"Elijah". A Comparison of the Original and Revised Scores. Part II (Concluded)

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Hence the darkened theatre, the hidden orchestra, the steam effects, the dragon, and other wonders and devices to flatter the senses at the expense of the intellect. We should not attach so much importance to these discrepancies if some such comparison had not been challenged—if Wagner's dramas had not repeatedly been styled great literary productions by some in authority, and he himself a great dramatist. Let it be fully conceded that Wagner's music, particularly in "Tristan und Isolde," is often remarkably dramatic; too often, however, are the finest situations marred by an unhappy lack of dramatic instinct in the writer. It would seem as if there were two distinct personalities in Wagner—the musician, who is fully possessed by the grandeur of his subject, and the *littérateur*, who frequently is irresistibly damaging. Without referring further to the dreary prolixity of the declamatory *résumés* of *Wotan* in the Nibelung tetralogy let us take an instance of this from "Tristan und Isolde." It is the magnificent scene where *Brangäne* rushes into the garden of *King Mark* and warns the lovers of the approach of daylight. All who have witnessed the scene that follows need not be reminded of the superlative beauty of the music, and the strength of the incident of the discovery of the lovers by *King Mark*. Instead of pursuing the dictates of the most ordinary dramatic feeling and finishing the scene at once, an anticlimax is arrived at in a speech from *King Mark* of almost insufferable redundancy, wholly iterative and unnecessary, and which nullifies the striking incident preceding it. The dramatic writings of Wagner abound in instances as glaring as this, and that their author should ever have been regarded as a great dramatist is a surprising proof of the lengths to which special pleading will go.

It needs little reasoning, indeed, to demonstrate that there is a wide gulf fixed between Wagner's theories, and his practical exemplification of them, novel and distinct from all other work in opera as this undoubtedly is. Without any malicious *arrière pensée* it may be said that Wagner was debarred from the perfect realisation of his theories, because his ideal of their realisation was impossible. The union of all the arts in representation, so that they are all mutually and equally operative, may be imaginatively depicted by the poet, but the hope of viewing such a consummation on the dry stage is purely visionary. Wagner's work in music is so individual and so distinguished, his position among the great composers so unassailable, that it is quite superfluous to make on his behalf any claims to divinity. We have alluded to his personal influence, and the interest his great career has excited outside the musical world. The influence of his compositions has for the last twenty years been continuously exercised over most of his contemporaries and is clearly apparent. The "new Art" which he bequeathed to the world resolves itself into this, that he established a new form of opera so different from others that it is most appropriately described by his own designation "music-drama." It would be presumptuous to speak of this as a "new Art," for that would be to infer that none of Wagner's predecessors or contemporaries had perceived the necessity of reconstructing opera or had introduced any beneficial innovations, and, moreover, that his theories absolutely originated with him. This, we know, is far from being the case. The art-work of Richard Wagner should be regarded not apart from, but in connection with, that of other great composers; we should even then discover in it qualities precious enough to make us deplore the utterances of fanaticism whether exhibited in praise or blame.

"ELIJAH"

A COMPARISON OF THE ORIGINAL AND REVISED SCORES

By JOSEPH BENNETT.

(Concluded from page 125.)

PART II.

No. 41—Chorus, "But the Lord from the north hath raised one."

Mendelssohn altered many details in the orchestration of this number, with a view, apparently, to greater dignity of effect. None of them, however, are important enough to call for notice here. But at the tenth bar from the end of the present version we come upon a very important change. The original has a different ending altogether, as the following example shows:—

No. 1. VOICES, unison.

And of the fear of the Lord.

Strings.

Strings.

Wind.

Moreover, this half close is followed by a somewhat extended movement, *Alla breve moderato*, in the same key, and having the form of an accompanied canon at the octave, four in one. We give the voice parts below, with such few indications of the accompaniment as are needful in a case where the instruments chiefly strengthen the vocal harmony. It may be premised that the words are the well-known Scriptural passage, "He will open the eyes of the blind," &c.:—

No. 2. SOPRANO.

Orchestra.

The musical score consists of two systems of staves. The left system contains ten staves of music, and the right system contains ten staves. The music is in G major and 4/4 time. The left system includes dynamic markings 'cres.' and 'p'. The right system includes dynamic markings 'p' and 'f'. The music is a choral-like theme with a soprano part and a bass part.

The choral-like form of the theme above employed suggests inquiry whether the composer borrowed it from Church song, and it may be that some of our readers can solve the doubt on this point.

No. 42—Quartet, "O come, every one that thirsteth."

In this number Mendelssohn very slightly touched the soprano part at one place only, and, removing an oboe from the score, substituted a clarinet, without, however, changing a note of the music.

No. 43—Chorus, "And then shall your light."

The Andante maestoso which now opens the final chorus was written after the Birmingham performance, and took the place of an Andante sostenuto in the same key twenty-two bars long. From the voice parts given below it will be seen that the composer anticipated the subject of his closing fugue. The wind instruments are impressively used in sustained harmony throughout this Andante, while the strings have a syncopation indicated in the first bar of our extract:—

No. 3. Andante sostenuto.

p Now to Him a - ble to do all things *f*

for us, do all things more than we can ask, can ask or
think, . To Him be glo - ry throughout all
time, yea, to Him be glo - ry with - out end, To Him be
glo - ry throughout all time, yea, to Him be glo - ry
with - out end. A - men, A - men, A - men.

Coming to the fugue it is seen that Mendelssohn gives a crowning proof of his dissatisfaction with the original work, and his resolve to spare no pains for its amendment. The movement in the original, though having the same subject as that in the printed score, is substantially different from its successor, and a comparison of the two conveys so much interest and profit that we cannot refuse the reader an opportunity of making it. The Birmingham fugue is, therefore, appended in its entirety. Its connected words are a portion of those used in the preceding *Andante sostenuto*—viz., “To Him be glory throughout time,” &c.:—

No. 4. *Allegro vivace.*

Our task is now ended, and, for the first time in the history of the oratorio, the changes made by Mendelssohn have been set forth with sufficient particularity for a just estimate of their extent and character. As regards the composer, we can now judge, not only his fas-

tidiousness, but his undaunted resolve that no labour should be spared to strengthen weak points. We learn also the value of second thoughts, and the fact that even genius requires many such for the perfecting of a great work of art. Mendelssohn, in "Elijah," reached the "Temple of the Sun," but his Pegasus was a slow and plodding beast. This should be at once a warning and an encouragement.

THE GREAT COMPOSERS

BY JOSEPH BENNETT.

No. XII.—ROSSINI (concluded from page 131).

ROSSINI remained in Bologna from 1836 to 1847, and during all that long time did nothing except complete his "Stabat Mater," under circumstances presently to be mentioned, and write three religious choruses—"La Foi," "L'Espérance," and "La Charité"—only the third of which was absolutely new. Still, it cannot be said that he idled away those eleven years of vigorous manhood. He took quite a fatherly interest in the Communal Lyceum at Bologna, and became not only the honorary, but, in effect, the acting director of that establishment, lifting it, if Azevedo may be credited, to the highest position in Italy as a school of music. It was there he marked the rising talent of Marietta Alboni, and there he trained her to become the acknowledged best exponent of his contralto rôles. Rossini's activity in these respects, however, went for little with the public. As year succeeded year, and "Guillaume Tell" remained without a successor, "all the world wondered." Then all the world began to ask the reason why. But there was no answer, and finally the matter became one of those permanent puzzles which are referred to only when topics of inquiry are scarce. We may add that the mystery of Rossini's inaction never has been cleared up. It may, however, be found discussed in an intelligent and interesting manner by Mr. Sutherland Edwards, who devotes to the subject one of the closing chapters in his life of the composer. The biographer marshals four popular explanations, which are these: first, disgust at the reception and treatment of "Guillaume Tell"; second, a conviction that nothing better than "Guillaume Tell" could be produced, while a worse was possible; third, annoyance at Meyerbeer's success; fourth, laziness. We hold with Mr. Edwards that the third should be dismissed at once. In one of his sardonic moods, Rossini may have said that he would recommence writing when the Jews had finished their Sabbath, but, apart from his consistent friendship with Meyerbeer, he was not a jealous man, the exalted idea he justifiably entertained of his own powers raising him above the level of so petty a feeling. As for laziness, he remained to the end of his life what he was at the beginning—a man who could do wonders under pressure, but without pressure preferred to enjoy himself. Far from being idle, he was keenly active, though the great vitality in him did not always find vent in what we call work. On the other hand, discontent at the fate of his greatest opera may have made him averse to once more taking up his pen, and the humour of a season finally became the habit of a life. Mr. Edwards contends that the master did not himself know with precision the reasons for his own silence: "It is astonishing how many persons had the coolness, not to say impertinence, to ask Rossini why he never composed anything for the stage after 'Guillaume Tell,' and it is amusing, though also provoking, to find that to most of these inquisitive persons he returned very evasive answers." Whether these premises be sufficient for