On Editing

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THE MUSICAL TIMES, AND SINGING-CLASS CIRCULAR.

DECEMBER 1, 1874.

ON EDITING.

BY G. A. MACFARREN.

THIS is the age of editing. In other times, it was enough for some men to produce and others to admire; but now, a third function with respect to art has come to be established, a third person stands between the artist and those to whom his work is addressed, and the editor so frequently presents himself, that the world begins to consider that his office must be indispensable.

Now there are three orders of editorship.

One takes upon itself the duty of purifying the text of an inaccessible author, and of presenting his works in a form as like to that in which he left them, as documentary and traditional evidence, together with most intelligent conjecture, can enable him to do. The result of his labour is what may be styled a library copy, valuable for reference on all occasions, and an authority on any points that may possibly be disputed. Such an edition as this, of any work of literary or musical art cannot be too highly treasured, and, in the case of true masterpieces, is desirable beyond estimate. Literature has fared better; but the debatable incidents in musical works are many, very many, and the means of deciding them are far beyond the reach of a vast majority of the persons who are interested in them. An editor of this class needs to exercise his discretion, when there is the choice of two authorities of nearly equal value; for instance, there may be the autograph of a work and a printed copy of the first edition of the same. In many cases the reliability of the former is indisputable; but in others, it may often happen that a composer has improved upon his first intentions, either from the experience of performance, from a reconsideration of a phrase, or from any other cause. He will then naturally alter the parts from which his piece is to be sung or played, or he will alter the proof sheets if it is to be printed; but he will rarely run home from a rehearsal or a printing office to correct his original MS. When this happens, of necessity a copy of the first edition is a better guide for the editor, than is even the hand-writing of the composer; at least, so judged the Council of the Handel Society, in opposition to Mendelssohn, when they issued *Israel in Egypt* under the editorship of the latter, who wished to restore several points from the MS. that had been altered, obviously for improvement's sake, before the oratorio was first printed. Some of these points are so highly interesting that one at least may be cited in support of the Council's decision, and in proof of the superiority of the printed over the written authority. Throughout the Chorus, "And with the blast of Thy nostrils," Handel wrote the often repeated phrase "the waters were gathered" with the word "we-re" in two syllables, having four separate quavers for "wa-ters we-re;" but printed it, as we all know, with two joined quavers for the first syllable, and one quaver each for the other two.

Another order of editorship engages itself with expounding, so to speak, the original, and by the substitution perhaps of one word or one note for another, or by the change of punctuation, to make clear the sense of phrases which has been left doubtful by the author. To this order belong the countless array of Shakspearean commentators, who have amended away at the assumed obscurities of the original text, till, it

is probable, the author himself might be unable to recognize some of his passages, and quite unable to understand them in the guise these worthies have given them. The punctuation of music consists in the slurs to indicate the phrasing, which supply the place of the commas, semicolons, and the like, of literature, which are almost as essential to the sense as the very words they divide and congregate. It is in this matter of slurring or phrasing that the works of many musicians, even among the most eminent, are sadly defective. A thoroughly cultivated reader can of course supply for himself the deficiencies of the copy; and, if he give an interesting rendering of the work, we are thankful to him, even though his views of the expression of a phrase perhaps differ from those of the man who wrote it. Such a rendering is scarcely to be improvised, but demands, in most cases so intimate a knowledge of the music, on the part of the player, that it must indeed live again as vividly in his mind as it did in that of the composer. This, and only this, can qualify him to treat a phrase as if it were his own; and it is only under such treatment that any phrase can come forth with a natural air, and an unconstrained expression. A vast proportion of music needs several simultaneous executants, and it is not possible under any doctrine of chances, that all of these can at once extemporise the same reading. It is necessary then, for an efficient performance, that some one person consider what has here been defined as the punctuation of music, and that he correspondingly mark the several parts which are to be played together. Some editors, of the order in present consideration, stretch their duty to its very verge, if not break it by excess of tension; which are they who not only indicate how many notes are to be given in one breath, or in one bow, or without raising the fingers from a keyboard, but mark what notes are to be played loudly and what softly, what are to be detached and what conjoined, and thus give often a meaning to a phrase which is apart from the composer's intention, and is sometimes opposed to the natural tendency of the phrase itself. This kind of thing is admissible in performance, where the personality of the player may give interest to his erratic construction of a composer's meaning; but it should not be perpetuated in print, unless accompanied with a complete description of what was originally written, and of what has been altered from and what added to the author's text. The free-handed and unavowed substitution of words in the editions of Shakspeare that preceded the present generation, has led to the adoption of many of these in general belief as authentic, and it is only readers who make first acquaintance with the text from later editions, the principle of which is to restore the earliest readings, who can receive these unprejudiced by the powerful influence of familiarity with "amended" versions, which prompts the supposition that right is wrong and corruption is purity. So too, in the reprints of the masterpieces in music, it has been so far customary for editors to insert their own marks of piano and forte, and sforzando, and so forth, that when one lights upon a primitive copy, one is astonished to find how much and how little belong to the composer of these expressive directions. What may be styled a practical copy is of great use, of musical works, to players who have not the capabilities to interpret a composer's purpose by the light of their own intelligence, either for want of intimacy with a particular work, or of time to acquire it, when general education may perhaps have prepared them to obtain an insight into its design and details. Respect to convenience renders it often impracticable to define in print exactly what

is editorial and what is authoritative; but it is of the highest importance that editions thus ornamented, let us admit it to be, with the annotations of an editor, should be distinguished as such, so that they may not mislead a reader into the supposition that the inserted marks are due to the writer of the piece. Let such as this be styled a school edition, if you will, and let its advantages be fully acknowledged; but let it never be confounded with the library edition before noticed, which there surely ought to exist, of every work whose interest was sufficient to make a knowledge desirable of what the author wrote, even though readers should in some instances prefer to depart therefrom. An edition of the pianoforte works of Beethoven, now in the course of issue in Germany, carries this assumed prerogative of an editor to an extent happily extraordinary, and extraordinary let us hope it may long continue. In this, with most reckless disregard of evidence, the editors and one in particular, assume to have a kind of second sight of the author's meaning, and by the guidance of this preternatural light, they take upon themselves to set aside what Beethoven wrote and printed, and they supersede this in many passages by substitutions of their own, which materially change the character and alter the effect of what common-place folks blindly believe must have been intended by the master—poor common-place folks! who have but the indisputable notes of the original, the general manner of the author, a comprehension of the theoretical and practical state of art in his time, and a reverence for a great man's meaning and his individual way of expressing it, to guide them. They who are responsible for this edition, unscrupulously add octaves or double octaves to passages written in single notes, extend scales from one octave to two, and make other still more serious changes, which, let us do them the kindness to suppose, they imagine to be betterings of what the world received, as perfect prior to the pretence of these gentlemen to prove it to be imperfect. Of a totally different character, is an edition of the pianoforte Sonatas recently issued in England, wherein infinite pains have been spent in purifying the text according to the highest authorities, and impunctuating the phrases as aforesaid, so as to distinguish their meaning to all who read them. The English, or one produced in the same spirit and with the same amount of insight, should of course be the school edition. The German edition must be a curiosity from which reason and feeling will revolt.

Our third order of editorship assumes the right and presumes the capability to add to the works of great musicians in order to fit them for present use. In letters the same was done by John Dryden, by Nahum Tate, and by David Garrick, with regard to the plays of Shakspeare, and a pretty business they made of their changements. Mankind has come to the convictions that the Tempest is best without having a youth that has never seen a maiden; that King Lear is not improved by the omission of the Fool or by the love of Edgar and Cordelia; and that Romeo and Juliet is good enough without the waking of the heroine before her lover's death and a maudlin, dawdling, sentimental piece of whining in consequence between the two. Would that a like conviction with regard to music might break upon us! The manes of an artist who wrote a Tragedy of four hours long, or an Oratorio of five—such as Hamlet or Belshazzar—could scarcely, with justice, rise from his repose to complain of the inevitable curtailment of his work; for now it is impossible, if ever an audience could endure it, to attend to a performance of such great extent. To shorten, where

this is unavoidable, is one thing; to colour, to decorate, to misrepresent, or even to dress (when the applied costume is out of the fashion of the age to which the work belongs) is entirely another. Perhaps one of the greatest evils that have ever been done in music, is the reinstrumentation by Mozart of Handel's Messiah; and the evil lies in the fact that the score is written with such consummate artistry as to rival the beauty of the original matter, that it is hence inseparable (save in those pieces in which, from the first, Mozart's additions have been unused), from Handel's groundwork in public performances. Because of its infinite merit, Mozart's orchestration is now indispensable; and, because of its indispensability, any one now regards it as a precedent, and takes licence from its example to invest other works of Handel with "additional accompaniments." Unhappily, or happily, as the case may be, everybody who paints Handel with the vivid colours of the modern orchestra is not Mozart. If he were, and were always at his best, then should we become strangers to the effects intended by the mighty one of Halle, the stern grandeur and the special sweetness of the Saxon giant would have no existence, and the delicious haze of sunset glories that hangs as a kind of veil between the ancient style of music and the modern would hide from view the most salient features of the master's individuality. I plead guilty to this act of treason against the musician's memory in my own poor strivings, which would not be extenuated by a recital of the circumstances that induced me to the act; I but acknowledge that I live in a glass-house, and the stones I may throw will shatter as much my own panes as they may strike against the crystals of others. Now the case of Handel differs from that of every later musician, and, to a great extent, from that of some composers of his own period, in that the unwritten organ part formed a prominent and important feature in the performances over which he himself presided; and that the absence of this designedly conspicuous feature, causes a vast blank, which imperatively needs to be filled. It was this imperative need which caused Mozart to write his wind instruments and occasionally to add to the string parts of Handel, for the performance of the Messiah in Vienna, in a hall that had no organ. He must be a man with the genius of Mozart or of Handel himself, or else with the belief that he had it, who would now-a-days dare to improvise an organ part to any work by Handel, that should aim at the contrapuntal character and the general fulness of interest of what Handel is recorded to have played; but a thing may be accomplished in the stillness of contemplation, which is impossible in the heat of excitement, and thus one—who could by no means extemporise it—might write, in a fortunate humour, such an organ part as even Handel might not have rejected. This would not be to modernise a work written in the spirit of another age, but to fill up the gap occasioned by the author's incomplete mode of writing. So deemed Mendelssohn—more wisely than when he recast *Acis and Galatea*—when afterwards he wrote his truly Handelian organ part for *Israel in Egypt*. It is seemingly inconsistent, on the other hand, to fill up the incompleteness of Handel with instrumental effects such as he never could have conceived, even though it be done after the example of Mozart's Messiah. Let us pass on, however, to a master who lived two generations after the grand old Colossus became silent, after the modern had been introduced into music by the magical touch of Mozart, and who is duly accredited with a mastery over the materials wherewith he worked, that is equal to the

measureless greatness of his thoughts. It has been proposed—mercy measure the monstrosity!—to improve the orchestration of the Choral Symphony of Beethoven, and the notion has been justly met by Mr. Manns in a paragraph in the book of his benefit concert last April, and by Mr. Joseph Bennett in an article that appeared in this journal. There is one thing to be urged, and this is the single one, in support of the extravagant proposal—namely, that let be written what may, either in the way of making clear the ideas which Beethoven is now declared to have been unable to express, or else in making clear what the proposer would like him to have expressed, let be written what may, the world has always the freedom to receive or to reject it, and we who have full faith in Beethoven, so may still play him as he wrote, and may still believe that his writing is the immortal portion of himself. The orchestration of a master is as entirely individual to him as are his harmonies or his melodies. One can tell at a hearing that this or that is a score of Mendelssohn or of Schumann, of Spohr or of Weber, of Beethoven or of Mozart, quite as certainly as one can recognise a painter by his colouring or a poet by his idiom. Would a passage by Shakspeare be any longer his, were every word in it that is unusual in our times to be replaced by the last new University slang phrase which has been adopted by the *Girl of the Period*? Would a picture by Reynolds be any longer his, were it to be recoloured by even the ablest of living artists? Let it be granted that some of the orchestral effects of our master are not satisfactory to the full, and let it be presumed that this is a possible consequence of his infirmity, which he might have altered had he heard these effects as we hear them. What then? If Beethoven had not possessed that miraculous inner sense of sound through which he perceived the beautiful, he would not have been Beethoven; and, in like manner, had he not possessed that natural as lamentable outer senselessness to the very sounds of his own conceptions, so neither would he have been Beethoven. It is he that is our love, our adoration; and he, disguised by the manipulation of another hand, at the prompting of another brain, is a stranger to musicians, and strange may he be for ever. It is argued that the capabilities of instruments have been extended since our master wrote, and that he would have constructed different passages had the means been at hand for their execution. What then? Had he written something else, he would not have written what he wrote, and we shall better enjoy this legacy of genius if we believe it to be unimprovable, than if we submit it to the hacking mercies of any after-comer. Nay, the then limitation of compass of certain instruments brought particular beauties into some works of Beethoven which would not have been there had pianofortes and flutes and other machines for setting the air in motion been without top or bottom to their scale. Notice in testimony, the many incidents, in the early Sonatas particularly, which, recurring in different keys from those wherein they first are heard, are then modified to bring them within the bounds of the instrument that would have been exceeded had the said incidents been precisely transposed; and new beauties spring from these modifications, beauties that never would have come into being had the copyist instead of the composer been able to transfer the phrases unaltered from one key into another. Let it be granted, a grant beyond the amplitude of all heretofore concessions, that the passages it is proposed to alter are weak, unworthy, even faulty. What then? A true lover may perceive faults in the person, or the mind, or the character of his mistress; but will he

love her the less? Will he not love her in spite of, and even because of these imperfections? This order of editorship has received countenance and even support in English print. Alas and welladay! It becomes then a duty to protest against it; but no protest can obliterate a once printed word. It is the winged seed that is borne upon the air from clime to clime and from people to people; there is only to wish, where hope has no anchor, that the seed may fall on flinty soil, and that men's hearts will afford no nurture to the art-impiety. May such never become the concert edition of musical classics.

The responsibility of a musical editor is beyond calculation. We owe an infinite debt of gratitude to anyone who accepts this responsibility with implicit faith in his author; we owe as deep a debt of resentment to one who grasps it with an unshakable belief in himself.

NEW MUSIC.

BY HENRY C. LUNN.

In a recent number of this journal I wrote a little sketch called "Old Music," the idea of which was, as may be remembered, suggested by the fact of a friend, in ransacking the contents of a cupboard which had not been disturbed for many years, discovering a parcel of soiled and torn compositions of ancient date which, had I not been present, would have been sent, as waste paper, to the butter-shop. I could not help thinking the other morning how strangely the incident appeared to present itself as a violent contrast when, by mere accident I lighted upon a quantity of "New Music," although, as might be anticipated, not precisely under the same circumstances. The scene was a country house, in the drawing-room of which I was, by my own desire, left for an hour or two undisturbed. On looking at the various articles, both for use and ornament, in the room, some of which appeared extremely valuable, I could not but remark how studiously old material and old workmanship had been sought, in preference to new. Here was a grand and massive oak cabinet, the carving on which carried us back to the days when lasting worth, instead of showy flimsiness, ruled the market, and the value of an article needed no attestation to ensure a sale. On the mantelpiece was a beautifully designed old clock, which had evidently been handed down from generation to generation, and was looked upon as a tried and valued friend of the family. The chandelier, which hung from the ceiling, was of cut glass, but so elaborately and delicately executed as to show that it came from the hands of no modern workmen. The books of classical authors, in luxurious editions, too, were lying upon the table, as if tempting you to devour their contents. Then the beautiful old English ornaments, which were scattered about, almost made me believe that, in my dream, I had strayed into a castle of bygone years, and that the Baron, surrounded by his retainers, would shortly enter and welcome me with a flagon of his choicest wine. Reasoning from the facts around me, I should certainly have been led to imagine that everything would have been selected in accordance with the feeling which had dictated the choice of the several articles I have enumerated. Strangely enough, however, on opening a portfolio of music which was lying upon the pianoforte, instead of being gladdened by the sight of the finest and most venerated specimens of the art, the work of men whose names are revered by all thoughtful musicians, I found a number of the most ephemeral productions of the present day—Waltzes, Polkas ("De Salon," of course), Reveries, Fantasias and songs of