

First Performances. III. Spohr's "Last Judgment."

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excess when, in saying the words "a toi tout mon—amour!" one introduces a breathing point between *mon* and *amour*, which nothing can justify! But he has had the pleasure of holding out his voice on a short syllable as long as his breath would last, and that for the sake of evoking a ridiculous and conventional outburst of applause. Such license is good for nothing else but to distort the musical thought and revolt common sense.

V. *La Pronunciation*.—The two principal things to be observed in pronunciation are—first, that it should be so clear, neat, distinct, and exact that no uncertainty shall be felt by the ear as to the word pronounced; and secondly, it should be expressive—that is to say, it should depict to the mind the sentiment enunciated by the word itself.

So far as regards clearness, neatness, and exactness, pronunciation is more frequently spoken of as *articulation*. It is the aim of articulation to faithfully reproduce the *external* form of speech. All else belongs to the *rôle* of *pronunciation*. By means of pronunciation one is able to express exactly the idea, sentiment, and passion which each word suggests. In short, articulation has for its domain the perfected or material form; pronunciation has for its domain the intellectual form, or that in process of formation. Articulation gives it clearness; pronunciation gives eloquence. In default of culture a right instinct may make all these distinctions perceptible. But one cannot over-estimate the value and interest which clear articulation and expressive pronunciation give to singing. They are of such importance, they exert such power over the auditor, that they are able, by dint of expression, to cast into the shade the possession of an inadequate or mediocre voice; while their absence leaves him insensible to the charm of the most beautiful voice in the world.

VI. *Le Chef d'orchestre*.—The conductor is the central point of a musical performance. The importance and responsibility of such an undertaking rests with him alone. It is for him to insist upon that uniformity of movement without which unanimity is impossible. This is evident to the eye, and needs no demonstration. It is above all things necessary that he should make his authority felt: his *bâton* is the word of command. But without unanimity, how often does not this word of command subside into slavery! What condescension to the caprices of singers! What fatal complicities to the interests of art and the true value of musical works does it not beget!

It is by no means necessary that the conductor's rule should be reduced to an intractable and implacable mechanical rigidity. This would result in bringing about an absurd triumph of the letter over the spirit. The conductor who, from one end of a musical composition to the other, comports himself as an inflexible metronome falls into an excess which is just as insupportable as the very opposite to this would be.

The great art of the conductor is that power which one might call *suggestion*, and which procures from the singer an *unconscious* obedience by making him believe that he requires just that which is required of him. In short, this is to coax the singer instead of to coerce him. Authority rests not in the will, but in the intelligence. This will not be disputed; it is self-evident. It is then the conductor's duty to determine for himself, and to make it plain to others to what extent he will admit concessions in the matter of *tempo* without altering its sentiment. It is for him to determine the difference which exists between suppleness and rigidity, and without introducing a sudden shock to compensate for an occasional retardation by insensibly recurring to the normal and orderly prescribed pace.

Another essential quality in a conductor is that he should not mistake hurry for warmth, at the risk of sacrificing the rhythmical power of declamation and the amplitude of sonority. It is too commonly supposed that a *crescendo* should be hurried, and that a *diminuendo* should be retarded. The very reverse of this is generally correct. A conductor's whole intelligence should be manifested by the *bâton* or bow which he holds in his hand. His whole person should animate those who have to obey him.

His attitude, his physiognomy, his look should prepare his singers for that which is to be demanded of them; his expression should be a prefiguration of his action and give a right direction to the intelligence of his executants.

With these ends in view it is by no means necessary to comport oneself as a fanatic. True intelligence is marked by tranquillity, as when the ancient poet wished to express the omnipotence of Jupiter he represented him as making the whole of Olympus tremble at a nod of his head. In fine, the conductor is the ambassador of the composer's thought; he is responsible for imparting it to his artists and the public, and *ought to be* its living expression, its faithful mirror, and infallible depository.

From the above it will be seen that it has been more our aim to furnish an epitome of M. Gounod's views on musical art than to criticise them. Agreeing in the main with what he has here advanced, one or two questions naturally suggest themselves. Admitting the beauty and the purity of Mozart's instrumentation, and that much is to be learnt from studying his scores, has he done right in recommending it, *at this date*, as a model for present-day composers? In doing this he has probably been influenced by the feeling that some of his younger compatriots have gone too far in the way of heaping up instrument upon instrument, and in so doing have mistaken mere noise for sonority. That he himself has practised what he now preaches cannot be said, for his own instrumentation, with its wonderful warmth and high colouring, is surely far more nearly akin to the school of Berlioz than to that of Mozart.

## FIRST PERFORMANCES.

### III.—SPOHR'S "LAST JUDGMENT."

By F. G. EDWARDS.

SPOHR has left us the record of his life penned by his own hand. His "Autobiography" (of which an English translation has been issued) is a naïvely written book, amusing and full of interest. For our present purpose it is invaluable in giving a detailed account of the first performance of his great oratorio, a record which it is probably impossible to find elsewhere. With the preliminary that Spohr was forty-one years old at the time of writing, and that he was Hofkapellmeister to the Elector of Hesse-Cassel, residing at Cassel, we will let him relate the story of this "first performance" in his own words:—

"In the same year [1825] Councillor Rochlitz, editor of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, offered me the text of an oratorio, the 'Last Judgment,' to set to music, which I received with great pleasure, as my previous attempt in that style of art—'Das jüngste Gericht,'\* the oratorio performed at Erfurt—by no means pleased me any longer, and therefore

\* "Das jüngste Gericht" (literally, "The Last Judgment"), Spohr's early oratorio, must not be confounded with "Die letzten Dinge" (literally, "The Last Days"), but known in England as "The Last Judgment," which is the subject of the present article. "Das jüngste Gericht" was written in 1812, and does not seem ever to have been published. See Spohr's "Autobiography" (English version), i., 157.

I had not once been disposed to perform a single number of it at the meetings of our Society. I now began with new studies in counterpoint and in the ecclesiastical style, and set zealously to work on the composition, in which I followed the suggestions of the librettist, which he had forwarded to me with the text, in respect to its treatment, and which I not only strictly adhered to but found of assistance to me. The first part of the oratorio was thus soon ready, and as early as the end of November I could give it with the members of our choral society, at a concert on behalf of the sufferers from the fire that had occurred shortly before at Seesen, although with pianoforte accompaniment only. On that occasion I observed with great pleasure that it made a deep impression upon the performers as well as upon the audience, and this observation was of the more importance to me, as it convinced me that I had found the proper style for this kind of work. I had in particular striven to be very simple, religious, and true in expression, and carefully to avoid all artistic trickery, all bombast, and everything of difficult execution. With increased zest I now proceeded to compose the second part, so that the whole work was finished by the following Good Friday (1826), and then first performed in the Lutheran Church.

"A letter of March 26,\* 1826, speaks of it in the following manner: 'Yesterday was a great festival-day for the lovers of music here, for never before had so solemn a performance as my oratorio taken place in Cassel. It was in the evening, and the church was lighted up. My son-in-law, Wolff, who had been long in Rome, proposed to illuminate the church as at Rome on Good Friday, with lights disposed overhead in the form of a cross, and he carried out his idea. A cross, fourteen feet long, covered with silver-foil, and hung with six hundred glass lamps, was suspended overhead in the middle of the church, and so bright a light was diffused that one could everywhere clearly read the text-books. The musicians and singers, nearly two hundred in number, were placed in the upper gallery of the church, arranged in rows one above the other, and for the most part unseen by the audience, which, numbering nearly 2,000 persons, observed a solemn stillness. My two daughters, Messrs. Wild, Albert, and Föppel, together with an amateur, sang the solos, and the performance was faultless. Never did I before experience such satisfaction from the performance of one of my greater works. I had always had to lament either an imperfect execution, an unsuccessful effect, or something else. This time it was quite different. The work also is simple and easy, and yet not less comprehensive in its contents than the others.'

"The visibly deep impression that the Oratorio made upon the public may also have been still further assisted by the solemn grandeur of the illuminated cross, which fully harmonised with the religious sentiment suggested by the day. The Elector only was not pleased with the selection of the Lutheran church and its 'Catholic illumination,' as he called the cross, and he ordered that the orchestra should in future give their Good Friday concerts in the court and garrison church, lit up with chandeliers to be furnished from the Electoral household lighting department.

"Shortly afterwards I received an invitation from my London friend, Ferdinand Ries, who had returned to Germany, and who was then living in the neighbourhood of Godesberg on the Rhine, to personally direct my new Oratorio at the Rhenish Musical Festival at Düsseldorf, the arrangements for which

had been confided to him. Although the Festival was held at Whitsuntide, and therefore at a time when our vacation at the theatre had not begun, and I had to get special permission to attend, I, nevertheless, succeeded in obtaining leave of absence immediately, as the Elector felt himself flattered when his musical director was invited to important musical performances and thereby acquired honour and fame.

"Favoured by the finest weather, we set out on our journey on May 9, 1826 . . . and I never recollect having made a more agreeable journey. On the third day we were met three miles from Düsseldorf by the Festival Committee and the family of the State-Councillor von Sybel, at whose house my family and I were to stay, and scarcely had we arrived in Düsseldorf than we were welcomed by the choral society with a serenade.

"At the first general rehearsal, which was held on the following morning, I had the satisfaction of finding that my oratorio had been carefully and correctly studied by the different societies, and was sung with an enthusiastic feeling for the work. I did not feel so satisfied in the orchestra, which had been gathered together from different places and in which amateurs assisted. . . . It was therefore a difficult matter to get all the instruments to the same pitch, and it could only be effected by great patience and frequent repetitions. . . . On the following day two more rehearsals of the performances for the first and second days of Whitsuntide (May 14 and 15, 1826), which then, after such careful rehearsals, passed off without a fault. My oratorio was received with such enthusiasm by those who played and by the audience, that on the evening of the very first day [*i.e.*, Whitsunday] the prolongation of the Festival was mooted in order to repeat the 'Last Judgment' for the benefit of the Greeks. This was publicly announced on the second day of the performances, and the majority of the strangers present stayed in order to be present at its repetition. Thus my work had the honour conferred upon it of a second performance, of which I might well be proud, as since then, so far as I know, such a thing has never happened to any work given at the Rhenish Musical Festivals. There appeared several very favourable notices of my oratorio in the musical papers, and I hastened to publish selections of it for the pianoforte. But the edition I issued was soon sold off, and a second was published afterwards by Simrock, of Bonn, who also brought out the vocal parts, by which the performances of the work in almost all the towns of Germany, Holland, and Switzerland were very much facilitated. I could, therefore, be very content with the reception and propagation of this oratorio, and frequently as it was performed and spoken of, no voice was ever heard raised in condemnation of it."

The foregoing extract is quite characteristic of the style of Spohr's "Autobiography." Spohr always sees himself through Spohric spectacles, and he seldom fails to encircle his artistic achievements with the halo of perfection. Bearing this in mind, it may be desirable to quote a more disinterested criticism of the Düsseldorf performance as furnished in the columns of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* of July 5, 1826:—

"The 'Last Judgment' was given, and greatly delighted the audience by its wealth of ideas, depth of expression, and artistically written accompaniment. In comparison with his previous works, Herr Spohr has developed in this composition an even greater tenderness and depth of feeling; humility, reverence, and piety breathe through this music, which has so beneficial an effect upon the hearer that no other work of modern times can be compared with it. . . . The work was most satisfactorily performed. Vigour

\* Spohr has evidently mis-dated his letter; it should doubtless be "March 25," as "March 26" was Easter Sunday in 1826.

and certainty in the choruses, precision in the instrumental passages, and exact agreement in their connection. The solo parts, indeed, left much to be desired. But we rejoice that so much has been accomplished, and that a choir of nearly 300 singers and players assembled for the Whitsuntide Festival on the Lower Rhine."

The first performance of Spohr's "Last Judgment" in England took place on Friday morning, September 24, 1830, at St. Andrew's Hall, Norwich, the occasion of the Norwich Musical Festival. The introduction of the work was due to Edward Taylor (1784-1863), a native of Norwich, and Gresham Professor of Music, 1837-1863. Taylor, having received a copy of the pianoforte score from Germany, was struck with its manifold beauties, and he wrote to Spohr for the loan of the full score, then in MS. Spohr readily complied with this request, at the same time stating that he considered the "Last Judgment" his best work. Taylor not only "bestowed many weeks in translating and adapting this oratorio," but published the first English edition of the work (folio) at "3, Regent Square, London. Price £1 5s."

Sir George Smart was the Conductor at the Norwich Festival, and thus had the honour of presenting the "Last Judgment"—as he did Mendelssohn's "St. Paul," six years later—to an English audience. The solo singers were Madame Stockhausen and Mrs. Wm. Knyvett (trebles), Mr. Terrail (counter-tenor), Mr. Braham and Mr. Vaughan (tenors), and Mr. (afterwards Professor) Edward Taylor (bass). The band consisted of 121 performers (one of the serpent players being a Mr. MacCunn), and the chorus numbered 234 singers. The organ does not seem to have been used. Although the attendance was the largest at the Festival, yet the audience numbered 426 less than on the corresponding morning of the previous Festival in 1827, when selections from Handel were given.

The following criticism of the new work and its performance, from the *Norwich Mercury*, of October 2, 1830, will show the style of provincial newspaper criticism sixty years ago: "the 'Last Judgment' was first produced by the composer at Cassel in 1837 (*sic*), at a sacred concert which he gave in the Lutheran Church for the benefit of different charitable institutions. It is a splendid work, and Mr. Taylor has conferred a great benefit on the musical world by his excellent adaptation of it to English words. Spohr, however, although he ranks among the first living composers, is not, strictly speaking, a vocal writer. He is so accustomed to the conquest of difficulties as an instrumentalist, and his ear has evidently become so habituated to the abstruse harmonies permitted in instrumental compositions, that he cannot divest himself of his predilections when writing for an organ less calculated to do his bidding. The general character of the 'Last Judgment,' therefore, is chromatic, and almost inharmonious; and a first inspection of the score is sufficient to alarm the susceptibility of a delicate taste by the dangers that beset the singer in the shape of abrupt transitions, harsh modulation, and difficult accent, whilst the keys chosen by the composer are no less appalling to the orchestra. Such a work, however, can only be appreciated when heard, and on the present occasion it was carried through with wonderful precision and excellence." The critic further gives his opinion that "Blessing, glory," is like "The many rend the skies" in Handel's "Alexander's Feast" (!), and that "Forsake me not" "is full of pathos, and we know one female professor who never sings it without tears."

The musical critic of the *Spectator*—no less a person

than Edward Taylor himself—says, in the issue of September 25, 1830: "The *mind* of every singer must be exercised more than the organs of his throat . . . It [the oratorio] does not contain a single song . . . The performance of the oratorio was most extraordinary. Difficult and novel as was the music, it was sung and played throughout with a degree of precision that left not a single weak point." A few numbers of the work were omitted, amongst them the symphony to the second part; but at the following Festival, in 1833, the entire oratorio was performed. The "Last Judgment" appears to have been given only once at the Norwich Festival since 1833—viz., in the year 1860.

In conclusion, it is interesting to notice that Spohr's "Last Judgment" was first given (in its entirety) in a church—the true home of the oratorio, as nowhere else can the surroundings more fitly harmonise with the solemn character of Spohr's masterpiece. The authorities of St. Paul's Cathedral—doubtless on the initiative of Sir John Stainer—felt the force of this appropriateness in instituting, in 1877, an annual performance of the work during Advent. Whether Spohr's contemplative oratorio will in future be less frequently heard in the concert-room remains to be proved. It is essentially a *church* oratorio, and, as such, will long continue to hold a high place amongst the beauties of devotional music. Moreover, is it not immortalised in the touchingly beautiful quartet, "Blest are the departed"?

THE letter of Lord Dysart to the *Times* of the 13th ult. calls for a few words of comment. Lord Dysart, who is a devoted adherent of the Wagnerian cult, and who has been, since their foundation, a constant patron of the Richter Concerts, utters a strong protest against what he considers to be the unfair preference manifested by the directors of these Concerts of late seasons for English as opposed to German singers. His contention is that the Richter Concerts are to all intents and purposes German Concerts, and that therefore German artists should be preferred at them; and he asserts that in Wagnerian circles strong dissatisfaction is felt at the way in which inferior native talent is encouraged by Dr. Richter. As we have always protested in the strongest terms in these columns against the boycotting of foreigners as advocated by Mr. Crowest and latterly by Mr. Rowbotham, we cannot be accused of approaching the subject in a spirit of insular prejudice. Lord Dysart's attitude is the very Antipodes of that adopted by these gentlemen, and it illustrates the truth of the maxim, *Les extrêmes se touchent*. The Richter Concerts are the concern of Dr. Richter, a German, and the nationality of the performers engaged by him, so long as they are efficient, will never exercise the susceptibilities of the artistic public, on whose support his enterprise primarily rests. Lord Dysart's protest is, we think, very fairly answered by the following remarks, which we extract from the *Globe* of the 15th ult.: "It would be much more satisfactory if, instead of indulging in this vague and general disparagement of native talent, Lord Dysart would kindly mention the names of the German singers resident in London, and available for the purpose, whose claims have been disregarded by Dr. Richter. And then let us hear what concert tenor is there who sings better than Mr. Lloyd, what baritone better than Mr. Santley. A glance at the composition of Dr. Richter's band will show that he is by no means indisposed to recognise the claims of his compatriots. The leader, and upwards of thirty performers bear foreign, and in almost every case unmistakably German patronymics. But the best and most conclusive answer to Lord