

The Foundling Hospital and Its Music (Concluded)

Author(s): F. G. E.

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THE FOUNDLING HOSPITAL AND ITS MUSIC.

(Concluded from p. 311.)

Two matters arising out of the first instalment of this article must needs be treated of before the narrative can be resumed. It will be remembered that the builder of the organ presented by Handel to the Hospital was a 'Dr. Morse, of Barnet.' In that connection we asked the question: 'Who was Dr. Morse, of Barnet?' Mr. F. T. Cansick, in his interesting book of Epitaphs gathered from churches and churchyards in the neighbourhood of Barnet, supplies us with the following information, which he derived from a tombstone in Hadley churchyard, Hertfordshire:—

Here lieth the Body of
SARAH, wife of IUSN. MORSE
of Chipin Barnet Surgeon
who departed this life
the 18th of March 1751
aged 72.

Also the Body of
MR. IUSN. MORSE, who died
October ye 20th 1752 in the
62 Year of his Age.

With this as a clue, the London newspapers of the day furnish us with all that at present is discoverable concerning this gentleman. Here it is, from the *London Daily Advertiser* of October 25, 1752:—

One Day last Week as Mr. Morse, an eminent Surgeon and Apothecary at Barnet, was riding in his Chair, he was seized with an Apoplectic Fit near the Windmill, and being carried home expired in a short Time, to the very great Concern of many Families in that Neighbourhood, with whom he was in much Esteem.

The name of Morse is a new one in Handel literature, and it would be interesting to trace the reason why he was selected, apparently by Handel, to build the organ presented to the Hospital by the composer of the 'Messiah.'

Further research by Mr. Davan Wetton in the Hospital Minute Books shows that in 1766, sixteen years after its erection, the Morse organ needed thorough repair. In March, 1768, an agreement was entered into between the Hospital authorities and 'Thomas Parker, of Grays Inn Lane, organ builder,' to erect a new instrument at a cost of £430. Two months later (May 27, 1768) the Minutes record the following business:—

Resolved—That instead of an organ agreed to be built for the use of the Chapel of this Hospital for £430, exclusive of the organ now in the said Chapel, there shall be one made by Mr. Thomas Parker upon the new principle invented by the late Doctor Smith, containing 4 additional notes in each octave, at the price of £670, exclusive of the case.*

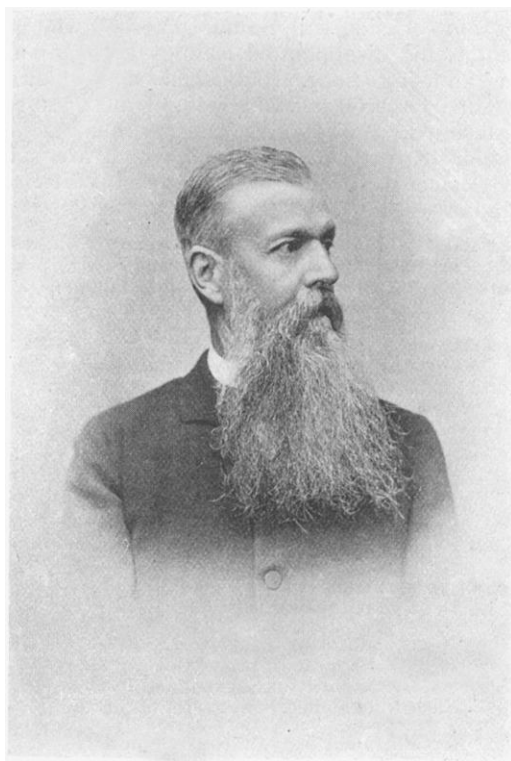
* The Doctor Smith referred to in this Minute was Dr. Robert Smith (1689-1768), Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, and the founder of Smith's prizes annually competed for in the University. Dr. Smith was the author of 'Harmonies, or the Philosophy of Musical Sounds,' Cambridge, 1749: second edition (augmented), London, 1759-62.

A Minute of November 15, 1769, reads thus:—

Resolved—That on the New Organ in the Chapel of this Hospital, the following inscription be made:—

Erected by subscription in 1769.
Thomas Parker, builder.

The above first-hand information not only clears up some doubtful points, but proves that the Parker organ—with its extra notes, non-preponderance of mixture work, and so on—was not Handel's gift! It also destroys the story that Parker was chosen through Handel's having heard an organ by that builder in Poynton Church, Cheshire, as the Parker instrument in the Foundling Hospital Chapel was not erected until after the bones of the great composer had



MR. ROBERT GREY,
TREASURER OF THE FOUNDLING HOSPITAL.

been resting for ten years in Westminster Abbey! Many statements made by numerous writers on Handel, organ, and pitch matters will have to be corrected in the light of this information from the Foundling records, now made public for the first time.

John Christopher Smith, born Schmidt (1712-1795), Handel's amanuensis and factotum,—of whom we give a portrait—was the first organist of the Foundling Hospital. He was appointed to that office, probably on the recommendation of Handel, one of the Governors, at a salary of £40 per annum, on October 2, 1754, at which time the chapel began to be regularly used for Divine service. (This disposes of the date 1750,

given in all the biographies of Smith as the year in which he became organist of the Foundling.) Reference has already been made to the benevolent work of Handel, which Smith reverently carried on at the Hospital after his master's death. Handel bequeathed all his manuscript scores to his faithful henchman, Smith, and the latter, in acknowledgment of the pension continued to him by the King, presented George III. with those precious autograph tomes, which are now preserved in the Royal Music Library at Buckingham Palace.

The immediate successors of John Christopher Smith in the organistship were respectively Stephen Philpot, Thomas Grenville, and John Immyns. The last-named, an amateur, was in 1798 appointed upon the recommendation of Joah Bates. One of the unsuccessful candidates on that occasion was Samuel Wesley, who gave vent to his disappointed feelings by composing an amusing song (published anonymously), entitled 'The Organ laid open, or the True Stop discovered.' We give a specimen of this humorous ditty, the words of which are stated by Vincent Novello to have been written by Madan:—

Come all my brave Boys that want Organists' Places
I'll tell you the fun of the thing,
Curse all your Bravuras, your fine 'Poggiaturas
All the Demis and Semis you'll bring.

You may strike up no matter 'Malbrook,' 'Stoney Batter,'
Or whatever comes into your Pates,
For let Handel or Worgan go thrash at the Organ,
If you've got the right key with Jo B——.

The Foundling's grand Organ was lately the gift
And all were determin'd to try,
Each made his best shift with a Finger so swift
And 'cock sure of Election am I.'

But to give 'em their trimmings, uppopp'd Maister Immyns
And quickly decided their Fates,
I can't, it is true, move my Fingers like you,
But I've found out the stop of Jo B——.

When Nebuchadnezzar his image set up,
His frolic appeared rather odd,
That at Music so paltry as Sackbut and Psalt'ry
Each Knee should bow down to his god.

This prophetic affair one would almost declare
To our Day of election relates,
For the sounds that combine have but serv'd for a sign
To fall down and worship Jo B——.

Then know by these presents all Men it concerns,
What succession of farces is playing by turns,
In vain ev'ry sound that your fancy creates,
For the true Diapason is Mister Jo B——.

Mr. Immyns had a short innings—only three years. He was succeeded by that gifted musician, William Russell, who held the post till his death, at the age of thirty-six, in 1813. Russell composed an oratorio on the subject of 'Job,' and another for the Cæcilian Society, of which he was the conductor, entitled 'The Redemption of Israel'; the autograph of the latter is in the library of Mr. Robert A. Marr, of Edinburgh. Russell, who was a pupil of William Shrubsole, of 'Miles's Lane' fame, wrote much for Sadler's

Wells Theatre, where he was engaged as pianist and composer. He edited, in 1809, 'Psalms, Hymns, and Anthems for the Foundling Chapel.' His exercise for the degree of Bachelor of Music (Oxford, in 1808) was a Latin Kyrie, Gloria in excelsis, &c. There are six volumes of Russell's music (in manuscript) preserved in the library of the Royal College of Music. Five of these, which includes a Mass for four voices, with figured bass, in C, were picked up at an old bookstall by Mr. W. Barclay Squire and presented by him to the College library.

William Russell composed two sets of 'Twelve Voluntaries for the organ or piano-forte,' of which the first set, though undated, appeared in 1804. The second set, published in 1812, is interesting in that two pieces (Nos. 2 and 11) contain a third line for the pedal part, this being the earliest known instance of its use in the works of an English composer. As Sir Walter Parratt has said in a reference to old voluntary composers: 'Many of their compositions have a tranquil grace which is not unpleasing, but they are too small in plan and too artless in execution to make themselves heard against nineteenth century bustle. Those by Russell ought not so to die. They are almost in suite-form, and generally contain a melodious fugue with clever modulation and climax.' These voluntaries furnish an interesting example of the organ tone of a hundred years ago, as compared with that of to-day: one of the Voluntaries is registered to be played 'Oboe solo (swell), accompanied by the great organ open diapason'! The name of Russell is known in all the churches by his melodious double chant in E. Unfortunately, no portrait of him seems to be in existence, or we would gladly have furnished our readers with a reproduction. Vincent Novello, who knew him well, has left the following appreciation of the gifted musician:—

Like the generality of really clever persons, William Russell derived more advantage from his own observation and study, than from the rules and dogmas laid down by his teachers. I was so fortunate as to enjoy an intimate friendship with him for many years, and invariably found him a frank, sincere and honourable man in his private capacity, and a most accomplished artist in his professional one. Though not equal to the great Samuel Wesley as an extempore fugist, yet as an accompanist, Russell was superior to him, and as a general organist, he was, in my estimation, one of the very finest players that ever lived. He also possessed extraordinary facility in scoring for an orchestra, and had he lived, he probably would have become a composer of first-rate ability, but he unfortunately died, after severe suffering from illness, in the year 1813, at the early age of thirty-six. A very small portion of his numerous productions have ever been published.

At Russell's death, J. C. Nightingale, known by his organ arrangements of Handel's choruses, became organist of the Foundling. It was probably during the Nightingale régime that 'Old Sam' Wesley gave an organ performance

in the chapel, with the co-operation of Vincent Novello. The following characteristic letter to Novello refers to the event :—

London, Oct. 5, 1814.

Dear N.—You will probably be surprised at my besetting you at a moment when you are in the thick of old Handel's best Psalm-Tunes, quavered by the best Psalm-Singers in England (excepting those in Italy, my Honey). On Thursday (or more intelligibly to-morrow) I mean to throw my carcase into the Norwich mail, and I wished also to have taken with me your very clear copy of mine Organ Duet in C, and also that of S. Bach, which we played at the Foundling Yours,

S. WESLEY.

Nightingale uttered his swan song in 1833, and to him succeeded Edward Sturges (born 1808, died 1848), an old St. Paul's boy and assistant organist to George Cooper, the elder, at St. Sepulchre's Church, Holborn. His only published composition is an anthem for Christmas, 'I know their sorrows'; but his son, Mr. Edward J. Sturges, organist of Lindfield Parish Church, Sussex, possesses the manuscripts of several anthems and services composed by his father. In 1839 Mr. Sturges organized a performance on festival scale of Handel's 'Messiah,' in the chapel, to commemorate the centenary of the founding of the Institution. Sir George Smart conducted and Mr. Sturges was at the organ; and among 'several of the young ladies, pupils at the Royal Academy of Music,' who formed the semi-chorus, we find the name of Miss Hopkins, the mother of Mr. Edward Lloyd; and 'Master Chipp, of the Chapel Royal,' helped to swell the full chorus.

The remaining trio of Foundling organists are all happily in the flesh. In 1848, Mr. Christopher Edwin Willing followed Mr. Sturges, and he worthily held the post for the long period of thirty-two years. His popular tune to the late Mrs. Alexander's hymn 'We are but little children weak,' doubtless owed its origin to the Foundling children and their sweet young voices. Upon the resignation, in 1879, of Mr. Willing, Mr. Myles Birket Foster was appointed to the chief musicianship, of which he ably discharged the duties for twelve years. Suffice it to say that the name of genial Myles Foster as a composer and examiner is known the wide world over.

The present organist, Mr. Henry Davan Wetton, entered upon his duties in November, 1892. A native of Brighton, where he was born on July 18, 1862, he became a chorister of St. Mary's Church, Stoke Newington, and held the organistships of All Saints' Church, Stoke Newington, Christ Church, Woburn Square, and St. Gabriel's Church, Pimlico. For a year he was acting organist of Wells Cathedral. After having been an articulated pupil of Sir Frederick Bridge, Mr. Wetton acted as an assistant to the organist of Westminster Abbey for fifteen years. He has always taken a deep interest in the history of the Foundling Hospital, especially its music, and in 1896 he discovered the band parts

of the 'Messiah' bequeathed by Handel to the Institution; these parts, which are of great importance, had theretofore remained unknown.

It was a happy thought of the present organist to revive the special musical services for which the Foundling Hospital was formerly famous, and the last of which seems to have been the 'Messiah' performance in 1839, under Sturges, already referred to. The selection of Gounod's 'Redemption'—excellently sung, on April 15—was probably due to the experimental nature of the revival, and in future we may look for some Handelian presentations for which the chapel has such unique traditions. Notwithstanding the limited orchestral conditions, the performance



MR. H. DAVAN WETTON, MUS. B.,
ORGANIST OF THE FOUNDLING HOSPITAL.
(Photograph by the London Photographic Co., Ltd.)

bore testimony to the enthusiasm of Mr. Wetton, who conducted, and to those who so earnestly co-operated with him on that occasion. The solo singers were Miss Elsie Mackenzie, Miss Nora Meredith, Miss Gertrude Calvert, Mr. Reginald Brophy, Mr. Arthur Barlow, and Mr. Ben Grove, of whom the first and two last-named are members of the Chapel Choir.

Acknowledgment must again be made of the kindness of Mr. Robert Grey, Treasurer; of Mr. W. S. Wintle, Secretary; and last, but not least, of Mr. Davan Wetton, organist of the Foundling Hospital, in affording us special facilities for the preparation of this article.

F. G. E.



JOHN CHRISTOPHER SMITH,

HANDEL'S SECRETARY AND AMANUENSIS

AND THE FIRST ORGANIST OF THE FOUNDLING HOSPITAL.