

Review

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music by J. R. Deer, No. 735, is a very tasteful part-song, somewhat Spohr-like in its harmonic progressions, but not by any means difficult. No. 736, words from Robert Jones's "First Book of Songs and Airs" (1601), music by F. Cunningham Woods, "Lie down, poor heart," could not possibly pass for a composition of the Elizabethan period, for some of the harmonies are distinctly of the present century; but the music is suitably plaintive in feeling and quite easy. Yet one more Elizabethan part-song. No. 737 is "How sweet the moonlight sleeps," being an illustration, by D. Emlen Evans, of Shakespeare's familiar lines. Here there is no attempt at imitating archaic phraseology, the little piece being written in a flowing style and in its melodic and harmonic progressions being suggestive of Mendelssohn and Spohr.

*Berthold Damcke, Etude biographique et musicale.*

[Paris: Alphonse Lemerre.]

In this admirably printed volume we read of a musician of whom little is known in England, excepting that he was an intense admirer of Berlioz, and also one of the French master's most intimate friends. In Part 1 the story of his life is told; but, as is mostly the case with musicians, it has little of general interest. Like Berlioz, having "fixé son but au dessus du médiocre," Damcke found the art of living by no means easy. The writer of the book, Prince Alexandre Bibesco, is no great admirer of Mendelssohn, either as man or artist; in one place, referring to that composer's dislike to "Robert le Diable," he remarks that the latter work "survivra longtemps aux pauvretés esthétiques du jeune Bartholdy." There are interesting pictures of Berlioz, and of other illustrious musicians who took part in the *soirées intimes* of the Rue Mansart, evidently drawn from life. Part 2 deals with Damcke's music. As a composer he was not prolific; and, so far as we can read between the lines, his works, excellent in their way, show signs of study rather than inspiration. Part 3 is devoted to the artist as a critic, and our writer places him in the first rank of "critiques-compositeurs." Two extracts, by way of specimen, are given from the *Journal de Saint-Petersbourg*, to which Damcke was a frequent contributor. In the one Rubinstein as a composer is discussed, and the judgments expressed are sound; the other contains Damcke's musical *credo*—viz., that *la beauté idéale* should be the aim of all composers. The remark is true enough: and yet of little practical use so long as musicians are not agreed as to what is, and what is not beautiful. Damcke sums up Wagner thus:—"Convictions factices, contradictions perpétuelles, infatuation de jongleur mal satisfaite: c'est là le vrai fond de Richard Wagner"; though, it should be added, that he regarded the master's musical organisation as "de premier ordre." Damcke's ardent friendship for Berlioz will account, to some extent, for his hostility to Wagner.

*First Steps at the Pianoforte.* By Francesco Berger.

[Novello, Ewer and Co.]

MR. FRANCESCO BERGER has prepared an excellent book for little folks, which has the special merit of teaching by visual associations. The value of learning by objective perception cannot be over-estimated. It is nature's method, and with children it is of paramount importance. Mr. Berger's book is distinctly the best introduction to the pianoforte and the Staff Notation at present extant, and if its methods and rules are faithfully followed it cannot fail to produce satisfactory results. Mr. Berger teaches the treble and bass staves separately, building up each line by line, the treble being taken first. The hands are treated in similar manner; the right hand, and subsequently the left, and finally both simultaneously, being used in progressions occurring in the upper part of the instrument. The study of the bass clef is delayed until some progress has been made in the time value of notes and even time signatures. This method has much that is commendable, and doubtless it has been well tested by Mr. Berger's experience as a teacher. It certainly has the merit of lending itself to clear mental classification, a desirable feature in all studies.

*The Human Voice: its Mechanism and Phenomena.* By Anatole Piltan. [Robert Cocks and Co.]

MR. PILTAN'S book has a scientific value which demands specific notice. This gentleman, with the laudable aim of reducing the respiratory movements of vocalists to scientific exactitude, has devised an apparatus which records, in the shape of a series of sympathetic curves on a revolving cylinder, the movements of the inspiratory and expiratory muscles and the pressure of air in various parts of the throat and head. With the zeal of an enthusiast the author has, by this means, tabulated every action in which the lungs take part from the groan to the sneeze. Broadly speaking, Mr. Piltan's deductions may be said to confirm what has been so ably shown in Dr. Joal's valuable book "On Respiration in Singing"—namely, that the best results are to be obtained from expansion of the lower part of the chest according to what is known as the costal method. Mr. Piltan, however, pursues his theory of the control of the breath being the source of all good vocal tone to the extent of throwing doubt upon the commonly accepted theory of the vibratory action of the vocal cords. He says: "The vocal cords must only be taken into account because they impede and, at the same time, regulate the air. Besides, it is not necessary that the vocal cords, which are stiffened by contraction, should vibrate like the reed of an organ pipe; we can see that there are many other ways of producing tone, and even though the vibratory reed determines the pitch, it is *not* the *tongue* or *reed* which is the sonorous element in any case—it is the *air*." The true theory of the action of the vocal cords is, however, of little moment to the singer, for, apart from the movement of approximation, they are not under his immediate control. The diagrams of the vocal shake would seem to show that the true shake is not the result of the rapid and direct alternation of two notes, but "a kind of beat resulting from the emission of two distinct shades of vowels for the two notes which constitute the shake." As this discovery seems to have been the result of observation, and as Mr. Piltan says, "I always get satisfactory results with this teaching," the matter will doubtless occupy the attention of many teachers. Mr. Piltan would have been wiser had he left the matter of "pronunciation for English singers" alone. The vocalist who for "totter he will not" sang "tawter he weal naught" in any English concert-room would give rise to "audible smiles." Some compromise in the pronunciation of the vowels may be tolerated when they occur in positions of exceptional difficulty, but obviously one of the chief aims of voice cultivation is to enable the singer to pronounce, as far as possible, all the vowels in all parts of his voice; and the sacrifice of clear articulation to produce a fuller tone is one of the besetting sins of vocalists. English audiences want to hear the words, and on the clearness with which they do so greatly depends their esteem of the singer. The method of question and answer which Mr. Piltan has adopted, and of which the former is so obviously dictated by the latter, and the want of terseness in the language are also regrettable, not to say exasperating features of his book; but although sometimes it takes long to get at the author's meaning, the time will be found well spent by all to whom the much vexed question of voice production is important.

*A Night in Spring. In Autumn Woods.* Songs. English words by Paul England. Music by Eric Meyer-Helmund. *Little Laughing Jean.* Song. Words by James Lumsden. Music by G. Henschel.

[Stanley Lucas, Weber and Co.]

THE first of these songs well sustains the reputation of the composer. The gentle melancholy of the text and tender longing for the presence of an absent one are admirably reflected in the music, which is graceful and expressive. The omission of a sharp before the C in the accompaniment in the first bar of page 4 is likely to prove disastrous to players at first sight. "In Autumn Woods" is less distinctive than the foregoing, and its melancholy is of a hopeless kind. The music is simple and unpretentious. Mr. Henschel's song is a sprightly ditty, but the accompaniment seems somewhat heavy and laboured for so light a subject.