

William Sterndale Bennett, 1816-1875

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Its rhythmic analysis is shown by the square phrase marks labelled A and B, with the figures 1, 2, 3 to show repetitions and variants of the two contrasted ideas it contains. Roughly speaking it conforms to the same A B A scheme of Mr. Sorabji's Indian fragment; it is more definite because more developed, and it contains no contradiction of established tonality. Yet it requires a somewhat keen ear to recognise these obvious qualities in the harmonic setting given it by its composer, and possibly many people who have heard it in the concert-room more than once may require to be told when they see it set down here that it is the principal tune of Mr. Eugene Goossens's quartet movement 'By the tarn.' The difficulty to the listener is certainly not due to any incapacity on the part of the composer to think in clear melodic terms, but to his complex sense of harmony. His subtlety in this direction wipes clean away the plain harmonic concepts which the tune in its ungarnished form presents to the ordinary hearer. This method is typical of a great mass of modern music which must be distinguished from the post-impressionist category referred to above. I doubt whether Mr. Scott is quite just in complaining of the thematic poverty of modern music as compared with that of a hundred years ago, because in any comparison of that kind one is tempted to place the ordinary modern work against the exceptional masterpiece which has survived because it is exceptional. Mr. Goossens's tune in 'By the tarn' may not be a great tune, but it is a tune which will stand comparison with the inventions of the thousand and one lesser lights who surrounded the throne of Beethoven; the difference being that when they wrote a tune they turned the harmonic limelight straight on to it. The modern creator of a tune disposes his lights more diversely; sometimes, as in this instance, letting the tune fall among dark shadows.

A study of modern music—for example, the later pianoforte sonatas of Scriabin—often shows one that the tune, or at any rate the thematic development, is consistent and that appreciation would be easy and one's power of remembering the details far greater if only one could get on familiar terms with the harmonic idiom. The doctrine of the composers is that we, the humble listeners, should make it our business to grow up to whatever harmonic idiom they in their wisdom may choose to adopt, but I doubt whether that is sound doctrine. For there is fairly strong evidence that a great many of them are not themselves on terms of easy familiarity with their own harmonic idioms. One has only to examine the harmony with which British composers endow the folk-songs they frequently quote to realise that many of them are exceedingly uncertain as to the best points on which to throw their lights and shades of harmony, and the haphazardness so apparent when they are dealing with borrowed

material must be equally present, though less demonstrable by the outsider, when they are disposing their own thematic material harmonically.

All this does not contradict Mr. Scott's main contention that we, the listeners, want more tune than we get in modern music, and that if we do not get more many of us will be liable to lose our interest in the modern developments of the art, but I do not believe in the theory of 'deliberate abstention' except in the comparatively small class of extremists who have eschewed tonality. The majority, I am convinced, are writing the best tunes they can, hampered by their effort to acquire a larger sense of tonality, which they only imperfectly understand and which the most part of their hearers do not understand at all. The great tunes of music at all periods only arrive when principles of tonality are not matters of speculation but are regarded as axiomatic. To reach them it is necessary to admit limitations, and that is what modern music in its present state of transition is unable to do.

WILLIAM STERNDALE BENNETT, 1816-1875.
BY LOUIS N. PARKER.

[We are glad to be able to print* the following eloquent appreciation of W. Sterndale Bennett by Mr. L. N. Parker, whose memories of his Academy days are not dimmed by his absorption in dramatic activities. Mr. Parker writes on the MAN and his attractive personality. His tribute should be read in connection with the article on Bennett's music by Mr. Frederick Corder that appeared in our May issue.—ED., M.T.]

I first met Sir Sterndale Bennett—if a worm can be said to meet an eagle—in the spring of 1870. I was a crude hobbledehoy, fresh from a Norfolk village, where I had acquired great fame by singing 'Not for Joe' at Penny Readings, and playing the organ (omitting the pedals, which I considered an impertinent superfluity) in the village church. A prospectus of the R.A.M. happened to be lying about in our lodgings in Margaret Street, and my father picked it up one morning and said casually, 'Why not study music?' I knew of no reason. So we made for the Academy, there and then. I don't think the Institution can have been in a very sound financial position; I think it must have been rather sharply on the look-out for new alumni. Anyhow, I was shown into the committee-room, and into the presence of two or three solemn Professors. I only saw one of them. It was one of Sir Sterndale's peculiarities, that if he were in a room you could see no one else. What I saw was a grave, kind face, looking at me out of searching eyes, which at first gave me an impression of severity; but presently I found they were much more complicated than that. The severity was modified by a latent humour in which lurked a touch of sarcasm: that again was modified and almost obliterated by kindness and sympathy; but behind all these was an indefinable expression as of some never-ceasing pain. This, I think, comes out very clearly in the Millais portrait.† I was asked to read a page of a Mozart sonata at sight. I rattled it off—heaven only knows with what sort of fingering!—and a moment later I was an accepted pupil of the Royal Academy.

For a long time Sir Sterndale remained, as far as I was concerned, an awe-inspiring mystery; the student in his first years did not in my time come into close contact with the Principal, or at least, he was not conscious that the Principal knew of his existence.

* By the kindness of Mr. Parker and the Editor of the 'Royal Academy Club Magazine.'

† Given as a Supplement with our May number.

I know better now. I know that Sir Sterndale was really in close touch with every student, watched him with affectionate solicitude, and was aware of his progress and of his prospects. But, although one only came into personal contact with him on rare occasions, he inspired many things beside awe. His personality was in itself an inspiration. In a manner I cannot explain he aroused the better kind of ambition, a determination to try to become, however remotely, like him; to be gentle, to be self-respecting, to get rid of the blatancy of youth. He was present at most of the orchestral and choral rehearsals, and he always sat in one particular seat at all the concerts. For a long time that was all I saw of him. But on these occasions, as on the occasion when I first stepped into his presence, I saw nothing else; and I believe my experience was that of many students of my time. One sat with one's eyes fixed on him; one could not help oneself. The magnetism of the man was quite extraordinary. Sometimes he was accompanied at the concerts by musicians whose names were household words throughout the world: Gounod, von Bülow, Ferdinand Hiller, Madame Schumann. That made no difference. They aroused a passing interest and one had a good look at them; but in a moment one was again absorbed in the contemplation of that grave, kind, humorous, suffering face. In the natural order of things the time came when I had to play at the rehearsals, or at a concert. I can assert that for me there was only one person in the audience: Sterndale Bennett. What would he think? What would he say? Would he say *anything*? If so, should I still be alive after he had said it? And, curiously enough, this devouring anxiety to win his good opinion extended not only to one's performances, but to one's personal appearance. His eyes seemed to scrutinise one's entire personality; so that one was not only anxious about that horrible passage on page 4, but as to whether one's cuffs were frayed, or one's tie sat straight.

By and by, in what turned out to be the last year of my academic life, I got into his class for composition. Ask me not how. My intimate friends, Eaton Fanning, Thomas Wingham, Arthur Jackson, Parry* and others were in it, and I refused to stay outside. There it was, perhaps, that I first fully realised the greatness of the man, and discovered what I had not previously known: his amazing, his all-pervading, all-conquering charm; the charm of his look, of his delicate, low voice, the charm of his eloquent hand, of every movement of his body. And now the suggestion of pain noticeable about his eyes was partly explained. It was, I think, the outward symptom of an exquisite, an almost excessive sensitiveness. There was never a more manly gentleman; but, perhaps for that reason, his nature contained a strong dash of what we call the feminine. This must on no account be confused with effeminacy. The quality is more simply expressed by saying that he was the embodiment of music. And he had a dash of elusive elfishness. But with all this there was ever present an unconscious dignity which surrounded him like an invisible, impalpable halo. In the wildest spirits of early youth it would never have occurred to the roughest customer among us—and there were one or two pretty rough customers!—to take anything approaching a liberty with Sir Sterndale. One felt that here was truly a great man, an exceptional man; a being moulded of altogether different clay; a spirit, clothed, to be sure, in the flesh, but shining and glowing through the flesh. When—as he often

did—he sat at the pianoforte, and from the storehouse of a phenomenal memory poured out passage after passage from the older masters, he became transfigured—a flame! One sat hushed, rapt, lifted into a new world, hoping, if one was conscious of anything besides the music, that the dream would never be shattered, that the music would never end.

The dream is shattered—the music has come to an end. I am an old man, and I have gone through the rough-and-tumble of life; but as I sit here and spin these inadequate words in honour of my revered and beloved master, I see again the old committee-room in the shabby old building—the green-baize-covered table, the eager young faces surrounding it, and the slender figure sitting at the head. I see the kind, ironic eyes fixed on one or the other; I hear the musical, sympathetic voice, praising, advising, sometimes admonishing with gentle sarcasm; and I am conscious that of all the influences which have moulded my own character in the forty-six years which have passed since I first crossed the threshold of the Academy, Sterndale Bennett's was the most powerful, and remains the most permanent—not in music only, but in every phase of my life.

I am grateful for the opportunity of laying this humble sprig of rosemary at the feet of one whose remembrance is a fragrant and living treasure.

GERMANY: HER MUSIC.

BY COLIN MCALPIN.

I.

Ruskin held that war was an indirect benefit to art, and, in reflex fashion, subserved the interests of beauty. Needless to say, it is an entire fallacy. Such a dictum ultimates in an absurdity; for are we to believe that with the incoming of the reign of peace, are we to suppose that with the advent of a universal brotherhood, poetry will be stricken dumb, music be silenced for ever, and painting be lost in the shadows of a sightless past? It is incredible, impossible, and unspeakably false. War is not the friend of art. It shatters the sacred fane, quenches the fire of poesy, and disturbs the harmony of music; and, despite the fact that to the shrill clarion-cries and dull thudding of the drums a million men will march to mutual slaughter, music in its inmost nature is supremely anti-bellifera. Indeed, it is tacitly assumed by Nietzsche, the arch-enemy of Christianity, that what we call classical music, rather than thrill the warrior-soul to the manner born, tends to enervate the spirit and enfeeble the arm of strife.

II.

But what of Germany? Is not one of her weightiest contributions to genuine culture just her indisputably massive music? What then? Why has she not lent a willing ear to the 'sweet reasonableness' of her humanising art? Why has she denied herself the healing ministry of her composers? Why has she heeded the harsh dissonance of an aggressive and inharmonious Prussianism? The true Germany had already sweetly subdued nations other than her own with her many-voiced tone-poets.

For we assume that music is profoundly capable of tempering the mind of man to a degree greater than is perhaps generally believed. And was not that enough for Germany? Could she not have rested content with so sweet a conquest? Truly the Prussian absorption of Germany has meant nothing less than her spiritual defeat. Yet Wagner wrought mightily against all social injustice, and preached in no

* Only Dr. Fanning (born 1850) is still with us. Arthur Herbert Jackson died in 1887, aged twenty-nine; Thomas Wingham died in 1893, aged forty-seven; and Haydn Parry died in 1894, aged thirty.