Straube and Bach

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rare quality of being as good a listener as a talker, and many of his pupils and friends were accustomed to confide in him, for they never found him lacking in that great-hearted sympathy and tenderness they needed. Perhaps the greatest charm in Safonov's character was the almost child-like simplicity which seemed to pervade the whole atmosphere of his surroundings. He hated show, vulgarity, and affectation—especially in women—and liked everything plain and unvarnished. Safonov loved England. He told me that once, many years ago, he had intended to become a naturalised Englishman; 'but,' he continued, with a gesture of his hands, 'it came otherwise.' His friendship was a privilege and honour to all those to whom it was extended, and there are many who will mourn his loss very deeply.

Reviews.

VOCAL MUSIC.

Frank Jephson's 'Dear Golden Days' (Novello) is a song of which an expressive singer can make much. It is simple, and though it has much in common with the ballad of the day, it is well written and sufficiently original to deserve a place in a higher category. Cyril Scott's 'The Pilgrim Cranes' (Elkin & Co.) is a very characteristic setting of a poem by Lord de Tabley. The vague discords and rhythm are highly suggestive features, and the pensive melancholy of the words finds apt expression. The familiar lullaby, 'Sleep, baby, sleep, thy father watches the sheep,' has been set yet once more, this time for S.S.A.A., unaccompanied, by W. W. Starmer (Winthrop Rogers). With a well-balanced quartet it would be very effective. The music is only moderately difficult.

PIANOFORTE.

In 'A Sequence of Melodies' (Augener) Ethel Boyce gives us five well-written little pieces suggested by ancient metres. Two very attractive pieces of salon type are the Scherzo and Valse of W. G. Ross, published together (J. & W. Chester).

ORGAN.

Edward L. Monk's Sonata in D major (Collard Moutrie) has an animated and effective first movement, and a pleasingly simple *Andante*. In the *Finale* the composer's invention seems to flag somewhat, with the result that the work, like many other Sonatas, ends less well than it began. W. C. Carl has made an effective little organ-solo from the Symphony to Purcell's famous 'Bell Anthem' (H. W. Gray Co., and Novello). It should be a popular item at Christmas services and recitals.

Obituary.

We regret to record the following deaths:

WILLEM COENEN, the well-known pianist and popular composer, at Lugano, on March 18 (or 19). He was born at Rotterdam on November 17, 1837. His sister Fien taught him pianoforte playing in his childhood, and later he had some instruction from Thalberg and Ernst Lubeck. After that he became his own teacher and achieved considerable distinction. He toured over North and South America, and in 1862 settled in London, where he remained until 1909, chiefly occupied in teaching at the Guildhall School of Music and privately. He was the first to introduce the chamber music of Brahms in this country. The *Musical Times* of May, 1870, records the performance of Brahms's Sextet for strings (the *Scherzo* of which was encored) at one of his concerts given in Hanover Square Rooms. A temporary injury to his right hand led to the composition of two Fantasies for the left hand only, one of which was on the 'Last rose of summer' and 'God save the King,' and the other on 'Home, sweet home.' He also composed twenty or more fantasies for both hands, and a notable contribution he made to concerted pianoforte music was a Caprice

Concertant for sixteen performers on eight pianofortes (published now as a four-handed duet, but still obtainable in its original form). As a song-writer he was very successful. Two of his songs, 'Come unto me' and 'Lovely Spring,' are still greatly in demand. He retired some years ago, and resided at Lugano, where he was near a married daughter. He was an old and valued friend of the House of Novello.

SOPHIE MENTER, recently, in Germany. Born at Munich on July 29, 1841, daughter of the violoncellist, Joseph Menter, she was a wonder-child as a pianist. She studied at the Munich Conservatoire under Leonhard, and later was in turn under Miest, Tausig, and Liszt. In 1872 she married David Popper, the violoncellist, from whom she parted in 1886. Her first appearance in England was in 1881. She made her name at a time when women-pianists were rarer than they are now, but she would have been notable at any time, for she deserved the compliment Liszt paid her when he called her 'his only true daughter.' A good story was told of her which showed her independence of character. When she was quite a beginner she obtained through the influence of Liszt an offer of an engagement at a Vienna Philharmonic Concert, in those days the summit of a young artist's ambition. She was determined to play Liszt's E flat Concerto, but the directors were frightened of it and asked her to play something else. She stuck to it, however, and when the old gentlemen looked like being obdurate she said in her best Bavarian Doric, 'Well, after all, need I play at one of your concerts?' They were so taken aback, for no one had ever spoken to them like that before, that they gave in.

GUSTAV SCHRECK, the Cantor of the Thomas Schule at Leipzig, in February. He had held the post since 1892, being the thirty-first incumbent since its institution in 1739, and the eleventh since Johann Sebastian Bach. His immediate predecessor was J. W. Rust. Dr. Schreck was born at Zeulenroda on September 9, 1849, and studied at Leipzig from 1868 to 1870, under Plaidy, Papperitz, and Jadassohn. He then settled for two years at Wiborg, after which he returned to Leipzig, where he lived till his death. As professor of composition at the Conservatoire he had a great reputation as a teacher, and composed much Church music.

EMIL SJOGREN, at Stockholm, last month. Born on June 6, 1853, in the same city, he completed his musical education at Leipzig, studying chiefly under Kiel and Hauptmann. He then returned to Stockholm, where he lived till his death, except for two years spent in touring Northern and Central Europe. In 1891 he was appointed organist of the Yohannis Kyrka. His music reflected his Leipzig training more than his Scandinavian origin. He was a voluminous and versatile composer. His larger works are not familiar in this country, but his 'Novellettes' for pianoforte and his Violin Sonatas are popular.

WASSILY SAFONOV (see previous page).

Correspondence.

STRAUBE AND BACH.

TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE MUSICAL TIMES.'

SIR,—At the risk of being unjustly regarded as a Pro-German, I cannot refrain from taking up the cudgels on behalf of Karl Straube's Bach interpretations. I have just read Mr. Harvey Grace's caustic comments on Straube's edition of Bach's organ works, and as one who in student days very often heard the great organist of Bach's old Church both play and conduct the master's works, I must say that Mr. Grace has a very mistaken impression of Straube's ideals. To hear him play the great Preludes and Fugues on his own organ was a revelation of how living and how full of every shade of feeling Bach's music really is, and also of how very far in advance of his time the giant really was. Translations from the German into English are always apt to emphasise the 'overweighted' style of the original, while the profuse employment of adjectives and adverbs which characterises German is altogether unsuited to English and has to be rendered in such a complicated way that it often makes a passage sound ludicrous. The too thorough directions as to fingering, &c., I do not attempt to defend—they probably spring from the habit of teaching, which teachers know well inclines one to

the evil idea that it is not wise to leave anything to the judgment or initiative of the pupil if one will have it properly done. My object in writing this letter is simply to say how very beautiful were the works of Bach, both choral and for the organ, under Straube's hands. However exaggerated his language may be, his playing was never so in effect. His mistake has been in trying to convey in words the subtle and wonderful beauty which he finds and reproduces in the music. Surely the mistake in this country—nay, the very sin, which has made Bach hated and feared as only 'exercises' and 'dry, dull' technical preparatory work—has been that of looking upon exquisite passages as merely the 'pleasant sequences' referred to by Mr. Grace.

To those who have studied Bach in his own city, and heard him week after week for years interpreted in his own church by the artist Karl Straube, his music will always be more full of infinite shades of beauty and living emotions, human and divine, than any other music that exists. Straube's playing of the glorious 'Passacaglia' was a demonstration of how the most mighty iron and the most delicate ethereal

gossamers can both be finely handled by the same workman. Having once heard that, German or no German one cannot sit and hear him attacked without speaking a word in his defence, especially as many pupils have been won over to become Bach worshippers by being taught his music on the lines followed by Straube in his playing.—Yours truly,

(Miss) ENID PAYNE.

Mr. Harvey Grace writes :

I sympathise with Miss Payne's desire to defend her old teacher, but I must remind her that my article was concerned solely with Herr Straube's work as a Bach-editor. Miss Payne's defence consists chiefly of a panegyric on his playing, and therefore is hardly to the point. Is Bach's music 'hated' in England? Most of us in a position to know claim that he is a popular composer, and that he has become so without such editorial aids as gushing comments, far-fetched meanings read into simple or conventional passages, and alterations of the music in order to obtain greater sonority.

BENJAMIN DALE'S PIANOFORTE SONATA IN D.*

BY FREDERICK CORDER.

This remarkable work, which is by far the most ambitious contribution to the literature of the pianoforte yet produced in this country, has now been before the public for twelve years, and it is surely time to recognize its existence. Written in 1902, whilst its composer was yet a student, its merits were so evident to his fellow-musicians that they felt the imperative necessity of having it published. But how was this to be rendered possible? What publisher in his senses would dream of undertaking as a business proposition the production of a Sonata, let alone one of over sixty pages in length and of extreme difficulty, by a totally unknown writer? Several abortive attempts were made, and at last, owing to the fact that there happened to be quite a group of unusually talented young men just then with works of a similar tendency, the Society of British Composers was formed, with the intention of doing for England what Belaieff had done for Russia—undertaking the publication of high-class music of a non-commercial kind, recognizing the fact that the sale of such music could only prove remunerative after a long time, if at all. Of the difficulties of this enterprise it needs not here to speak; suffice it to point out that among the first publications were the Dale Sonata, Paul Corder's Nine Preludes, Swinstead's Prelude in D, Bowen's first Miniature Suite, and Bax's Celtic Songs—all works which were artistically far ahead of any pianoforte music hitherto produced in this country. With the limited resources of such a Society the advertising possibilities could never be adequate for the pushing of these works into the reluctant public mind. One could not pay great foreign performers to play them, or send lines of sandwich-men down Regent Street inviting people to

'support home industries and buy the Dale Sonata.' Apart from such methods there is little that one can do. From time to time ambitious young pianists of high attainments have played it, and the verdict has always been, 'A magnificent work, but far too long.' Too long for a critic who has to 'do' two concerts in one afternoon, or a member of the audience whose one idea is to get away from it. But how can a great work be too long? When his 'Mastersingers' was first produced Wagner felt that no audience could be expected to stand five hours of it, and provided cuts, which were thankfully accepted. But when it became well-known these cuts were gradually withdrawn, and now it is not uncommon to have the work performed entire. This is the supreme triumph, the true touchstone of success. There is no reason why excerpts from the Dale Sonata should not be separately performed, especially the Variations, which are practically distinct pieces, complete in themselves.

The work consists of a big *Allegro* first movement in D minor, and a Theme and seven Variations in the unrelated key of G sharp minor, the last of which is a continuous Fantasia melting in a singular manner into the *Finale*, which is a Rondo of ample dimensions in D major. The *Coda* of this re-introduces the theme of the Variations and ends *Adagio* in D minor. This scheme startles at once by its entire originality, the only work in the least similar in plan being Tchaikovsky's great Trio in A minor. In manner and matter, however, there is no resemblance between the two works.

The first movement starts off boldly with an impetuous subject :

the first eight bars of which are immediately repeated, gracefully modulating to F major. It will be noticed that the necessary expression-marks and other signs are written in with meticulous care throughout; indeed, they number

277 in the first page alone. Technical difficulties, such as abound throughout the work, begin with the twelfth bar, where groups of two, three, and four notes have to be played simultaneously :

* Avison Edition, 6s. 3d. net. Cary & Co.