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NEW LIGHT ON EARLY TUDOR COMPOSERS

By W. H. GRATTAN FLOOD

XIII.—THOMAS FARTHING

In the valuable list of old English composers printed by Morley, in 1597, as an Addendum to his 'Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practical Musicke,' appears the name of Farthing. Many specimens of Farthing's powers as a composer have survived, and one of them, 'In May,' is quoted by Dr. Ernest Walker in his 'History of Music in England' (1907). Yet, strange to say, up to the present no musical historian has attempted to lift the veil which hid the identity of this early Tudor composer. Not even a fairly approximate date had been furnished for the period of his musical activities, save merely a haphazard statement that he probably flourished 'under Henry VII. and Henry VIII.'—a period of sixty-two years—rather vague, indeed. As to his personality not a hint has previously been given. Hence it is with special pleasure I present the following definite information regarding the composer of 'In May,' 'The thought within my breast,' 'With sorrowful eyes,' 'I love truly,' and a nameless three-part piece. The four last-named are in the British Museum (Add. MS. 31,922).

Thomas Farthing (the name is variously written Farding and Farthyng) was born *circa* 1475, and in 1508 we first meet with him as a singer in the chapel of the Countess of Richmond and Derby, the mother of King Henry VII. On the decease of this noble and philanthropic lady we find that she bequeathed annuities to her retainers, including Hugh Aston,* Thomas Farthing, and others. Late in the following year (1509) Farthing was given a post as Gentleman of the Chapel Royal under William Cornish; and his name appears among those who received mourning livery for the funeral of Prince Henry, who died on February 22, 1511.

On July 8, 1511, Thomas Farthing had confirmation from King Henry VIII. of the annuity of ten marks which had been bequeathed to him by the Countess of Richmond and Derby, and in this document (printed in the 'Calendar of Letters and Papers of Henry VIII.') his name appears as 'Thomas Farding, Gentleman of the King's Chapel.' He took part in the various Masques and Disguisings played at Court during the years 1511 and 1512, and he accompanied King Henry VIII. to France in June, 1513, as one of the Chapel Royal, taking part in the magnificent choral services at Théroutanne, Lille, and Tournai in September of that year.

The name of Thomas Farthing appears as a singing-man among the list of the Gentlemen of the Chapel Royal who took part in the gorgeous pageants at the Field of Cloth of Gold,† in June, 1520, along with William Cornish as Master of the Choristers, and Dr. John Clerk as Dean of the Chapel Royal. Farthing's friend, Dr. Richard Pace, Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, preached a Latin oration on this memorable occasion at the Val Doré, ever since known as 'Champ du Drap d'Or.'

In recognition of Farthing's services as a composer and singer, King Henry VIII. granted him a fine mansion house at East Greenwich on condition of a

fine to the outgoing tenant, Thomas Ritter. The date of the grant is November 21, 1520, and the précis of the document is as follows:

1520. 21 Nov. Grant to Thomas Fardying, Gentleman of the Chapel Royal, and his heirs for ever, by the service of a red rose, if it be asked, of a Penement in East Greenwich, formerly in the tenure of Robert Johns, and lately of Thomas Ritter, gent. usher of the Chamber, who has compounded with Fardying.

We next find a notice of Farthing as having taken part in the Revels at Greenwich on December 9, 1520, an entertainment at which John Heywood also assisted; but it was Farthing's last appearance in public. Three days later he was seized with illness, and his death occurred quite suddenly on December 12, 1520, at his house at East Greenwich.

It is of interest to note that the annuity of ten marks which Farthing had enjoyed from 1509 to 1520 was allotted to another Court musician, John Heywood, named above, then rising in favour. The official grant was dated February 4, 1521, and the Letters Patent may be summarised as follows: 'John Heywood, the King's servant, is to have the annuity of ten marks, as held by Thomas Farthing, deceased.'

No doubt many of the compositions of Farthing are regarded as crude, but there is a good vein of melody running through them, and it must be remembered that his creative period was between the years 1500 and 1518. Although he cannot be rated as highly as his contemporary, Fayrfax, who died in October, 1521, it is, of course, probable that much of the music by Farthing—now, alas! lost or undiscovered—may have contained beauties equal to those of Fayrfax, Browne, Dygon, Chard, Pigott, Ashwell, Hyllary, Davy, Alcock, Jones, and Whitbrook. Yet this is but speculation. As for his biography, the only known facts are those contained in the present article, mainly based on the monumental 'Calendar of Letters and Papers of Henry VIII.'

MARCEL DUPRÉ: THE MAN AND HIS MUSIC

It is said, we know not with what truth, that during a private visit recently paid to this country by M. Marcel Dupré, a famous English teacher of the organ told his pupils that they might as well go out of the business now that M. Dupré had arrived. Probably M. Dupré would be the last person in the world to agree with such a statement, for after attending a number of English services in September, 1920, for the first time in his life, he spoke in the highest terms of the organ-playing which he heard in this country. He was particularly impressed by the fact that in a great Cathedral like St. Paul's the accompaniments to the choral parts of the service were played on the 'grand organ' by no less a person than the grand organist himself, and he greatly admired the restraint with which the wonderful instrument was handled until its own moment arrived at the end of the service.

It may be desirable to remind some of our readers that in every considerable church both at Paris and elsewhere in France there are two organs. One of these is a smallish instrument placed near the choir-stalls on which the *maître de chapelle* accompanies the singing of his choir. The other is a much larger instrument, placed at the west end of the building,

* An account of Hugh Aston was given in the *Musical Times* for February, 1920.

† For an account of this pageant see *Musical Times* for June, 1920.