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MOUSSORGSKY'S OPERAS.

BY ROSA NEWMARCH.

Seventeen years ago I first became acquainted with Moussorgsky's music. I was then working in Petersburg under the guidance of Vladimir Stassov, the champion of the national movement and director of the Fine Arts section of the Imperial Public Library. Day by day I occupied a place in the room adjoining Stassov's, and the fiery, energetic old man used to stride in every hour or so with some fresh book or score, or some unpublished correspondence which he thought necessary for my education; always impatient for me to complete one task and pass on to another.

Not every one worked comfortably with him, for he set a pace that soon finished off the indolent or physically incapable. The field of Russian art was rapidly expanding, and at that time the workers were few and often merely superficial, consequently the willing labourer must not shirk doing double shifts. Moreover, Stassov, like many Russians, realised the shortness of life and the imminence of death with such intense, painful clearness that it became infectious.

He could, however, restrain his impatience on occasion. The ultimate acknowledgment of Moussorgsky's genius was one of the dearest hopes of his heart; but he did not show me the operas until he thought I was ripe for that honour. Then, together, we went through the early edition of 'Boris Godounov' (1875) and 'Khovanstchina,' already issued with Rimsky-Korsakov's revisions. 'Love them or hate them,' Stassov used to say in my moments of doubtful enthusiasm, 'but at least take the trouble to *know* every page of them. There is more vitality in Moussorgsky than in any of our contemporary composers. These operas will go further afield than the rest, and you will see their day when I shall no longer be here to follow them to Germany and France, and perhaps (rather doubtfully) to England.' How surely his predictions regarding this and other questions have been fulfilled is borne in upon me every year that I live and work in the world of music. Later on he gave me the new edition of 'Boris' (1896), edited by the composer's life-long friend—and in some degree his teacher—Rimsky-Korsakov. Theoretically, Stassov was furiously opposed to these editorial proceedings; for, while admitting Moussorgsky's technical limitations and his tendency to be slovenly in workmanship, he still believed it was better for the world to see this individual and inspired composer with all his faults ruthlessly exposed to view, than clothed and in his right mind with the assistance of Rimsky-Korsakov. Stassov's attitude

to Moussorgsky was that of the Russian vagabond who said to Stephen Graham: 'Love us while we are dirty, for when we are clean all the world will love us.' We who loved Moussorgsky's music in spite of all its apparent dishevelment may feel inclined to resent Rimsky-Korsakov's conscientious grooming of it. But when it actually came to the question of producing the operas, even Stassov, I think, realised the need for some practical revisions, without which Moussorgsky's original scores, with all their potential greatness, ran considerable risk of becoming mere archaeological curiosities. In 1908, Bessel published a later edition of 'Boris,' restoring the scenes cut out of the version of 1896. This is the edition now generally used; the first one, on which I was educated, having become somewhat of a rarity.

I do not propose to turn this article into a comparative analysis of the two scores of 'Boris,' or to contribute anything here to the conflict now being waged in Russia and Paris as to the respective merits of 'Khovanstchina' according to Rimsky-Korsakov, or according to Diaghilev, Ravel, and Stravinsky. At last we have got Russian opera in England, given under the best available conditions; for heaven's sake let the public hear it undisturbed by all needless polemics. We may rest assured that the operas still contain enough of Moussorgsky's essential genius not to fail of their profound psychological impression. With what grim sardonic humour Moussorgsky himself would have watched this controversy, and what a blood-curdling song-parable he may even now be composing, likening the dead genius to a fallen warrior, and the army of commentators and 'improvers' to a flock of crows each bearing away something of his vital organism, and batten on his musical remains.

Modeste Moussorgsky was born March 16/28, 1839, at Karevo, in the Government of Pskov. He was of good family, but his people were comparatively poor. His father, who died in 1853, gave Modeste every facility for becoming an excellent amateur pianist; his mother grounded him in music, and remained the good genius of the young man's life, until her death early in the 'sixties. Moussorgsky was educated for the army, and entered the famous Preobajensky Guards at eighteen. Borodin has left a graphic sketch, dating from 1856, of a dandified, but attractive, young officer, popular in society, singing agreeably, and endowed with a gift for languages. The account of Moussorgsky's subsequent meeting with Dargomijsky and Mily Balakirev, of his awakening to the consciousness of his artistic powers, and his unhesitating renunciation of all his worldly prospects for music's sake, reads more like a religious than an artistic conversion. In most biographical sketches of Moussorgsky unnecessary stress is laid upon the fact of his having been a drunkard, and addicted to drugs. It is true that towards the end of his life, after he had suffered all the stupidity and cruelty that 'world's use' can inflict upon a man incapable of compromising with

his artistic conscience, he took refuge from pain and insomnia in stimulants and narcotics. But neither 'Boris' nor 'Khovanstchina,' nor any of his better lyrics, can be judged as the work of a dipsomaniac. Probably only five or six of his songs, composed as late as 1877, show any trace whatever of mental deterioration.

It was by a happy chance that Moussorgsky became acquainted with Dargomijsky in 1856, since the latter was at that moment the sole mature representative of national music in Russia. Glinka, broken in health and spirit, had just started on a journey abroad from which he was destined never to return; while Balakirev, Cui, Borodin, and the other members of the new school of Russian music, had as yet produced next to nothing. Dargomijsky was still smarting under the comparative failure of his opera 'The Roussalka,' which had been produced in Petersburg a few months previously. Its racy humour and touches of actuality were not to the taste of a public nurtured wholly on Italian music. Dispirited, but undaunted, Dargomijsky, at the time of Moussorgsky's first visit, was engaged upon the work which was to embody the ultimate expression of his artistic creed: 'I want the note to be the direct equivalent of the work. Above all things I want the truth.' The cultured classes of Russia, just awakening to the emotional positivism of Gogol and Dostoevsky, were still far from prepared to welcome an apostle of musical realism. Dargomijsky's operatic experiment, 'The Stone Guest' (based on Poushkin's version of 'Don Juan') made no appeal to the public; and although it was accepted in a moment of enthusiasm as the ideal model of the young Russian school, only Moussorgsky eventually followed his master's theories to their logical conclusion. While intercourse with Dargomijsky contributed to a forced maturing of Moussorgsky's ideas about music, the circumstances of his life still hindered his technical development. His early letters to Cui and Stassov show how deeply and independently he had already thought out certain problems of his art. Meanwhile Balakirev carried on his musical education in a far more effective fashion than has ever been admitted by those who claim that Moussorgsky was wholly self-taught, or, in other words, completely ignorant of his craft. The 'Symphonic Intermezzo,' composed in 1861, shows how insistent and thorough was Balakirev's determination that his pupils should grasp the principles of tradition before setting up as innovators. Here we have a sound piece of workmanship, showing clear traces of Bach's influence; the middle movement, founded on a national air, being very original in its development, but kept strictly within classical form.

Faced with the prospect of service in a country garrison, Moussorgsky left the army in 1859, and accepted a small post in a Government office which soon proved just as irksome as regimental life. I pass over the compositions of the next year or two as having little connection with the broad lines of his subsequent development. In 1866 he fell ill,

and rusticated for a couple of years on a remote estate belonging to his brother. During this period of rest he seems to have found himself as a creative artist. After working for a time upon an opera based on Flaubert's novel 'Salammbô,' he turned his attention to song, and between 1864 and his return to Petersburg in 1868, produced a number of his wonderful reflections of Russian life in its pathetic and humorous aspects; a series of human documents which are worthy to live side by side with the works of Gogol, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy. The analysis of these songs stands outside the scope of this article; but they contain the essence of Moussorgsky's genius.

His next operatic essay took the form which he described as 'opéra-dialogué.' The subject—Gogol's prose comedy 'The match-maker'—was admirably suited to him, but after completing the first Act he abandoned the work because he was becoming absorbed in a more thrilling design. The idea of basing a music-drama on Poushkin's tragedy 'Boris Godounov' was suggested by Prof. Nikolsky, and from September, 1868, to June, 1870, Moussorgsky was engaged upon this work. Each Act as it was finished was tried in a small circle of musical friends, the composer singing all the male rôles in turn, while Madame Alexandra Pourgold (afterwards the sister-in-law of Rimsky-Korsakov) created the women's parts. Dargomijsky, who heard a portion of it before his death in 1869, declared that Moussorgsky had entirely surpassed him in his own sphere.

'Boris Godounov' was rejected by the Direction of the Imperial Opera on the ground that it gave too little chance to the soloists. The unusual form of the opera, the bold treatment of a dramatic, but unpopular, episode in national history, and the democratic sentiment displayed in making the People the protagonist of the work, were probably still stronger reasons for the attitude of disapproval always shown by 'the powers-that-be' towards 'Boris Godounov.' Very unwillingly, yielding only to the entreaties of his friends, the composer consented to make some important changes in his work. The original plan of the opera consisted of the following scenes: The crowd awaiting the election of Boris, and his Coronation; Pimen in his cell; scene in the Inn on the Lithuanian frontier; Boris and his children, and the interview with Shouisky; scene in the Duma, and the death of Boris; the peasant revolt, and the entry of the Pretender. It will be seen that the feminine element was curiously neglected. The additional scenes, composed on the advice of Stassov and the distinguished Russian architect V. Hartmann, were partially designed to rectify this omission. They include the scenes in the house of the Polish grandee Mnishek; the song of the Hostess of the inn; portions of the first scene of Act 1; the episodes of the chiming clock and the parakeet; and some fine passages in the scene between Pimen and Gregory (Scene 1, Act 2). Portions of 'Boris' were given at

Kondratiev's benefit at the Maryinski Theatre in February, 1873, but the production of the opera in its entirety was delayed until January 24, 1874. How often has Stassov described to me the excitement of the days that followed! The old-fashioned subscribers to the Opera sulked at this interruption to its routine; the pedants of the Conservatoire raged; the critics—Moussorgsky had already satirized them in 'The Peep Show'—baffled, and consequently infuriated, 'foamed at the mouth.' So stupid were the intrigues organized against 'Boris,' that some wreaths sent by groups of young people and bearing messages of enthusiastic homage to the composer, were intercepted at the doors of the opera house and sent to Moussorgsky's private residence, in order to suppress a public recognition of his obnoxious genius. For it was the young generation that took 'Boris' straight to their hearts, and in spite of all organized opposition the work had twenty performances, the house being always crowded; while students sang the choruses from the opera as they went home through the streets at midnight.

While this controversy was raging, Moussorgsky was already occupied with a new music-drama upon a historical subject, suggested to him by Stassov, dealing with the tragic story of the Princes Khovansky and the rising of the old archers-of-the-guard—the Streltsy. He was full of confidence in his project, and just before the first performance of 'Boris' in 1873, wrote to Stassov in the following characteristic strain: 'Now for judgment! It is jolly to feel that we are actually thinking of and living for "Khovanstchina" while we are being tried for "Boris." Joyfully and daringly we look to the distant musical horizon that lures us onward, and are not afraid of the verdict. They will say: "You are violating all laws, human and divine"; and we shall reply, "Yes," thinking to ourselves, "so we shall again." They will warn us, "You will soon be forgotten for ever and a day"; and we shall answer, "Non non, et non, Madame."' This triumphant moment in Moussorgsky's life was fleeting. 'Boris Godounov' was not suffered to become a repertory opera, but was thrust aside for long periods. Its subsequent revivals were usually due to some star artist who liked the title-rôle and insisted on choosing the work for his benefit night.

In 1871 Moussorgsky shared rooms with Rimsky-Korsakov until the marriage of the latter in 1873. Then he took up his abode with the gifted poet Count Golenishtiev-Koutouzov, whose idealistic and mystical tendencies were not without influence on the champion of realism; as may be seen from the two song-cycles, 'Without sunshine' and 'Songs and dances of death,' composed to his verses. 'The Nursery,' a series of children's songs, the 'Pictures from an exhibition,' inspired by Hartmann's drawings, and the orchestral piece, 'Night on the bare mountain,' date from this period; also portions of a new opera on a Malo-Russian subject, Gogol's humorous tale, 'The Fair at Sorochinsk.' Meanwhile the stress of poverty and the growing distaste for his

means of livelihood—a singularly unsuitable official appointment—were telling on his health. Feeling, perhaps, that his time on earth was short, he worked with feverish energy. Finally, some friction with the authorities ended in his resigning his post in 1879, and undertaking a tour in South Russia with the singer, Madame Leonora. The appreciation shown to him during this journey afforded him some moments of happiness; but his constitution was hopelessly shattered, and in 1880 he was obliged to rest completely. A series of terrible nervous attacks compelled him at last to take refuge in the Nicholas Military Hospital, where he died on his forty-second birthday, March 16/28, of paralysis of the heart and the spinal marrow.

Moussorgsky left four operas in various stages of completeness, but I can only deal at length with the two in which the British public are most interested at the present time, 'Boris Godounov' and 'Khovanstchina.'

The historical drama 'Boris Godounov' was one of the fruits of the poet Poushkin's exile at Mikhailovsky in 1824. Virtually imprisoned on his father's estate to repent at leisure some youthful delinquencies, moral and political, Poushkin occupied his time with the study of Karamzin's History of Russia and Shakespeare's plays. 'Boris Godounov' marks a transition from the extreme influence of Byron to that of the creator of 'Macbeth.' Ambition coupled with remorse is the moving passion of the tragedy. The insane cruelty of Ivan the Terrible deprived Russia of almost every strong and independent spirit with the exception of the sagacious and cautious Boyard, Boris Godounov, the descendant of a Tatar family. Brother-in-law and regent of Ivan's weak-witted heir, Feodor, Boris was already, to all intents and purposes, ruler of Russia before ambition whispered that he might actually wear the crown. Only the Tsarevich Dmitri, a child of six, stood between him and the fulfilment of his secret desire. In 1581, Dmitri was murdered, and suspicion fell upon Boris, who cleverly exculpated himself, and in due course was chosen to succeed Feodor. He reigned wisely and with authority; but his Nemesis finally appeared in the person of the monk Gregory, the false Demetrius, whose pretensions were eagerly supported by the Poles. Boris, unhinged by the secret workings of conscience, was brought to the verge of madness just at the moment when the people—who had never quite resigned themselves to a ruler of Tatar origin—wavered in their allegiance. Urged by Rome, the Poles took advantage of the situation to advance upon Moscow. At this critical juncture Boris was seized with a fatal illness. The Tsars, as we know, may appoint their own successors; Boris with his last breath nominated his son (also a Feodor), and died in his fifty-sixth year, in April, 1605.

The intellectual power and fine workmanship which Poushkin displayed in 'Boris Godounov' entitle this drama to rank as a classic in Russian literature. It contains moments of forcible eloquence, and those portions of the play which

deal with the populace are undoubtedly the strongest. Here Pouskin disencumbers himself of all theatrical conventions, and shows not only accurate knowledge of the national temperament but profound observation of human nature as a whole.* Such a subject accorded well with Moussorgsky's genius, which was eminently democratic. He has expressed this tendency very clearly in a letter to Stasov, dated 1872. 'To seek assiduously,' he says, 'the most delicate and subtle features of the human crowd, to follow them into unknown regions, to make them our own; this seems to me the true vocation of the artist.' And again: 'In the human mass, as in the individual, there are always some subtle, impalpable features which have been overlooked; unobserved, untouched, by anyone. To mark these and study them, by reading, by direct observation, by conjecture—in other words, to feed upon humanity as a healthy diet which has been neglected—there lies the whole problem of art.'

By the time this article appears, 'Boris Godounov' will have been played for the first time in England, and the English translation of the libretto—some copies of which have unfortunately been published without my having had an opportunity for revising the proof—may be in the hands of all who are curious on the subject of this opera. I need not therefore analyse it scene by scene. Moussorgsky arranged his own text, retaining Poushkin's words intact wherever that was practicable, and simplifying, remodelling, or adding to the original material when necessary. The result is a series of living pictures from Russian history, somewhat disconnected if taken apart from the music, which is the coagulating element of the work. The welding of these widely contrasting scenes is effected partially by the use of recurrent leading motives, but chiefly by a remarkable homogeneity of musical style. Moussorgsky, as may be proved from his correspondence, was consciously concerned to find appropriate musical phrases with which to accompany certain ideas in the course of opera. But he does not use leading motives with the persistency of Wagner. No person or thing is labelled in 'Boris Godounov,' and we need no thematic guide to thread our way through the psychological maze of the work. There is one motive that plays several parts in the music-drama. Where it occurs on page 49 of the pianoforte score of 1908 (just after Pimen's words to Gregory: 'He would be now your age, and should be Tsar to-day'), it evokes the memory of the murdered Tsarevich Feodor; but it also enters very subtly into the soul-states of the impostor who impersonates him, and of the remorseful Boris. There are other characteristic phrases for Boris, suggesting his tenderness for his children and his ruthless ambition.

The opera opens with a Prologue in which the people are gathered in the courtyard of the many-towered monastery of Novo-Dievichy at Moscow, whither Boris had withdrawn after the assassination of the Tsarevich. The crowd moves to and fro in

a listless fashion; it hardly knows why it is there, but hopes vaguely that the election of a new ruler may bring some amelioration of its sad lot. Meanwhile the astute Boris shows no unseemly haste to snatch at the fruit of his crime. The simplicity and economy of means with which Moussorgsky produces precisely the right musical atmosphere is very striking. The constable enters, and with threats and blows galvanizes the weary and indifferent throng into supplications addressed to Boris. The secretary of the Duma appears, and announces that Boris refuses the crown; the crowd renews its entreaties. When the pilgrims enter, the people wake to real life, pressing round them and showing that their enthusiasm is for spiritual rather than temporal things. In the second scene, which shows the coronation procession across the Red Square in the Kremlin, the song of praise (Slavsia) is sung with infinitely greater heartiness, for now the Tsar comes into personal contact with his people. The scenes of the Prologue and the coronation move steadily on, just as they would do in real life; there is scarcely a superfluous bar of musical accompaniment, and the ordinary operatic conventions being practically non-existent, we are completely convinced by the realism of the spectacle and the strangely new, undisciplined character of the music. The truth is forcibly brought home to us of M. Camille Bellaigue's assertion that every collective thought, or passion, needs not only words, but music, if we are to become completely sensible of it.

The text of the opening scene of Act 1 is taken almost intact from Poushkin's drama. Played as it now usually is between the strenuous animation of the Prologue and the brilliant Coronation scene, its pervading atmosphere of dignity and monastic calm affords a welcome interlude of repose. Moussorgsky handles his ecclesiastical themes with sure knowledge. In early days Stasov tells us that he learnt from the chaplain of the Military Academy 'the very essence of old Church music, Greek and Catholic.' The scene in the inn where Gregory and the vagabond monks, Varlaam and Missail, halt on their flight into Lithuania is often cut out of the acting version. It contains, however, two characteristic and popular solos: a lively folk-song for the Hostess, and a rollicking drinking-song for Varlaam (bass); besides frequent touches of the rough-hewn, sardonic humour which is a distinguishing quality of Moussorgsky's genius. Nevertheless the determination to drop this scene from the opera is perhaps wise, for it is doubtful whether its unabashed 'naturalism' might not displease an audience which has travelled much farther from the homely ribaldry of Elizabethan days than had the simple-minded 'big public' of Russia to whom Moussorgsky's work was designed to appeal a generation ago.

With the opening of Act 2 we feel at once that Moussorgsky is treading on alien ground. This portion of the opera—for which he was his own librettist—was added in order that some conventional love interest might be given to the work. The glamour of romance is a borrowed quality in

* See 'Progress and Poetry in Russia,' by Rosa Newmarch. John Lane, the Bodley Head.

Moussorgsky's art. In spite of the charm of the scenic surroundings, and some moments of sincere passion, the weakness of the music proclaims the fact. He who penetrates so deeply into the psychology of his own people, finds no better characterization of the Polish temperament than the use of the polacca or mazurka rhythms. True that he may intend by these dance measures to emphasise the boastful vanity of the Polish nobles and the light, cold nature of Marina Mnichek; but the method becomes monotonous. Marina's solo takes this form, and again in the duet by the fountain we are pursued by the eternal mazurka rhythm.

The second scene of Act 2 is packed full of varied interest, and in every episode Moussorgsky is himself again. The lively dancing-songs for the young Tsarevich and the Nurse are interrupted by the sudden entry of Boris. In the scene which follows, where the Tsar forgets for a moment the cares of State and the sting of conscience, and gives himself whole-heartedly to his children, there is some exquisitely tender music, and we begin for the first time to feel profound pity for the usurper. The Tsarevich's recital of the incident of the parakeet, reproducing with the utmost accuracy and deep simplicity the varied inflections of the child's voice, as he relates his tale without a trace of self-consciousness, is equal to anything of the kind which Moussorgsky has achieved in 'The Nursery' song-cycle. This delightful interlude of comedy gives place on the entrance of Shouisky to the first shadows of approaching tragedy. Darker and darker grows the mind of the Tsar, until the scene ends in an almost intolerable crisis of madness and despair. From the moment of Boris's terrible monologue the whole atmosphere of the work becomes vibrant with terror and pity. But realistic as the treatment may be, it is a realism—like that of Shakespeare or Webster—that is exalted and vivified by a fervent and forceful imagination.

In the opening scene of Act 3, enacted amid a winter landscape in the desolate forest of Kromy, Moussorgsky has concentrated all his powers for the creation of a host of national types who move before our eyes in a dazzling kaleidoscopic display. They are not attractive, these revolted and revolting peasants, revenging themselves upon the wretched aristocrat who has fallen into their hands; for Moussorgsky, though he raises the Folk to the dignity of a protagonist, never idealises it, or sets it on a pedestal. But our pulses beat with the emotions of this crowd, and its profound groan of anguish finds an echo in our hearts. It is a living and terrible force, and beside it all other stage crowds seem mechanical puppets. In the foreground of this shifting mass is seen the village idiot, 'God's fool'; teased by the thoughtless children, half-reverenced, half-pitied by the men and women. After the false Demetrius has passed through the forest, drawing the crowd in his wake, the idiot is left sitting alone in the falling snow. He sings his heart-breaking ditty: 'Night and

darkness are at hand. Woe to Russia!' and the curtain falls to the sound of his bitter, paroxysmal weeping.

The last scene is pregnant with the 'horror that awaits on princes.' The climax is built up step by step. After the lurking insanity of Boris, barely curbed by the presence of the Council; after his interview with Pimen, who destroys his last furtive hope that the young Tsar may not have been murdered after all; after his access of mental and physical agony, and his parting with his beloved son—it is with a feeling of relief that we see death put an end to his unbearable sufferings.

Although 'Khovanstchina' may in some ways approach more nearly to conventional ideas of opera, yet foreigners, I think, will find it more difficult to understand than 'Boris Godounov.' To begin with it lacks the tragic dominant figure, swayed by such universal passions as ambition, remorse, and paternal tenderness, which gives a psychological unity to the earlier work. Here the dramatic interest is more widely scattered; it is as though Moussorgsky sought to crowd into this series of historical pictures as many different types of 17th century Russia as possible; and these types are peculiarly national. Except that it breaks through the rigid traditions of Byzantine art, the figures being full of vitality, 'Khovanstchina' reminds us of those early ikons, belonging to the period when the transport of pictures through the forests, bogs, and wildernesses of Russia so restricted their distribution, that the religious painter resorted to the expedient of representing on one canvas as many Saints as could be packed into it.

Stassov originated the idea of utilising the dramatic conflict between old and new Russia at the close of the 17th century, as the subject of a music-drama. It was his intention to bring into relief a group of representative figures of the period: Dositheus, head of the sect known as the Rasskolniki, or Old Believers*, a man of lofty character and prophetic insight; Ivan Khovansky, typical of fanatical, half-Oriental and conservative Russia; Galitsin, the westernised aristocrat, who dreams of a new Russia, reformed on European lines; two contrasting types of womanhood, both belonging to the Old Believers—the passionate, mystical Martha, falling and redeeming herself through the power of love, and Susan, in whom fanaticism has dried up the well-springs of tenderness and sympathy; the dissolute young Andrew Khovansky, ardently attracted by the pure, sweet young German girl, Emma; the egotistical Scrivener, who has his humorous side; the fierce Streltsy, and the oppressed and suffering populace—'all these elements,' says Stassov, 'seemed to suggest characters and situations which promised to be intensely stirring.' It was also part of his original

* In the reign of Alexis the revision of the Bible carried out by the Patriarch Nikon (1655) resulted in a great schism in the Orthodox Church, a number of people clinging to the old version of the Scriptures in spite of the errors it contained. Thus was formed the sect of the Old Believers which still exists in Russia.

design to bring upon the scene the young Tsar Peter the Great, and the Regent, the Tsarevna Sophia. But much of Stassov's original scenarium had perforce to be dropped; partly because it would have resulted in the building up of a work on an unpractically colossal scale, but also because Moussorgsky's failing health spurred him on to complete the drama at all costs. Had he lived a few years longer, he would probably have made of 'Khovanstchina' a far better balanced and more polished work.

From the musical point of view there is undoubtedly more symmetry and restraint in 'Khovanstchina' than in 'Boris.' We are often impressed by the almost classic simplicity of the music. A great deal of the thematic material is drawn from ecclesiastical sources.

'Khovanstchina' opens with an orchestral Prelude descriptive of daybreak over Moscow, than which nothing in Russian music is more intensely or touchingly national in feeling. The curtain rises upon the Red Square in the Kremlin, just as the rising sun catches the domes of the churches, and the bells ring for early matins. A group of Streltsy relate the havoc they have worked during the preceding night. The Scrivener, a quaint type of the period, appears on the scene and is roughly chaffed. When the Streltsy depart, the Boyard Shaklovity enters and bribes the Scrivener to write down his denunciation of the Khovanskys. No sooner is this done than the elder Khovansky and his suite arrive, attended by the Streltsy and the populace. In virtue of his office as captain of the Old Guard, the arrogant nobleman assumes the airs of a sovereign, and issues autocratic commands, while the people, impressed by his grandeur, sing him a song of flattery. When the crowd has departed, the Lutheran girl, Emma, runs in pursued by the younger Khovansky. She tries in vain to rid herself of his hateful attentions. At the climax of this scene, Martha, the young Rasskolnik whom Prince Andrew has already loved and betrayed, comes silently upon the stage and saves Emma from his embraces. Martha reproaches Andrew, who tries to stab her; but she parries the blow, and in one of her ecstatic moods prophesies his ultimate fate. The elder Khovansky and his followers now return, and the Prince inquires into the cause of the disturbance. Prince Ivan admires Emma and orders the Streltsy to arrest her; but Andrew, mad with jealousy, declares she shall not be taken alive. At this juncture Dositheus enters, rebukes the young man's violence, and restores peace.

Act 2 shows us Prince Galitsin reading a letter from the Tsarevna Sophia, with whom he has formerly had a love-intrigue. In spite of his western education Galitsin is superstitious. The scene which follows, in which Martha, gazing into a bowl of water, as into a crystal, foretells his downfall and banishment, is one of the most impressive moments in the work.* Galitsin, infuriated by her predictions, orders his servants to drown Martha on her homeward way. A long

scene devoted to a dispute between Galitsin and Khovansky, is rather dry. Dositheus again acts as peacemaker.

Act 3 takes place in the quarter of Moscow inhabited by the Streltsy. Martha, seated near the house of Andrew Khovansky, recalls her passion for him in a plaintive folk-song. The song closes with one of her prophetic allusions to the burning of the Old Believers. Susan, the old fanatic, overhears Martha and reproves her for singing 'shameless songs of love.' She threatens to have her brought before the Brethren and tried as a witch; but Dositheus intervenes and sends Susan away terrified at the idea that she is the prey of evil spirits. Night falls, and the stage is empty. Enter Shaklovity, who sings of the sorrows of his country in an aria that is quite one of the most beautiful things in the music-drama. The next scene is concerned with the Streltsy, who march in to a drinking song. They encounter their women-folk, who, unlike the terrified populace of Moscow, have no hesitation in falling upon them and giving them a piece of their mind. Undoubtedly the Streltsy were not ideal in their domestic relations. While they are quarrelling, the Scrivener comes in breathless, and announces the arrival of foreign troopers and Peter the Great's bodyguard, 'the Petrovtsy.' The cause of Old Russia is lost. Sobered and fearful, the Streltsy put up a prayer to Heaven, for the religious instinct lurks in every type of the Russian people.

In Act 4 the curtain rises upon a hall in Prince Ivan Khovansky's country house, where he is taking his ease, diverted by the songs of his serving-maids and the dances of his Persian slaves. Shaklovity appears, and summons him to attend the Tsarevna's Council. As Khovansky in his robes of ceremony is crossing the threshold, he is stabbed, and falls with a great cry. The servants disperse in terror, but Shaklovity lingers a moment to mock the corpse of his enemy. The scene now changes to the open space in front of the fantastic church of Vassily Blajeny, and Galitsin is seen on his way to exile, escorted by a troop of cavalry. When he has gone by, Dositheus soliloquises on the state of Russia. Martha comes in and tells him that the foreign mercenaries have orders to surround the Old Believers in their place of assemblage and put them all to death. Dositheus declares that they will sooner perish in self-ignited flames, willing martyrs for their faith. He enjoins Martha to bring Prince Andrew among them. During the meeting between Martha and Andrew, the young Prince implores her to bring back Emma, and learning that the girl is safely married to her lover, he curses Martha for a witch, and summons his Streltsy to put her to death. In vain the Prince blows his horn, his only reply is the hollow knelling of the bell called Ivan Veliky. Presently the Streltsy enter, carrying axes and blocks for their own execution. At the last moment a herald proclaims that Peter has pardoned them, and they may return to their homes.

In the 5th and last Act the Old Believers are assembled by moonlight at their hermitage in the

* This aria was first sung in England by the late Mrs. Henry J. Wood at several of my lectures on Russian music in 1902.

woods near Moscow. Dositheus encourages his followers to remain true to their vows. Martha prays that she may save Andrew's soul by the power of her love for him. Presently she hears him singing an old love song which echoes strangely amid all this spiritual tension. By sheer force of passion she induces him to mount the pyre which the Brethren, clothed in their white festal robes, have built up close at hand. The trumpets of the troopers are heard drawing nearer, and Martha sets alight to the pyre. The Old Believers sing a solemn chant until they are overpowered by the flames. When the soldiers appear upon the scene, they fall back in horror before this spectacle of self-immolation; while the trumpets ring out arrogantly, as though proclaiming the passing of the old faith and ideals and the dawning of a new Russia.

Such are the two music-dramas which Moussorgsky launched forth to make their way 'towards new coasts, regardless of storm, gales or sunken rocks; towards life, no matter what it has to show; towards the truth, no matter how cruel it may be.' In France they seem to have found permanent anchorage; whether they will sail into the haven of our affections and remain there, is a question that the next few weeks will decide one way or the other.

THE APPRAISEMENT OF PROGRAMME-MUSIC.

By M.-D. CALVOCORESSI.

The theory upheld by the Hanslick-Riemann school of aestheticians, that the very spirit of descriptive or programme-music is antagonistic to the essence of musical art, is indefensible except if the proof comes forth that descriptive or programme-music is foredoomed to remain subject to other and less propitious conditions than those governing music pure and simple.

Now it stands to reason that the part played by material suggestion in the much abused imitative or descriptive music—and likewise by each single dramatic suggestion of 'emotionally associated' music, by each abstract analogy in 'conventionally associated' music,*—is far less than theorists aver: it affords, in Mr. Newman's words, but 'the raw material out of which programme-music is made.' It acts as a stimulus to the composer's creative imagination, and not, as one would have the student believe, as a check.

Take, for example, the familiar and convenient instance of chimes. Any given effect of chimes may be turned, for musical purposes, into a motive which will be good or bad, which will be suggestive and pregnant in proportion as the composer is endowed with the poetic faculty.

With the suggestion of a motive ends the part of the *primum mobile*, whether material or immaterial—form being suggested, one must remember, only by an actual programme consisting of at least two distinct elements. On the other

hand, a fact on which theory does not insist sufficiently is that the pattern, length, and tone of any motive predetermines its working-out. The motive of Beethoven's fifth Symphony calls, inside the general pattern of a classical first movement, for other methods of working out than those which suit the motive of Beethoven's sixth (as to modern music, an illuminative comparison may be made between the first sections of Borodin's second and third—unfinished—Symphonies respectively). Creative faculty is displayed alike in inventing a theme and in working it out, possibly even more in the working-out. An inferior composer will expose himself as thoroughly through his treatment of a 'pure, abstract' motive as in a piece of 'materially descriptive' music, despite the semblance of style that he may achieve by closely adhering to standard rules.

The limitations of purely descriptive or imitative music are obvious as soon as one overlooks the part played in it—and freely played—by creative imagination; but that is begging the question, and it still remains to demonstrate that, for instance, M. Ravel's 'Jeux d'eau,' although founded on nothing but imitative motives, do not afford as elaborate a display of purely musical imagination as one can wish for.

Reverting to the case of motives derived from chimes, the student will notice that they may supply the whole material of short pieces like Greig's 'Wedding-bells' and Moussorgsky's prelude to the coronation scene in 'Boris Godounov'; that they may be used in conjunction with another element, and with equal rights, as in M. Ravel's 'Vallée des cloches' or in M. Florent Schmitt's 'Glas'—the other element being, in the former case, the suggestion of the calm of a valley bathed in evening mist, and in the latter a funereal dirge—or appear as a mere episode, as occurs in countless specimens of really programmatic music: in short, play any of the parts that it is the composer's custom to ascribe to motives.

This method of investigation applies to any instance of imitative or descriptive music, and should suffice to convince. However, one can also resort to the reverse test, with similar results, *i.e.*, study the several appliances of any given musical effect in programme-music and in pure respectively.

Let us select the simple and typical one of the holding note. In the prelude to Wagner's 'Rheingold,' it may be considered as descriptive according to our classification. But certainly the composer has kept in view the emotional appeal and the colour of the deep, steady, even E flat, and not specially the apology for more accurate material description. Whichever the case, however, his purpose is poetical and not 'abstractedly' musical.

In the case already quoted of Borodin's 'Steppes of Central Asia' it may, although we cannot neglect the unmistakable expression of the shrill protracted E, be considered as directly suggested by the long even line of the plains. In the 'Wooden-horse' variation of Dr. Strauss's 'Don Quixote' it intervenes, by virtue of what we have

* See foregoing article, *Musical Times*, June, 1913, p. 373.