

The Great Musical Reformers. I. Hucbald de St. Amand

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I abhor. If in his latter days he should take to the romantic and write melancholy music, or to the classical and give us fugues—and I should not be surprised if he did—Berlioz can compose a new symphony on him, ‘*De la Vie d’un Artiste*,’ which I am sure will be better than the first.” Poor Herz! It seems strange that Mendelssohn should devote so many words to a musician who at the present time is not only dead, but altogether extinct. Yet Herz was a man of mark fifty-four years ago. So one generation sits in judgment on the idols of its predecessor, and condemns them to be broken up like old ships. Mendelssohn did but anticipate the verdict.

Referring to the failure of the “*Melusina*” Overture, Mrs. Moscheles tried to cheer up the composer. He answered her thus: “You say, too, I am not to care for public and critics, and that is just as bad. Am I not by trade an anti-public-caring musician, and an anti-critic-caring one into the bargain? What is Hecuba to me, and what the press (I mean the press that depresses)? And if, this very day, I had an idea for an Overture to Lord Eldon, in the form of a canon *alla rovescia*, or of a double fugue with a *cantus firmus*, write it I would, although I knew it could never become popular; how much more the lovely *Melusina*—a very different subject! Only it certainly would be annoying if one never had a chance of hearing one’s things performed; but as you say that is not to be feared, let us wish the public and critics long life and happiness—and me too—and let me live to go to England next year.” Evidently, from this genial extract, the little soreness about the “*Melusina*” had passed.

(To be continued.)

THE GREAT MUSICAL REFORMERS

By W. S. ROCKSTRO.

I.—HUCBALD DE ST. AMAND.

THE difficulty of tracing to their origin even the simplest forms of technical expedient with which, for centuries past, whole generations of musicians have been made familiar in the nursery, is so great, that it may well be doubted whether the most careful historian or the most learned antiquary has ever, in so much as one single instance, succeeded in satisfactorily overcoming it. Up to a certain point the task is by no means a laborious one. Abundant written evidence, of unimpeachable authority, may be brought forward to prove that a certain well-known device was in common use at a certain definite period; that, in an earlier century, its employment was far less general; while, in a still earlier one, examples of its occurrence are so rare as to render the extremest caution necessary in dealing with them. But at this point further elucidation of the subject becomes so difficult that by no amount of research, however diligent or however comprehensive, are we able to arrive at anything more satisfactory than a purely negative conclusion. Who invented the device? No one can tell. We have absolutely no means of ascertaining who first used so simple a sign as the *guidon*, or “direct,” placed at the end of a stave to indicate the note with which the next stave begins. Go back as far as we may, we can never feel sure that a record may not some day be found of earlier date than the MS. on which we based our conclusion. And, so long as the history of art continues to engage our attention, the difficulty will be ever present with us.

This state of uncertainty has, not unnaturally, given rise to a school of criticism, the distinguishing characteristic of which is universal distrust; an everpresent and unconquerable element of suspicion;

suspicion, often justifiable, and not unfrequently justified by facts; but, none the less, often unreasonable and sometimes even unreasoning. It is, too often, only necessary to bring forward what seems to be a fairly conclusive proof that a certain mediæval student invented a certain symbol, in order to provoke the retort that such a theory is absolutely untenable, since it cannot be proved that no earlier student was acquainted with its use. It is by no means desirable that this suspicious phrase of criticism should be allowed to die out. It is a valuable safeguard against hasty conclusions. But let us not abuse it. The truth is as often obscured by vulgar incredulity as by vulgar credulity; and the *via media* which separates these two dangerous errors of judgment will undoubtedly be found to be the *via tuta* also.

But however formidable may be the difficulties with which questions of this nature are surrounded, it is incontestable that conscientious investigation is never thrown away. And we believe that a great step may be made in the right direction, by careful consideration of the work performed by men whose names form universally recognised landmarks in the history of art; men who, rightly or wrongly, enjoy the credit of having invented the alphabet of music while it was yet in its infancy; later geniuses who, during the period of its adolescence, founded its earliest schools of composition; still later ones who, sweeping away the dust of ages in search of artistic truth, brought it to light in new and unexpected forms, so strange, sometimes, that the world rebelled, at first, against their introduction.

Reformers such as these have existed in every age, and the world has rarely abstained from protesting against the doctrines they preached, before it decided, first, upon treasuring them among its most precious possessions, and then, when their novelty had worn off, upon relegating them to the domain of antiquated rubbish. Forms that were opposed, in the sixteenth century, as revolutionary innovations, were regarded, in the seventeenth, as priceless heirlooms, and, in the eighteenth, cast to the moles and to the bats.* But they all served their turn; and, as we believe that a great lesson may be learned by a careful inquiry into the life and life-work of the men by whom some of these forms were, or are believed to have been, introduced, in so far as the facts are accessible to us, we propose to say a few words upon, and draw a few not unnecessary deductions from, the history of some of the most prominent among these great Musical Reformers.

And first, let us see how far the progress of art was advanced by one of the earliest writers on music, whose works have been preserved to us since the time of Boëthius.

Hucbald de St. Amand—Hugbaldus, or Hubaldus de St. Amando—was born, in or about the year 840, at the town of St. Amand sur l’Elnon, in Flanders, whence he derives his patronymic.

Of the details of his early life very few have reached us, save the broad facts that he was admitted, like most other learned men of his time, to Holy Orders; became a monk in his native town; was a disciple of St. Remi of Auxerre, and enjoyed the intimate friendship of St. Odo of Cluny—who was born in 878 and died in 942, and was therefore very much his junior—and devoted himself to the study of music with all his heart and soul.

But, however strong may have been his predilection for art, he was not celebrated for his knowledge of music alone. His title to eminence, in his sacerdotal character, is sufficiently vindicated by his friendship

* Witness the discords tentatively employed by the Prince of Venosa.

with St. Remi and St. Odo. Moreover, he was a learned poet and a witty, and exceeding loyal. His Imperial master, Charles le Chauve, being bald, he wrote a poem in praise—not of his Imperial master, but—of baldness! a proceeding which, for loyalty and delicate good taste, could scarcely have been surpassed. In proof of his learning, he composed it, not in the vernacular, but in orthodox Latin hexameters, as good—for mediæval Latin—as he could make them. And, in illustration of his wit and ingenuity—and, perhaps, of his patience also—he took care that every word in it should begin with the initial letter of the Emperor's name and most prominent personal attraction—the letter C: on this wise—*Carmina Clarisona Calvis Cantate Camæna*. For these facts, and for the knowledge that Hucbald died, at the age of ninety or thereabouts, in the year 930, we are indebted to the Chronicle of Siebertus Gemblacensis; but for the information that most nearly concerns our present enquiry, we must refer to the works—or rather work, for one only is known—of Hucbald himself—the famous Enchiridion or tract, *De Harmonica Institutione*.

Of the very rare MS. copies of this valuable tract now known to be in existence, the two most perfect are (a) a very fine one in the Paris Library,* dating from the eleventh century, and (b) another, probably still earlier, in the Library of Corpus Christi College (St. Benet's) at Cambridge.† The true authorship of the last-named codex—a very precious one indeed, entitled *Musica Hogeri, sive Excerptiones Hogeri Abbatis ex Autoribus Musicæ Artis*, and corresponding exactly, in everything but its title, with the Paris MS.—was first established by Dr. Burney, who was justly proud of his discovery, though he could throw no more light upon the identity of the Abbot Hoger—or Roger—than could Dr. Rigel, who, in the year 1639, was in correspondence on the subject of this very MS. with Giovanni Battista Doni, and, in answer to the pressing enquiries of the Italian historian, confessed that he could find out nothing at all about it.‡ Dr. Gale, indeed—no mean authority—describes it as *Excerptiones Rogeri Baconi*,|| but on what grounds no one knows. The volume contains two distinct tracts, both beautifully written on vellum. The first of these is the Enchiridion of Hucbald, proved by Dr. Burney to be identical with the Paris MS.§ The second, preceded by the rubric, *Incipit Scholium Enchiridii de Arte Musica*, was farther identified by Dr. Burney as the Enchiridion of St. Odo, a much better known work, which the learned historian conceives, on the authority of this rubric, to have been intended by the Saint of Cluny as a commentary upon the older work of his friend at St. Amand. Beyond the internal evidence it affords, this is really all that is known about the volume. The only *savant* of note who has seriously examined it within the memory of the present librarian is the Abbé le Normand; and, so far as the bibliographical question is concerned, the history of the MS. remains very much in the condition in which it was left by Dr. Burney at the close of the eighteenth century.

It is, however, with the contents of the tract, and not with the history of this particular codex, that we propose to deal in the elucidation of our present subject.

The treatise—which, as its name implies, is intended

* No. 7202.

† No. cclx. ("Codex membranaceus in 4to, perantiquus non gentis adhinc exaratus.")

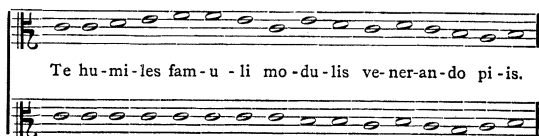
‡ "Joannis Bapt. Donii Commercium Litterarium." (Florentiæ, 1754.)

|| "Cat. Lib. Manuscript." (Angliæ, 1697.)

§ Both MSS. begin with the words: "Archytas vero cuncta ratione constituens non modo sensum aurium imprimis consonantiis observare neglexit: verum et jam maxime intra Tetrachordorum divisionem rationem secutus est," &c.

to serve as a handbook for the enquiring student—deals, during the course of its argument, with the whole science of music, in so far as it was understood in the ninth century.

The writer appears in the character of a Reformer from the very beginning of his work. In treating of the rudimentary forms of harmony practised by his contemporaries, he makes more than one suggestion which, at the time it was written, must have seemed almost revolutionary in its boldness. The so-called *Organum** of the period permitted the use of the fourth and fifth only, in addition to the octave and unison. Hucbald boldly advocated the use of the third, and even of the second. Under the title of *Symphonia*, he describes three kinds of harmony in the fourth, fifth, and octave, which he calls respectively, *Diatessaron Symphonia*, *Diapente Symphonia*, and *Diapason Symphonia*. From these three simple forms he derives three others in the eleventh, twelfth, and fifteenth; giving, however, the preference to the octave. After giving examples of these several forms, he shows how it is possible to use also the third and the second; and sums up the whole in an effusion which must have seemed novel indeed to the "Organisers" of the ninth century, and which undoubtedly betokens considerable progress in the right direction:—



This example, he tells us, is constructed upon the principle that one voice may be permitted to move freely in any direction, so long as the other remains upon the same note. Would it be possible to describe the modern "pedal-point" in clearer terms than these? or to give an example of its use more orthodox than that contained in the first eight notes of the foregoing passage?

This alone suffices to prove that Hucbald was not afraid to propose new methods of procedure, when he considered them to be improvements upon those in common use among his contemporaries; but he stands forth as a bolder reformer still in his system of notation.

The form of notation—or, rather, semiography—which chiefly prevailed in the ninth century, was based upon the employment of *Neumæ*, or signs, written above the verbal text, in such sort as to show the direction in which the melody was intended to move; but giving no indication either of the exact interval required or of the pitch of the sound to be sung. It is manifest that such a system as this could give but a very faint suggestion indeed of a melody with which the singer was previously unacquainted, and there is a strong reason for believing that it was simply designed to assist the memory of those who had already learned the "tune" by ear.

* The derivation of this term has given rise to endless discussion. It is, however, quite certain that neither Hucbald nor any other mediæval writer ever used the word to indicate a part intended to be played upon the instrument now called an organ. It simply indicated a part, which would now be called, in popular language, "a second." This second part, which was sung extempore against the *Canto fermo*, was called, indiscriminately, *Diaphonia*, *Discant*, or *Organum*; and the choristers who improvised it were called *Organisers*, and received extra pay for their services. Whether, as some have suggested, this added part was called *Organum* because it was found possible to play a second part upon the organ, is an open question; but it is quite certain that the Organisers sang without any instrumental accompaniment whatever. The derivation of the other terms is obvious. *Diaphonia* from *δις*, twice, and *φωνήω*, I sound; *Symphonia* from *συν*, together, and *φωνήω*, I sound; *Discantus* from the Latin, *dis*, twice, and *cantus*, a song. Hucbald uses the terms *Symphonia*, *Diaphonia*, and *Organum*, but not *Discantus*.

Hucbald invented a notable improvement upon this. By writing the syllables of the verbal text upon a framework of interlinear spaces, he showed, not only the exact interval by which the voice was to ascend or descend, but also the exact sound it was to sing; and this, without the use either of *Neumæ* or of the "points" or "notes" which, in later centuries, were written upon the stave. For it must not for a moment be supposed that Hucbald's invention either anticipated the principle or contained within itself the germ of the true stave of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. He drew his lines simply for the purpose of marking out the spaces upon which the verbal text was to be written, not with the idea of making them serve as a support for any form of point or sign whatever. This will be made clearly apparent by the subjoined example, which, as the solution beneath it shows, represents a complete vocal score in four parts:—

T				Do \					
T					mini \				
T	Sit		oria	/		in	\	cula, etc.	
S		\ glo /		Do \		sæ /			
T					mini \				
T	Sit		oria	/		in	\	cula, etc.	
S		\ glo /				sæ /			
T				Do \					
T					mini \				
T	Sit		oria	/		in	\	/cula, etc.	
S		\ glo /		Do \		sæ			
T					mini \				
T	Sit		oria	/		in	\	cula, etc.	
S		\ glo /				sæ /			
T									

SOLUTION.

The solution of this really very simple cryptogram was first discovered by the Padre Martini, who published it in his "History of Ecclesiastical Music" in the year 1774.* The principle is this: the letters T and S refer to the tones and semitones (*tonus* and *semitonium*) of the scale, consequently the singer, in moving from one space to the next, must proceed by a semitone when he passes upwards from, or downwards to, a space marked S, and, in all other cases, by a tone. Thus the various positions of the letter S in the above example show that the *cantus*, or highest voice, must begin on F, and the bass on C, from which notes all the rest are deducible in their natural order. In some of his examples Hucbald substituted for the letters T and S certain arbitrary signs, of which he invented sixteen for the notes of the scales and four for the four authentic modes. But this really made no difference in the mode of solution. The form of harmony (*Symphonia*) here used—not very agreeable to our modern ears—is what he describes as "Auctiore Diaphonia per Diatessaron," in which both the *Cantus primus* and the *Organum* are doubled in the octave above.

That this method of notation—we say nothing about the harmony—was an immense improvement upon the older system of *Neumæ* is evident, and it fixed the exact pitch of every note. But it was open to many formidable objections. It made no provision whatever for determining the comparative duration of the notes—which was only natural, seeing that no form of time-table was in existence until long

after its promulgation; and it must for ever have remained inapplicable to instrumental music, since it was by the position of the words only that the pitch of the notes to be sung to them was determined. It was, no doubt, for these reasons, among others, that the system never underwent any farther development; indeed, there is strong reason for believing that it was employed by Hucbald and his friend, St. Odo, alone; and the *Neumæ* remained virtually in possession of the field until the invention of the stave more than a century later.

But, though a compromise, the system was a clever one, and it needed the head of a very clever Reformer to initiate it.

(To be continued.)

CREATION AND CRITICISM.

SOMEBODY—a Frenchman, if our memory serves us aright—has made an exceedingly interesting and entertaining collection of the commonplace remarks of great men. Such a collection is a comforting thing to the person of average intelligence, in so far as it proves that great gifts are compatible with occasional deviations into the realm of truism. And great composers, too, have their moments of "banality," or something like it. But what is even more interesting is the fallibility of judgment from which great minds are not exempt in their estimates of the work done by others in their own department, even when there is no suspicion of their having been actuated by jealousy. It is, of course, easy to say that the constructive and the destructive elements, the creative and critical faculties, do not coalesce. But this hardly accounts for the blunders into which eminent musicians have fallen in their verdicts upon others equally eminent. A credulous simplicity is often the mark of noble and magnanimous natures, and that might explain the exaggerated value which genius has occasionally attached to pretentious mediocrity. In the sphere of conduct and character ordinary folk are often endowed with a surer instinct than exceptional natures, and it is a not uncommon but painful experience to witness such a nature magnetised by another of coarser fibre, or sacrificing itself to an idol of the basest clay. But the other form of fallibility—the inability of genius to recognise genius elsewhere, is a more inexplicable phenomenon. The analogy from character is not so easy to find here. We often see saints imposed upon by sinners, but angels generally recognise each other. Perhaps, however, it is altogether unjustifiable to hunt for such parallels. The longer one lives the more is one convinced that music in itself, and apart from association, is an absolutely extra-moral thing. It undoubtedly reflects and illustrates the character of the composer. But not completely. There are sides of some composers' characters which they fortunately manage to keep out of their music. Music can be cynical, vulgar, tawdry, sentimental, ugly, if you like; but, apart from its setting, it cannot very well be styled immoral. After all the solution of the difficulty may be the rather obvious and ordinary one, that persons of strongly marked artistic individuality find it hard to feel sympathy for the works of those whose individuality is equally strongly marked, but in a different direction. The romantic genius is affronted by the pedantry of the classicist; the wielder of the orchestra despises the writer for the pianoforte; the dramatic composer is out of touch with the writer of chamber music, and so on.

In exemplifying the critical incapacity of composers, we purposely exclude all detailed consideration of two who were critics by profession, Berlioz and Schumann, or of Wagner, who devoted so much time

* "De cantu et musica sacra." (1774.)