

The Hanover-Square Rooms

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To record, as is done here and now, a protest against that licence of artists which involves a breach of their trust as interpreters may be the duty of all amateurs, and may have an effect proportioned to its publicity, and the influence of him who makes it. But protest can practically avail nothing so long as the bulk of the musical public worship the agent rather than the principal, the medium rather than the thing conveyed. In view of this, appeal has an obvious *raison d'être*. Let those among artists who are such in more than name set a noble example of reverence and faithfulness to the great thoughts it is their duty to interpret. Let all who by speech or pen can help to disseminate right principles on this vital question lose no opportunity of doing so; and let the enlightened section of the public be quick to repudiate sympathy with those performers whose labours mean misrepresentation, and who, like a bad mirror, distort whatever they reflect. This done, the snake, if not killed, will be scotch'd,—in its degree, a good result.

THE HANOVER-SQUARE ROOMS.

By HENRY C. LUNN.

THE associations surrounding these well-known Rooms are so deeply rooted in the mind of musical professors and amateurs in this country, that the announcement of their sale and appropriation to other purposes than that to which they have been devoted for so many years was received with universal regret. The aristocratic patronage of music in England, like the aristocratic patronage of literature, may be said to have fostered and nourished it in its infancy; and it is not likely, now that it is strong and vigorous enough to dispense with this aid, that these services should be forgotten, or that the home in which the art was so carefully nursed should not be regarded with due reverence. Unlike our more modern Concert-halls, which are especially adapted for the people, these Rooms were especially adapted for the nobility and those moneyed aristocrats who, either from taste or fashion, were content to devote a portion of their time and capital to the support of struggling music. The general air of elegance observable in all the arrangements of the concert-room and its approaches will sufficiently confirm our assertion. The ante-room, with fireplace and seats—the long mirrors, reflecting the costumes of the audience—the Royal box, with a smaller one on each side for the ladies and gentlemen in attendance—the spacious retiring-room, and even the rooms appropriated to the artists (sufficiently commodious of course to accommodate those noble patrons who might perchance flit in and out during the evening), convince us that the concert-room of the period was simply regarded as a drawing room where the privileged few could meet after dinner, hear music, and enjoy as much conversation as the rules of politeness would allow.

The history of these Rooms is, to a great extent, the history of music in England. The conversion of a portion of the building into an Assembly Room was effected by John Andrea Gallini, John Christian Bach and Charles Frederick Abel, who purchased the premises from Lord Wenman in 1774. Gallini was a dancing-master, who taught the family of George the Third; Bach was the eleventh son of Sebastian Bach, and Abel was the celebrated performer on the *viol da gamba*, an instrument which appears to have faded from our memory since his death. Gallini was evidently a man of much enterprise, for not only did he

become the manager of the Opera House (then the King's Theatre) in the Haymarket, but he bought the shares of Bach and Abel in the Hanover-square Rooms, and made most important alterations and improvements in the premises. A great impetus was given to the art when Salomon brought over Haydn to England; for the twelve Symphonies written by this composer especially for his concerts, which were given at the Hanover-square Rooms, not only excited the attention of the music-lovers of the time, but remain to the present day as acknowledged favourites of the concert-room. Their composer conducted the performance of his works, the papers announcing that "Signor Haydn would preside at the harpsichord." King George the Third and his Queen, Charlotte, used frequently to attend the grand balls given at the Hanover-square Rooms where, in the Queen's Tea-room (as it was called) is placed, over the mantel-piece, a large looking-glass, presented by His Majesty. The Ancient Concerts, formed in 1776, were not at first given in these Rooms. They commenced at the Tottenham-street Rooms (now the Prince of Wales's Theatre), were afterwards taken to the Concert-room of the King's Theatre, Haymarket, and became located in 1804 at the Hanover-square Rooms, the Directors having taken a lease of the premises from the proprietor (then Sir John Gallini) at a rental of £1,000 per annum. At these concerts the finest works of the best composers of all countries were given, and their cessation in 1848 was deeply deplored by many of the most earnest musicians. When we consider that the subscription (which had formerly been higher) was six guineas (with the privilege of attending the rehearsals) for eight performances, or five guineas for the concerts only, there can be little doubt that the appeal for support was made solely to the aristocracy and wealthy gentry. It was customary for the Director of the evening to entertain his brothers in office at dinner; and we can say, from experience, that the amount of somnolence, generated by the combined effects of feasting and ancient music, which prevailed amongst the occupants of the privileged seats was such as we have never seen in any other concert-room. But it was known to be an aristocratic lounge; and to look upon the faces of the leading nobility, even in sleep, was something: it is true that modern musical audiences have, as a rule, improved in every respect; but let us not forget that, although the Ancient Concerts had thoroughly done their work when they ceased, that work has left results which could scarcely have been effected by any other means.

The first concert of the Philharmonic Society was given on the 8th March, 1813, at the Argyll Rooms (corner of Argyll Place, Regent Street); when these premises were destroyed by fire in 1830, they were transferred to the Concert-room of the Opera, and were removed to the Hanover-square Rooms in 1833, where they continued until, yielding to the necessity of appealing to more popular audiences, they were given at St. James's Hall, a change which dates only six seasons back. The Rooms, at the decease of the late Misses Gallini, nieces of the former proprietor, passed into the hands of Mr. R. Cocks (the eminent music publisher), who however let them on lease to Mr. Martin until December 1861, when he took possession of them, and, after renovating and entirely re-decorating them, the concert-room, looking so bright and cheerful that its best friends could hardly recognise it, was re-opened with a performance of Mr. Henry Leslie's choir on the 8th January, 1862, the Philharmonic Society commencing its fiftieth

season (a jubilee year) in the same month. The pamphlet published by Mr. Cocks on the restoration of the Rooms (from which we gather the above particulars) drew much attention to the admirable manner in which the Concert-room has been constructed for sound: the smallest *piano* is distinctly audible, and the most powerful *forte* produces no confusion, whilst the absence of galleries gives an air of comfort to the audience part which cannot be realised in any other Hall built for musical performances.

We have dwelt upon the early historical records of the Hanover-square Rooms; but how many incidents connected with them, within our own recollection, crowd upon us as we write. Well indeed do we remember the Recitals of "Mr. William Sterndale Bennett," who, with a pianoforte on a raised platform in the centre of the room, not only revealed to his listeners the beauties of classical chamber music, but told them how to play it. Then do we, in imagination, again people the orchestra with the numerous eminent artists who have for many years passed away. Sir George Smart, Cipriani Potter, Sir Henry Bishop, Charles Lucas, and many others, stand once more before the conductor's desk; and a vision, too, of a certain evening occurs to us when Mendelssohn, *bâton* in hand, and with an anxious face, bent over the side of the orchestra to catch the sign, from Mr. Anderson, for commencing the National Anthem, at the precise moment Her Majesty appeared at the door of the room.

Reminiscences such as these might be almost indefinitely multiplied; but we must not be tempted into believing that the patience of our readers will not be exhausted because we have not exhausted our subject. The Royal Academy of Music—for years so intimately associated with these Rooms as to make former students of the institution cling with the fondest attachment to their memory—gave a concert on the 19th ult., the last ever to be heard within its walls. It was a graceful act of Mr. Cocks to place the concert-room at the disposal of the Academy for a farewell performance; for, not only amongst the audience, but amongst the artists in the orchestra, how many were there who took a final leave, on this occasion, of the locality where their first success in public was made. Many years must pass away before the recollections connected with these time-honoured Rooms can be effaced. The premises may be converted into a club-house; but to all who love to haunt the spot where some of the brightest ornaments of musical art displayed their talents, and to recall the numerous incidents which occurred there, it will indeed be difficult to realise the fact that the familiar building at the corner is no longer the "Queen's Concert Rooms, Hanover Square."

ROYAL ALBERT HALL CONCERTS.

THE unique experiment, which, since November 7, has been made in the Royal Albert Hall, may now be said to have furnished the data necessary for future guidance, and to have reached a stage where the term "experiment" hardly applies. It was necessarily begun under conditions purely speculative, because nothing of the kind had ever been attempted before. The directors, whom some have blamed for imprudence, and others praised for boldness, had to advance over the boundary of an unexplored region, with nothing more certain to guide them than that by no means infallible process called arguing the unknown from the known. Several things were necessarily assumed in order to make a

start at all with the slightest hope of success. Thus, it was assumed that the public would go to the Albert Hall in sufficient numbers, tempted by a weekly programme arranged to please all tastes from the most refined to the most "popular." It was anticipated, further, that they would do this with a promptitude great enough to warrant a hope of ultimate success before the sacrifice, inevitable at the outset, had become too great. And it was further expected that the carefully disposed artistic resources at command would prove equal to the enormous strain of daily concerts. But an assumption, however strong, has yet to bear the test of experience, and if any of those just named have failed to pass the ordeal, the directors, though they may regret the fact, cannot reproach themselves. The scheme of the Albert Hall Concerts was a grand one, worthy of this musical age, and was worked with a faithfulness and devotion that from the first placed the result, no matter how disastrous, in the category of misfortunes which have nothing to do with faults. Safe on this score, the directors need not fear to confess that, while the experience of seven weeks has shown their enterprise, as a whole, to be founded upon an estimate of facts that erred only in being too sanguine, the results, as a whole, point emphatically to the need of material change. They cannot refuse to believe that, even under present arrangements, the scheme would become self-supporting in process of time, for it has always been observed that enterprises of such "pith and moment" are sure to create their own public. But the vastness of the undertaking makes the process of working up to this result one of very serious responsibility—such responsibility, in point of fact, as should only be incurred by a public organisation, or with a guarantee of State aid. Nor is this the only consequence of the seven weeks' teaching. The directors have now become thoroughly acquainted with the exigencies of the vast building in which their concerts are given, and with the limit within which the resources it exacts can be worked with the best results. The highest wisdom is shown in profiting by experience, and the directors of the Albert Hall Concerts do no more than justice to themselves and to their enterprise by frankly making the changes which seem to them necessary. What those changes are has now to be succinctly told.

In the first place, the number of concerts per week will be reduced from six to two, and, as a matter of course, the opportunities for careful preparation thus afforded will be used to their utmost extent.

Secondly, it is the intention of the directors to increase the number both of band and chorus, bringing each up to the strength necessary for the best effects attainable in the huge area devoted to the performances. The wisdom of this course needs no demonstration.

Thirdly, it is proposed to cover the same ground as that occupied by the series of concerts now ended, doing so by the following arrangement. One concert in each week will be devoted to the popular music hitherto presented on Monday and Saturday evenings, special care being taken that the term "popular" shall have a liberal signification as regards good and improving works. One concert in each alternate week will be devoted to oratorio, given up to the present on Thursday evenings, and one to the orchestral music which, under the daily scheme, supplied programmes for Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday. With regard to oratorio, it need only be said that the great standard