered, and the Society deserves congratulations on this further example of the vigour and enterprise which have been so conspicuous in the short period of its existence. We hope the Congress will have the great success it deserves.

Musical reconstruction is progressing apace in Germany. One of the organs of the new movement is a fortnightly paper called *Melos*, of which the first number is before us. Its drastic methods are explained in a portentous editorial which tells us that 'Tonality is dead.' The writer uses the martial metaphor of 'Durchbrechung'—all the 'pseudo-architectonic forms of the tonality-epoch must abide our question,' he says. The only hope of the art is in the study of 'pretonal and atonal phenomena'—that is to say, of music as it existed before the major and minor scales, and as it is likely to exist after the process of 'Tonalitätsdurchbrechung' is complete. This study is not such a simple thing as may appear. It can only be carried out by devout souls united in humble and loving realisation of Truth—and aloof from the world. Only to such can the 'Melos' be revealed, which is the inner law, 'Becoming and Being under the rule of its own might.' We have heard all this, or something very like it, before. Many well-known writers and musicians are on the staff of *Melos*, and some of them write much as they used to write before 1914 in spite of the very futurist design on the title-page.

In our correspondence columns appears a letter from Mr. F. A. Hadland, suggesting that practical steps be taken towards the more frequent performance of Purcell's works, especially the operas. So much interest is now taken in Purcell, that the moment seems opportune for the formation of a society with this end in view. Better still, perhaps the Purcell Society could call in a few dramatic enthusiasts, and extend its operations. Now that its work as an editing and publishing body is practically finished, it could not do better than add the coping-stone by taking a lead in the direction of making Purcell once more a popular composer. At present, outside church music circles he is little more than a mere item in the musical dictionary. The extraordinary success of the 'Fairy Queen' at Cambridge is proof that, given a fair chance, there is no old composer more alive.

We congratulate Mr. W. G. Whittaker on being made an Officier d'Académie by the French Government. Mr. T. J. Gueritte, the honorary secretary of the Société des Concerts Français, in his letter to us announcing the above, says that 'Mr. Whittaker has succeeded during the past fifteen years in making Newcastle so important a centre of study of French music, that French musicians conversant with British conditions doubt whether any other town, even in France, may be found in which French music is so well-known in its most intimate developments.'

The League of Arts, as a preliminary to its projected revival of Purcell's 'Dido and Æneas,' and other works in London parks, is giving four performances of 'Everyman' at King George's Hall, Central Y.M.C.A., Tottenham Court Road, on March 29, 30, 31, and April 1, under the direction of Mr. Patrick Kirwan.