Review

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REVIEWS.

Akademische Fest-Ouverture von Johannes Brahms. (Op. 80).

Tragische Ouverture von Johannes Brahms (Op. 81).
Clavierauszug zu vier Händen. [Berlin. Simrock.]

THE first performances abroad of these new works by the greatest of living classical composers has already been noticed in THE MUSICAL TIMES, and we may expect a speedy call to discuss them as given by one or other of our own orchestral societies. When the call arrives, an opportunity will be afforded of doing that which would be out of place while passing a mere pianoforte transcription in review. Brahms is not one of the composers to the form and manner of whose orchestral writing an arrangement for four hands can do even a fair measure of justice. We shall, therefore, make no pretence now of estimating the new overtures, as they will have to be judged when presented under proper conditions. It may not be uninteresting, however, to describe, as far as mere words will allow, some of their more prominent features. The *Fest-Ouverture* begins *Allegro* in C minor, and somewhat belying its name, is introduced by the graver instruments, *sotto voce*. A decided *Fantasia* character appears in the work almost at the outset, due to frequent changes of style, key, and rhythm; the use of arpeggios, and wild leaps from octave to octave. The introductory section is followed by another in which, the key having changed to C major, a broad theme appears, not unsuggestive of a student's song. This leads to the more festal part of the work, the theme being based upon that of the opening section, though the key continues major. Presently an *Animato* in G major is reached, and a lightsome subject is announced fugally, after which a move is made back to the original key, and to the arpeggios. Presently, however, the composer discards once more the lesser third and settles down to an extremely vigorous piece of work, full of spirit and dash, which, in the Coda, reaches the climax of a perfect swirl of rapid scale passages. The overture is one of marked irregularity in point of form, but there are indications, even on these necessarily bald pages, that every section is elaborate and interesting.

The *Tragische Ouverture* opens, *Allegro ma non troppo*, in a way that at once excites attention. Its first chord is the first inversion of D minor; its second, the dominant of D, without the third, while for nine bars the composer coquets with the keys of F and D minor, always refusing its third to the dominant of the latter. Then the C sharp comes, and the movement pursues its decidedly rugged way in a fashion more satisfactory to the ear. The hand of the master is here firm and strong. His passion is deep; yet at the same time tender, and we know not hardly whether we should respond with anger or grief. The preparation for the second subject and the subject itself are altogether beautiful, and so, after the themes have been worked out with abundant vigour, is a lovely, tranquil passage in D major, which seems to speak of peace amid the storm. We are inclined to rank this overture much above its companion. It is a grand work, largely conceived, masterfully wrought, and instinct with feeling. Who will have the honour of first performing it in this country? And why have we need to ask the question?

Six Pièces d'Orgue avec Pédale obligée, par Eugene Gigout, Organiste de l'Eglise St. Augustin.

[Paris: Durand, Schœnewerk et Cie.]

THOUGH there be no evidence of decided genius in these six pieces, they are all more or less interesting and likely to be useful. No. 1 is an Introduction and Fugued Theme in B flat minor, of which the fugal movement will command by far the greater attention. It does not assume to be a fugue proper, and the composer has used his liberty to good purpose in the way of an attractive result. M. Gigout writes contrapuntal music with neatness and fluency. No. 2, "Communion," is an Andantino in A major, quite unpretentious, but distinguished by smoothly flowing melody, and, for the most part, natural, unforced harmony. For church use it has distinct recommendations. No. 3, "Marche Religieuse," a Moderato in E flat, verges

often on the commonplace. Its themes lack character—as, indeed, do most of M. Gigout's subjects, and there is little in their treatment to make amends. We are much more pleased with No. 4, "Marche Funèbre," a Lento in B flat minor. The general style of this piece is dignified and expressive, without being too cold on the one hand, or too sentimental on the other. Organists, who have not a great choice of funeral marches, will be disposed to welcome this increase of a scanty store. No. 5, "Andante Symphonique," in E major, is, perhaps, more French in style than suits English taste; but its cleverness and undoubted interest should be recognised. As much may be said of No. 6, "Grand Chœur Dialogué," *Allegro quasi Maestoso* in G. This decidedly brilliant and showy piece will find favour with organists of sufficient executive skill.

St. John the Evangelist. A Sacred Cantata, or Church Oratorio. The words selected from the Scriptures, by the Rev. J. Powell Metcalfe, M.A. The music composed by Philip Armes, Mus. Doc., Oxon.

[Novello, Ewer and Co.]

THERE have been two great Church uses, belonging to different epochs and coming from seemingly rival sources, yet nevertheless bound together by one purpose—these are the reading of the great Bible of Reformation days, and the earlier Oratorio, both alike aiming at setting forth before the people God's truth and sacred story. The former of these died out before the multiplication of bibles and the increased ability to read them at home; the latter has grown from its infancy, in the simplest possible forms of musical recitation, to the glorious manhood of an "Elijah," a "Mount of Olives," or a "German Requiem," where the voice or voices are intensified by the powerful aid of instruments. But this growth of the Oratorio has had the effect of taking it away from its original use and purpose of intensifying sacred truth and story. If we must give a dreadfully commonplace reason—various instruments need various players, these must needs be paid, and so we get to tickets, and so we get out of church into the concert-room. For many years past, in the earnest desire to put right things in their right places and to their right uses, there has been an ever-increasing effort to bring back Oratorio into church for the edification of the people. There is no doubt that the audiences who now crowd to hear the "Messiah," whenever and wherever it is to be heard, attend in a spirit raised far above the mere concert-going spirit; nor any more doubt is there, that the rapt and solemn attention with which the St. Matthew "Passion" and like works—now, happily, so often heard in our larger churches—are listened to prove that the movement is *right*, so right, in fact, that we cannot stand still where we are; cannot, in fact, leave the benefit of this revival of the ancient use of the Oratorio to such rich congregations and churches as can afford the cost of a band, or—the only alternative if we do anything at all—maul and disfigure the composer's noble thought, so often largely depending upon orchestral aid, by accompanying all by the one organ tone. In fact we have come to this question: Can we secure for our people the benefits of the true Oratorio with the resources now possessed by the larger churches of our land singly or in association? Dr. Armes, in his new church Oratorio "St. John the Evangelist," has answered this with an emphatic affirmative, giving us a work with the feeling of the present and the learning of the past. Being essentially a church Oratorio, the libretto is so arranged that though in the whole it sets forth by its principal incidents the life of St. John—illustrated by his own words—each separate part, The Call, At the Supper, By the Cross, At the Sepulchre, At the Ascension, Witnessing to the Faith, and The Revelation, can be used by itself as an anthem for different seasons of the Christian year.

The music, written throughout with the special purpose of its performance before a congregation, rather than an audience, has none of those "effects" which are expected in the great massive Oratorios originally designed for voices and orchestra. The real strength, therefore, lies in the sympathetic expression of the words, deepened by that artistic skill which may be confidently relied upon in a composer of Dr. Armes's talent and experience in church music. The solos are extremely melodious, and never beyond the powers of the principals of a tolerably well-

trained choir; a great feature in the work being the chorals, the harmonies of which are both musicianlike and appropriate. Many of the choruses—especially “If we walk in the light” (a canon, 4 in 2), and “Hereby we know” (unaccompanied)—contain some masterly writing, the feeling of the text never being sacrificed for undue scholastic display. We are particularly pleased, too, with the Duet for soprano and tenor, “Behold, what manner of love,” and the Quartet, “Blessed are they,” the flowing accompaniment to the latter materially aiding the effect of the voices. The organ part (as may be expected) is remarkably well-written throughout, and although we understand that the work is also scored for an orchestra, it must not be forgotten that the combinations thus attainable formed no portion of the original design.

Practical Harmony: A Manual for the use of Young Students. By W. S. Rockstro. [Robert Cocks and Co.]

MANUALS explaining every branch of music are multiplying so fast in the present day that no student should find a difficulty in obtaining the knowledge necessary for passing an ordinary examination. But it must be remembered that, however musicians may agree upon the use of chords, a very considerable diversity of opinion exists upon their origin; and pupils consequently, when filling up a paper containing a number of questions on the theory of the art, become somewhat nervous as to the particular “system” adhered to by the examiner. When, therefore, we open Mr. Rockstro’s “Practical Harmony” we know perfectly well that we shall meet with the earnest and conscientious thoughts of an accomplished artist; but we also know that these thoughts will be coloured with the opinion of the author, delivered not as opinions, but as facts, by which the student is presumed to build up his musical knowledge. In confirmation of this, Mr. Rockstro tells us in the preface to his book he is “not without hope that beginners, unable to obtain lessons, may, by their own unassisted endeavours, learn from it enough to give them such a fair general idea of the subject as may prove of inestimable use to them in their later studies.” And to show that he desires to help teachers as well as pupils, he says: “For the assistance of any who may make this laudable attempt, we have published a Key to all the Exercises contained in the book, and a series of Questions for Examination; adjuncts which we imagine will be equally acceptable to self-teaching students and tutors of only moderate experience.” There can be little doubt that those “tutors of only moderate experience,” who are compelled to purchase the Key to these Questions in order to teach their pupils how to answer them, can be of no use to any intelligent inquirers into the subject; and we therefore counsel all who do not employ the services of an accredited master to procure the book and work by themselves, assuring them that they will at least find everything logically arranged and clearly explained. To support our assertion, however, that many of the opinions of the author differ from those generally received, we may mention that the chord of the eleventh and the chord of the thirteenth are described as dominant harmonies held over, and resolved upon, a tonic bass. Now, without debating the question whether the figuring given by Mr. Rockstro is the right one, we confidently affirm that when musicians speak of the “chord of the eleventh” and the “chord of the thirteenth,” they mean a fundamental eleventh and thirteenth on the dominant, the resolution being into the tonic harmony. Again, in his chapter “Concerning Retardations” he classes as such those suspensions which resolve upwards. Of course, if it is stated that every suspension must fall to its resolution, some other term must be used to express those which rise; but if a student is made thoroughly to understand that a suspension is a note arrested in its progress, and that, when released, it moves precisely as it would have moved had it not been so arrested, there can be no occasion for subdividing these discords. If we tie a stone to a string and suspend it from the window, when the string is cut the stone falls to the ground; but if we place an air-ball in the same position, as soon as it is released it rises into the air. This is a familiar illustration, but it thoroughly explains the theory of discords of suspension. We have said that the explanations in this book are exceedingly clear; and, although

on some points our opinions may not agree with those of the author, we quite think that, from his own point of view, he has fairly made out his case, and that his “Practical Harmony” deserves a warm welcome. Before closing the volume, however, we cannot refrain from expressing a hope that in the note at the foot of page 37, where the “original” root of a chord (which would seem to imply that there is another root) is spoken of, this prefix should be struck out; and we must also mention (with reference to the author’s observations at page 55) that Handel *has* used the second inversion of the dominant seventh, although we freely admit that he has usually gone out of his way to evade it.

Crotchets and Quaverings. No. 1. By an English Musician. [Stanley Lucas, Weber and Co.]

THE author of this pamphlet tells us that he intends to issue a number every month; but as the one forwarded to us is dated “January, 1881,” and we have received none since, we have no means of ascertaining whether this promise has been kept. Unquestionably the worst part of the “letter,” as the writer terms it, is the title, which would scarcely tempt the public to peruse its contents, and certainly would lead no musician to expect some excellent and ripened thoughts upon the state of the art in England conveyed in terse and forcible language. It is very important, in considering the difference between English and foreign concerts, that we should recollect, as we are told in this little essay, that “the explanation is to be found partly in the fact that the concerts are generally given by a Society, instead of an *entrepreneur*, and still more in the taste of the ordinary public, which in England goes to concerts, and accordingly controls them, while in Germany and France only connoisseurs care for any kind of concert, but the ordinary public still has its musical taste amply satisfied elsewhere, viz., at the theatre.” After mentioning that almost every town maintains a permanent Opera, and at the theatre (which is abroad a municipal institution, where both operas and spoken dramas are given) the services of both instrumental and vocal artists are also required, he truly says that any one who wishes to organise a good concert has the means ready to his hand. Speaking of the proposition of Mr. Villiers Stanford that local orchestras should be formed in this country, he continues thus: “Fancy an English provincial town with a full orchestra resident, and a series of twenty concerts during the winter. What are the players to do on the other 345 days in the year? And how are they to maintain themselves? Will the bassoon and drum players find any teaching to occupy their spare time? In Germany, as I have explained, they would be wanted at the theatre, and on Sundays at the churches; in England they would simply have nothing to do except at occasional concerts, and they would assuredly starve.” We quite agree with our author that the endeavour to “educate” the people by mixing classical music with trashy dances and royalty ballads in the same programme is a mistake, and that is why we have never been able to become eloquent in praise of our English promenade concerts. “Instrumental music, like architecture, is a purely structural art,” it is said, “and depends for its power upon beauty of design; and without some insight into the laws of proportion—without some study of the art—no one will appreciate a Symphony.” This is all undoubtedly true, and we read on until the following passage occurs: “Where then can help be found? In what way is a musician who looks upon the art as something better than a mere trade to do his share in making the English people as celebrated for their music as they are for their poetry, their philosophy, their science, their commerce, and their empire?” Now comes the disappointment: the author has “arrived at conclusions (especially as regards the proper remedy) which will probably very much surprise many musicians.” But the announcement of this remedy, we are told, “must be reserved for another letter.” It is really too bad to propound a riddle and hold over the answer during the author’s pleasure.

Three Pieces for the Pianoforte. Composed by Paul Semler. [Duncan Davison and Co.]

THESE three unpretentious pieces are extremely melodious; and, as light sketches for drawing-room performance, will assuredly find favour with amateur pianists. No. 1,