

Employment of Female Voices in Church Choirs

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Ferdinand, is accused of conspiring, and his arrest gives rise to a powerful concerted piece on which the curtain falls. The scene of the fourth and last act is naturally the prison, where *Egmont* hears read to him his sentence of death. *Clärchen* brings him the comforting assurance that his friends are about to effect his release, and the lovers give vent to their transports in a duet which will unquestionably prove the most effective *morceau* of the opera. It is as full of melody as of impulsive passion, and was sung magnificently by Mdlle. Isaac and M. Talazac, whose high chest notes rang clarion-tongued through the house. It produced a tremendous effect. But while the lovers are the world forgetting, they are not by the world forgot. For in the midst of their transports the solemn notes of the mass for the dead strike upon their ear, and as the curtain falls *Egmont* goes to his doom." Students of Goethe will at once recognise the material, though in view of the exigencies of the lyrical stage perfectly justifiable, deviations from the original drama perpetrated in M. Wolff's libretto. It is remarkable that a drama so suggestive of musical situations as the great German poet's "*Egmont*," which had already inspired Beethoven to the composition of his famous incidental music, should have been disregarded so long by operatic librettists. More remarkable still that the first operatic librettist who so utilised it should have been a Frenchman.

Curiously enough, the libretto of the only other important French operatic novelty we have to record this month is based on a very similar subject, forming the groundwork of M. Sardou's well-known drama "*Patrie*," and bearing the same title. The composer is M. Paladilhe, the successful writer of "*La Mandolinata*," and the *première* of the work took place with considerable *éclat*, on the 20th ult., at the Grand Opéra. M. Sardou himself is the author of the libretto, which is said to be highly effective, while the Paris press organs teem with eulogistic accounts concerning the music wedded thereto.

The famous Concerts of the Paris Conservatoire, now in the sixtieth year of their existence, were resumed on the 5th ult.

A very successful performance is reported, on the 6th ult., at the Leipzig Gewandhaus, of Mr. F. H. Cowen's Scandinavian Symphony, and the press organs have taken very favourable notice of it.

The first performance in America of Wagner's "*Tristan und Isolde*" took place on the 1st ult., at the Metropolitan Theatre of New York, with the famous Wagner tenor, Herr Albert Niemann, and Mesdames Lilli Lehmann and Marianne Brandt as the interpreters of the principal characters.

A bill has just been presented to the Italian Chamber of Deputies, to empower the Government to remove the remains of Rossini from their present resting place, at the Père la Chaise, of Paris, to the historical Church of Santa Croce, in Florence, in conjunction with the testamentary executors of the composer's widow. The removal is to take place in May next, on which occasion there will be a solemn religious service, with the Maëstro's music, and the remains will probably be placed near the monument of Cherubini.

Under the title of "*Poliuto*," M. Gounod's opera "*Polyeucte*" is to be produced during the present winter at the San Carlo Theatre of Naples, under the personal direction of the composer.

The principal works to be performed during next season at La Scala Theatre of Milan, are Verdi's new opera "*Otello*" and the same composer's "*Aida*," Bizet's "*I Pescatori di Perle*," and Samara's successful opera "*Flora Mirabilis*." The leading artists engaged for the season are Mesdames Emma Calvé, Giulia Novelli, Panteleoni, and Petrovich; MM. Maurel, Garulli, Coletti, Navarrini, Roveri, Tamagno, Fornari, Limonta, and Paroli.

Both at Milan and Turin a new opera "*Edmea*," by the Maëstro Catalan, has recently been produced with very considerable success.

It is required in German journals that Herr Felix Draeseke's "*Requiem*," the recent performance of which by the Riedel'sche Gesangverein, of Leipzig, has attracted a more general attention to the work, is to be produced during this year at Rome, by special desire of the King of Italy.

A statue of the popular Russian composer, Glinka, was unveiled on November 27 at Smolensk, in the vicinity of which town the composer was born. The day of unveiling likewise coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the first performance of Glinka's celebrated national opera, "*The Life for the Czar*."

The death is announced, at Darmstadt, on November 17, of Louis Schlösser, for many years a distinguished member of the orchestra of the Darmstadt Hof-Theater, in the capacity of first violinist and musical director, the composer of numerous operas, and other musical compositions, both for the church and the chamber, and, of late years, also a distinguished contributor to the German musical press. The deceased artist was born at Darmstadt in the year 1800, and was a pupil of several celebrated masters, amongst them Rink, at his native town; Salieri, at Vienna; Lesueur and Kreutzer in Paris.

At Berlin died, on November 20, the highly gifted young pianist, Anna Prill, aged twenty-three.

The death is also announced at Barcelona of Elena d'Angri, the once celebrated operatic contralto, whose fame extended far beyond the limits of her native Italy, and who retired from the stage as long ago as 1847, while she was yet in the zenith of her popularity, her principal rôles being "*Sappho*," "*Semiramide*," and "*Lucrezia Borgia*."

CORRESPONDENCE.

EMPLOYMENT OF FEMALE VOICES IN CHURCH CHOIRS.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE MUSICAL TIMES."

SIR,—I notice in your issue for December a letter signed "*Cantatrice*," on the subject of female voices in Church choirs. Like everything else that is new, whether it be an improvement on the old order or not, the introduction of boys' voices into choirs, and their gradual substitution for female voices, has been the subject of much discussion and much that is indefensible. It has, however, borne the attack and come off victorious, and now we see everywhere the disappearance, I hope for ever, of "mixed" choirs. No sooner are we at peace than a new suggestion is put forward. The rejected ones are not content to be put out for ever, but since the verdict has been given against them, they plead for a back seat, giving, as their reason, that their voices are "purer" and sweeter than those of the boys. With this remark—and I think in doing so I shall have the support of many able judges—I beg to differ. A properly trained boy's voice is far away sweeter than the *ordinary run* of female choir voices, and certainly bears comparison with the *very best* of them. Boys, we must remember, were introduced into choirs, not only because they were boys, but because their voices were also allowed to be most suitable for the purpose, and as to the comparison between treble and soprano, we have the testimony of men which I suppose "*Cantatrice*" will consider unimpeachable—*e.g.*, Rev. J. Troutbeck. Of course, we cannot expect that the rejected singers will accept their rejection without considerable demur, but we do hope that such suggestions as are contained in "*Cantatrice's*" letter may never be acted upon.—I am, yours very truly,

December 2, 1886.

CANTAB.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE MUSICAL TIMES."

SIR,—Many surely will echo "*Cantatrice's*" opinion as to the value of women's voices as a supplement to surpliced choirs. Everyone of experience must acknowledge the frequent want of tone and quality in boys' voices, unless under training for years—a want not atoned for by numbers. In answer to the question asked, there are several churches, both in London and the country, to my knowledge, where ladies have the back rows in the chancel assigned to them. I may mention Canon Shuttleworth's Church, St. George's, Bloomsbury; and at the church of which I have been twenty-two years organist, Holy Trinity, Little Queen Street, Holborn, a surpliced choir will be introduced at Christmas, and arrangements have been made, by special request, to retain the ladies at the back.

I remain, dear Sir, yours truly,

M. J. COPE.

41, Great Coram Street, December 18, 1886.