

Marcel Dupré: The Man and His Music

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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.

upon which the 'grand organist' plays voluntaries, interludes, and—the French are themselves responsible for the term—*interruptions*! This arrangement is responsible in some measure for many of the distinctive traditions of French organ-playing. It relieves an instrumental executant from the labours of choir training and choir accompaniment, and relegates those branches of the art to a specialist. It attaches to every great church a solo organist of the calibre of Widor, Guilmant, or Vierne, whose executive abilities find an outlet in the shape of improvisations, versets, and symphonic interludes which form a part of the regular order of service on Sundays and great days, and which are much appreciated by the worshippers.

It must be borne in mind that the grand organist of a great French church does not 'fill in' at random.

as it is in Palestrina's vocal 'versets.' This explains the *raison d'être* of a great deal of French organ music. It is founded upon plainchant themes not because of any poverty of ideas on the part of the composer, but because it is intended to be used in the manner described above.

Turning to the subject of this article, it may be said at once that M. Marcel Dupré at the age of thirty-four can boast of as long an experience as a church organist as many of us of riper years. Born in 1886, M. Dupré began his musical studies seriously at the age of seven, and a year later was able to play Bach's Prelude and Fugue in E minor (Book 3, No. 9, in the Peters Edition) sufficiently well to win the approval of Guilmant. In 1898, when twelve years old, he became grand organist of St. Vivien at Rouen, and at the inauguration of the new organ at that



MARCEL DUPRÉ AT THE GRAND ORGAN, NOTRE DAME, PARIS

He 'interrupts' to some purpose and in accordance with long and inflexible tradition. For instance, at the Office of Vespers, five psalms are sung in the choir, each psalm having its own antiphon. The liturgical chanters sing the antiphon at the beginning of each psalm, and then sing the psalm itself, both antiphon and psalm being sung in plainsong and accompanied on the small organ. But as soon as the psalm is finished the grand organ plays the antiphon as a solo piece, and although this organ 'verset' may be an extended composition on quite modern lines, it never forgets the traditional plainchant theme of the antiphon-melody which it represents. Similarly, the alternate verses of the plainsong office hymn are not sung in the choir, but are played on the grand organ. They may be, and often are, played in a free style, but the plainchant is there all the time just as truly

church, Guilmant insisted that the youthful prodigy should appear in public at his side. Three years later M. Dupré's Biblical oratorio 'Jacob's Dream' was performed at Rouen by the choral society conducted by his father. In 1905 he took the first prize for pianoforte playing at the Paris Conservatoire by an admirable performance of Chopin's second Ballade and Saint-Saëns's Toccata from the 'Egyptian Concerto.' M. Dupré's crowning achievement was reached in 1914, when, at the age of twenty-eight, he won the Grand Prix de Rome for musical composition with his lyrical scene 'Psyche.' Since 1916 he has been acting as grand organist of the Cathedral of Notre Dame at Paris, in the absence, through serious and prolonged illness, of his old friend M. Louis Vierne.

In the early part of the present year M. Dupré

gave a series of ten recitals of the organ works of Bach at the Paris Conservatoire, at the request of the Minister of Fine Arts. In the course of these recitals he performed the unprecedented feat of playing *from memory* the two hundred odd organ works of the great master, including the sonatas, chorale-preludes, and the less known compositions.

At the last of these recitals, given before a distinguished audience which included members of the Institute of France, many distinguished French musicians and the professors of the Conservatoire, M. Widor addressed the company, concluding with these words: 'We must all regret, my dear Dupré, the absence from our midst of the person whose name is foremost in our thoughts to-day—the great John Sebastian himself. Rest assured that if he had been here he would have embraced you and pressed you to his heart.'

B.

## Occasional Notes

In these columns and elsewhere in the musical press the need for decentralisation in London music has often been urged. We are glad to see that more and more steps are being taken in the direction of giving concerts of what may be called West-End quality elsewhere than in that over-favoured (and not too appreciative) locality. The latest effort is being made by a new organization—The Decentralisation of Music Committee—the founder and moving spirit of which is Captain C. à Beckett Williams, backed up by an advisory board that includes Lady Cooper (the Lady Mayoress), Messrs. Adrian C. Boulton, Harold Samuel, F. Gilbert Webb, and Dr. Arthur Somervell. Mr. Philip Ashbrooke, 20, Old Cavendish Street, is the concert secretary. The committee is making a start by giving concerts at Town Halls in and round outer London. The first three are announced to take place at Fulham Town Hall on Sundays, November 21, December 5 and 19, at 7.45, and it is hoped the results will justify a large extension of activities. For the first concert Mr. Mark Hambourg and other well-known performers were engaged. We shall watch the movement with interest, and with cordial wishes for its success.

The Thursday recitals at Westminster Abbey, in aid of the Restoration Fund, are drawing great crowds. Recitals will be given on December 2, 9, and 16. It is fitting that Sir Frederick Bridge should return to the organ bench to do his bit for such an object, so he will play on December 16; Mr. Ben Davies will sing. Mr. E. T. Cook, of Southwark Cathedral, will be at the keyboard on December 2. The player for the following week is not decided at the time of writing.

We are glad to learn that the Worcester Festival, so far from being the financial failure anticipated by a good many, produced a balance on the right side—a notable fact, in view of the enormously increased expenses. These were about £4,500, and the receipts amounted to £5,868. After deductions for the reserve fund, the clergy charities receive the balance of £588.

The withdrawal of Mr. Herbert Howells' Quintet from the London Chamber Concerts Society's programme at Wigmore Hall, on November 2, has led to a good deal of discussion. As many of our readers know, the rights in the work had been acquired by Mr. Oscar Street, a fact of which the intending players were unaware until the rehearsal stage was well advanced. They were then informed by Mr. Street that permission to perform the work would be contingent on (a) the acknowledgment of his rights on the printed programmes and (b) his presence at rehearsals. The performers (the Philharmonic Quartet) agreed readily to (a) but said 'no' to (b), with the result that Mr. Street demanded the return of the parts. It has been suggested that Mr. Howells' work has thus received an exceptionally good advertisement. But surely the best type of advertisement for a composition is public performance. If Mr. Street can stop one performance, he can stop all, in which case the excellence of this method of advertising is not apparent. So large a proportion of modern chamber works are the result of commissions and competitions, that the question calls for speedy settlement. Our composers will be wary and chary of writing works under conditions that apparently give the patron the right to forbid the bands, so to speak.

An event of great interest to organists and church musicians will take place in the Royal Albert Hall on December 9 at 8 p.m., when M. Marcel Dupré, a famous French organist, will give a recital, assisted by the London Gregorian Association. He will play Bach's Fantasia and Fugue in G minor, d'Aquin's 'Noel' with variations, the first movement of Widor's fifth Symphony, his own Prelude and Fugue in G minor, and a series of pieces now in the press. He will also improvise interludes between verses of psalms and hymns sung by the choir. The concert is in aid of the funds of the Officers' Association.

At a meeting of past and present members of the Royal College of Music, on November 18, it was unanimously decided that the proposed memorial to Sir Hubert Parry should take the form of a reading-room, study, and reference library, to be known as the Parry Room. We can imagine no more fitting memorial to one who so consistently urged on musicians the importance of reading. Miss Emily Daymond was appointed hon. treasurer, and Mr. H. C. Colles hon. secretary.

The Board of Trinity College, Dublin, has elected Dr. C. H. Kitson (late organist of Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, and Professor of Music in University College, Dublin) as Professor of Music in Dublin University, in succession to Dr. P. C. Buck, resigned.

As we go to press we learn that *Musical News* has been acquired by Messrs. Curwen, who will combine it with the *Musical Herald*, and issue it as a weekly under the title *Musical News and Herald*. Mr. Edwin Evans has been appointed editor. Congratulations and best wishes! If the journal is not an unqualified success we shall be surprised.

Owing to unusual calls on our space, we are compelled to hold over reviews of new books and music, a good deal of correspondence, and the Gramophone Notes.