

The Great Composers, Sketched by Themselves. No. VIII. Gluck

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professional musicians may be made Honorary Fellows or Associates, and give advice when asked. As now constituted, the Council consists of thirty-three shareholders, of whom nine reside in Edinburgh, eight in Glasgow, eight in Dundee, and eight in Aberdeen; these groups forming committees for the furtherance of the Society's general purposes in their respective districts. The members of the Council would seem to be in all cases men of standing and influence. Edinburgh contributes a peer, a retired officer, a High School Rector, a Doctor of Laws, an advocate, two professors, and a wine merchant. Glasgow sends five merchants, one professor, a music publisher, and a lithographer; Dundee, six merchants, a manufacturer, and an engineer; and Aberdeen, three merchants, an advocate, a professor, a Sheriff-substitute, a manufacturer, and one other who appears to have no vocation. It is assuring to note the preponderance of the commercial element in this list. The careful, cautious traders of North Britain are not at all likely to make the new Society "plunge." They may be slow to appreciate some artistic questions, but they will take care that any course adopted is reasonably assured of bringing about a substantial return. But be this as it may, the working of the Society will be watched with very great interest, not only for what it may do in Scotland, but because it involves the solution of a problem fraught, possibly, with important results elsewhere. For the first time in the history of the art, we see—assuming all shares to be taken up—a body of amateurs bound by their own laws to administer £20,000 for the exclusive promotion of music. The phenomenon, having regard to what is possible with so large a sum, comes upon us in almost startling fashion. It excites not less envy than admiration, and should the Council of the Scottish Musical Society discharge their trust with wisdom and success, we may hope to see other bodies, similarly constituted, arise in the southern part of Great Britain. Imagine what might be done in London, on the same principle, with £100,000—how many clever young people might be given a start, how many dumb composers might have a "door of utterance" opened to them; and how many concert-giving societies might be assisted to produce really valuable though unremunerative works! We devoutly wish success to the Scottish venture, and heartily commend the enterprise which has set it on foot in such a novel yet powerful form.

THE GREAT COMPOSERS, SKETCHED BY THEMSELVES.

By JOSEPH BENNETT.

No. VIII.—GLUCK.

VERY few letters of the Chevalier Gluck have come down to us, but it fortunately happens that those few contain a good deal of valuable matter, as throwing light not only upon the master's art theories but also upon his personal character. We shall find from the evidence thus presented that Gluck was a man of singular earnestness and gravity. Of polished and dignified manners, he combined with the graces of a "gentleman of the old school," a devotion to his calling for its own sake, and a steadfastness of purpose in proclaiming artistic truth such as must have been rare at the time he lived and in the society he frequented. On these points, the letters to be presently quoted speak distinctly enough for even imperfect ears to hear.

The first epistle of the too-short series now before us was written to the Grand Duke Leopold of Tuscany, for the purpose of obtaining permission to inscribe that august person's name on the title-page of "Alceste." Addressing a liberal and enlightened

Prince, Gluck naturally felt bound to explain and vindicate the theories illustrated in his opera; theories so much at variance with the established usages of the lyric stage that they must have stunk in the nostrils of the rigidly orthodox as rank heresy. Italian opera, regarded as drama with music, is bad enough now, but we can form little idea of what it was in Gluck's time. Our master held that "simplicity, truth, and nature" are the great fundamental principles of the beautiful in all artistic creations. The Italian opera of his day had different ideas. It contended that the elaborate, the false, and the artificial constitute beauty, and it carried out this view to the bitter end. A thing calling for reform thus stood face to face with a reformer, and now let us hear Gluck expound his method of improvement as shown in "Alceste":—

"When I undertook to compose music for 'Alceste,' I proposed to abolish entirely all those abuses introduced by the injudicious vanity of singers, or by the excessive complaisance of masters, which have so long disfigured the Italian Opera, and instead of the most splendid and beautiful of all entertainments, rendered it the most ridiculous and tiresome. My purpose was to restrict music to its true office, that of ministering to the expression of the poetry, and to the situations of the plot, without interrupting the action, or chilling it by superfluous and needless ornamentation. I thought that it should do what brilliancy of colour and skilful light and shade effect for a correct and well-designed drawing, by animating the figures without distorting their contours. I wished, therefore, to avoid arresting an actor in the most excited moment of his dialogue, by causing him to wait for a tiresome ritornella, or, in the midst of half-uttered words, to detain him on a favourable note, either for the purpose of displaying his fine voice and flexibility in some long passage, or causing him to pause till the orchestra gave him time to take breath for a cadence. It did not appear to me that I ought to hurry rapidly over the second part of an aria, possibly the most impassioned and important of all, in order to have the opportunity of repeating regularly four times over the words of the first part, causing the aria to end, where, in all probability, the sense did not end, merely for the convenience of the singer, or to enable him to vary a passage according to his caprice. In short, I have striven to banish the abuses against which reason and good sense have so long protested in vain. My idea was, that the overture should prepare the spectators for the plot to be represented, and give some indication of its nature; that the concerted instruments ought to be regulated according to the interest and passion of the drama, and not leave a void in the dialogue between the air and the recitative, so that the meaning of a passage might not be perverted, nor the force and warmth of the action improperly interrupted. Further, I thought that my most strenuous efforts must be directed in search of a noble simplicity, thus avoiding a parade of difficulty at the expense of clearness. I did not consider a mere display of novelty valuable, unless naturally suggested by the situation and the expression, and, on this point, no rule in composition exists that I would not have gladly sacrificed in favour of the effect produced. Such are my principles."

With the declaration of these principles began the struggle for dramatic truth on the lyric stage which has not yet ended in victory, albeit the tide of public opinion is at last setting strongly in its favour. At the outset Gluck was, of course, fiercely assailed, and, in a letter dedicating his "Paride" to the Duke of Braganza, he shows some soreness of spirit, though bearing himself under the infliction with

reasonableness and dignity: "The sole object that induced me to publish my music of 'Alceste' was the hope of finding successors who, following the path already opened, and encouraged by the suffrages of an enlightened public, should take courage to destroy the abuses introduced on the Italian stage, and bring it as far as possible to perfection. I bitterly feel that I have hitherto striven after this in vain. Pedants and critics—an infinite multitude, who form the greatest obstacle to the progress of the fine arts—loudly protest against a method which, were it actually to root, would destroy all their pretensions to supremacy of judgment, and injure their sphere of influence. They thought themselves entitled to pronounce a verdict on 'Alceste' from some informal rehearsals, badly conducted, and even worse executed; the effect to be produced in a theatre being calculated from that in a room, with the same sagacity as, in a certain city of Greece, judgment was passed on statues at the distance of a few feet, originally intended to be erected on lofty columns." From this Gluck goes on to argue that operas constructed after his peculiar method are singularly liable to misrepresentation in performance. "Very little would suffice, by merely changing something in the expression of my aria, 'Che farò senza Euridice,' to turn it into a saltarello for fantoccini. A note more or less sustained, a neglected *rinforzo* in the time or voice carelessly omitted, an *appoggiatura* out of place, a shake, a passage, a run, may ruin a whole scene in such an opera; whereas these things do no harm to, or, indeed, rather embellish the common run of works. The presence, therefore, of the composer at the performance of this class of work is as indispensable, so to speak, as the presence of the sun to the works of nature. He is its absolute soul and life, and without him all must be confusion and darkness. But we must be prepared for obstacles so long as there are in the world people who consider themselves authorised to decide on the fine arts, because they enjoy the privilege of possessing eyes and ears, no matter what the quality of these may be. The mania of discussing the very subjects they least understand is, unhappily, a failing only too prevalent among men; and, very recently, one of the greatest philosophers of the age presumed to write about music and to bring forward as oracles 'blind dreams and romantic follies.'"

It is clear from the foregoing that even Gluck's philosophy and dignity were not proof against the assaults of criticism; nor could they stop him from resorting to the commonplace retort of ignorance and prejudice. But hostility likewise braced up his energies for fresh efforts. Hence he says in the letter just quoted: "I do not expect greater success from my 'Paride' than from my 'Alceste,' at least in my purpose to effect the desired change in musical composers; on the contrary, I anticipate greater opposition than ever; but, for my part, this shall never deter me from making fresh attempts to accomplish my good design."

When "Iphigenia in Aulis" appeared, influence was used to secure its performance at the Grand Opéra of Paris, and Gluck promptly acknowledged the efforts of his friends in a letter addressed to the *Mercur de France*. From this we take a passage which shows how truly he continued to appreciate the object of "applied" music: "Whatever talent a composer may possess, he can only write indifferent music if the poet does not excite in him that enthusiasm without which the productions of every art must be feeble and languid. The imitation of nature is the aim all ought to seek. This it is that I strive to attain. Always simple and natural, as far as I can make it so, my music only tends to enhance the

expression and to add force to the declamation of the poetry. For this reason I do not employ those shakes, passages, and cadences of which Italians are so lavish." Gluck went on to say that he would willingly have brought out his new opera in Paris "because by its effect, and with the aid of the celebrated M. Rousseau, of Geneva, whom I purposed to consult, we might perhaps, acting in concert and seeking a noble, touching, and natural melody . . . have succeeded in establishing the system I have in view—that of producing music appropriate to all nations, and thus abolishing the ridiculous distinction of national music." The bold idea of teaching the Parisians anything, even with the aid of the celebrated M. Rousseau, of Geneva, was remembered against Gluck when he began his work in the French capital, and exposed him to many sharp attacks. To these he refers when dedicating "Orphée et Euridice" to Marie-Antoinette. "It has been no pretension of mine, though some have thought fit to reproach me with it, to come here to give lessons to the French in their own language, nor to prove to them that until now they have had no composer worthy of their admiration or their gratitude. Some pieces exist among them to which I award the praise they merit; several of their living authors are worthy their reputation. I thought that I might attempt with French words the new style of music that I have adopted in my three last Italian operas. . . . The style that I have attempted to introduce seems to me to restore to art its primitive dignity, and music will no longer be restricted to those cold conventional beauties to which authors were formerly forced to limit themselves." Whether Gluck improved matters by his so condescending reference to the merit of some French composers, and by the laudation of his own, is not a matter for conjecture, since we know that he only raised a heavier storm than had raged before.

We need not follow Gluck through his experiences of the great faction fight between his supporters, headed by Marie-Antoinette, and those of Piccini, under the banner of Madame Du Barry. Our concern lies only with his own recorded utterances, one of which we find in the shape of a letter addressed to a friend concerning the step taken by the Opéra in handing the libretto of "Roland" to Piccini, knowing all the while that Gluck was engaged upon it in pursuance of agreement. The master naturally resented such treatment, but it is pleasant to see that he had no hard words for his Italian brother in art. After stating that, on hearing the news, he had burned all that he had written of "Roland," Gluck continues: "I am not the man to enter into rivalry with any one. M. Piccini would have too great an advantage over me; for, in addition to his personal merits, which are assuredly very great, he would also have that of novelty, I having given four works in Paris—whether good or bad, no matter. This must exhaust the imagination; besides, I have shown him the way, and he has only to follow me. Of his patrons, I say nothing." But Gluck did say much, and it was not in the highest degree complimentary. The temper of the insulted man comes out in the following remarks: "I do really pity M. Herbert (director) for having fallen into the hands of such persons—the one (Marchese Carraciola) an exclusive amateur of Italian music; the other (M. Marmontel) the dramatic author of operas supposed to be comic. They will make him see the moon at mid-day." Gluck so far pitied M. Herbert that he was willing to let him have his "Armide," on conditions. Wagner himself might consistently stipulate for terms like these: "When I come to Paris, I am to have at least two months to train my actors and actresses; I am to be empowered

to call as many rehearsals as I may think necessary; no part is to be doubled, and another opera is to be held in readiness should an actor or actress be indisposed. These are my conditions, and without their fulfilment I will keep my 'Armide' for my own pleasure." How true it is that "there is nothing new under the sun!" The trumpet of Bayreuth no more than echoes these strident tones.

Gluck anticipated Wagner, also, in his readiness to take up the pen against adversaries. On one occasion, a certain M. Framery charged the master with plagiarism from Sacchini, the Queen's professor of singing, and composer of an opera called "Olympia." Furious at this, Gluck wrote to the *Mercur de France*: "Almost everything that M. Framery thinks fit to say about M. Gluck, M. Sacchini, and M. Milico (a singer) is false. . . . It is true that M. Sacchini inserted in his air 'Se cerca,' a musical phrase to be found in the Italian 'Alceste' of M. Gluck, published at Vienna in 1769. . . . M. Framery is not aware that an Italian composer is very often forced to humour the caprice and the voice of a singer, and it was M. Milico who prevailed on M. Sacchini to insert the said phrases into his aria. M. Gluck himself reproached his friend Milico with this. . . . M. Sacchini's genius, so replete with fine conceptions, has no occasion to despoil others; but, from courtesy towards Milico, he borrowed those passages in which the singer thought he could shine the most." From this generous explanation of what Sacchini had done, Gluck turned to Framery, who had written French words to the Italian musician's airs, and fired at him a Parthian shot: "The reputation of M. Sacchini has been so long established, that it has no need whatever of vindication; but it may possibly be tarnished, owing to his airs, written for Italian words, being parodied by arranging them with French words, taking into account the difference between the two melodies and prosodies. M. Framery is a man of letters, and might be better employed than in thus confounding the national character of the French and Italians, and writing mongrel-music, by arranging airs which, though endured at the Opéra-Comique, are not suitable to the Grand Opéra."

On another occasion, the famous La Harpe severely criticised "Armide" in the *Parisian Journal of Politics and Literature*, saying that it had been coldly received, that it was too noisy, that it was afflicted with monotonous, tiresome *criaileries*, that the composer had made *Armide* a Medea instead of a siren, and so on. This time Gluck picked out his sharpest pen and pointed it direct at La Harpe, addressing him in a letter which is a masterpiece of sarcasm. After declaring his agreement with La Harpe's "judicious observations," he added, "Hitherto I have been simple enough to believe that in music, as in other arts, all the passions were within its sphere, and that it ought not to please less in expressing rage and fury and the cry of grief than in depicting sighs of love. . . . I was convinced that singing, imbued with the colouring of the sentiments to be expressed, ought to be modified in accordance with them, and assume as many different accents as the poetry has different tints. In short, that the voice, the instruments, every sound, and even silence itself ought all to tend to one single aim, that of expression, the union between the singing and the words being so close that the poem should not appear less composed for the music than the music for the poem. . . . These, sir, were my ideas before reading your observations. Instantly light dissipated darkness; I was confounded to find that you had learned more of my art in some hours of reflection than I had done after having exercised it for forty years. You prove to me, sir, that it suffices

to be a man of letters to entitle you to pronounce on all subjects. . . . I agree with you that of all my compositions 'Orphée' is the only one that is tolerable. I humbly ask pardon from heaven for having deafened my auditors by my other operas; the number of times they have been performed, and the applause the public have thought fit to bestow upon them, do not prevent my seeing that they are pitiable. I am so convinced of this that I intend to write them afresh, and as I perceive that you are all for tender music, I propose to put into the mouth of the furious *Achilles* a song so touching and sweet that the spectators shall be moved by it even to tears." In the same sarcastic spirit, Gluck offers to amend "Armide," and invites La Harpe to procure a rhymist to insert a couple of arias in each scene. "I, on my side, will work at the music, from which, of course, I must scrupulously banish all noisy instruments, such as kettle-drums and trumpets. It is now my desire that only oboes, flutes, French horns, and violins (muted, of course) should be heard in my orchestra, while my sole object shall be to arrange the words to suit these airs, which will not be difficult, having previously taken their exact dimensions. Then the part of *Armide* will no longer be a monotonous and tiresome *criailerie*. She will no longer be a Medea, a sorceress, but an enchantress. I intend that, in her despair, she shall sing an air, so regular and methodical, and the same time so tender, that the most delicate *petite maîtresse* may listen to it without the smallest shock to her nerves." Gluck then supposes "some blockhead" as protesting against such artistic untruth, and answers that he does not wish to offend the ears of M. La Harpe. Finally, he declares that he has been recommended to retort by criticising La Harpe's poetry, and thereupon winds up with a home-thrust: "I feel, on due consideration, that I cannot follow this suggestion without incurring the fate of him who, in the presence of Hannibal, lectured on the art of war."

Although Gluck shows himself well able to hold his own against La Harpe, he took care to look round for allies, and a letter soliciting the help of M. Suard has been preserved. "What do you think, sir, of the fresh attack M. de la Harpe has made upon me? This M. de la Harpe is a very pleasant doctor, truly. He speaks of music in a manner that would excite the contempt of the most juvenile chorister in Europe, and yet he says, 'I will it so,' and talks of 'my doctrine,' *Et pueri nasum rhinoceronis habent*. Cannot you, sir, say a few words to him; you, who defended me so advantageously against him? Ah! if my music has given you any degree of pleasure, I entreat that you will place me in a position to prove to my friends, the connoisseurs in Germany and Italy, that among the men of letters in France there are some who, in speaking of the arts, know at least what they are saying."

In what now remains of the few extant letters of the master, only one incident is worthy of notice here, and that shows him in a light wholly amiable, but not unexpectedly so, since we cannot fail to have noticed Gluck's rare courtesy towards brother musicians. Two years before "Armide" was written, M. Cambini had set to music, as a concert-piece, a scene from the same story, and gained by it considerable applause. When Gluck's opera appeared, Cambini withdrew his aria from the public, and could not be prevailed upon by his friends to allow its performance. The aid of Gluck was then sought to reason away his reluctance, whereupon the master wrote: "M. Gluck is very sensible of the politeness of *MM. les amateurs* and M. Cambini. He has the honour to assure those gentleman that it will give

him much pleasure to hear the performance of M. Cambini's scene from 'Armide.' It would indeed be tyranny in music to seek to prevent authors bringing forward their productions. M. Gluck enters into no rivalry with any one, and it will always be to him a pleasure to hear music better than his own. The progress of art ought to be the sole object sought."

There is little to add. We have seen in these letters a strong and earnest artist fighting valiantly for what he discerned as truth; gifted not only with clear perception but a strong will; respecting himself, but loving music more; courteous to all save the arrogantly incompetent, and doing honour to the profession which for all time will be proud to honour him.

THE FATHER OF THE SYMPHONY.

BY L. NOHL.

(Continued from page 540.)

WE have seen that the opening movement of the sonata, the so-called *first Allegro*, as it forms the basis of this species of composition, is, at the same time, decisive as to its general character. Two further movements, the *Andante* and *Finale*, were subsequently added; and a fourth, the Minuet, usually placed before the *Finale*, was first regularly introduced by Haydn into the symphony. A technical analysis of what we have called the sonata-form shows the first *Allegro* to consist of two parts, written throughout in common time and of distinctive structure. A theme—being either a full-blown melody or merely a musical motive—is introduced, by which the character of the movement is determined, and which, having been fully developed by repetition or elaboration of its component parts, is followed by a second in the dominant key, usually presenting a most marked contrast to the former, both as regards rhythm and harmony, leading eventually to a characteristic conclusion of the movement in the dominant of the original key. It will be seen that the elements of this dialectic form, which naturally presented themselves where a distinct idea or individual mood was to be represented musically, were already to be found in the existing dramatic aria, the distinguishing characteristic of which was the combination of contrasting melodies, which, nevertheless, appeared to proceed from the same source of a given dramatic situation. The important step towards the development of purely instrumental composition consisted in the use made of the customary second theme of the old aria, intended in the first place chiefly to serve as a contrast between the opening melody and its final repetition, and which was now, in instrumental composition, changed into a movement constructed from the materials of the first part, to which it possessed as much inner relationship as it contrasted with it outwardly. In this new way the entire movement had gained, beyond the mere melodiousness, which it already shared in common with the existing opera, the vast and creative sphere of contrapuntal polyphony. Thus, after the first part of the instrumental movement had once clearly defined a given theme or themes, the "thematic elaboration," the logical development, so to speak, was carried on in the second. And if, as is only natural and desirable, a final return is made to the first part, it appears invested with a fresh and enhanced interest, seeing that we now fully understand and appreciate its meaning and musical purport. There can be no doubt that this signifies a decisive step in the progress of modern instrumental music, and the merit of having taken it must be granted to the Germans, and, above all, to Haydn.

The development of the new idea was, however, by no means rapid. Haydn himself only gradually per-

ceived the spiritual and artistic importance of the dual character of the first *Allegro*, being satisfied at first merely with an harmonic rather than a thematic connection of the two parts of the movement. When, however, he had become fully aware of the significance of this interconnection of themes, the entire art-form assumed a new aspect by his treatment of the first movement. His melodies were now invented with conscious regard to their subsequent thematic elaboration as the chief reason of their existence. And not content with the final repetition of the first part of the movement, he added, after the concluding phrases, a *coda*, recapitulating in short and succinct reminiscences the leading ideas of the whole. Thus an organic art-form had been gained which was capable of a mighty development, which would admit of the infusion of even an exuberant wealth of ideas, since it was capable of expanding with them, being itself the outcome of the elements which filled it. Haydn, in order to draw attention to the more serious purport of the new class of composition, as distinguished from the popular "feast and dance music," soon adopted a short *Adagio* movement as introductory to the *Allegro*, dreamily foreshadowing sometimes, in his later works, the themes of the latter. From the first, these themes are characterised by a distinct individuality and by the transparent lucidity by which the free play of his ideas is ever accompanied. Two characteristics especially may be discerned even in his earliest sonatas, viz., the absolute *naïveté* of his mind frequently leading him to the display of waggish humour, and the lucid and symmetrical arrangement as regards form. A few biographical allusions may here follow as an illustration of the former characteristic of our artist's individuality. Haydn and some of his young friends were in the habit of taking "passatim" evening walks in the streets of Vienna, serenading their acquaintances of both sexes, according to the fancy of the moment. In these itinerations the master had become acquainted with the last of Viennese original comic artists, Kurz. In speaking of Haydn's natural temperament, Griesinger dwells upon the fact that a harmless roguery, or rather humorousness, had been a principal feature of it; and whoever had spent only an hour in his company could not help observing that "the spirit of the Austrian national humour dwelt in him." This spirit, then, if in a somewhat coarse outward shape, yet with perfect truthfulness to nature, showed itself in the famous Viennese clown, and the fact of Haydn having been brought into close contact with this, the last genuine German "Hans-Wurst," greatly assisted him in the appreciation of the peculiarly Austrian, or specifically Viennese, humour of those days. On one occasion Kurz had requested him to accompany with music some comic pantomimics, and encouraged by the success of the performance, the actor persuaded the composer to set to music a comic piece, entitled "Der Krumme Teufel." This composition is unfortunately lost, but we can discern the same popular comic element in hundreds of Haydn's subsequent works. The source of this humour is, in fact, essentially a permanent disposition, not a mere jocularly, and was, therefore, not only easily conveyed into music, but could enfold there its true significance and being. "His Allegros and Finales more particularly are frequently calculated to produce, by means of their affected seriousness, an irresistibly comic effect upon the listeners, and to lead them on into a state of almost unbounded merriment," says Griesinger. The German clown or "Hans-Wurst," as is well known, has, with the rise of the native drama, been banished from the German stage, properly so called; and it is a curious fact that at the moment of his disappearance, the free