

The Springtide of Music

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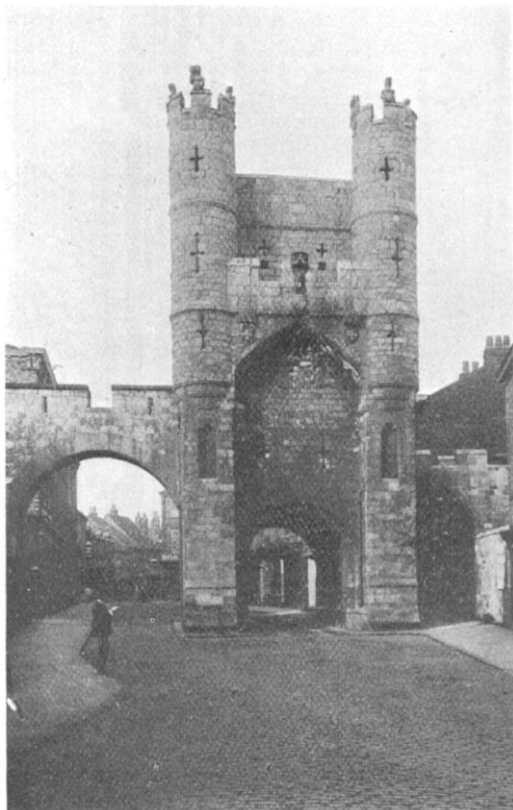


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native musicians. All the above pieces were interpreted with that artistry which is naturally associated with the technique and, we may add, reverent interpretations by the King's Master of Musick upon the king of instruments.

The new organ is entirely satisfactory. (We give a complete specification and photograph of the console on page 315.) The mechanism is above reproach, and the wind supply both ample and steady. In regard to tone, it is as it ought to be, a *church* organ, and not one of the concert-room type. Messrs. Walker have long been noted for their diapasons, and this most important characteristic



MONK BAR, YORK.

(Photo by Messrs. Duncan and Lewin, York.)

—the true organ tone—is a commendable feature of the York Minster organ. It may be said that this instrument lacks the glamour of some others similarly placed. So much the better for the purposes for which it is intended. Reeds on heavy pressures of wind, diapasons of gamba quality, meretricious fancy stops, and mere noise in the 'full organ,' detract from the dignity of the instrument as an aid to devotion. The organ opened the other day by Sir Walter Parratt is one upon which the builders, the Dean and Chapter of York, and their excellent organist may be heartily congratulated.

DOTTED CROTCHET.

## THE SPRINGTIDE OF MUSIC.

When Mythology, going backwards as it were to the dayspring of things, found that—under the parable of the Goddess springing fully-armed from the head of Jupiter—there were certain matters which in the origin could be understood less by much study than by a sort of natural instinct, music must surely have been of the very essence of that suggestion. Certain arts (there is no doubt about it) come, as one may say in Ionic speech, 'of themselves.' And since speech is the primary expression of intellect, it follows that the writing down of speech, if it is to be considered also among the early arts, takes its place in what may be ranked as the secondary education of the ancients. Thus it is that the Iliad has become the chief battle-ground between those who believe that the art of writing was known to Homer's generation and those who believe that Homer was a mere summary, made by poets of a later date, of the ballads which had accumulated in the celebration of the first greatly known war, outside biblical history, of modern civilization. In any case the composition of the ballad went first; and seeing that the ballads were chanted among the fields and in the vineyards of Greece, music, as we all know, must have existed more or less as the art of chant long before the art of writing began to be known. For music was a sort of anterior voice; it expressed emotions of a general kind; it was the vehicle of intimacies, sad, merry, or commonplace, without any reference to artistic or classified development. Thus it may be said that by degrees there came to be a sort of rivalry between speech and music, until they separated slowly into two distinct arts, each heavy with future possibilities. They separated gradually; and as friends that look back over the shoulder in parting; for there is no doubt whatever concerning the truth of the theory which maintains that rhythm—that is to say, verse, in highly-developed forms—was the predecessor of prose. Verse existed as in Homer, so in Hesiod, so too in Pindar, long before Herodotus wrote his exquisitely beautiful history.

From Herodotus one makes a natural passage to Thucydides, in whose person the art of prose, so far as the Greek nation was concerned, came to its climacteric. One can but trust that this historically suggestive parable will account to some extent for the suggestions which I now propose to make concerning the development of music, not right down to its later sources, but down to the point when those latest sources began to put on the full pride of their modernity. Music, of course, has had its period of barbarism—shall one say its Cave period, when it was looked upon as the means of emotional expression in the rough, when no laws governed it, when it was merely the outcome of an individual scene in early comedy or early tragedy—when in fact it had no binding or loosing, when to it were not entrusted those keys which belong to every

fulfilled art—the keys of the kingdom either of Hell or of Heaven?

In other words music has had a spring of its own; a spring like that of literature, to which I have already referred; a spring gay, fresh, and like the sweetest morning of all the springs that the world had ever seen. Sudden, unexpected, and yet the fulfilment seemingly of a natural law, the leaves and the young flowers of the early buds of our Western music came upon us with a quickness that might have seemed almost unnatural save for the summer development which has come since. The long-separated companion of the ballad had come back from her wanderings. Out of the deadness of winter there seemed to come the cry: 'The rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.' The preparations, like the sap in the trees, had been made in secret; Plain-Song, followed by those natural developments that led to the complex music of Palestrina, had done its best in the way of preparation, and out of a congeries of scales (which included, by-the-way, as details, the major and minor scales which we use at the present day) there issued a body of musicians who, taking the tide at the flood, inaugurated in full spring weather that future which is only at this moment being passed on to another future by the great musicians of recent times. For it is impossible not to think that the present time contains the making of a true and complete summer of music, now that the day is over of the nonentities who in the early part of last century held fashionable sway in Opera House and in Concert Room. Yet the modern musician takes his opportunity from those spring-tide writers who, awakening to the warmth and the beauty of art, contributed to its fulfilment, even as the young primroses by their own perfect beauty, though forerunning the prouder blossoms of summertime, contain in their promise and in their own symmetry the fulfilment of the time which gave them birth.

Take a man like Stradella. With scarcely an artistic ancestor, his being clamoured for expression through the pipes of Pan; whatever should come to him came as it were with music resounding in his ears; and he was wise enough to learn all that he might of the technique of his art before he fell a victim to the common assassin. Corelli, too, a musician of this springtime of the West, peered into futurity rather than assumed the position of one who considered that his lifetime had been an absolute fulfilment; his beautiful work indeed was there to proclaim how completely he had assimilated every law and every teaching of the past; but one cannot help but think that it—such is the inexorable law—is just a trifle pathetic to find how that with all his knowledge, with all his study, with all his genius, his leaf was still of the spring and not of the summer after which he had dreamed. Nor can aught else be said of

that distinguished harbinger of modern times, Christopher Gluck. Gluck, true, was a reformer: was one who emphatically understood the essence of dramatic art so far as it applied to music. His study of the Greek drama had straitly shown him to a large extent how opera might be written which should not only possess beauty of musical expression, but should also make for dramatic verisimilitude. But despite all theory, the truth remains that Gluck did not contrive to evade the melodic spirit of his time; magnificent as his musical inspiration was, confident and perfectly true as was his dramatic theory, it nevertheless remains an absolute fact that in accomplishment, though his work is exquisitely beautiful, it in reality contained far less of the spirit of futurity than might have been expected from the man's musical or dramatic attitude. Gluck indeed seems to me to be quite the last so far as our present reckoning goes of the spring musicians. Mozart led the way into the summer; Beethoven set the trees calling with the note of birds; Wagner drove his wain through the fields for the harvest, and, as one may think, to-day is the time of full fruitage and of ripe corn. But it will need a resurrection to bring us back to the days of the musical spring when composers had not learnt the necessity (and mind you, now, but not in their time, a most stern necessity) of avoiding an unused simplicity.

The sifting of that which is really important in musical art from that which is utterly ephemeral, and of the earth earthy, is a task which I for my part would not care to undertake; but it is a matter of interest to observe that later times, by reason of their accumulations of mere material, have distinctly lowered the average of the earlier days which saw the rise of music in its springtime. In the old days no man would dream of perpetuating a musical air unless it were of definite and genuine value; means were not at his disposal so to do. At the present time, as it would seem, a man has only to conceive a melody of the utmost unimportance and it is in his power to burden the public with it, too often to the utter disadvantage of those who care about musical phrase and musical thought. This is only an enforcement of the parable. One is perfectly convinced of the privileges which are entailed in knowing, appreciating, and enjoying the works of the later masters in musical art. Nevertheless, it is impossible not to feel a certain lingering envy for those who heard music that was composed only by enthusiasts, that was played only by the gentle artist, and that was circulated among those to whom music was a sacred name requiring sacred treatment. Have I wandered from the idea of a musical spring? I think not. These early inspirations were surely the daffodils of music; they came before the swallow dared, and they took the winds of March with beauty. The dew of the day-spring was upon this work: and

though spring is the Angel of summer, it is of itself complete in beauty. Often have I seen orchids of most elaborately trained groups, perfect in their own symmetry and most curious in their own complexity; they are exceedingly beautiful, and one has certain moods in which they represent as it were symbolically the complicated thoughts and emotions of modern times. Yet in another mood it may be that 'the meanest flower that grows' inspires more native and more intimate thoughts. So do I find the difference between our great modern giants and my musicians of the springtide; and for the moment I am rather for Edmund Spenser's 'clean cut fields and flowery banks' than for the gilded barque of Cleopatra. Civilization and ethical development are curious matters, and I fear that it is still possible for the modern man now and then to lament modern complexity in the reminiscence of historical simplicity. Yet to-morrow there will certainly be another change; and he who out-vies our present modernity itself will be thrice welcome in our midst, and will be set off as an easy foil not only against those simple-minded men who crowded the days of Western music in its springtime, but also against the men of mighty scores whom we honour to-day because they seem to do for us the work of pioneers. So every spring turns to summer; and so even in the wild fields the harebell yields to the clover. And the centre of all speculation is found to have but a relative quality, when it is finally justified.

VERNON BLACKBURN.

#### WILLIAM STERNDALE BENNETT

(1816—1875).

Have not the conditions of modern life—in its unrest, its complexity—made their way into our music? Even the intellectuality of the age engenders artificiality. And does not mechanical invention—the strident pianoforte, or full-blown organ, to wit—play its part in the general trend of this up-to-date domination? There is only one answer to these questions, and it may be received in silence for all the good a protest, or even a warning, may do. But just as the weary wayfarer in a busy city finds refreshment in the tranquillity of some fair scene, so may we, at this springtide of the year, when nature is assuming her 'radiant loveliness,' turn to an English master whose music charms by its gentle grace, its refreshing influence, and natural beauty.

William Sterndale Bennett was born on April 13, 1816, at Sheffield. The exact location of the house in which he first saw the light has very nearly been determined through the patient investigations of Mr. W. T. Freemantle, of Rotherham, who has traced it down to one of two habitations. In so doing he has proved that 8, Norfolk Row, as given in more than one

biography, is not the birth-house. Sterndale Bennett—so named after his father's friend, William Sterndale, a versifier of Sheffield—came of a musical stock. His grandfather, John Bennett (born at Ashford, Derbyshire, in 1750), became a Lay Clerk of King's, St. John's, and Trinity Colleges, Cambridge, and the devoted guardian of his gifted grandson. His father, Robert Bennett, was organist of Sheffield Parish Church from 1811 till his death in 1819. This Robert Bennett, a pupil of Dr. Clarke-Whitfield, was a musician of repute in Sheffield, and on April 13, 1812—exactly four years before his gifted son was born—he gave a concert in the Assembly Rooms, at which tea and a ball were 'thrown in' to the purchasers of tickets. Sterndale was a babe of two when his mother died. His father soon afterwards married again, but in a few months he also died, at the age of thirty-three. The stepmother took little interest in the Bennett bairns, and in December, 1819, a month after his father's death, the four-year-old boy was taken to Cambridge to be lovingly nurtured by his kindhearted grandfather. The child was not baptized until after he had arrived at Cambridge: the ceremony took place on March 19, 1820, at St. Edward's church. On February 17, 1824, Master Bennett, then nearly nine years old, became a chorister of King's College, Cambridge.

The organist of King's, John Pratt, did not long retain the services of the little chorister. It so happened that the Rev. F. Hamilton, chaplain to Lord Melbourne and superintendent of the Royal Academy of Music—not to be confused with the Principal of that Institution—paid a visit to Cambridge and heard the boy play, in other words he discovered young Bennett. The Academy had then been in existence only three years, and the foresight of the Reverend gentleman who watched over its domestic interests—for it was then a resident school of music—is in the highest degree commendable. The boy, aged ten, entered the 'old place' in Tenterden Street in March, 1826, and remained a student there till June, 1836, a period of ten years. According to his grandfather's wish he took the violin as his principal study, his teachers being Oury and Spagnoletti. His theory professors were first Charles Lucas, and afterwards Cipriani Potter and Dr. Crotch, all of whom, including their genius pupil, were at one time or another Principals of the Institution. He took the pianoforte as a second study under W. H. Holmes, but his lovely touch—we sigh for it nowadays—soon pointed the way to devoting his chief attention to the keyboard instrument. His fellow-students remembered him as an amiable and affectionate boy who endeared himself to everyone with whom he came into contact. Of a quiet disposition, his remarks on music, even at that early age, were original and worthy of note. To the lasting honour of the Academy, Sterndale Bennett was admitted a free student.