

Review

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The scene of "Parsifal" is laid partly in the Castle of Monsalvat, where the "Holy Grail" is being guarded, and its vicinity, "in the northern mountains of Gothic Spain," partly at the castle of the magician *Klingsor*, situate at the southern range of the same mountain chain. The following is a brief outline of the story enacted in these surroundings. *Amfortas*, the son of *Titirel*, has succeeded his father, who is still living, in the king-guardianship of the "Holy Grail"—the sacred vessel containing the blood which had flown from the crucified Saviour. It is a part of the royal prerogative to exhibit this sacred relic periodically before the assembled knights of the holy order, on which occasions the "Holy Grail" gives forth a magnificent light which exercises a divine influence over all, and none who have witnessed it can die within that week. It appears, however, that *Amfortas* being enticed into the precincts of the castle of *Klingsor*—the scheming magician, ambitious to obtain the "Holy Grail" and the power it wields—had fallen a victim to the sensuous attractions with which the latter surrounds his Court, and had been wounded with a spear wrung from his hands—the sacred weapon which had pierced the side of the Saviour, and which had hitherto formed part of the treasures connected with the "Grail." Conscious of having defiled the holy office which he held, the king returns to Monsalvat, but, although mortally wounded, he cannot die on account of the innate power of the mystery whose guardian he is, and which it is his duty weekly to display. At this juncture *Parsifal* enters upon the scene, a young adventurer whose father, *Gamuret*, a descendant of *Titirel*, had died in battle before the son was born, and who had been brought up by his mother in the solitude of forest life, kept in utter ignorance of worldly matters lest he should one day share the father's fate. The youthful hero had, however, torn himself away from these maternal leading-strings, and on his aimless wanderings had arrived at the seat of the holy mystery, "which none but the pure in heart can reach." He is conducted by one of the knight-guardians into the hall of the castle, where the holy rites are just being performed. *Parsifal*, greatly impressed by the scene, and still more by the sufferings exhibited by the king, remains throughout the ceremony, and afterwards, speechless, and his silence being construed by his guide into indifference, he is, after the assembled knights have left the hall, contemptuously told to quit the castle never to return. With characteristic *naïveté* the first act closes by the indignant knight in question violently closing the door after his youthful *protégé*, upon which the curtain drops. The following act introduces us to the luxuriant splendour of *Klingsor's* castle and its surroundings. After a somewhat lengthy dialogue between the magician and *Kundry*, a mysterious heathen woman—the only female character in the drama, and one surrounded with great interest by the dramatist—our hero again makes his appearance, resists the many temptations offered him, gains possession of the sacred spear, and as he breaks the spell around him the magician's seeming splendour disappears. With this the second act comes to a close. Between it and the third act several years must be imagined to have elapsed, years of wandering on the part of *Parsifal* in search of the "Holy Grail," during which time that inner process of purification must be supposed to have taken place which it does not lay within the power of the dramatist to depict. At last, however, the time arrives when the weary wanderer—the sacred spear, undefiled by him, in his hand; himself an altered, purified being—again reaches the doors of the long-desired Monsalvat. Again he is conducted into the grand hall, where the knights have assembled to mourn the death of their old king *Titirel*, whose coffin is being carried in and placed in the centre of the room. His son *Amfortas*, still suffering from his never-healing wound, is determined not to prolong his agony any longer, and, refusing to perform again the sacred rites which to him signify but a living death, exposes his bare breast to the warriors, imploring them to pierce it with their swords. At this moment *Parsifal* enters, and, extending the sacred spear to *Amfortas*, the old wound of the latter closes, and he is infused with new life. *Parsifal*, the sufferer, the redeemer, is hailed by all as the only one worthy to be the guardian-king of the

"Grail." And as the holy vessel once more gives forth its glorious light the ancient *Titirel*, regaining life for the moment, raises himself in his coffin to bestow his blessing upon the assembly.

Our space does not permit us to offer more than this very faint and imperfect outline of the subject of Herr Wagner's latest drama. We abstain from all further criticism for the present, being content to await its final completion with all the wonderful musical effects and detailed stage accessories of which we know its author to be a consummate master. The work will no doubt become fruitful in controversy. Some portions will be objected to on orthodox religious grounds, while others will offer full scope to the pen of the satirist. But Herr Wagner has had to encounter similar antagonism upon the first appearance of nearly all his music-dramas, and he has grown old and famous in spite of it all. We will only add that the poem is written for the greater part in rhyme, the alliterative verse, so conspicuous in "Der Ring des Nibelungen," being but rarely made use of.

*Album-Sonate.* Für das Pianoforte. Von Richard Wagner. [Schott and Co.]

WHEN we say that this piece was composed in 1853 it is almost unnecessary to add that it embodies not the ripened theories of one whose greatest boast is that he refuses allegiance to any code of rules save what may be evolved from his own conviction of the true mission of music in the world. By the term "Album-Sonate" (which perhaps may be a title given by the publisher) we are of course led to expect a composition not fully developed, or what we should perhaps term a "Sonatina;" and viewed in this light we are inclined to believe that the piece—which, although the time varies, is not divided into movements—will be played with much interest by musicians, and listened to with much pleasure even by a general audience. Commencing with a tranquil and expressive subject in A flat major, we are carried (some-what abruptly) into C major, when a quiet and unpretentious melody appears. Some extremely good, but simple, writing afterwards occurs where fragments of the themes are treated, with a florid bass; and there are many effective changes of key, the calmness of the concluding portion of the piece, with the triplet accompaniment, being in excellent contrast with the energetic passages which precede it. No person hearing this unambitious trifle would believe that Herr Wagner is its composer; but everybody must feel that it is the holiday-work of an artist.

*A Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (A.D. 1450-1878). By eminent writers, English and Foreign. With illustrations and woodcuts. Edited by George Grove, D.C.L.

[Macmillan and Co.]

To produce a reliable Biographical Dictionary of Musicians is by no means an easy task, but when to this is added an explanation of musical terms, with articles on the history of the art, on the science and practice of composition, and the nature and use of musical instruments, the difficulties accumulate to an extent which perhaps even the earnest and indefatigable editor of the work now before us has, in this early stage of his labours, scarcely yet fully realised. In his preface he says, "Every effort will be made to compress the articles as much as possible, consistent with their being intelligible and readable;" but herein, as it appears to us, lies a very sufficient reason why a Dictionary of Musicians and a Dictionary of Music should form separate works; for whilst the first should be a collection of interesting and well-digested biographies, the second should form a musical lexicon, the principal subjects in which should be treated of at length by the ablest authors. It is of course impossible to deliver judgment upon a single part of a work, considering that twelve quarterly parts—of about the same size, we presume—are found necessary to complete it; but, so far as we can pronounce upon the specimen before us, the plan laid down by the editor appears to be most satisfactorily followed out. A good staff of contributors has been secured; and, seeing that of necessity the space allowed them is perhaps unduly limited, they have ably and carefully performed the tasks allotted to them. As all the articles are signed, it would be invidious to mention any as particularly deserving of praise; but we may say, generally, that the subjects of most

importance have been judiciously entrusted to those who have made them their special study, and that in all these cases much information is conveyed in a small compass, the explanations of the terms being often made additionally clear by musical illustrations. We know how exceedingly difficult it is to decide what to admit and what to reject in a Dictionary of this description, but can scarcely understand why, for example, *Mdlle. Albani* should be mentioned, and not *Mdlle. Albani*; *F. E. Bache*, who is deceased, and not *Edward Bache*, now living; why also, as the word *Academy* is fully treated, the *Royal Academy of Music* should be omitted. As a matter of fact, too, we must mention that *William Ball* did not, as is asserted, write English words either to *Spohr's "God, Thou art great"* or to *Mendelssohn's "Lobgesang"*; but the English text was supplied to the first-named composition by *Morley Chubb*, and to the second by *Mr. J. Alfred Novello*, who, at the request of the *Birmingham Festival* stewards, journeyed to *Leipzig* to accomplish the adaptation in consultation with the composer, so that no time might be lost in preparing the work for the *Festival* then fast approaching. It is strange too, as the *Dictionary* bears the date of 1878, that *Dr. S. S. Wesley* should be spoken of as a *living* composer, considering that he died as far back as 1876. Then, as mere misprints, we would call attention to *Michel von Asantschewsky*, who is said to have been born in 1839, and to have become *Director of the Conservatoire de Musique*, at *St. Petersburg*, in the same year; to the invariable spelling of the word "*obbligato*" with one "*b*," and to the deriving the term "*Acciacatura*" from "*Acciacare*," the correct spelling of the verb being with two "*c*'s." Referring to page 41, where, in explaining the word "*Agitato*," mention is made of *Mendelssohn's "Lieder ohne Worte," Book 1, No. 5*, which is marked "*Piano agitato*," we may say that in the modern German edition it is altered to "*Poco agitato*." There can be no doubt that the original direction was a mistake, especially as the "*p*" for "*piano*" also appears. All the points we have mentioned (more important of course in a work especially designed as a reference for facts than in a mere gossiping book) may be easily revised in a reprint of the Part before us; and we are certain that, even if the editor do not agree with us as to the value of our suggestions, he will give us full credit for good intention in submitting them for his consideration.

*Harmony.* By *John Stainer, M.A., Mus. Doc., Oxon.* [Novello, Ewer and Co.]

This work forms one of the series of "*Music Primers*" issued by the above firm; and in his preface the author says that his aim has been the "collecting and explaining those facts universally accepted as the groundwork of harmony," rather than the putting forward "any special opinions he himself may have formed." The one exception to this rule—that of retaining the German system of naming intervals—he states that he has made "after much consideration," and this consideration we are bound to say is so apparent throughout the book that, although we may differ from the author on certain minor points, the obvious sincerity of his convictions makes us cordially welcome him as a worthy worker in the cause of musical progress. As a mere matter of opinion, we confess that we are not partial to the German system of naming intervals. It is good, we think, to call fourths, fifths, and octaves, perfect and imperfect; and it might be urged that, by using the words "*tritone fourth*" and "*imperfect fifth*" for those intervals which occur in the scale, all diatonic intervals would be major, minor, and perfect, and the terms "*augmented*" and "*diminished*" would be exclusively reserved for those intervals which are chromatically raised or lowered. We quite sympathise with *Dr. Stainer* in the desire to make his little book an introduction to works of a more elaborate character; and where the pupil is expressly told that he is not to rest content with the facts set forth in the *Primer*, but merely to provide himself with the materials for building, it is perhaps infinitely better to say too little than too much. One or two points, however (no doubt oversights), should be mentioned. At the commencement of chapter vii. it is said that "when the tonic of a common chord is not the lowest note in it the chord is said to be inverted." This word "*tonic*" (which we

presume means "*root*") so often occurs when a common chord is spoken of that we are certain of the author's thanks for drawing attention to it; and we may also (whilst pointing out such small matters) refer to paragraph 52, where it is stated that the pupil need not bind himself to prepare his "*minor sevenths*," a direction which, of course, is intended to apply exclusively to "*dominant sevenths*."

In conclusion we cannot award too much praise to the logical manner in which *Dr. Stainer* has arranged the subjects upon which he treats. The exercises, it is almost needless to say, are excellent; and the plan of recapitulating the contents of each chapter by question and answer between master and pupils is well adapted to impress the characteristics of the various chords upon the memory. We are glad to find that the author asserts the impossibility of learning harmony without a master; but should any adventurous student attempt this task we do not know that we can recommend him a more satisfactory guide than *Dr. Stainer's Treatise*.

*On Purity in Musical Art.* By *Anton Friedrich Justus Thibaut (Heidelberg, 1825)*; translated from the German by *W. H. Gladstone.* [John Murray.]

Speaking of this work, *Schumann* says, "Read it often as you grow older;" and that in Germany this advice has been extensively followed may be evidenced by the fact of the fifth edition of the book having appeared as recently as 1875. Let us hope that in England, where a love of true musical art is so rapidly gaining ground, the opinions of so learned and thoughtful a thinker upon the true mission of music in the world may, by the help of *Mr. Gladstone's* excellent translation, soon become as well known as in the land of the author's birth. The translator in his preface says that, "in choosing for his *Essay* the title of '*Purity in Musical Art*,' *Thibaut* had in view not so much technical as moral purity. Music he considered not a mere study, nor a mere amusement, but rather as a moral agency." In furtherance of the desire rigidly to enforce this theory, it can scarcely be wondered at that he should seize upon the golden age of Church music as the period from the glory of which he believes we have gradually departed; that *Palestrina* should be placed at the head of the great sacred school; and that, even in speaking of *Sebastian Bach*, he should deplore the fact of his endeavouring to perfect his art "in the direction of florid part-writing," and to account his four-part chorales "unprofitable as regards the people at large, and most of our organists." His remarks upon the Choral, and upon the gradual secularisation of Church music follow logically from his premisses, for he says that "Religious earnestness is wont to wax cooler as mechanical skill increases;" and although it is evident that a full admission of the truth of this maxim would keep us firmly to the traditional idiom of the style founded by the early Church writers, and thus bar the possibility of progress in sacred musical art, we cannot but respect the convictions of a writer who has so thoroughly thought out his subject and can so eloquently defend the principles he advocates. Passing on to the Oratorio—which, although our author does not expressly say so, he evidently considers the commencement of a departure from the true school—he dwells with enthusiasm upon the genius of *Handel*, and especially says that he never allowed his Oratorios to "travel away into Opera," although those who best know, and even reverence, this composer might assuredly cite instances where he has "allowed his Operas to travel away into Oratorio." We quite agree with the remarks upon the value of purely national melodies. The airs of the *Troubadours*, *Minnesingers*, and *Meistersingers* may be said to thoroughly reflect the spirit of the time in which they were sung; but we share with *Thibaut* the doubt as to whether any of these are preserved in all their integrity. The genuine tunes of a country which appear, as our author says, "to emanate from the people themselves, or are adopted by them and preserved as favourites, are, as a rule, pure and clear in character, like that of a child," and as few of these, fortunately, have been permitted to die out, every musician should possess and study them. Before reading the chapter "*On the Use of Instruments*," we had formed a tolerably clear notion of the manner in which the subject would be treated. "Had there been no sufficient reason," it is said,