The Royal Institution: Lecture on 'Emergency Music' (February 13)

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Obituary.

We regret to have to announce the following deaths :

JOHN FOSTER on March 25, at Hampstead. He was born in August, 1827, and was thus in his eighty-eighth year. When he was nine years of age he entered the choir of St. George's Chapel, Windsor. After his voice had broken, he became an articulated pupil of Sir George Elvey, and in 1847 he succeeded Richard Redhead as organist of St. Andrew's, Wells Street. Here he formed a professional choir, and established the Cathedral type of service. It was at St. Andrew's that he gave the first hearing of the well-known Ely Confession, composed by his friend Janes, organist of Ely Cathedral. He developed a beautiful alto voice, and became a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal and a lay-vicar of Westminster Abbey. His other activities in metropolitan musical circles were remarkable, and made him one of the most popular and esteemed choral conductors of his time, and he was justly regarded as an authority on the interpretation of glees and madrigals. He resigned his appointment at St. Andrew's in 1856. He directed the music at the Royal Academy banquets, and conducted many well-known musical organizations, including the Civil Service Musical Society, and that connected with the Stock Exchange. He also sang for thirty-four years in the Noblemen and Gentlemen's Catch Club. In 1860 he and Mr. Arthur Lewis formed a male-voice choir under the title of the 'Moray Minstrels' (Mr. Lewis at that period lived at Moray Lodge, Campden Hill), and it is stated that in the course of the forty-eight years of the existence of the choir he had never been absent from a rehearsal or a concert. He married a sister of Madame Sainton-Dolby.

An old member of the Civil Service Musical Society, writing from Rue des Alpes, La Tour de Peitz, Vevey, says : 'My acquaintance with Mr. John Foster was chiefly in connection with the old Civil Service Musical Society, of which I was one of the original members, remaining so until the dissolution of the Society. After the resignation of Mr. Arthur Sullivan, Mr. John Foster remained sole conductor of the Society until the end. As a member of the old semi-choir, I have a vivid recollection of Mr. Foster's extremely animated and genial manner, and of his ideal conducting, for which no praise could be too high. He knew not only the precise effects which he wished to obtain from his choir, but also the best and quickest way to obtain them, and his own enthusiasm was always infectious. He was most deservedly popular, and I am sure that any other surviving members of the old choir would support this description with enthusiasm. Those days can never be forgotten, although many of our number have since joined the majority. I enclose my card, and should be very glad indeed to be put into communication with any living member of the old Civil Service Semi-Choir if it should be in your power kindly to do this. Mr. Henry R. Bird, of Kensington, was our able accompanist in those days.'

BARON HERBERT DE REUTER, who, overcome with grief at the recent death of his wife, took his own life on April 18. He was born in March, 1852. In his youth he decided to enter the musical profession, and he went to Paris to study. Later he altered his mind, and took up his father's famous Agency. His love for music was great, and he had a most exact knowledge of all musical works of importance, from Palestrina to Offenbach and Gilbert and Sullivan, but he would go neither to concerts nor to the opera. He used to say that it afforded him just as much pleasure to read the score at home as to hear the music. His most absorbing passion was for books, and his library was an immense one.

WALTER BAPT, on Good Friday. Born at Leeds in 1852, he went to Dublin in 1876 as vicar-choral of St. Patrick's Cathedral. For close on forty years his beautiful tenor voice was very much appreciated both in St. Patrick's Cathedral and in the Chapel of Trinity College, while he was an esteemed favourite in the concert room. Last Christmas, owing to ill-health, he resigned his vicar-choralship, and he passed peacefully away on April 2, at his residence, 22, Upper Pembroke Street, Dublin. He was one of the original promoters of the Feis Ceoil, and was a prominent member of the Masonic body.

FRANZ NERUDA (the youngest brother of the late Lady Hallé), at Copenhagen. He was born on December 2, 1843, at Brunn, in Bavaria, where his father, Joseph Neruda, was organist of the cathedral. He was an excellent violoncello performer, and for a few years, 1877-79, was a member of the Hallé (Manchester) Orchestra. In 1892 he succeeded Niels W. Gade as conductor of the Musical Society at Copenhagen, and later he conducted the Stockholm Orchestra.

On March 28, at the Mental Hospital, Upper Warlingham, GUSTAV LOUIS AMÉDÉE KÜSTER, a well-known musician for many years resident at Croydon. He was born at Orbe, Canton de Vaud, Switzerland, on November 25, 1833, and was therefore in his eighty-second year. He failed mentally towards the end of his life. He had lived in England for the last sixty-five years.

Mr. JAMES SNEDDON, Mus. Bac. He was born at Dalget, in 1833. His musical life was spent mainly in school music superintendence at Edinburgh.

THE ROYAL INSTITUTION.

LECTURE ON 'EMERGENCY MUSIC' (FEBRUARY 13).

In our March issue (p. 166) we gave a full report of a 'Lecture to untrained listeners,' given by Dr. H. Walford Davies at the Royal Institution on February 6. In the following week (February 13) he delivered a second lecture, a report of which we are glad to be able to place before our readers.

I.—PRELIMINARIES.

Last week the art of the listener was considered. It was then pointed out that as music is movement and only movement, as it is in fact entirely dynamic by nature, it is wonderfully adapted to record the varied play and interplay of creative energy which is obviously of perpetual interest to every man, whether he is aware of it or not. It was seen that by cultivating the natural powers of reception and response—of intelligent reception and of imaginative response—listeners may also take an active part. With little trouble they may gain the freedom of the city of music; they may quickly learn the innate significances of sounds; and it is easy to do so, precisely because music by its nature can only discourse upon what may be called the free-will energies, and man by his nature seems chiefly interested in the expression of these energies. It was further pointed out that listeners can cultivate a power of aural adaptation. They can as it were filter the music to their own use, receiving that which concerns them and rejecting that which does not. It is to be hoped that the examples given last week may also have made it encouragingly clear that only slight technical equipment is needed to enable the hearer to understand the essential elements of that which is uttered by music.

To-day we are to consider not so much the listener's art of adapting himself to whatever music he may chance to hear, as our power of adapting music itself to the listener's requirement, in any given state or circumstance—in any given emergency, great or small.

Two of the definitions of the word 'Emergency' in Johnson's Dictionary run as follows :

- (1) 'The act of rising or starting into view';
- (2) 'Any sudden occasion or unexpected casualty.'

To illustrate the first meaning there is a quotation from Newton's 'Optics,' which refers to the 'Emergency of light.' To illustrate the second is one from Glanville, who wrote : 'Most of our rarities have been found out by casual emergency, and have been the works of time and chance rather than of philosophy.' It is fairly easy to find the highest power of the word by compounding these two meanings with a third and generally implied meaning. Thus, 'Emergency' music is in Newton's sense something that emerges; in Glanville's sense it is 'the product of the unexpected casualty,' which we call an emergency; in a third and always implied sense, it is a casualty through which there has appeared an instant and unforeseen need. In the fullest and combined sense, 'Emergency' music would be that which emerges from emergency: it is a

second part of the emergency brought about on purpose, and therefore, as we say, 'for love,' to meet or rather to balance the first part of the emergency which was not brought about on purpose, but which occurred as 'a casualty.' Now both meanings, it will be noticed, unite in carrying with them the element of surprise: the emergency of accident was unforeseen or it could not be an accident; and the emergency of action rises to meet it—as Johnson says, 'starts into view.' The last phrase is a felicitous touch of the great man. In one meaning he seems to indicate the unexpected problem—the emergency of fate; in the other the unexpected solution—the emergency of free-will. Both these unexpected must have a fascinating interest for us. At their highest, the one has the interest of terror, the other has the interest of triumph. When the emergency problem is less terrible, the emergent solution of it is necessarily less momentous; a small emergency from without brings about a correspondingly small emergent response. We shall always naturally seek, and when we find shall always feel satisfaction and restoration in controlled response to uncontrolled event. The unwilling, unforeseen Emergency Part 1 may produce some disturbance of existing affairs and therefore momentary incompleteness—possibly a painful, terrible or, as we rightly say, a fatal incompleteness. This cannot seem beneficent to those who, looking on, can see no solution. We feel a certain helplessness, and wait for genius to deliver us from the bondage of circumstance. Emergency Part 2 must always intend to be beneficent, since it has always the choosing force behind it. Its processes are creative and deliberate. It arises to meet Part 1, to replace instability with balance, incompleteness with a solution, pain or inconvenient helplessness with joyous power; surprise and perhaps terror give place to Browning's 'triumphant art' which counters and assimilates the 1st Emergency.

II.—NEED OF FITNESS.

Let this distinction between the two elements—which I will ask you to call Parts 1 and 2—of every emergency be clearly borne in mind; then it will readily be seen that if there is such a thing as emergency music or emerging art of any kind, and of course there is, it can only belong to the beneficent Part 2. Art registers energy. But it is also essentially purposeful, free, existent for choice. Emergency Part 1 is energetic, but fateful and uncontrolled; to us it is mechanically exclusive of choice. It happens not for love. Part 2, viz., the act with which we choose to meet it, has love in it, and it is there only that we can expect to find emerging art. For we know that art all the world over is nothing but the doings of man that are done for love.

There is a momentous distinction to be made here. Art itself may approach us as something from without us, like a fate, which we never choose, thus differing from the art that we ourselves gladly make (or gladly contemplate) for love. Our neighbour's pianola may for example be his art, but our fate; to him beneficent, to us malevolent—his triumphant Emergency Part 2, our terrible Emergency Part 1. From this the deduction follows that art which in any given time or place does not fulfil the conditions of that controlled response to circumstance which may be called emergent art, is for practical purposes not yet art. In other words, it must have fitness,—to human capacity, to time and to place. Last week we assumed that the ideal listener could receive and respond to all music. This is true of man in his creative capacity. As creatures we are different, and can no more enjoy the company of every kind of music at every place than we can enjoy the presence of every shade of character in our fellow-creatures. As creators we can doubtless transcend incompatibilities and dispense with good manners in others. But creative energies must hitch on if mortal creatures are to have part in and enjoy them; and though an omnivorous listener may be able to do wonders in adapting himself to any music, yet it is an obvious condition that on the other side of the bargain there must exist a state of wise penetration and sympathetic adaptation to the listener's needs if both the maker and taker of music are to find art in it. The moment we as hearers or contemplators are led whither we would not, the compact is broken as far as we are concerned; the affair is not for choice and therefore has lost one of its essential

factors—that of freedom.* It would be a failure and an outrage if a creative artist being himself free should require us to subject our freedom in contemplating his. To take a simple example, here is energy expressed in angular unsympathetic outlines:

in which the perpetrator for purposes of his own holds melodic movement so cheap that few could care to follow his vagaries for choice. True, there is no possible series of notes in our present system of which some kind of interesting sense could not be made. Still one is face to face here as in so many other matters with the perpetual paradox of life; he who would expect his fellows to appreciate such melodic violence at its proper value must himself appreciate gentleness; conversely, so-called 'good taste' includes the idea of knowing exactly how and when it is proper to be improper or shocking. A little further thought on almost any line of experience will lead us to see that the action or manifestation of creative or free-will energy which is to give us joy must display fitness; and furthermore if it can attain perfect fitness, that is, completeness; if the joyous energy can arise and achieve before our very eyes or ears; if we see the resourcefulness, the skill, the control of fate, the inspiration of it from beginning to end, then our gratitude and wonderment are intense, and our possession of the solution correspondingly complete.

III.—ESSENTIAL CONTINUITY IN ART.

Here it is necessary to beware of a fallacy. Our desire for completeness is not, I think, to be confused with any desire for finiteness. Our persistent, apparently instinctive desire for an Alpha and Omega to all our arts does not contradict or belie our equally persistent intuition that there are none but infinite beginnings and measureless endings; and this sense of infinitude gives a lovable horizon to all definiteness. A giver of artistic gifts does well to present his good things to his neighbours in a definite setting which picks them up where they are and leaves them where they would be with a sense of complete acquisition. Think of the careful beginnings and happy endings of story-books. Or take for example any scrap of melody:

which may possess charm and freedom and impulse. But it has no setting; it is a wayward fragment. To give it a setting, a starting point and a confirming cadence, is to follow the constant custom of Beethoven and Schubert:

* In passing it should be noted that the use of unpleasant discords, sounds that we should not choose for ourselves, offer no exception to the universal rule of the indispensability of choice in art; for we often choose for a greater end that which for smaller ends is unchoosable—in art as in ethics we are constantly willing to traverse dreary ground to reach a joyous region.

This is wise, not because it can improve the fragment (there are dangers that it may clip the melody's wings), but because it is then more likely to become a permanent possession of the hearer. He can as it were hang it upon the walls of his house of sound. It is framed. But truly creative processes are timeless. They can have neither a first nor last. The beginnings and endings, the settings or frames, are their mortal parts which change or fall away, but are none the less necessary.

Now our framework, our canvas, our field of interest in all Emergency Art lies in that period of time which falls between Part I and the completion of Part 2: between the surprising event and our assimilation or mastery of it. The interest lies in the process of meeting it, and every expression that furthers this process is welcome in proportion to its credentials of power, of freedom, and of fitness. Obviously there must be room for interest between the unwilling arrival of a problem and its willed solution or mastery. If the most stupendous emergency came upon us at 11.59 p.m., and was solved at midnight, there would be little chance to take more than a retrospective and theoretic interest in it all.

While we enjoy and even exact a sense of unity or completeness, yet our engrossing interest is in processes more than in causes or results; in motive more than in fixed or first appearances. Occasion provokes action. A riddle outside ourselves calls for the answer through or within ourselves—whether it be as active or passive participators (*i.e.*, in music, whether as composer, interpreter, or listener). The occasion impresses us, the completion delights us, but the joyous activity lies in the processes themselves.

IV.—REPARTÉE IN MUSIC.

At once the concisest and most generally intelligible form of Emergency Art is to be found in repartee. The three qualities which were referred to last week as typical of complete art—*viz.*, strength, grace, and humour—are all characteristic of reliable repartee; indeed, it would seem that the pleasure we find in a smart repartee is provocative of sudden laughter precisely because we experience all these joyous qualities in a single moment. As I prepared this lecture, I took a walk, and was struck with the resourcefulness of a coalheaver who sat on his cart (as on some grimy throne) being carried home by a traction engine. Two very large lumps of coal had dropped on to the road as I passed, and he shouted to the engine-driver to stop. He then sat still waiting for any passer-by to pick up the coal. I was one of three. We none of us were inclined to oblige him. His hands and clothes were the colour of the coal, and ours were not. Seeing that we did not pick it up, he called to the driver to go on. But the engine failed to move. Then ensued the half-minute of emergency. He had either to seem weak and climb down, or to look foolish and sit still. It would probably be difficult for anyone to find a better emergency remark than the one he made as he decided to climb down. 'Old 'ard, Bill, we're losing the profits,' was all he said; but the manner of covering his own confusion with this quaint assumption of ownership was, as you will readily see, quite masterly, graceful, and humorous. An old lady wrote to her son: 'I wish I could fly over to see you.' A mutual friend instantly remarked: 'She mustn't; she'll be shot for a strange bird.' Slight though it may be, this also seems a perfect remark; it satisfies the literal and pleases the fantastic mind; it has continuity of idea, energy, and not a little humour. Years ago an anxious England heard dubiously that Buller had found the key to Ladysmith. A Fleet Street bus-driver relieved all our feelings with the aptest comment: 'I wish he'd find the keyhole.' It is not appropriate to multiply non-musical instances here. But a few slight melodic instances may now be named in which one remark creates a situation which the next solves by some happy turn:

Ex. 4.

The last instance may well be the most remarkable case of musical retort that exists. The melodies are so deeply informed with feeling that their skill passes almost unnoticed. A moment's analysis however, will show (1) that the drooping sixth in the first bar receives the completest fulfilment in the second phrase built on the only three notes of the scale that were left unsounded; (2) that this second phrase is inverted a moment later to form the first half of the accompanying counter-subject; (3) that the first half of the subject is in its turn inverted to form the second half and cadence of the counter-subject.

These are condensed but significant examples of a great principle, in which the second or complementary inspiration is of the nature of a repartee or emergency remark.

V.—EXPRESSIVE POWER OF SOUND IN EMERGENCY.

Music has full public recognition as a pleasant pastime; but its amazing aptitude to express and communicate energies has not always been equally apparent. The mere power of sound finds perhaps aptest illustration and proof in the part it plays in ordinary speech. That part of a man's speech which may be called the musical part (its rise and fall and rhythm) is precisely that which tells most, and is clear even to those who do not understand the grammar of the language he uses. The analogy between speech and music may well be pursued by those who suspect that musical meanings are specialised and for the few. Let it be imagined that a foreigner in the streets of London overhears two or three different deliveries of the same greeting: for example, 'I am glad to meet you.' In one case it is said in a cursory monotone; in another with effusive and unreal emphasis; in the third with an unmistakable naturalness and heartiness. Let him be utterly ignorant of the literal meaning of the six English monosyllables uttered, yet is it likely that he will have no clue to the real nature of the three greetings? There is a sense in which the man who understands nothing comprehends most. Even a dog recognises the most important variety of truths in the varying tones of a voice. Perhaps only his name is uttered. But in one inflexion it will bring him leaping to his master; in another it will bring him cringing, or send him flying away. Both the foreigner and the dog grasp facts through tones. Both would probably tell you, if they could, that they were in possession of the important part of the communication. Details are not conveyed without the understanding of a pre-arranged language; but broad facts can be conveyed in tones: such facts as that a greeting was affectionate, or that a call was peremptory. Everyone's daily experiences suggest the superficial generalisation that there are two parts to language—its sound, and its sense; and many are prepared to deduce that as music is sound it is probably not sense. Yet music above all things establishes the fact that any sound made on purpose must make sense of some sort. Instead of the rather uncertain deduction that words can

convey sense, and tone can convey emotion, it would really seem much more correct to say that one conveys facts, the other conveys energies behind facts; one indicates states of mind, the other states of being. In emergency both count, both combine to fulfil the needs. And of the two it would seem obvious that in the long run states of being count most. Endurance is a state of being: love is a state of being. Mental meanings are necessary to meet special circumstances, to co-ordinate numbers, to steer energies into their right courses and so forth. But whatever the circumstances, it is in states of being that power lies; they alone give grip to all emergency-effort, and release us into the realm of creative consciousness in which art thrives, of which music is a rather unique expression.

Now that which exactly expresses our feelings fulfils two ends: while it records our energies, it both releases and communicates them. For these two reasons it is salutary. When circumstances that are outside control arise (*i.e.*, in emergency), we are automatically provoked to compensating action; and if we can manage it, to transcendent action. Where uncertainty is produced, we instinctively wish to counter it with certainty. We should in approaching sadness look for enough joy at least to annul and if possible transcend the sadness. In shifting ground we look for firm foothold, and so forth. To take an elementary example: the emergency music of pain is a cry; while it records feelings, it communicates and relieves them. It summons sympathy; communicating our agony we share it, *i.e.*, we call upon the health in others to help to counter our emergency; while the cry records our feelings it both relieves and communicates them. What is true of a slender personal instance is true of the great national instance now upon us. The War is a stupendous Part I. Emergency. Instantly the music of national energy is heard. Energies—creative energies—of every kind surge to meet the event, some so heroic and controlled as to serve us splendidly; some seemingly uncontrolled and childish—such as those of the poor lady who offered herself to the War Office as a strong swimmer who might save drowning soldiers. All these creative energies collectively might in the profound sense be called the Music of the War. Music itself occupies a humble but very useful place among them all. Bearing fully in mind the true nature of our art and its innate and associated meanings, we may try to trace the extent of its serviceability in such an emergency as the present, and to note the general bearing of art upon event.

The current of our life was flowing. It came across a resisting circumstance. Our energies, as we have seen, not only continue to flow, they are automatically and immensely amplified. Our state of being is intensified; our sympathies and antipathies have become powerful and formidable. This is the counter-move of creative energy in us. Now two of three things can happen. The hard resisting circumstance becomes as a dam, against which the current of our energies will first accumulate, then, secondly, (*a*) overflow, or (*b*) be diverted. As a matter of fact, it is just these three conditions which call out art and, notably, music. In it we find a welcome means of expression when other activities are held up, when an abounding energy leaps circumstance, or when circumstances are so big and unyielding that we seek refuge in diversion. Put shortly, music comes about (*a*) when energy is arrested; (*b*) when it leaps ahead; (*c*) for diversion.

These three ways seem to cover the whole ground of the serviceability of artistic utterance, and we may now proceed to a short concert of illustrations by a choir formed for use in war-time.

[Here a series of illustrations were sung such as are used at soldiers' concerts and in hospitals, all of which are to be found in the lecturer's recently-issued book of 'Thirty songs, old and new, arranged for men's voices.']

Songs of arrested energy, such as 'The flowers o' the forest,' are characterized by contemplative stillness and deep quietude. Songs that leap ahead are always buoyant, triumphant, and energizing in themselves. The nucleus of such songs may be found in any apt battle-cry. The street counterpoint of this nucleus best known at the moment is the cry, 'Are we down-hearted? No!' The best songs of diversion (*a*) appeal strongly to past associations, and (*b*) take long views, correlating immediate and urgent surroundings with vaster future issues, and so securing more spacious values. The old glee to Shakespeare's

words, 'The cloud-capt towers,' is a simple instance of a spacious song, that refreshes by its very vastness.

It seems scarcely perceived by many people that when there is an emergency probably the last thing for art to do is to expatiate upon the emergency. The only justification for singing about the emergency is to call the hearer's attention to it, to awaken sluggards; and it is sad to note that there have been few occasions when impertinence has so out-reached itself as in some of the recent patriotic effusions about the War.

On the other hand, it would be unfit, and indeed impossible, to continue in the pursuit of an art that ignores the great emergency, since art is largely energized by the intuitive effort to surmount present and immediate circumstance.

VI.—CONCLUSION.

The fundamental truth, as it seems to me, is this: There is everywhere observable in human affairs the working of some immense law of compensation. Its appearance is so constant as to make one sure that it is as powerful and unflinching in the world of human experience as is the law of gravity in the physical world. It would be extraordinarily interesting to trace its results in many departments. 'I am so sorry for the man of leisure,' said a hard-worked man, 'because he can never have any holidays.' To endure an intense pain is to become singularly independent of small pains. This is the law that gives us an abundant crop of paradox and epigram and proverb: 'You never hear the clock tick till it stops,' 'Jack of all trades, master of none.' An example of its working in musical experience is to be found in the enchanting sound to the ear of even the poorest music after one has heard no single note for a month. And conversely, the musical critic could doubtless testify to the barrenness of the most glorious chord to one who has heard it every hour for a whole concert season. It is of constant interest to note how often in strict accordance with this law an obstacle or limitation is provocative of the finest art. One of the most wonderful as well as best-known instances of the transcendence of limitations by genius, is to be found in Bach's 'Chaconne.' [The lecturer played parts of it on the pianoforte, showing how one melody is made to do the work of four.]

A new world of melody is revealed, because the whole is necessarily contained within a single strand, and harmonization in the ordinary sense is impossible. The emergency which reveals such treasures may be simply that no accompanist was available or desirable under the circumstances, and one player must do the work of two or three or more.

It is as though all arts, all our deeds of choice, had a vast and equable energy behind them, which flows unobserved, undemonstratively, till obstacles break it as rocks break a deep swell. It is then that glorious things happen. It is as though sound and light take on no beauty till they are broken up. This would explain the constantly noticeable fact that our joys are most resplendent on the edges of things. An *almost* is a fine thing in life, productive both of effort and joy. When it becomes a *quite*, then effort ends and joy subsides till a new *almost* is reached. Creative energy manifests itself most fully when there is most to do; when there are most obstacles. The loveliest parts of a stream are those where it meets with resistance. Broken surfaces catch the light; and in music, limitations provoke genius. Indeed, where there are none, we probably do well to make some. ['That is the great use of the Royal Academy of Music,' interpolated the lecturer for the benefit of Sir Alexander Mackenzie, sitting near him.] What is the beauty of rhythm itself but the beauty of broken-up energies? Limitations are our glory in this sense, and the American who said, 'Wagner's climaxes are ten minutes long—mine shall be twenty minutes,' would have done better to say, 'I will signify in five minutes all that Wagner said in ten; I will pen as much in a single strand of melody as Wagner did in all his polyphony.' That is to surpass Wagner.

It is from great emergencies that great things must emerge. Was old Glanville, whom Johnson quotes, right when he boldly asserted that 'most of our rarities have been found out by casual emergency and have been the works of time and chance'? If he meant that they have been evoked or revealed by time and chance, it would seem very near the

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truth. As has been said, music itself is but a small part of the total output of controlled activities called out in this stirring time. But it is no small thing for a great art that new urgency has come into it. New audiences have come into being, and as my friends of the choir could tell you, they are distinguished for sincerity. Soldiers will tell musicians when they have had enough. They will take a moving part in the concert. They will even do us the invaluable service of starting a tune of their own, if our utterance interests them less than theirs. If only such sincerity pervaded the output of our post-European-War art, there would then be no more blasé affectation. Creative energy would work in composer, player, and listener alike in such strength and breezy sincerity that we shall write the common chord anew and aright, because we love it anew and aright. There is certainly hope that one of the incidental joys resultant upon and evoked by a great sorrow and anxiety will be, that the much-desired national art will now become naturally emergent and understood. We shall speak our own language, to the joy of England, and, let us hope, to the enrichment and gratification of her Allies and her enemies alike.

PLAINSONG: SOME PROS AND CONS.*

BY HARVEY GRACE.

Although plainsong is steadily advancing in favour, and is being studied more generally and sympathetically than ever before, it still labours under some disabilities. To many it smells of Popery, and is promptly damned on that account alone. Samuel Sebastian Wesley's amusing letter to an inquiring pupil is significant:

'Your question about Gregorian Tones has caused me much pain. I thought I had made a better musician of you. I am sorry for this. I beg to assure you that I am a Musician, a Protestant, and Yours truly,
S. S. WESLEY.'

Bearing in mind the prevailing ignorance on the subject at that time, we need not attach much importance to Wesley's objections on musical grounds. Given our opportunities of studying and hearing plainchant, a man with Wesley's sense of the strong and dignified in Church music would assuredly have been speedily converted. I fancy the really important word in the letter is 'Protestant.' We must remember, too, that the most earnest plainsong revivalists then were parsons and ecclesiastically-minded laymen with more zeal than knowledge. I seem to have read somewhere of a vicar who was so fond of the psalm tones that he conversed with his wife in inflections, and held a Gregorian festival off his own bat with a choral force consisting of the cook, a couple of servant girls, and a boy in buttons. Advocacy of this kind could hardly do other than prejudice the professional musician unfavourably. To-day, happily, we find many of our leading musicians both in and out of the Church interested in the revival of this old music, and composers of various schools are showing themselves fully alive to the charm of its modal and rhythmical characteristics. Apart from the 'Protestant' objection, perhaps the cause of plainsong now suffers most from some of its devotees' insistence on its antiquarian and historical side. They forget that antiquaries and trained musicians form but a very insignificant proportion of our congregations. What the man in the pew needs is not lectures on the origin and antiquity of plainsong so much as demonstrations of its fitness for regular use in our services. He is apt to point out that there is no virtue in mere age, else a shop egg would be esteemed a delicacy. But if you begin by convincing him by the evidence of his ears that this old music is pre-eminently fitted for a particular purpose, and then point out that, in addition to this fitness, it has the added weight that comes from generations of use, you will be in a fair way to making a convert.

A short time ago I met an old friend who had stood by my side and sung Anglican chants when we were boys together. He has remained faithful to that type of Church music ever since, it being the only kind with which he is familiar. He was bitterly bemoaning the fact that he and his fellows were threatened with plainsong. He had

protested in the manly and effective way adopted by choir-men when faced with the uncongenial,—that is to say, he had handed in his resignation. He opened his mind to me very fully. Briefly put, here is his case, and it may be taken as typical: Plainsong is (a) monotonous; (b) dull; (c) ugly; (d) not music at all, but crude and barbarous attempts at music; (e) its revival is putting back the hands of the clock; (f) it is uninteresting to the choir.

When people say that plainsong is monotonous they generally refer to its use in chanting the Psalms, so we will consider it in that connection.

In the first place, have we not rather misled people by speaking of *singing* the Psalms? If we remember that chanting is merely reading with inflections, we shall have a much clearer idea as to the method of performance: more important still, we shall make no mistake as to the kind of variety to be aimed at, which is rhythmical rather than tonal.

There are three ways of reading the Psalms: (a) the go-as-you-please method, with each reader a law to himself as regards pitch, accent, and inflection; (b) the monotone; (c) a mixture of monotone and inflection—the latter now being reduced to a system instead of being improvised by the individual. This third method is known as chanting, or singing, and the farther we get away from the ideas suggested by these terms, and the more we regard the process as organized and inflected reading, the nearer we shall approach a rendering worthy of some of the finest prose in our language.

It is obvious that the most satisfactory formulæ for use as inflections will be those that approach most nearly to the involuntary cadences used by the average speaker. Take the simplest form of plainsong, the versicles and responses, as examples. It will be noticed how inevitable and natural these are. I have on several occasions found their naturalness proved in a most convincing fashion. I have heard children in schools recite the Creed. Nominally, they monotoned it; actually, in course of time, they had unanimously adopted a system of rising and falling accents almost exactly on the lines of the responses.

The same kind of thing is to be found in some of the old street cries. We have all heard a hawk apparently breaking forth into ecclesiastical song, when he was really only crying his wares, and adopting such inflections as would make his call more arresting. The plainsong Psalm tones possess just this easy naturalness.

It is of course a truism that any musical phrase that has to be repeated many times *must* be simple. It may be taken as axiomatic that the more striking the phrase, whether as to melody, harmony, or rhythm, the less well does it bear repetition. In chanting the Psalms we are faced with the fact that the musical setting has to be provided for any number of verses from four to seventy-six. With a plainsong tone, the melodic simplicity, the absence of fixed harmony, the fact of the last note frequently suggesting a half-close rather than a cadence, and the freedom of rhythm enable us to go through a long Psalm with no sense of monotony. As to rhythm, in a Psalm of thirty verses you will find hardly two with a similar scheme, whereas with an Anglican chant you will hear this rhythm thirty times:

Moreover, the latter has a definite musical form, fixed harmony, and often a striking progression that, pleasing for a few verses, ends in becoming wearisome. Take for example the well-known chant of Wesley,—one of the most beautiful ever written:

Ex. 1.

This little piece of music contains as much charm as could well be packed into such a small compass. But its most effective point,—bar 4—when it had been recited on

* The substance of a lecture delivered before the Church Music Society on March 20.