

William Sterndale Bennett (1816-1875) (Continued)

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Source: *The Musical Times*, Vol. 44, No. 724 (Jun. 1, 1903), pp. 379-381

Published by: [Musical Times Publications Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/903249>

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Military music is of course represented, seeing that we have not yet quite got over our warlike fever. In Mr. Seymour Lucas's 'Standard-Bearer' (180) the big drum serves a peaceful purpose, but in Mr. Godfrey Merry's water-colour 'The King's Guard' (820), the military band is in full play, while an *ad libitum* additional accompaniment is furnished by an energetic juvenile whistler. In 'The Black Watch on the trek' (930), by Mr. W. Skeoch Cumming, the stirring sound of the bagpipes has penetrated into South Africa, and is apparently evolving mixed feelings from the inhabitants, though as yet they have not begun to take refuge in flight.

By way of contrast attention may be called to two studies of belfries. Sir Edward Poynter's 'Bells of St. Mark's Campanile' (101) is of course highly interesting as a record of the recently ruined tower and landmark, and with it may be compared a pen-and-ink drawing by Mr. H. H. Statham, 'In a belfry: ringing-in the New Year' (1,350).

Finally, if we turn aside into the architectural room, that peaceful little backwater from the stream commonly followed by visitors, we may as well cast a glance at Mr. J. A. Hughes's pretty design for a decorative panel, 'Music' (1,666), and at Mr. Reginald Blomfield's refined and dignified music room in Renaissance style at 'Hatchlands,' Guildford (1,652).

HERBERT THOMPSON.

WILLIAM STERNDALE BENNETT (1816—1875).

(Continued from page 309.)

The 'Three Musical Sketches' (The Lake, the Millstream, and the Fountain)—that trio of charming pieces for the pianoforte—were published in 1836, and dedicated to his friend, J. W. Davison. A reviewer in the *Musical World* said:—

The whole composition deserves the attention of an advanced player, and the last movement [The Fountain] is original as well as delightful, which may be a recommendation in these days of mere difficulty without adequate reward: of horse labour, with husks and chaff for your pains.

'Husks and chaff' are not an unknown quantity in the present day, but our criticism is now more kid-gloved and of less stability. The exquisite grace of the Naiades overture is acknowledged by all who can appreciate refinement in expression and finished workmanship. Its poetic import, however, has variously worked upon the imaginations of programme annotators. Take for instance the *pizzicato* episode: here are two interpretations of its meaning:—

The splashing of large water drops tossed from the wavelets, which assume the human shape of the Naiades,

Fairy bells tinkling their gladness.

Again, the lovely melody of the second subject is said to represent—

The love looks of the damsels of the deep, whereby they allure mortals to destruction.

It is as though some water deity sang while floating on the bosom of a stream restless from past disturbance.

Upon his return from Leipzig (in 1837) Bennett was appointed to a professorship at his *Alma Mater*, and entered upon a busy professional life in London. In October of the following year he again found his way to Leipzig, where he played at the Gewandhaus his Fourth Pianoforte Concerto (in F minor) containing the Barcarolle. The middle movement was originally a 'Pastorale,' but as Mendelssohn, to whom the composer played the work, did not take to it, Bennett substituted the Barcarolle. This boat-song, one of his most familiar compositions, was written at Grantchester, near Cambridge, its conception being suggested by the sedgy windings of the Granta. The programme of an orchestral concert given by him in London on May 25, 1838, shows that he played his



ROBERT BENNETT.

FATHER OF SIR W. STERNDALE BENNETT, AND ORGANIST OF SHEFFIELD PARISH CHURCH FROM 1811—1819.

(From the original painting by Wageman, reproduced by kind permission of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Case.)

Caprice (for pianoforte and orchestra), then designated 'L'Hilarité.' The orchestral concerts given by him were annual events, and at that of June 25, 1844, Mendelssohn conducted the orchestra and played with the concert-giver the former composer's Andante con variazioni in B flat for two performers on one pianoforte (Op. 83a). Bennett played the Rondo from his Concertstück (MS.) for pianoforte on that occasion, and the lady students of the Royal Academy of Music sang Mendelssohn's Motet 'Laudate Pueri.'

Shortly before this concert Bennett was married—at Southampton, on April 9, 1844—to Miss Mary Anne Wood, only daughter of Commander James Wood, R.N. The *Musical Examiner* duly recorded the event in these

fatherly words, penned by the editor, Mr. J. W. Davison: 'The bride is accomplished, beautiful, and good. Our prayers for the happiness of this union are hearty and sincere.' The joy of his marriage and the affection of his friends helped to soften the disappointment Bennett experienced earlier in the year in not being elected to the Professorship of Music in the University of Edinburgh. The candidature was the cause of much lively writing in the daily and musical press, and many a dull moment may be brightened by turning to the pages of the *Musical Examiner* to see what 'J. W. D.,' the doughty champion of 'W. S. B.,' had to say on the subject. One of the candidates he calls:—

Mr.- Doctor Concerto-organ Gauntlett . . . a musico-philosophico-legal salamander—a kind of polyhedric and multi-coloured jack-a-lantern, whose infinity of surfaces and infinity of tints, by a perpetuity of motion admirable to think upon, bear the semblance of one surface and one tint—so to speak, a many-hued teetotum in full spin.

This well spun-out sentence is of a style which even the impressionist critic of the present day would find it hard to beat. The contest lasted six months, and in the end Hugh Pearson (afterwards Hugo Pierson) was appointed to the Professorship. Mr. Davison characterized Mr. Pearson's election as 'a job, glaringly unlawful, outrageously dishonest,' against which legal proceedings should be taken. 'O that we had a thousand pounds,' he editorially said, 'to venture on the issue.'

Not the least gratifying of the testimonials Sterndale Bennett received in his candidature for the Reid chair was the following from his friend Mendelssohn, written in his usual good English:—

Berlin, December 17, 1843.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I hear that you proclaimed yourself a Candidate for the musical Professorship at Edinburgh, and that a testimonial which I might send could possibly be of use to you with the Authorities at the University. Now while I think of writing such a testimonial for you I feel proud and ashamed at the same time—proud, because I think of all the honour you have done to your art, your country, and yourself, and because it is on such a brother-artist that I am to give an opinion; and ashamed, because I have always followed your career, your compositions, your successes, with so true an interest, that I feel as if it was my own cause, and as if I was myself the Candidate for such a place.

But there is one point of view from which I might be excused in venturing to give still an opinion, while all good and true musicians are unanimous about the subject: perhaps the Council of the University might like to know what *we German* people think of you, how we consider you. And then, I may tell them, that if the prejudice which formerly prevailed in this country against the musical talent of your Country has now subsided, it is chiefly owing to you, to your compositions, to your personal residence in Germany.

Your Overtures, your Concertos, your vocal as well as instrumental Compositions, are reckoned by our best and severest authorities amongst the first standard works of the present musical period. The public feel never tired in listening to, while the musicians feel never tired in performing, your

Compositions; and since they took root in the minds of the true amateurs, my countrymen became aware that music is the same in England as in Germany, as everywhere; and so by your successes here you destroyed that prejudice which nobody could ever have destroyed but a true genius. This is a service you have done to English as well as German musicians, and I am sure that your countrymen will not acknowledge it less readily than mine have already done.

Shall I still add, that the Science in your works is as great as their thoughts are elegant and fanciful—that we consider your performance on the Piano as masterly as your Conducting of an Orchestra? That all this is the general judgment of the best musicians here, as well as my own personal sincere opinion? Let me only add that I wish you success from my whole heart, and that I shall be truly happy to hear that you have met with it.

Always yours, sincerely and truly,

FELIX MENDELSSOHN BARTHOLDY.

To W. Sterndale Bennett, Esq.

The life of a pianoforte teacher so much in request as Bennett left him little time for composition. Wearied by the daily round of lesson-giving, he would feel little inclination to court his creative muse except perhaps at holiday times, and then he was probably glad to get away from music. But he must have kept up his pianoforte playing, as in addition to his annual orchestral concerts, at which he played one or more concertos, he gave year after year a series of 'Classical Chamber Concerts' and 'Performances of Classical Pianoforte Music.' A large number of the programmes of these highly artistic music-makings, covering a period of twelve years, now before us, show Bennett's refined and eclectic taste. For instance, Bach's clavier concertos, violin sonatas, and selections from the '48,' then almost novelties, and other lesser-known works of the great masters were conscientiously set before the favoured listeners in the Hanover Square Rooms. The pianist's lovely touch added a special charm to his poetic intuitiveness, and vocal music of a high order—*e.g.*, the Liederkreis of Beethoven—gave variety and interest to these very enjoyable afternoons of music.

We may pass on to the year 1849, an eventful one, as it witnessed the inception of the Bach Society, founded by Sterndale Bennett. The history of this important organization in propagating the music of Bach in England has been so fully set forth by the present writer in these columns that details may be dispensed with*; suffice it to say that Bennett conducted the first performance in England of the 'St. Matthew Passion' on April 6, 1854, and that he threw himself unreservedly into the Bach cause with hardly less enthusiasm than did old Sam Wesley half-a-century earlier.

A great honour was paid to Bennett and to English musicianship in the year 1853, when the Directors of the famous Gewandhaus concerts at Leipzig invited the subject of this sketch to become the conductor of their famous concerts.

* 'Bach's Music in England,' THE MUSICAL TIMES, September to December, 1896.

No similar distinction has come this way before or since. It is no wonder that he was 'completely overwhelmed with the feelings of joy and pride in the receipt of such a testimony of friendship and good feeling,' but after careful consideration of the matter, he felt it his duty to remain in England, though 'it was his fondest wish to go to Leipzig.'

The Gewandhaus invitation may have prompted the directors of the Philharmonic Society to appoint Bennett conductor of their concerts after the Wagner fiasco of 1855. At all events he was elected to the post and held it for ten years, from 1856-1866. The first Philharmonic concert he conducted—April 14, 1856—was made memorable by the first appearance in England of Madame Schumann, who played Beethoven's Pianoforte Concerto in E flat. Nothing could be more appropriate than that Schumann's English friend should take so prominent a part in the introduction of this great artist to an English audience. During the same eventful season he conducted the first performance in this country of Schumann's 'Paradise and the Peri'—Philharmonic concert of June 23, 1856—when Jenny Lind sang the soprano solos. It was a 'command' performance, and Queen Victoria honoured the concert with her presence. Her Majesty was accompanied by the Prince Consort, the Prince of Wales (now King Edward VII.), the Princess Royal and Prince Frederick William of Prussia (afterwards Emperor and Empress of Germany), Princess Alice, and a large suite, all of whom remained till the conclusion of the concert—in fact the event was in the nature of a State visit, the Court newsman recording that the Royal party 'occupied six carriages.'

'Paradise and the Peri,' however, failed to meet with the approval of Mr. Davison. He wrote in *The Times* that 'a less "dainty dish" was assuredly never "set before the Queen."' He also began a leading article in the *Musical World* with these words:—

ROBERT SCHUMANN has had his innings, and been bowled out—like Richard Wagner. *Paradise and the Peri* has gone to the tomb of the *Lohengrins*.

In spite of this anti-Schumannism on the part of 'J. W. D.' and other London critics, Bennett continued to favour his good friend of the Leipzig days, Schumann's Symphony in C being first played in England on May 30, 1864, under his (Bennett's) direction. For the Jubilee concert of the Philharmonic Society he specially composed his own picturesque overture 'Paradise and the Peri.' By-the-way, has *that* gone to the tomb of the forgotten?

On the death of Thomas Attwood Walmisley (in 1856) Bennett was elected Professor of Music in the University of Cambridge, and received the degree of Doctor of Music, *honoris causa*. A course of four lectures delivered by him, in April, 1858, at the London Institution is a little-known incident in his career. We have before us the prospectus of these discourses. The first

is entitled 'On the state of music in English private society'; its syllabus reads:—

Is England a Musical Nation?—The great Public Musical Societies now existing—The large number of Amateurs assisting in Public Musical Entertainments—What is done for Music at Home?—Is good Music to be ever inseparable from state and ceremony, and always to include the penalties of hot rooms and late hours?

These interrogatories furnish food for thought even in our own times. The second lecture was on the subject of 'The visits of illustrious foreign musicians to England—Handel, Mozart, Haydn, Clementi, Dussek, Spohr, Rossini, Weber, Hummel, and Mendelssohn, with musical illustrations'—an interesting theme, though the absence of Wagner's name strikes us as being remarkable. But he was not then 'illustrious.'

[F. G. E.]

(To be continued.)

Occasional Notes.

MANY HAPPY RETURNS OF THE DAY TO:—

Edward Elgar	- - - - -	June 2.
Paul Felix Weingartner	- - - - -	" 2.
Charles Steggall	- - - - -	" 3.
Arthur Somervell	- - - - -	" 5.
Siegfried Wagner	- - - - -	" 6.
Madame Frickenhaus	- - - - -	" 7.
Madame Clara Novello (Countess Gigliucci)	- - - - -	" 10.
Charles Ainslie Barry	- - - - -	" 10.
Richard Strauss	- - - - -	" 11.
Edvard Grieg	- - - - -	" 15.
Charles Wood	- - - - -	" 15.
William Shakespeare	- - - - -	" 16.
Alfred James Hipkins	- - - - -	" 17.
Frank J. Sawyer	- - - - -	" 19.
A. Herbert Brewer	- - - - -	" 21.
Karl Reinecke	- - - - -	" 23.
Miss Maude Valerie White	- - - - -	" 23.
Julian Marshall	- - - - -	" 24.
Plunket Greene	- - - - -	" 24.
Edward Bunnett	- - - - -	" 26.
Miss Fanny Davies	- - - - -	" 27.
Joseph Joachim	- - - - -	" 28.

The King's Private Band will be disbanded at the end of September. Such, in effect, is the official announcement of a decision that must cause regret at the giving up of an artistic feature of Court life, and one that is rich in historical interest. As this, however, is not the first time that the King's Band has ceased to be, we may hope for its resuscitation at some future time. Sir Walter Parratt will still retain his ancient office of Master of the King's Musick. In our next, or in an early issue, we hope to give some historical particulars of the King's Band during various reigns, stretching back to that of Edward IV.

Sir Alexander Mackenzie's second Canadian letter (printed on p. 385) will be read with interest not only in the Mother Country, but in the Daughter Dominion. In a private letter covering his public communication, Sir Alexander refers to the fact that Mr. Charles Fry, in addition to the part he took in the 'Dream of Jubal,' gave musical and other recitations during the illness of the tenor vocalist (Mr. Virgo). He