

THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

AUGUST 1st, 1865.

A General History of Music. By DR. JOSEPH SCHLÜTER. From the German, by MRS. ROBERT TUBBS. London: Richard Bentley.

A Course of Lectures on the Third or Transition Period of Musical History; delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain. By JOHN HULLAH. London: Longman & Co.

THE tendency of modern works on history is evidently to pass over as rapidly as possible the early stages of progress, and to dwell at length upon the periods which seem most interesting to the reader, as more nearly approximating to the state of culture which exists around him. Whether any such appeal to what may be termed the "fast" spirit of the present day can be conscientiously commended is a question for grave consideration; but if it be at all allowable in any one of the arts and sciences, we certainly think that music may fairly claim such privilege. The early history of the art is a blank which every musical antiquarian attempts to fill up according to his own fancy; and thus much time is wasted in speculation which had better be employed in grasping the details of a period where reliable information can be obtained, and of which authentic records are in existence.

Dr. Joseph Schlüter's History of Music seems based on the principle so ably carried out by Kiesewetter—the division into "epochs"—with this difference, that the amount of attention bestowed upon each period is only so much as, viewed from the present day, its intrinsic worth would seem to warrant. In the preface this method of considering the various phases through which music has passed only as they affect its position in our own time is thus boldly stated:

"Above all, while thus treating of the subject, taken as a whole, it is necessary to unfold the doctrine of progressive development having an actual inherent sequence, to demonstrate the fact that the Present is not merely connected with the Past by the loose chain of tradition, but grows out of it by reason of its internal structure and formation."

After this declaration it may be supposed that very little space is devoted to the infant state of the art. The subject of Greek music—about which so much has been written, and of which really nothing is known—is despatched in a few lines; the author very truly observing that the "little of Greek music which is supposed to be still preserved in writing is comparatively of small value; an acquaintance founded on trustworthy documents, with the composition of one chorus, would be more important to us than all the learned dissertations on Greek music that have ever been held."

Whatever remnants of Greek melodies might still linger in the Church of the early Christians, there can be no doubt that the strenuous efforts of the converts to the new religion to banish from their service every thing connected with the worship of the heathens must have tended to their gradual extinction. Pope Sylvester, St. Ambrose, and afterwards Gregory the Great, really laid the foundation of that Church singing which is in use, with various additions and alterations, in the Roman Catholic Church to this

day. Due prominence is given to Hucbald, who, although his harmony of fourths and fifths would be intolerable to modern ears, really carried out the idea of harmonizing a melody, and deserves therefore the merit due to a discoverer. With the efforts of Franco of Cologne and Johannes de Muris to establish a perfect time-table, the struggles of music to assert its real power in the world are brought to an end; and Dr. Schlüter at once passes to the so-called "Belgian School," commencing with Guillaume Dufay, who was chapel-master and tenor singer in the papal chapel from 1380 to 1432.

The marked effect of Palestrina on the state of music existing in his day is very properly dwelt upon by our author. In the criticism upon composers who have long passed away it is, in our opinion, too much the custom to consider their compositions in proportion as they fulfil our modern musical requirements, instead of listening to them in that spirit of reverence which should accompany our judgment when works essentially forming a link in the chain of progress are submitted to us. When we consider that the music of Palestrina actually turned the tide of indignation against the *figurate* melody which had gradually crept into the church, we may reasonably conclude that he was not only a man of consummate genius, but an earnest enthusiast in the art of which he was so bright an ornament. If proof were wanting of the effect produced by his music upon modern ears, we may cite, as noble instances, that Goethe and Mendelssohn were profoundly affected by a performance of his best works; but to those who believe that power can only be gained by the most violent dissonances and chromatic progressions, the music of Palestrina must ever remain tame and colourless.

We agree with Kiesewetter who, viewing his works as illustrating an important period in the history of music, advises his admirers "not to perform them to a modern audience without careful selection and examination; as it can never be our intention to bring Church music back to the simplicity of Palestrina's time." The careers of Monteverde, Carissimi, and Scarlatti are hastily sketched; and the rise of the opera truly deduced from their influence. As a German, we may well imagine that Dr. Schlüter does ample justice to the genius of Bach and Handel; and in the transition period of opera, Gluck is deservedly recognised as the foremost reformer; but when we come to the modern operatic composers, the "History of Music" often degenerates into a record of the somewhat biassed opinions of Dr. Joseph Schlüter. That even an historical work must inevitably be coloured with the feeling of its author has been abundantly proved by every historian, down even to our own Macaulay; but we question whether a confidently expressed opinion upon every individual who appears upon the stage of history is an advantage to a work of this kind, even when such opinions emanate from a more able critic than Dr. Schlüter. Speaking of Rossini, we are told "that he is universally allowed to be unequalled in genuine *buffa* opera; but he is quite as great in *opera seria*." Further on, he says, "Conceited German reviewers, however, were never weary of denying to this highly gifted man invention, depth, and character; but they had to retract everything when *Guillaume Tell* was brought out."

Now although it may be the opinion of Dr. Schlüter that Rossini is "quite as great" in *opera seria* as in *opera buffa*, it was by no means proved to those competent to judge until the production of *Guillaume Tell*. If therefore Dr. Schlüter only arrived

at this estimate of Rossini's genius *after* the performance of *Guillaume Tell*, he must have had to "retract everything" in common with the "conceited German reviewers." If this opinion were formed upon his previous serious operas, it becomes somewhat difficult to accept him as a competent authority, especially when he says that "of all that usually characterizes Rossini's earlier operas, nothing is discoverable in *Tell*;" and afterwards that "meretricious embellishment, shakes, runs, and cadences are carefully avoided in this work." To show that the opinion of our author as to the merit of Rossini's early serious operas is not borne out by results, we may mention, as a fact almost beyond dispute, that *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and *Guillaume Tell* appear to be gradually driving all the other composer's works from the operatic stage.

Passing over the verdicts upon the several creative artists as they are brought chronologically under review—with many of which we completely disagree—we pause at a name which seems to call forth all our author's artistic wrath, that of Giacomo Meyerbeer. Here we are told that "In operatic composition Meyerbeer is the very caricature of the universal Mozart; he is the cosmopolitan Jew, who hawks his wares among all nations indifferently, and does his best to please customers of every kind." Afterwards, in speaking of his operas, we have the following decisive criticism. "In spite of the intense exertions of musical abilities of a very high order, Meyerbeer produced nothing great, original, or of a novel kind; his operas leave on the mind of the more intelligent listeners an impression of mingled admiration and contempt." Descending from this general to a special view of his works, he afterwards says, "*Les Huguenots*, and that far weaker production, the *Prophète*, are, we think, all the more reprehensible (now-a-days, especially, when too much stress is laid on the *subject* of a work, and consequently on the *libretto* of an opera) because the Jew has, in these pieces, ruthlessly dragged before the footlights two of the darkest pictures in the annals of Catholicism, nor has he scrupled to bring high mass and chorale on the boards."

There can be little reply to such comments as these upon a man who has obtained an European reputation; and who, whatever may be his shortcomings, has shown the real dramatic faculty in the fine old Protestant *Marcel*, in the *Huguenots*, as well as in the courtly music, the chorus of bathers, and the great duet between *Raoul* and *Valentine*, in the same opera. There is more of this wholesale adverse criticism on composers who have firmly established themselves before the public—Gounod amongst the rest—all of which might have some weight with readers of wavering opinions, had not the same person, who treats with the utmost contempt the pretensions of "the Jew," Meyerbeer, previously declared that the serious operas of Rossini, before the production of *Guillaume Tell*, were "quite equal" to his comic ones, a fact which the German "reviewers"—more true to art than Dr. Schlüter—steadily refused to admit. As a compensation for all these defects in an otherwise well-digested book, Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Weber, and many others, are treated with the utmost respect; and the "new German School," with Liszt and Wagner at its head, is spoken of, as it should be, with a firm reliance upon the fact that development, and not re-construction, must inevitably characterize the real "music of the future."

We must conclude our notice of this book—which,

with all its faults, is a welcome addition to musical literature—by bearing testimony to the excellence of the English translation, the "authorized" one, as it appears by the title-page.

The second book on our list claims attention, not only from the importance of its title, but from the fact of its containing *verbatim* a series of lectures delivered at the Royal Institution by one whose position as a popular teacher should entitle him to a hearing. We are always somewhat afraid of lectures published in a volume, not only because they must of necessity be written for temporary effect, but because there is always so much of the personality of the lecturer intruding itself into the matter of the discourse. Again, each lecture must be rounded off with a climax for the evening, which, like a novel published in monthly parts, must inevitably detract from their merit in a collected form. Apart from these inseparable defects, however, much credit is due to Mr. Hullah for the manner in which he has treated the several schools of music, and also for the care with which he has collected the materials for illustration. In the first and second lectures, devoted to Italy, much real information is given on the life and works of composers of whom scarcely anything is known at the present day; and we quite agree with Mr. Hullah that we have a right to become acquainted not only with those who have bequeathed us immortal works, but with those who have exercised a positive influence on the development of an art by forming the minds of men, whose mission it was to create. Thus, we might take exception to the space given to Durante, who, although a highly respected composer in his day, has little save his learning and skill to recommend him—were we not reminded that "he was the instructor, during his first professorship (in the Conservatory *Dei Poveri di Gesù Christo*) of Pergolesi, Dani, Traetta, Vinci, Terradeglias, and Jomelli; and during the second (in the Conservatory of *S. Onofrio*) of Piccini, Sacchini, Guglielmi, and Paisiello."

The third lecture treats of France, and includes what is here called the "Gallo Belgian" School. Prominence is of course given to Lulli, Couperin, and Rameau; but we cannot conceive why, in a strictly musical discourse, so much space should be wasted on Rousseau. Had he been himself a gifted musician, however eccentric, or had his writings in the slightest degree influenced the art for good or evil, there might be some show of reason for assigning him an important place in the history of French music; but he had not even the merit of consistency to recommend him; for, unlike Wagner, who, right or wrong, sticks to his theory, in spite of opposition and neglect, Rousseau, after roundly asserting that orchestral music was a "chaos," and "an insult" alike to the "ears and the judgments of an auditory,"—that "the only effect which can result from the aggregation of a number of melodies individually good, is that they destroy one another"—actually composed operas as conventional in construction as any that he had abused, and with not even the charm of melody to redeem them. Assuredly if musicians in after years have treated his compositions with neglect, it is only a return for the manner in which he abused art and artists during his lifetime; for, not to mention his attacks on Rameau and his works, the following complimentary sentence occurs in his letter on the adaptability of the French language for poetry: "I do not hesitate to address myself on this subject to poets; but as for musicians, no one would think of

consulting them on any matter requiring the exercise of reason."

The lecture on Germany is, of course, chiefly devoted to the career of John Sebastian Bach; and here we must take exception to what we conceive an unsound doctrine in art. With the opinion of any musician on the compositions of Bach, we have of course no right to interfere; but, regarding Mr. Hullah as an authority to whom the uninstructed may appeal for information, we are unwilling that they should in the slightest degree be led astray.

After stating his belief in the *humanizing* tendency of Fine Art, through means which "of themselves give pleasure," he says "This pleasure will vary in intensity according to the susceptibility of those to whom it is to be given; and this susceptibility, to whatever extent it may or may not be natural, is capable of great increase by cultivation. Now, it is notorious that the great mass of mankind do not put their susceptibilities under any sort of culture, in any systematic way, for any length of time; nor, in other words, do they accept Fine Art as a science, and study it, and deal with it accordingly." This we believe to be perfectly true; but when he proceeds to say, as a necessary consequence of this want of culture, that works are produced by poets, painters, and sculptors that cannot reach "the great mass of readers, spectators, or auditors," we imagined that the necessity of gradually educating themselves to the comprehension of these works was about to be urged upon them. To our surprise, however, this clear statement of the case is followed by a piece of special pleading on their own side. He says, "The question then is whether this great mass—the world at large, the uninitiated—are the more to blame for not appreciating such works of art, or the artists themselves for producing them. And the answer to this question is involved in that to another:—is any sacrifice of self-respect entailed on an artist by the endeavour to extend the sphere of his direct influence as largely as possible? or, to put it in another way, is pure and beautiful thought inconsistent with clear and beautiful expression?"

Certainly not, we reply; but "clear and beautiful expression" to the educated becomes very often a confused mass of unintelligible sound to the ignorant. The highest thought in all art requires the highest intellect to thoroughly appreciate it; and it is no valid argument that because the masses are comparatively uneducated, art must be manufactured to fit their requirements. The example of clear writing mentioned by Mr. Hullah—Handel's *Hallelujah Chorus*, in the *Messiah*—appeals from the nature of the subject, as well as from the music, to the public at large; but can we not point to many of the finest choruses in *Israel in Egypt*, which are only now beginning to be at all understood by the uninitiated, a result chiefly effected by the persevering efforts of the Sacred Harmonic Society to place the Oratorio before the public, in spite of the apathy with which it was first received. Let us multiply examples, by mentioning Beethoven's *Fidelio*, which was at first actually condemned and laughed at; the same composer's Ninth Symphony, a philosophical poem only to be comprehended in all its beauty by many appeals to the ear, and scarcely coherent to the uneducated listener at first, although Mr. Hullah tells us that if a piece of music "be not—I do not say perfectly understood, but—to some extent felt, on a first hearing, there is little likelihood of its ever being understood or felt at all." Nay, we may take the

very composer who has elicited these remarks—Bach—and prove that day by day his works are obtaining admirers amongst the higher classes of amateurs, not as our author observes, because of their "interpretation by certain eminent performers," but because of their intrinsic merits, as the increasing sale of his compositions must sufficiently prove. We believe we may state as an axiom, that if the works of John Sebastian Bach—or those of an equivalent genius in any other art—convey the profoundest meaning to those who have trained themselves to appreciate it, the want of that training, and not the want of "clear and beautiful expression" in the artist, is the sole reason that others cannot share in the enjoyment.

In the fifth and sixth lectures, on England, Mr. Hullah does every justice to the many composers who, in very early times, really created a school before the influence of continental art became sensibly felt. We have not space to follow him in detail through his very interesting sketches of English musicians; but we may say that the remarks upon Henry Lawes might well be taken to heart by many composers whose words and music seem to have come together by accident. The specimen given, "While I listen to thy voice," is as happy an instance of sound following sense as could be selected in any language.

A great portion of the last lecture is devoted to the life of Handel; and much is said upon his readiness as a composer in all styles of music. To an English audience of course a criticism upon his Oratorios would be superfluous; and Mr. Hullah, therefore, judiciously confines himself to the records of his early career; remarking, however, that throughout his chequered life he was always "the same honest, truth-telling, God-fearing man, who so becomingly gave his later years to compositions (as he himself said) better suited to the decline of life, and which he hoped would "not merely entertain his hearers, but make them better!"

We cannot take leave of Mr. Hullah's interesting book without commending his selection of the specimens from various authors, many of which, as he says, are "new to all but the most enterprising of musical antiquaries." Such illustrations make the volume doubly valuable; and we have no doubt that it will have a ready sale, as it addresses itself not only to the cultivated amateur, but to that large section of the public which Mr. Hullah has already done so much to instruct.

THE HANDEL FESTIVAL.

THE selection on the middle day of this great Festival was one eminently calculated to show the extreme versatility of Handel's genius. The portions taken from *Saul*—an Oratorio most unaccountably neglected—contained some of the best specimens of the work. The opening chorus, "How excellent thy name," was sung throughout with an attention to the effects of light and shade scarcely to be expected from such an enormous body of voices; and the "Envy" Chorus—one of the most dramatic and powerful in the whole range of Handel's writings—produced an impression upon the audience so extraordinary as to make its immediate repetition a matter of imperative necessity. The "Carillon" Chorus was delivered with admirable precision, the characteristic instrumental accompaniments coming out with remarkable clearness. We must mention, too, as one of the great orchestral triumphs of the Festival, the execution of the Dead March, which was listened to with a reverential silence such as we scarcely remember, and which materially aided the awful sublimity of the composition. The one *solo* selected from this Oratorio was the prayer, "O Lord, whose mercies numberless," which was given by Madame Sainton-Dolby with a devotion of feeling thoroughly in accordance with the meaning of the words; indeed, we have seldom heard this beautiful composition so well sung, or produce such an effect upon the listeners.

The selection from *Samson* gave Mr. Santley an excellent opportunity of proving his many artistic qualities in the air, "How willing my paternal love," which he sang with much feeling; but the great success was reserved for Madlle. Patti, who gave the