

HANDEL BI-CENTENARY

An Event Which The Musical World Celebrates To-day.

LIFE OF THE GREAT COMPOSER.

The Profound Influence of His Works.

Two hundred years ago to-day a child was born at the University town of Halle, in Saxony, who was destined in later years to exercise a powerful influence in every land where music, in its regular forms, is known. Like Haydn and Mozart, who followed him, Handel, as he is known to the English-speaking world, showed an unconquerable taste for music in the years of early childhood, but, unlike them, was restrained from its gratification, until circumstances and the desire of those in high places combined to help the boy's wishes. His father, a surgeon, knew nothing about art, and cared less, deeming it a degrading pursuit, or at best an idle amusement. The boy smuggled a dumb spinet into the garret of the house, and taught himself to play before he was seven years old. At that age his father took him on a visit to the Court of the Duke of Saxe-Weissenfels, where young Handel soon made friends with the musicians attached to the Duke's chapel. Being lifted to the organ stool one day after service, he played in such a manner as to surprise every one, and attracting the Duke's attention, the latter prevailed on the old surgeon to allow the boy to study music. George was accordingly placed with Zachau, the organist of Halle Cathedral, under whom he studied canon, counterpoint and frequent practising on the organ, harpsichord, violin, and hautboy, the latter being his favourite instrument. During these three years he was allotted the task of composing each week

A SACRED MOTET

as an exercise. At the age of ten he went to Berlin, where the Elector of Brandenburg was interested in him, and wished to attach him to the Court and to send him to Italy, but his father objecting, he returned to Halle and Zschau. A few years later he went to Hamburg, and was attached to the opera there as "violino di ripieno." Business troubles overtaking Keiser, the director, Handel took his place in the orchestra at the harpsichord, and showing his wonderful powers, the place was made permanent. While at Hamburg professional jealousy involved him in a duel with Mattheson, afterwards his biographer, which nearly deprived the world of the great composer, Mattheson's sword being turned by a button, thus saving Handel's life in 1705.

HANDEL'S FIRST OPERA, "ALMIRA,"

was performed at Hamburg, followed shortly by "Nero." It was in "Almira" that the beautiful "Lascia ch'io pianga," afterwards used by him in "Rinaldo," was first written as a saraband. In 1706 he went to Italy, visiting Florence, Venice, Naples, and Rome. While on this journey he produced, always with great success, various operas, oratorios, and sacred works. In 1709 he returned to Germany, and accepted the post of Capellmeister to the Elector of Hanover, afterwards George I. of England. In 1710 he came to England, where Italian Opera had recently become fashionable. In 1711 Handel's "Rinaldo," which was written in fourteen days, was produced in London with a degree of magnificence surpassing anything ever seen there, and was an immediate success. After a short visit to Hanover he returned to London in 1712, as a truant from his post in Germany, and on the arrival of

GEORGE I.

to assume the English throne, he was in disgrace at the Court. He made his peace, however, by the composition of a series of pieces styled the "Water Music," to be used on the occasion of a fête given by the King on the Thames. After an absence of two years in Germany, during which he produced his German oratorio "The Passion," he returned to England, and accepted the post of chapel master to the Duke of Chandos. During the three years that Handel held this post, he produced the two "Chandos" Te Deums, twelve "Chandos" Anthems, "Acis and Galatea," and "Esther," his first English oratorio. In 1720 he assumed the direction of Italian Opera for the Royal Academy of Music. During this time there was great jealousy and rivalry between Handel on the one side, and Bononcini and Ariosto on the other, giving rise to the celebrated

"Some say, compared to Bononcini, That Mynheer Handel's but a ninny; Others aver that he to Handel Is scarcely fit to hold a candle; Strange there should such difference be 'Twixt Tweedle-dum and Tweedle-dee!"

This *jeu d'esprit* has been credited to Dean Swift, but was in reality written by John Byrom. In 1729 Handel went into partnership with Heidegger, the proprietor of the King's Theatre, and produced opera after opera. In 1734 he took Covent Garden Theatre on his own account, but with disastrous results financially, as he became a bankrupt in 1737. His popularity with the public and the high appreciation of his character and genius are shown by the fact that about this time a statue of him was erected in Vauxhall Gardens, the only instance of such an honour being accorded an artist in his life time. After this he wrote few operas, devoting his time to oratorio and similar subjects. He himself said that "sacred music was best suited to a man descending in the vale of years." The series of works which have immortalized Handel began now, when he was already 55 years old. In 1740 he composed and performed "Saul" and "Israel in Egypt," the latter containing

SOME OF THE MOST COLOSSAL CHORUSES

he ever wrote. "Israel" was followed by the "Ode on St. Cecilia's Day," "L'Allegro," "Il Penseroso," and "Il Moderato." In 1741 the Duke of Devonshire, then Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, invited Handel to that country. He stayed about a year in Dublin, and during that time composed the "Messiah,"

HIS CROWNING GLORY

in twenty-four days. This oratorio was first performed in Dublin, April 18, 1742, its first performance in London being in 1749. On the

latter occasion the audience was so moved by the Hallelujah chorus that all, including the King, who was present, rose and remained standing till the chorus ended. From this incident originated the custom of standing during this chorus. The "Messiah" was followed by "Samson" and the Te Deum composed in honour of the victory of Dettingen, by "Joseph," "Sam-le," "Balthazar," and "Hercules." In 1745 the old jealousy had worked against him so persistently that he was again bankrupt, and for a year and a half he wrote scarcely anything. In 1746, however, he began again, and wrote the "Occasional Oratorio," "Judas Maccabæus," "Joshua," "Solomon," "Susanna," "Theodora," and the "Choice of Hercules." His last oratorio was "Jephtha," composed in February, 1752. While engaged on this oratorio he was attacked by the disease which finally deprived him of sight. He, however, continued to play the organ at the performance of his own oratorios, and even to play organ concertos. On April 6, 1759, he attended a performance of the "Messiah," and on the 14th of the same month he died, and was buried in Westminster Abbey. As a composer Handel's influence was great—great as regards his contemporaries and successors, and as regards the public—

YET HE FOUNDED NO SCHOOL.

All his works were performed as soon as written. By this means his mind grew to such an extent that he surpassed himself more rapidly than he influenced others. Sir George Grove says, "That which is imitable in his work is simply the result of certain forms of expression which he used because he found them ready to his hand; that which is his own is inimitable." It is as a vocal, and above all as a choral writer, that Handel is supreme. No one ever developed the resources of the chorus as he did; and his compositions of this class remain to this day as unapproachable as ever. His choruses are full of breadth and flow of melody, are picturesque in their grandeur, while so simple in conception, and to quote Sir George Grove once more, are "the glorified apotheosis of the purely contrapuntal, vocal music." The orchestra, in his day, was very differently constituted from the assembly familiar to us. At the festival held in Westminster Abbey in 1785, in commemoration of his birth, and twenty-five years after his death, a chorus of 274 voices was accompanied by an orchestra composed of 48 first and 47 second violins, 26 violas, 21 violoncellos, 15 double basses, 6 flutes, 26 oboes, 26 bassoons, 1 double bassoon, 12 trumpets, 12 horns, 6 trombones, 4 drums, and the organ.

THE ENORMOUS PREPONDERANCE

of wind instruments will be remarkable to the concert goer of to-day. Handel was fond of this, and was regarded, even in his own day, as noisy and sensational in his orchestration. Mozart and Mendelssohn have modernized his instru-

mentation, so that the original effects are not presented to us. As a writer he was quick but careful. Some of his MS. scores show two and even three alterations of the settings of the same words, besides numerous erasures, corrections, and after-thoughts, showing that he brought sound judgment and stern criticism to bear on his own creations. As a song writer, he was somewhat conventional in form, though infinitely varied in idea, melodious and vocally expressive. Handel has often been accused of plagiarism, and the charge is undoubtedly well founded as regards the adoption of themes from the works of others, but it must be remembered that in his day, the sign of the musician was his contrapuntal treatment of given themes, and that consequently so much importance was not attached to the ownership of mere melodic phrases. As he drew with almost equal readiness on previous works of his own, it may fairly be assumed that he took what he wanted because it suited his purpose, and his success with such piracy must be taken as its justification.

AS A MAN

Handel was the soul of honour and integrity, and was of an uncompromising independence of character. In temper he was irascible, violent, and passionate, but possessed of a fund of geniality, wit, and humour that endeared him to his friends, and that preserved him his friendships in spite of his infirmities of temper. The musical public all over the world is commemorating this, his bicentenary; we in Canada are contributing our share. In Toronto, last Thursday, the Choral Society performed his "Samson," and to-night the Hamilton Philharmonic Society sing the "Messiah." It remains to be seen whether the third centenary will enable the world to institute comparisons in his sphere of musical creation with George Frederick Handel.

HANDEL'S POSITION.

The London Echo says:—"If Handel has been supreme in England, on the Continent he has been singularly neglected. Opinions differ as to his ultimate place among musicians. The present leader of the House of Commons in an Edinburgh Review article for 1887 asks:—"Has he, for an age familiar with the masterpieces of Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schumann, and Wagner, any but an historic interest?" Mr. Balfour replies:—"Without Beethoven the whole musical history of the nineteenth century would have been utterly different from what it is. No such proposition can be advanced respecting Handel. His works form, as it were, a monument, solitary and colossal, raised at the end of some blind avenue from which the true path of advance has already branched, and which, stately and splendid though it be, is not the vestibule through which art has passed to the discovery and exploration of new forms of beauty." To the question, "Will the year 1985 see a Handel tricentenary as successful and as truly popular as the bicentenary of 1885, or the (so-called) centenary of 1784?" Mr. Balfour answers, "It is hard to say. But he rejoices that for us 'Israel' and 'The Messiah' are still 'immortal,' because they live in our affections, not because they lie honourably embalmed in the dusty recesses of our museums." As to the alleged plagiarism of which Handel was alleged to be guilty, and which Hueffer, in the Encyclopædia Britannica, says is "unprecedented in the history of music," Mr. Balfour defends him on the ground that he used judiciously what he stole; that the music, after its appropriation, enjoyed a fame it would never have attained under the names of its composers; and that Handel does not seem to have regarded the act as a thing to be ashamed of. Rockstro and Schoelcher on the one side and Chrysander on the other have something to say on this matter. Few attempts are made to revive any of the numerous works of Handel which have lapsed into oblivion, doubtless because such attempts have not hitherto proved successful, but the oratorio, a musical plant that has grown so vigorously in English soil, is Handel's creation."

The Handel Celebration.

The house at Halle in which Handel was born two hundred years ago still stands in a narrow street called the Grosser Schlamm. It is a two-story building, with a high roof, and bears the name and effigy of the "Yellow Stag." In preparation for the recently celebrated Handel anniversary its front was completely renovated. A fine colossal bust of Handel was placed in a niche over the door, and the names of his great oratorios and other works were fixed in golden letters along the front of the building, as also a marble tablet recording his birth there. The main celebration took place at noon. The public ceremony before the Handel statue was very picturesque under the clear winter sky, with snow covering the roofs, flags and banners fluttering in the breeze, and the entire market place densely crowded with people, above whom towered the composer's great statue, with a laurel wreath placed on the head. All the windows facing the market were filled with spectators. Even the galleries around the high towers of St. Mary's Church and the bridge connecting the latter were crowded. The proceedings opened with Handel's most popular air, "See the Conquering Hero Comes," performed by a military band stationed on the balcony of the Town Hall. Herr Schneider, the Burgomaster of Halle, then from a stand facing the statue delivered an address, in which he pointed out the significance of the day and the immortal achievements of Handel, that first, best and noblest son of Halle. In concluding he placed a large wreath, in the name of the town on the railing surrounding the monument. While the band played the march from "Joshua" delegates of the singing and other societies also placed wreaths, numbering nearly fifty, around the monument, including one from the Dom Church congregation to their organist, Handel. The complete absence of any representatives or tokens from England was much remarked. The celebration concluded in the evening with the performance of the "Messiah" in St. Mary's Church, in which Handel took his first lessons on the organ. The oratorio was given according to the arrangement by Mozart and Franz in the most perfect manner. The solo singers, the orchestra, and the chorus of the Halle Singing Academy, all did full justice to this glorious composition. The choruses, "Surely He Hath Borne," and the great "Hallelujah," were delivered with overpowering effect.

MOZART'S 12TH MASS.

"Figaro" says:—"Perhaps the least admirable form in which the Mozart centenary can be celebrated is by performing the apocryphal 'Twelfth Mass.' There is now not the remotest doubt that this Mass is a forgery, and one of which Mozart himself would have been thoroughly ashamed. A good deal about this and other spurious works will be found in the writings of Martineau and Otto Jahn. The attack on the authenticity of the 'Twelfth Mass' was started in 1826 by Von Seyfried in the 'Cecilia.' Seyfried directed attention to weaknesses in part writing and tonality—it commences in G, but most of the music is in C or its related keys, and the Mass itself ends in C—and consequently declared it to be spurious. This brought to the fray the publisher, the late Mr. Simrock, of Bonn, who, by the way, did not issue the Mass to the public until thirty years after the composer's death. Simrock stated that he had first received it from one Carl Zulehner, that the MS. was not in Mozart's handwriting, although it resembled Mozart's, and that Zulehner would doubtless explain how he came by it. Zulehner, however, preserved a discreet silence, and there is not much doubt that he imposed upon Simrock. Nearly all the authorities declare the Mass to be apocryphal. Jahn, in his monumental biography of Mozart, is certain that it is a fraud, if only because the treatment of the instruments, and particularly the bassoons, is totally different to that of Mozart in his Salzburg manner. Kocael is also positive the work is a forgery. The violinist Jansen went further, and stated that he had frequently sung it as a boy, about 1812, in Bohemia, where it was called 'Muller's Mass.' In all probability, however, the 'Twelfth Mass' was an impudent forgery of Zulehner. That Zulehner was not above this sort of thing is proved by the fact that he also possessed and tried to sell a mass in C, called the 'Coronation Mass,' which he alleged to be Mozart's, but which was a mere potpourri of music patched up from 'Cosi fan tutte.' When taxed with the fraud, Zulehner declared that the mass was the original form in which the 'Cosi fan tutte' was written, and that Mozart afterwards turned it into an opera, but the lie was denounced by the critics of the period, who pointed out that this piece of patch-work could only have been done by some bungling church musician. In any case, the once popular, but in no sense worthy, 'Twelfth Mass' ought now to be discarded, particularly so far as the Mozart Centenary is concerned. Unfortunately, in various parts of the country, the truth about the 'Twelfth Mass' does not appear to be known, and in Dublin and its vicinity alone it is alleged that no fewer than five choral societies are getting up this forgery for the celebration next month."