

Review

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Reviews.

Life of Richard Wagner. By Wm. Ashton Ellis. Vol. V. [Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd.]

The mere fact that this biography has already filled 2361 closely-printed pages gives it a claim to be called gigantic, and yet Mr. Ashton Ellis has still twenty-eight not uneventful years of Wagner's life to chronicle! The present instalment, up to the summer of 1855, is of special interest to English readers as, with the exception of forty pages devoted to the 'Faust' overture, the entire volume (460 pages) is occupied with the master's eventful visit to London (in 1855) as conductor of the Philharmonic Society's concerts. Not only does Mr. Ellis give a microscopical account of those distressful four months—only 100 pages per month—in Wagner's career, but he quotes column after column of London newspaper criticisms on Wagner during his sojourn in London. These quotations make this volume the most amusing of those hitherto issued; in reading them one wonders if a similar laugh will be turned against present-day critics by those who, fifty years hence, will read their critical deliverances. At all events no one can accuse Mr. J. W. Davison of having been a dull writer, for J. W. D.'s amusing onslaughts against 'the music of the future' are most entertaining in their readableness, while the redoubtable musical critic of *The Times* had a no less formidable and mirth-provoking ally in Mr. H. F. Chorley, of the *Athenæum*: verily Vol. V. of the 'Life of Richard Wagner' furnishes an interesting study in English musical criticism.

Mr. Ashton Ellis fully sustains his reputation for industry and love of detail in this volume of his apparently exhaustless task. But are not his attacks on Ferdinand Praeger tinged with malice? As the poor man is dead, and therefore cannot reply to the charges made against him, it is only fair in the interests of accuracy, and as a warning to other biographers and historians of music, to take up the cudgels on Praeger's behalf, although he himself was not above reproach in regard to reliability. In his relentless pulverizing enthusiasm Mr. Ellis has, by inference, accused Praeger of deception; and this not on the foundation of fact, but on the thin ice of supposition, with the result that Wagner's biographer not only gets a ducking, but he will have to re-write pages 72 to 74 of his book. Without going into details, it may suffice to say that the *English Gentleman* of 1845-46 is at the British Museum (Newspaper Room), and that it has been on the shelves there for half-a-century! In the issue of November 15, 1845, p. 497, Mr. Ellis will find Praeger's letter describing the first performance of 'Tannhäuser,' upon the existence of which he (Mr. Ellis) casts 'the gravest suspicion': he will also find that it is signed 'From yours, F. P.' and that it is prefaced with an editorial endorsement: 'We have been favoured with the following extracts from a letter from Dresden.' Moreover, if Mr. Ellis had taken the ordinary precaution of consulting the issues of Mitchell's 'Newspaper Press Directory' for 1845 and 1846, he would have found that the *English Gentleman* was running its course in those years—No. 1 issued April 26, 1845—a discovery that should have led him to make further investigations before casting an imputation upon Praeger's veracity anent the production of Wagner's 'Tannhäuser' at Dresden in 1845. By the way, in the letter above referred to, 'Tannhäuser' is misprinted 'Tambäuser'!

NEW ANTHEMS.

The Lord hath done great things for us. Composed by John E. West.

Hear, O My people. Composed by Joseph Holbrooke.

Cast me not away. Composed by C. Lee Williams.

[Novello & Co., Ltd.]

Mr. John E. West's anthem, 'The Lord hath done great things for us,' was composed by request for the Jubilee festival of the Lichfield Diocesan Choral Association, held on June 27. Laid out on broad lines and constructed on a diatonic basis, the part-writing is perfectly clear and eminently singable. In the concise first movement excellent use is made of vocal unison and unaccompanied phrases, and the music is well

knit together in a pæan of praise. The next section, beginning 'Our help standeth in the name of the Lord,' is assigned to a semi-chorus for the first fifteen bars, when the full chorus interjects with unrestrained jubilation the opening vocal phrase of the anthem, this time in tones of strenuous unison. The last movement—more developed than those which precede it, but not over worked-out as too often happens—is cleverly designed in its contrasting elements. Here we find 'Tone III., 2nd ending,' given out by tenors and basses, answered by the Hallelujahs of the sopranos and altos; this and other commendable features go to make up a movement which worthily sets its seal on a first-rate festival anthem—one which should make its way by reason of musicianship and effective construction. The independent organ part is well laid out for the instrument, and Mr. West has written independent parts for cornets, trombones and drums, which may be used if desired, though these are not necessary to the rendering of an anthem which does credit to its composer.

Choirmasters in search of a festival anthem possessing distinction may be recommended 'Hear, O My people' composed by Mr. Joseph Holbrooke. Essentially modern in character, the harmonies in several instances are somewhat extreme for church use; a well-trained choir is also absolutely necessary, but the part-writing will interest good singers and, well-rehearsed, the anthem will be impressive. An *Andante* movement, laid out for quartet, provides an effective contrast to the dignity of the opening and the vigorous conclusion of the anthem.

'Cast me not away,' composed by Mr. C. Lee Williams, although specially applicable to Lent, is also appropriate for other seasons. The music is thoroughly devotional in character, smoothly written, and possesses that tranquil beauty that might well stir the souls of the listeners to prayer.

Les Symphonies de Beethoven.—By J.-G. Prod'homme.

[Paris: Librairie Ch. Delagrave.]

M. Edouard Colonne, the well-known conductor, has written a preface to this volume which 'by making known to us Beethoven enables us the better to understand him.' The nine Symphonies of the master are carefully analysed with copious musical examples—about which a word or two anon—together with long extracts from critical notices and various comments and historical details. The author in his preface alludes to biographies and other works on Beethoven and his music which have appeared in France, and remarks that hitherto an 'étude' on the nine Symphonies has been lacking in that country. He refers, of course, to the English work by the late Sir George Grove, 'Beethoven and his Nine Symphonies,' and, as the contents of his book show, he has made liberal use of it.

An appreciation of Beethoven's symphonic art-work on the plan of this new publication will of course attract the notice of young French students and lovers of music who wish 'to know and to understand,' just as here in England Sir George Grove's work was welcomed, and still remains the best book on the subject. A German edition, by-the-way, has just appeared: the translator is Max Hehemann.

Although there is much that is useful and interesting in M. Prod'homme's work, there are features in it which greatly detract from its value. Already on page 5 there is a statement which acts as a danger signal. It does not concern Beethoven, but Mozart. We there read that the latter did not use the clarinet in his Symphonies. That instrument certainly was not represented in the score of the Symphony in G minor as first written by Mozart, but he afterwards added parts for two clarinets. Again, on p. 41, we find a foot-note to the effect that the three famous letters thought to have been addressed to the Countess Guicciardi were, *en réalité*, written to Theresa of Brunswick. The matter is of some importance, as the supposed engagement between Beethoven and Theresa crops up again in the chapters on the fourth and fifth Symphonies; a foot-note, therefore, might surely have mentioned Dr. A. Kalischer's 'Die unsterbliche Geliebte,' in which the author stoutly maintains the 'Guicciardi' theory. From M. Prod'homme's book no reader would suspect that there was a shadow of suspicion attaching to Miriam Tenger's account of the matter. Other