The Music of the Czecho-Slovak Races. II (Continued)

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OCTOBER 1, 1918.

THE MUSIC OF THE CZECHO-SLOVAK RACES.

BY ROSA NEWMARCH.

Continued from September number, page 392.)

II.

Three provinces speaking two dialects, but united in a supreme aspiration for national independence, make up the country called, collectively, Bohemia. The most westerly province, Bohemia proper, is the home of the Czech race, and its capital is the ancient city of Praha (Prague), the proud citadel which has ever held inviolate the ideals of a race eternally struggling against the strangle-hold of Pan-Germanism. In Slovakia—the eastern division—dwells an innumerable, tragic peasantry, whose homes lie at the foot of the Tatra (Carpathian) Mountains. It is a folk richly-endowed with the artistic sense. Hedged between the two is the old duchy of Moravia, which has also contributed its portion to the general treasury of Bohemian literature and music.

How little we know of the past history of this country! To most of us, a Bohemian long suggested a vision of a shaggy person of gipsy origin, endowed with an uncanny and ill-disciplined musical talent, leading of his own free will the disordered life which Henri Mürger describes so picturesquely in his famous novel, 'La Vie de Bohême.' Shakespeare, in 'The Merry Wives of Windsor,' makes the host of the Garter Inn allude to 'a Bohemian-Tartar,' and Tallet in a foot-note says: 'In Germany were several companies of vagabonds called Tartars and Zigans; these were the same, in Mezeray's opinion, as those the French call Bohemians and the English gipsies.' The term is here used to describe the strange appearance of Simple. And yet, for all our ignorance, the history of the country has sometimes touched our own. In 1381, Richard II. of England married Anne, sister of Wenceslaus, King of Bohemia. This was not the famous Wenceslaus I., hero of the carol, but the fourth sovereign of that name who reigned over Bohemia. There was a strong affinity between our Wyclif and Jan Hus. Again, in 1641, that enlightened humanist and educational reformer, John Amos Comenius (Comenius), visited England, and, under the auspices of the Long Parliament, proposed to found an academy on his own system of 'Pansophy.' A universal language and a league of nations were features of his teaching. The Irish rebellion and other impending troubles diverted the thoughts of Parliament, and the scheme came to an end. But Comenius during his sojourn with us awakened the interest and sympathy of no less a person than John Milton.

In reality, the Bohemians, whose early literature was largely of a religious and mystical character, and whose University, founded at Prague by Charles IV. in 1348, attracted students from England as well as from the Continental countries, have been an intelligent and serious-minded people, not in the least resembling the type depicted by gossip and prejudice. The part being played at the present juncture by the Czecho-Slovak legions on various fronts—and more especially in Russia—proves them to be a race of rare energy

and organizing power, with a great future before them. Like the Serbs, they plead that we should not merely bestow generously upon them in order to relieve their sufferings, but that we should study their ideals and culture and decide if indeed they are worthy of our support. Bohemia will emerge triumphant from such a scrutiny.

The early unwritten history of Bohemian music appears to have progressed on similar lines to that of Russia. There were primitive songs in both lands which incurred the disapproval of their first evangelisers on account of their pagan tendencies. These, being proscribed, may very probably have adopted new words, and, blending with the church music, taken on a fresh meaning and colour. Russia furnishes examples of so-called spiritual songs in the epic of 'Alexis, Boje Chelavek'; the beautiful song in which the pilgrims have hailed each other for centuries ('Zazdravnaya'); and other archaic melodies. But the history of mediæval secular music remains often a matter of conjecture, and authorities are divided as to whether the skilled minstrels borrowed their themes and legends from the folk, or whether—as the late

FR. ŠKROUP.

The Composer of the Czech National Anthem (see page 391, September number).

George Wyndham believed—the song and the poem owe their origin to the Court rather than the countryside.

The first authentic Bohemian tunes are of a religious character. The 'Hospodin pomyl ny' ('Lord, have mercy upon us'), attributed to St. Adalbert, Martyr and Bishop of Prague (12th century), claims priority. Another almost equally venerable tune is the Hymn to St. Wenceslaus, which may have originated as early as the 11th century, although its author is usually said to be Arnestus, Archbishop of Prague during the reign of Charles IV. (1345-78). It takes the form of a Kyrie, each verse, after invoking the intercession of St. Wenceslaus on behalf of his people, ending with the Kyrie Eleison. In the 15th century this tune was adopted by the Catholics in opposition to the Hussite hymn, 'All ye warriors of God.' Both tunes show evidences of the popular treatment of a traditional church theme. Arnestus (or Ernest) was certainly a musician of no mean capacity, and it was due to his

influence that music formed part of the curriculum of the newly-founded University, the head of the music school being a composer of talent—Zaviš. This musician remains a somewhat mysterious personality, but one may perhaps call him the Tallis of Bohemia. It is claimed for Zaviš that he wrote at least one famous love-song, and probably brought into vogue the dancing-songs which then became popular; so that amid great ecclesiastical activity—the Chapter of the Cathedral of St. Vitus at Prague maintained at least a hundred and fifty chorists—secular music, other than folk-song, made a modest entrance into Bohemian life. In the 14th century, Passion Plays and 'The Laments of the Virgin Mary' gave a first impulse to dramatic music; for though the themes of the latter were borrowed from the church, their treatment was in the popular style.

The linguistic conflict between the Latin of the Western ritual and the Slavonic of the Eastern rite has always been a feature of Bohemian Church history. Latin was used by the priests of the Roman Church—German Catholics—who superseded the Græco-Slavonic monks in 1096. An old legend of St. Procopius relates how his spirit revisiting his own monastery of Savaza and finding the Germans—cuckoos then as now—in 'possession,' tells them roundly that it was not for their benefit that he had prepared the site. 'Ye are infamous Hungarians* come from anywhere'—thus the irate apparition apostrophises the Boches—'delay not, get ye quickly back to Prague.' Procopius, however, knowing with whom he had to deal, had recourse also to material persuasion, and trounced the Germans so severely with a stout cudgel that they were glad to flee and leave the monastery to its rightful owners.

But to return to historical facts. The Bohemians never lost their invincible pride in their own language, and Charles IV., a good nationalist, restored the Slavonic liturgy by the special permission of the Pope, so that for a time the citizens of Prague could hear the service bequeathed to them by their first evangelisers, SS. Cyril and Methodius, sung by Byzantine monks in the royal monastery of Emmaus, while elsewhere the Ambrosian plain-chant, introduced from Milan, was in general use.

The Hussite Wars (1419-68) turned men's minds from secular music. Love-songs, drinking or dancing songs, did not accord with the grim struggles of conscience which then absorbed the Bohemian people. Hus himself was quick to realise the great power of music as a propagandist force. In his time the Latin hymns were eagerly translated into the vernacular. Hymns which are practically fierce war-songs were composed, or adapted to fresh words, and collected in finely illuminated manuscripts by the Unity of the Bohemian Brethren, who exercised great influence in Moravia. Each religious party had its own hymns, which expressed its individual aspirations. The Utraquists, or Calixtines, represented the moderate followers of Hus; while the Taborites, or extreme reformers, who occupied the town of Tabor, under the leadership of the famous warrior John Lizska, were in many respects the Tolstoyites of the 15th century. A few of the sturdy hymns of this period have crept into English collections, where they are vaguely distinguished by the words 'Prague' or 'Moravia.' The tunes are still familiar to the Czecho-Slovaks, and could be more appropriately used to welcome them in our midst than the Russian national anthem.

From the last decade of the 15th century until the battle of the White Mountain in 1620 wrought ruin to the national life of Bohemia, music was more widely

cultivated and less exclusively ecclesiastical than in Russia during the same period.

Imitating the example of their sovereign, Ferdinand I., who founded the first Court Chapel in Bohemia, the nobles began to set up their own private bands, the most famous of which belonged to the powerful house of Rosenberg, or Rozmberk. This family possessed also a superb musical library, comprising works by Orlando di Lasso, Melchior Franck, Philippe de Monte—representative in fact of all the mediæval schools of European music. An independent music school was established in Prague in 1616, and already half a century earlier Brother Blahoslav (1523-71) had collected the songs and hymns of the Moravian 'Unity,' and published his famous theoretical treatise, 'Musica.' Native talent was encouraged by a prosperous bourgeoisie, who organized musical societies in the cities. Nor were the working classes excluded from this æsthetic activity. Musical education must have been fairly general if, as Hantich tells us in his brochure, 'La Musique Tchèque,' the folk at this time found no difficulty in joining correctly in two-, three-, or four-part church music. Instrumental did not lag behind choral music. Even small towns had their orchestras, and from the 18th century onward Bohemia began to supply other lands with teachers and executants. Cernohovsky, a monk, director of the music of the Tyn Church at Prague, was famed among his contemporaries as a composer. Most of his works were destroyed in the great fire of 1754, and he is now chiefly remembered as the teacher of Gluck and Tartini. Somewhat later we find such eminent names as those of Joseph Reicha, professor of counterpoint at the Paris Conservatoire, the violinists George and Frant Benda, the 'cellists Neruda and Stasny, John Sticha, the great horn-player, Flaška the oboist, Czerny and Dussek the pianists, and many others who, less than half a century ago, were usually lumped together in the category of *German* musicians. Many of them, it is true, sought a career in Vienna and other Austro-German cities during the period of Bohemia's downfall; but there have always been fine examples of patriotic self-sacrifice among Czech musicians, such as Victor Brixl, the famous organist of Podebrady, who declined the post of Court Musician to Francis I. because he would not leave his native land; and, later on, Smetana, who chose to limit his energies to national opera rather than win a wider reputation by adopting a more cosmopolitan style. Someday it will be a historian's task to restore to the various Slav races of Central Europe the plumes plucked from them and insolently worn in the caps of their Teutonic oppressors. Sir William Hadow has already done this act of justice for Haydn;* but almost as much remains to be accomplished in the æsthetic, as in the political, sphere.

In the 18th century, Bozan, Frant Brixl, Ryba, and Kopřiva boldly composed to texts in the vernacular, although at that period German had succeeded in imposing itself to some extent as the literary language.

In 1784 musical progress received a severe check, when Joseph II. suppressed the choral societies which kept alive not merely the people's love of music, but the national life itself. A typical instance of Hapsburg policy of denationalization. These were the years in which, if we turn to the literary history of the Czechs, we shall find that even patriotic writers were driven to express themselves in Latin or German, for, under the heavy hand of the Hapsburgs, the Bohemian language was all but expelled from the schools. Debarred from their joy in choral singing, the people

* German or Hungarian is an interchangeable term of opprobrium among the Czecho-Slovak folk, just as Germans and Tatars are con-founded in the Russian popular songs.

* 'Haydn, a Croatian Composer.'

had to suffer in silence, although throughout their long persecution they clung to their own language as to a means of self-preservation :

A people is not lost,
A country is not utterly undone,
Where from generation to generation
Is heard the native speech.

Vyacheslav Hanka.

Meanwhile the townspeople consoled themselves with imported opera, and proved their previous generations of culture by the enthusiasm with which they acclaimed all that was best in the music of the time. The operas of Gluck, and later those of Mozart, were received with ovations. Grateful for the appreciation shown to 'The Marriage of Figaro,' Mozart wrote 'Don Juan' expressly for the Prague Opera House. Mozart—with his curious name and un-German physiognomy — has he, perhaps, some hitherto unestablished affinities with the Slavonic races? But in all this rapture, so justly expended upon the masterpieces of contemporary music, lurked the danger lest the national consciousness should be lulled into inactivity. As in Russia, so in Bohemia, cosmopolitanism threatened to stifle the special characteristics of literature and art, when happily the songs of the countryside intervened to remind the cities of the existence of a racial music. But this did not happen until the early years of the 19th century, when a general recrudescence of patriotic feeling led, among other manifestations, to a renewed interest in the folk-songs.

John Kollar (1793-1852) was the great national poet of this renaissance. His 'Daughter of Sláva,' which began as a modest collection of sonnets in 1821, expanded in subsequent editions to a large volume comprising epic and lyric poetry. Some of these poems are impassioned invocations to the Slav spirit, crushed and degraded by German tyranny, and many lines are extraordinarily appropriate to the actual moment. 'Worse than wild war, more dreadful than flame and tempest, is the man who fumes against his own race,' cries the poet in righteous wrath against those Slavs who had Germanized themselves. And again, complaining that the language of the people was threatened with extinction, he asks: 'Who has been guilty of this crime? What one nation has dishonoured all humanity? Blush, envious Germany, neighbour of the Slavs! Thine is the hand which wrought this evil. No foe ever spilled so much blood and ink as Germany has done to destroy the Slavs. . . . He who forges fetters to enslave others is himself a slave. Whether he chain the hands or the tongue, it matters not; he proves himself incapable of respecting the rights of others.' These words show the spirit in which the Czechs started their new effort to revive the solidarity of the Slav races.

The movement to collect and preserve the popular poetry and music now began in earnest, and the first-fruits of this enthusiasm appeared in Prague about 1825. Between 1842-52, Erben published three volumes of Czech songs; and in 1860—the year of the Charter of Liberation—Martinovsky brought out another hundred folk melodies. Sušil performed the same service for the Moravian songs, and at a somewhat later date Zvonář, a musician of some distinction, called attention to the musical value of the Bohemian popular tunes.

In my next paper I shall try to describe the special characteristics of the Czecho-Slovak folk-melodies, which have been almost as great a source of suggestion and inspiration to modern Bohemian composers as the songs of Great Russia to Glinka and his successors.

(To be continued.)

PRINCIPLES OF MODERN COMPOSITION.

By G. H. CLUTSAM.

(Concluded from September number, page 400.)

Subjecting all these elaborations of the ordinary dominant to the established principles of inversion, extraordinarily effective combinations can be evolved. As in the simple triad, the one interval in the dominant chord that overweights it by duplication is the third and its reflex, the eleventh. The effect of all inversions, however, is regulated by the register wherein they are cast. This is a point that has never been considered in the text-books. I have but the minimum of space to treat of the perspective of chords, and can therefore only deal with the matter broadly.

The natural perspective of any grouping of dominant chords is that of the harmonic series. The available extent of effective and distinctive sounds is practically determined by the limitations of the orchestra, about five octaves and a-half. In the first octave and a-half:

or thereabouts, it is impossible to deal effectively with any chord groupings, save the octave and its fifth, unless some indefinite rumble, possibly with dramatic or comic import, requires suggestion. It is evident that low down in the scale registers vibrations are set up discountenancing any pretence of a clear-cut chord, and it is probably the sensing of some such creation of a discordance or suggestion of it, that has originated the rule against the doubling of the third, especially in a low register. In the next octave and a-half, or, generally speaking, the scope of the human voice, the average ear is curiously sensitive to the balance of chord-structures, and no matter how widely extended, the substance of any chord material should first find its proper perspective within these limits. In the upper register the duplication of intervals scarcely requires consideration. Certainly there is no possibility of vibrations being set up, and each can well take care of itself.

In the contrapuntal era, all movement in parts was regulated by well-ordered if extremely simple chords. Even fugues were constructed on a chord-basis, although the theorists and teachers did and are doing their utmost to make the form one of extreme difficulty by insisting on the line system. It does not really matter, however, whether the hen or the egg came first in this question, for it is little likely that such a musical structure will ever again be recognised by composers, even if it take some little time to obtain its definite exclusion from text-books and examination papers. The present-day composer, as it seems to me, has not yet reached the point of dealing contrapuntally with the wonderful wealth of material recently placed at his disposal, whose origin, as I have shown in these articles, is to be attributed to a natural development of the old system, modified by the necessity for accepting equal temperament as a working basis. It is precisely in this modification (which appears to be definitely established), and the linking-up of all scales into one perfect homogeneous system, that most of the old theoretical symbols and appurtenances seem to fail in utility; but practically there are many that remain indispensable, only they require altogether a different outlook upon their particular characteristics. No modern composer could be content with a dependence on those harmonies that supported the classical system even as represented by its most recent masters. One