

Review

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Reviews.

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

In a note prefixed to vol. v. of this remarkable biography, Mr. Ellis says: 'In all probability volume vi. will cover the next six to nine years of Wagner's life.' As a matter of fact, vol. vi. covers only *four* years of that period! Assuming that these proportions will be continued, six more volumes may be expected, making twelve in all; and at the present rate of progress the work will not be completed until the year 1917, four years after the centenary of the composer's birth.

No one can charge the author of this voluminous life-story of Wagner with lack of enthusiasm in his subject. Pains-taking to a degree and microscopical in his methods of setting forth facts, he is prone to be discursive. And is it the best trait in the character of an out-and-out hero-worshipper—if ever there was one, Mr. Ellis certainly deserves that designation—to depreciate other folk in order to super-glorify his idol? First poor Minna Wagner—for whom much sympathy must be felt—and then Franz Liszt, Wagner's true friend and generous benefactor, come under the depreciatory displeasure of our author. For the rest the reader is referred to these 450 pages of a book which treat of an interesting and important period of Wagner's career. Their perusal will convince him that Mr. Ellis is a master of research and that he means well, even if his style has a peculiar idiom of its own.

In his 'Supplemental Notes' to the present volume Mr. Ellis gives amusing accounts of how he went to work in order to verify or disprove two errors in vol. v., which we ventured to point out in our review of it (*THE MUSICAL TIMES*, August, 1906, p. 551). One of these was the wrong number of the house in Balcombe Street (formerly Milton Street), in which Ferdinand Praeger received Wagner as his guest in 1855. In visiting the spot, Mr. Ellis says: 'What landmark could I fly to? There was a Wesleyan Chapel in the street, but English chapels mostly stand superior to numbering, and this particular one formed no exception. Deserted by spiritual aid, I turned to the spirituous; and sure enough—a licensed house, *The Portland Arms*, had survived all cataclysmic changes . . . to which I can swear—please don't be shocked—for I slaked my thirst there.' We can afford to smile at these personal pleasantries, more especially as, in both instances, Mr. Ellis confirms the accuracy of our corrective statements. May he long be spared to slake our thirst for a full, if overflowing, account of Wagner's wonderful career.

Organ music. By various composers.
[Novello & Co., Ltd.]

The series entitled 'Original Compositions for the Organ' is rapidly approaching its 400th number, a remarkable testimony to the productivity of composers for 'the king of instruments.' A recent instalment (Nos. 375-380) begins with a 'Grand Chœur' (No. 2) by Mr. Alfred Hollins, a brightly written piece in Minuet form and in the Key of C, with a contrasting Trio in the subdominant key. The strenuous chromatic passage towards the end of the composition will not escape notice. A 'Cavatina in G,' which fully justifies its title, is an unpretentious but melodious contribution from the pen of Mr. Ernest Newton. Dr. Herbert Wareing's ripe musicianship and inventive powers are displayed in an extensive 'Concert Fantasia,' which needs a deft performer, of which there are nowadays many, to do it justice. Two fantasias of an ecclesiastical nature have been composed by Mr. William Faulkes—(1) on 'Old Christmas Carols,' 'What Child is this?' 'The moon shines bright,' and 'The great God of heaven has come down to earth'—and (2) on the fine old melody 'Urbs beata.' The latter appeals to us more than the former, doubtless by reason of its more attractive subject-matter. To the growing number of Variations must be added those on the chorale 'Jesus ist mein Aufenthalt,' which Mr. Luard-Selby has treated in his usual skilful manner.

As the source of the tune is not given on the piece, we venture to supply the omission: it is from the 'Lüneburgisches Gesangbuch' (Lüneburg, 1686), and is to be found in English hymnals under the name 'Meinhold.'

Two volumes (iii. and iv.) of 'Popular Marches for the organ,' each containing twelve pieces, will be found useful for both recital and church purposes. Fourteen of these twenty-four marches are by native composers, including such well-known names as Hollins, Macfarren, Mackenzie, Parry, and Smart, while the foreign contributors are represented by Guilmant (Marche Triomphale), Mendelssohn (Pilgrims' March, so-called), Tchaikovsky (Marche Funèbre) and Wagner. The practical convenience of having a number of clearly-printed marches bound in two volumes only needs to be mentioned in connection with these useful publications.

Of even greater utility to church organists are the two recently issued books (Nos. 46 and 47) of the Village Organist, as they have been compiled to suit various seasons of the Church's year, or for special occasions. The first book contains suitable voluntaries for Advent, Epiphany, Ascensiontide, Whitsuntide, Feasts of Apostles, Martyrs, or Evangelists, and All Saints' Day; while the second embraces the services of a Dedication Festival, Holy Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion, and General Thanksgiving. Original compositions and arrangements furnish the twelve pieces constituting these two books, the last voluntary being S. S. Wesley's 'Choral Song,' a perfect thanksgiving in itself.

Moussorgsky. By M. D. Calvocoressi. 'Les maitres de la musique.' [Paris: F. Alcan.]

The production of Moussorgsky's *chef d'œuvre* 'Boris Godounow,' at the Paris Opera, has prompted M. Calvocoressi—to whom the readers of this journal were lately indebted for an appreciation of Debussy—to publish the work under notice. Moussorgsky adds another name to the list of Russian composers who were educated for other callings. Belonging to a family of the lesser nobility, he was born in 1839 and educated for the Army. In due course he received a commission in a 'crack' regiment, and as in addition to his musical gifts he was the possessor of an agreeable person and cultivated manners, his social success was assured. His love for music declared itself early in life, and he studied the pianoforte as an amateur with more than average success. At that time the popular Italian operas of the day served to satisfy his tastes. Gradually, however, he drifted into the society of the leading musical spirits of St. Petersburg—Borodin, Balakirew, Cui, Rimsky Korsakow and Dargomyjski—and was thus led on to higher aims. After some success in composition he determined to adopt music as his profession, and we find him at the age of twenty years embarking on a new career, actuated by the highest aims, but greatly deficient in technical training. Of his musical associates he appears to have been most strongly influenced by Dargomyjski, who adopted as his principle that 'beauty of phrase was second to truth,' a maxim akin to that of our pre-Raphaelite brethren, 'truth first and beauty afterwards.' For 'absolute' music neither master nor disciple professed much appreciation. The precise meaning of this principle as applied to music is a little difficult of comprehension. Its logical development in dramatic music would seem to be an eternal recitative, which would soon become intolerable.

In addition to a catalogue of Moussorgsky's compositions, M. Calvocoressi has supplied a careful analysis of the more important works. The great success of the composer's life was undoubtedly the opera 'Boris Godounow.' The lurid episode in legendary Russian history on which it is based is taken from a well-known dramatic poem of Poushkin, but greatly modified and rewritten by the composer himself. Produced at the St. Petersburg Opera House in January, 1874, it was a popular success, having been performed for twenty successive nights to crowded houses; but its popularity does not seem to have been maintained, as it was withdrawn from the repertoire in 1876, and from that time the composer seems to have lost heart. He had never been able to make a living by his Art, and after having accepted some inferior position under the government he ended his days in a public hospital at the early age of forty-two.