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Battle, a Cycle of Ten Songs by P. Napier Miles; Wilfrid Gibson
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the Pièces where he shows sentiment,—such as ‘Tendres reproches,’—giving us full measure of his very personal outlook, and of a sensibility which the so long existing habit of playing the works of the French clavecinists with coldness and exactitude made it impossible to discern.

Whilst the chapters on Lully, Rameau, Grétry, and Méhul are excellent in style and very complete for a work of this kind, the chapter on the Clavecin composers, on the contrary, is too brief and too summary in character. This is the more regrettable, as in forming French musical taste and in the establishment of the French æsthetic viewpoint, the Clavecinists have played a considerable part: even to-day their works seem to have suffered less from the hand of time than those for the theatre of the same period. However, what Mrs. Hargrave says of Couperin is very good. It is with more justice that she writes, for example, the following: ‘In “Les Folies françaises ou les Dominos” there are distinct foreshadowings of Schumann’s “Carneval” and “Papillons,” psychological characterization and programme-music’ (p. 101).

Since this book seemed to aim at depicting fairly completely a great epoch in French music over a period of almost exactly two centuries, one is tempted to ask why the author has not, in a felicitous manner, completed her chapters both on Rameau and on Grétry by a study which would have been profitable and interesting to English students of music,—a study of French opéra-comique at the end of the 18th century? And the transition would be made quite naturally from Grétry to Boieldieu, to whom Mrs. Hargrave quite rightly renders justice. It seems unfair to exclude from a work of this nature musicians like Monsigny and Dalayrac, for example, who in a style more agreeable and less ambitious than that of either Rameau or Méhul have nevertheless contributed with much artistry, intelligence and subtlety, and sound musicianship, to the keeping alive of the true French spirit in music for the stage. Boieldieu was, in a word, only the continuator of their work, and it is to be regretted that a few pages of this book were not dedicated to the memory of these charming composers.

After making these reservations on the general plan and the detail of the book, it is none the less true that several of its parts contain much sound criticism, and that the relevant authorities are ranged consecutively and clearly.

There are works which do not carry out the ambitious aims conceived for them, revealing on either hand all that separates the critical sense and the presumption of their authors; but in this case our author seems rather to lack both confidence in herself and a justifiable ambition. If it is true that this book corresponds exactly to the object which its writer proposed to herself: ‘to supply English readers with concise biographies of French musicians from Lully to the beginning of the 19th century, reflecting in some measure the conditions and influences of the times in which they lived and worked,’ then the taste and the care which is lavished on the work makes one regret that Mrs. Hargrave has not, rising above her subject, attempted to give more co-ordination to her biographies, and instead of painting only a few portraits had considered herself capable of painting the true picture of French music in its essential lines during these two centuries (1632-1834), which in reality constitute a momentous epoch in the history of French art.

With much propriety she has framed between these two dates the earlier French musicians; they mark with exactitude the entrance of music on the French stage, the liberation, if one can thus express it, of profane music, its influence and its success in drawing-rooms and at the theatre. After this period Berlioz was to appear and to spread confusion; but was also destined to enlarge the French musical outlook, give renewed power to the orchestra, open all doors to the symphony, and thus prepare the medium which was to allow modern French musicianship to express with inspiration and diversity its sense of the picturesque and the distinctive quality of its emotions.

One would have been glad had the author, with less modesty, risked binding together the figures of the design, and searched profounder depths of criticism. We must, however, hope that the work will give her more assurance. At all events it fills a place which up to this time stood empty in English musical research with regard to French music, and will no doubt be read with interest and profit.

SONGS.

Songs of the British Folk. Collected and edited by W. H. Gill (Curwen).

This is a book of twenty-seven lyrics, with an introduction by Mr. John Graham indicating that Mr. Gill has gathered hundreds of traditional songs and that the present volume is part of the result. Judged by this the little book is rather disappointing, as so much of its contents, in more or less similar versions, have already been published. ‘Twankydllo,’ ‘My Bonny Boy,’ ‘I must live all alone,’ ‘Cupid the pretty Ploughboy,’ ‘Rosebuds in June,’ ‘Richard of Taunton Dean,’ and some others given by Mr. Gill may be compared with copies in ‘English Country Songs,’ ‘English Traditional Songs and Carols’ (Miss Broadwood), ‘Sussex Songs,’ and Dr. Barrett’s ‘English Folk-Songs.’ ‘Some love to roam o’er the deep sea foam’ is not a folk-song. Its words are by Charles Mackay and the air by Henry Russell. Also ‘Miss Myrtle is going to be married’ is (words and music) by Lady Dufferin, when she was Mrs. Price Blackwood. ‘Nobody’s coming to marry me’ is common in old song-books and early music sheets, while ‘My rattling mare and I,’ was a popular street song in the ‘sixties.

Battle, a cycle of ten songs by P. Napier Miles (Sydney Acott & Co., Oxford), is a vivid setting of some striking poems by Wilfrid Gibson. Like so much modern music, the cycle is a blend of impressionism and folk-song idiom, the composer showing a deft touch, and generally obtaining his effects by simple, almost sketchy, means. There is nothing of the ordinary soldier song in the words. They deal with the grisly side of war in poignant manner,—as in ‘Deaf,’ ‘In the ambulance,’ and ‘The bayonet.’ In ‘Sport’ and ‘Mangel wurzels’ a roughly-humorous note is struck. Best of all, however, is the imaginative power behind such songs as ‘Comrades,’ ‘Hill-born,’ and ‘Before Action.’ The songs are dated March-April, 1916, and both words and music are evidently the outcome of hard experience.

In violent contrast to the simple, almost painful, directness of ‘Battle’ is Mr. John Ireland’s *Marigold*, an ‘Impression’ for voice and pianoforte (Winthrop Rogers). The ‘Impression’ consists of settings of two poems by D. G. Rossetti, and one by Ernest Dowson (after Verlaine). These are very exotic, very difficult to sing and play, and even the words (especially of No. 2, ‘Penumbra’) convey little save to a very attentive hearer. Of the clever and elusive music, we prefer that to No. 3 (‘Spleen’), in which the weary bitterness of the words is faithfully reflected. But we must confess that the work as a whole strikes us as being somewhat unwholesome.

PIANOFORTE MUSIC.

From Messrs. Winthrop Rogers we have received a parcel of pianoforte music covering a very wide range. On the easy side are Alec Rowley’s ‘Twelve Little Fantasy Studies,’ an ‘Album of second year pieces,’ ‘Quatre Pièces Mélodiques’ by Charles Vincent (who appears to have overlooked the suitability of the English language for the use of plain English folk), a ‘Love Song’ by Rudolf Friml, a Rhapsody by John Ireland, and Frank Bridge’s arrangement of ‘Sally in our Alley’ and ‘Cherry Ripe’ for pianoforte duet. Of these only the Rhapsody and duet claim more than mere mention, and these deserve more extended notice than we have space for. Mr. Ireland’s ‘Rhapsody’ is a big work, full of rugged strength. Of definite melody it has little, and that little is abrupt and almost uncouth. But there is ample interest in other directions, such as development, harmonic and rhythmical variety, subtly conceived keyboard effects, masterly writing and lay-out generally, with great emotional power at the back of it all. This strong and original piece of work should enhance Mr. Ireland’s growing reputation. For Mr. Frank Bridge’s duet we have also nothing but praise. The two delightful old tunes are very freely treated (‘arranged’ is too modest a term), and some of the harmony is certainly startling. But the chief constituents are delicately-woven counterpoint, alternating touches of pretty sentiment and freakish humour, and neatly-finished workmanship, the combination resulting in two pieces of most engaging quality. The settings are also published for string quartet or string orchestra.