

The Compleat Organist. XII. Of His Instrument (Continued)

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PART III.
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Church and Organ Music.

THE COMPLEAT ORGANIST.

BY HARVEY GRACE.

(Continued from January number, page 26.)

XII.—OF HIS INSTRUMENT.

Musicus. Organicus.

Musicus.—Has it ever struck you as being odd that the instruments most sung by the poets are among the least satisfactory? Pegasus has rarely been hauled from his stable on behalf of the violin and pianoforte—two instruments as near perfection as can be. But he has had many a gallop while his rider—generally ignorant of both music and instruments—has sung himself hoarse in praise of the harp and organ. There is something to be said for the harp on the score of picturesqueness. It certainly beats all other instruments in an appeal to the eye. When the ear is concerned, however, a very few minutes of its tinkling is enough to satisfy. The organ has nothing in its appearance to commend it to the lover of the beautiful. You may deck it with carved wood, add gilded angels blowing something between a Bach trumpet and a post-horn, arrange dummy pipes in nice gradation, with other delights. But these things are not the instrument. They are merely trimmings. Behind them all is a monstrous collection of pipes and machinery. If there is a detached console, it looks for all the world like a harmonium afflicted with dropsy.

Organicus.—May I—

Musicus.—You may—later. What a ghastly compromise your organ is! A menagerie!—a collection of effects and devices many of which will not bear inquiring into—a gigantic box of mystery—the sausage of musical instruments! For example, you have a stop called 'Vox humana.' Why, my dear fellow, if you or I or anybody else got up on our hind legs in public and emitted sounds like it, we should receive what I believe is known in the more plebeian houses of entertainment as 'the bird.' Then you have also a 'Voix celeste.' We can say nothing as to the correctness of the name, because none have heard a celestial voice—a fact which makes the choice of name even more absurd. You might as reasonably call a stop 'Voix de fée.' Fairies, however, being hopelessly pagan, can hardly look to be so honoured. Moreover, you generally get this 'celestial' effect by using two stops purposely out of tune with one another! Why not extend the idea to the choir-stalls? You want to give your congregation a taste of celestial music. Very well. All you have to do is to turn on a couple of solo-boys, one of them singing

slightly sharp. But you don't. The only effects of the kind in your choir are unrehearsed, and lead to trouble when you next meet the culprits. Then you have your mixtures—an abomination, if ever there was one. You take delicate harmonics, and exaggerate them out of all proportion by making little tin whistles to sound them. Also you make one stop do duty under different names, using it on one manual under one name, and borrowing it for another manual and calling it something else. Your motley army of pipes is a fearful compromise in the matter of tuning. I believe that if some of you organists heard a passage played in the pure scale you would find it objectionable, forgetting that the fault is in your vitiated ears. Further, in a big modern organ, how rare it is to hear passages for full organ sound like anything but a hopeless muddle! Old Haydn, had he lived to-day, need not have been at the pains to compose his extremely mild 'Representation of chaos.' He would have saved time, and been more convincing, had he written some rapid passage-work and directed it to be played full organ with all couplers.

Organicus.—But—

Musicus.—Exactly! You are going to point out that the fault occasionally lies with the player. This is true, I admit. It is also sometimes the fault of the composer, who writes 'Full organ' over many a passage that would be more effective with half the stops. For example, you are playing a rapid pedal solo. 'Full pedal organ,' says the composer. So you shoot out all your pedal stops, and start on your mad career. Now, your full pedal includes a 32-ft., a heavy booming 16-ft. open, and a hoarse 16-ft. reed. Your other pedal stops, and those on the manuals played through your couplers, back you up loyally enough. But how many of the semiquavers do the bigger pipes of your heaviest pedal stops give? Listen carefully, and you will hear intermittent hoarse noises—spasmodic coughs from the underworld, as of some monster in pain. Why don't your players reserve these slow-speaking heavy stops for suitable passages? I admit their effectiveness when holding on some long, relentless pedal-point, or for delivering a grandly-stalking *cantus firmus*. What composer for the orchestra ever gave his tuba and bass-trombone rapid passages in unison with the bass strings? Even the 16-ft. tone of the strings is rarely called upon for a sprint, save for special effects. Do you suppose that Beethoven would have used the double-basses for the giving out of the fughetta subject in the Scherzo of the C minor Symphony if he had wished the passage to be clear and the effect purely musical? Not a bit of it! Why do audiences smile at the elephantine capers of the basses at this point? Either Beethoven meant to make them smile with one of his rough jokes, or he made a miscalculation. I think we know our Beethoven well enough to decide which is the case. Yet you organists play pedal passages—not quite so rapid as the Beethoven passage, I admit, but too quick for clear effect—with your most lumbering stops drawn, and seriously think the effect is satisfactory. Similarly, you play a *presto* passage on your full Great, with full Swell, coupled, which means that doubles and reeds are included. This is pretty much as if an orchestral composer should direct all the strings, wood-wind, and brass to play a brilliant cadenza in unison!

Organicus.—It seems to me—

Musicus.—Let me edge in a word or two! Is there anything in musical terminology more absurd than your haphazard collection of stop-names? You have odds and ends of half-a-dozen languages, and many of the titles are absolute misnomers. For

instance, the stop that you call Horn, and with which some of you play passages in transcriptions that are in the original played by the horn of the orchestra, is not at all like the real thing. Some of your flue stops can be used as very fair imitations of the orchestral horn, so of course you call them various kinds of diapasons. Your oboe is merely a milder form of your so-called horn, and is not a bit like the orchestral one. The stop that goes nearest to giving us the real 'tang' of an oboe is usually what you call a Gamba—which of course is a name borrowed from the old string family. The piccolo of the orchestra sounds an octave higher than its big brother the flute. Your corresponding stop you call a Flute 4-ft., and your piccolo sounds *two* octaves higher than the real flute. Perhaps as a result of our present (possibly fleeting) preference for English things, including language, we may find the organ specification of the future couched in our own tongue. I amused myself the other day by drawing up a list of stops in your usual linguistic muddle (for instance, you frequently find Flôte, Flauto, and Flute in the same specification!), afterwards giving a literal English version. Here it is:

Geigen.	Gemshorn.
Clarabella.	Waldflöte.
Hohl-flöte.	Quint.
Dulciana.	Contra Gamba.
Sesquialtera.	Tuba mirabilis.
Flauto traverso.	Gedackt.
Lieblich Gedacht.	Salicet.
Vox humana.	Suabe Flöte.
Unda maris.	Flautina.
Bourdon.	Contra fagotto.
Rohrflöte.	Vox Angelica.
Voix celestes.	Cor de nuit.
Hautboy.	Piccolo.
Lieblich Bourdon.	Tibia plena.
Viola da Gamba.	

How many of our builders dare use these titles in a tongue understood of the people? Here they are, in their proper order:

Fiddle.	Chamois horn.
Clear-beautiful.	Wood flute.
Hollow flute.	Fifth.
Sweet.	Double knee.
Whole and half	Wonderful trumpet.
another (!)	Closed.
Cross flute.	Little willow.
Lovely closed.	Swabian flute.
Human voice.	Little flute.
Wave of the sea.	Double faggot.
Burden.	Angelic voice.
Reed flute.	Night horn.
Celestial voice.	Little.
Highwood.	Full bone.
Lovely burden.	
Knee violin.	

There's a medley for you! And of all of them the funniest is perhaps your 'Unda Maris.' Where was your sense of humour when you called your ridiculous trembling effect 'Wave of the sea'? 'Wave in a teacup' would be nearer the mark!

However, leaving this amusing side of your alleged musical instrument, what of it as regards dynamics? To begin with, you have no means of obtaining accent. I laugh when I see composers of organ music peppering their pages with *sforzando* marks. And, mind you, they don't merely mean a touch on the swell-pedal (of which monstrosity I shall have somewhat to say anon). This is proved by the fact that such marks often occur when both feet are engaged in pedalling. Moreover, we often meet with an accent mark over one note, played on the same manual as others not so marked. How can it be done?

Organicus.—We—

Musicus.—Yes, I know how you organists fondly imagine you get over the difficulty. You think that by lengthening your accented notes, and taking a bit off the less important ones, you give us a satisfactory substitute. The method is fairly successful in passages where the rate of movement is slow, but how when it is rapid? Compare your performance of such a phrase as:



with that of a violinist or pianist. Not only can you give no real accent; you cannot obtain a *crescendo*. You may thrust out a hoof and put in action some more or less clumsy mechanism by means of which you open some shutters, and let out more sound—which is not the same thing at all. A good *crescendo* by a voice or any other wind instrument—any wind instrument, that is, but yours—gives the hearer not only more sound, but an impression of growing intensity as well. The motive power—air—is under the control of the performer, and the pressure can be varied. But you have no control over your wind supply, and your alleged *crescendo* by means of opening the swell is a poor thing because it is so obviously a cheap 'fake.' When you build your organ you intern what is often nowadays the finest part of your instrument in a huge wooden box. You make it as soundproof as you can, and when the composer demands a *crescendo* you dole out the noise. Even then, with all your care, your swell doesn't play the game, for the first inch or so of opening the shutters produces as much effect as all the other inches together, so you have 'shot your bolt' too early to get any prolonged cumulative effect. Your *diminuendo* is of course as great a failure. Just as you have to prepare for your *crescendo* by entombing half your organ, so in playing you have to get ready for your *diminuendo* by opening your swell.

Organicus.—But—

Musicus.—That's a delusion. You were about to argue that you can get your increase and decrease of tone by means of stops. I admit that by drawing or pushing in stops you make more or less noise, but the sound comes on in chunks, and goes off in the same way. Even the German 'Rollschweller' is only a modified success, though it is sufficiently good to deserve more general adoption in this country. Of course when you play on your Great or Choir alone your tone is absolutely fixed and level—and the joke is that some of you pretend to like it! Would you like a voice or a pianoforte or any other instrument to possess the same virtue? Besides, if it is a virtue in your Great and Choir, why make your Swell vicious by enclosing it? Then your tremulant! You think you can reproduce the almost imperceptible wave which a good voice discovers in moments of emotion, and you set about this impossible task by creating a commotion in the swell-box with a fan! My dear fellow, when I sing I can get a better tremulant than that by playing five-finger exercises on my Adam's apple!

What an instrument! Apply some of its methods to other branches of executive music—the choral, for example. Behold in your mind's eye the Royal Choral Society. Before they commence to sing, the members draw on a diver's helmet. Why? They must prepare for *crescendos* by enclosing the sound. They must be able to see the conductor, so obviously a diver's helmet is the only wear. A *crescendo* is demanded, Sir Frederick signifying the same in the usual manner. Two thousand little trap-doors open at the top of as many helmets, and a thrilling effect is the result. Observe, too, that when the sound goes

out the air comes in, and the choir goes on its way refreshed and rejoicing. (Over what happened on one occasion when a thoughtless composer demanded six consecutive pages of *pianissimo* singing let us draw a veil. In vain did Sir Frederick 'Sh-sh-sh!'—some unfortunate member was constantly coming to the surface for air!)

Organicus.—Look here, if you call this sort of thing argument—

Musicus.—Keep your eye on the Royal Choral! A *crescendo* lasting over several pages is desired. This is more than the helmet-shutters can manage. So the first step is to reduce the choir. This is done by silencing all the singers save the Montmorencys, De Veres, Marchbanks, and Chumleys. The remaining clans are added in accordance with the accession of strength required. For a slight addition the ffolukes, Mortimers, or Standishes are sufficient. For a sudden burst the Jones's, Browns, or Robinsons are called on, while for the final crash (corresponding to your coupling of Solo to Great) the Smiths step into the breach, with what effect you may imagine. To see Sir Frederick haling these families in and setting them to work is one of the joys of London life. But see! a soloist rises, and begins to sing. There is a demand for emotional display in the second page of his song. He raises a superlatively manicured hand, and with a couple of fingers beats a light tattoo on his throat. The effect is magical. As the liquid, trembling notes steal over the vast hall, women silently weep, and strong men sniff and draw their sleeve across their brow. Even the timpanist, a hard man not easily moved, especially when, as now, he has 72 bars rest to count, blows his nose with stifled ferocity, the tuba-player thereby incurring in next morning's *Daily Semaphore* a rebuke for a wrong entry.

Returning to the choir for a moment, you will of course understand that prolonged *diminuendos* are managed by inverting the *crescendo* arrangements. The Smiths are first to be dismissed, and finally the Chumleys and Marchbanks are left in sole possession.

Ridiculous? Of course it is. But these are your own methods at the organ.

Finally—for I observe signs of impatience—can you wonder that decent composers refuse to touch your uncouth monster with a barge-pole? I was talking recently to one of the cleverest of our English composers, and asked him why he never wrote for the organ, although he played it. He replied, 'When I write for pianoforte I know what I am writing for, since one pianoforte is pretty much like another. I am also on safe ground in dealing with strings, and when I write for orchestra I say what instruments I require, and I know that they will be forthcoming. But when I write for the organ I may be writing for anything, since there is no standard. There is the Albert Hall organ on the one hand, and the box of whistles at a village church on the other. You may as well call a flea and an elephant by the same name, and ask a saddler to fit 'em both from the same pattern.'

Organicus.—Now, if you're quite finished, perhaps I may be permitted to say something on behalf of the defence. I fancy it will not be difficult to show that many of your objections have the slenderest of foundations. And—before I get to work—apropos the Anglicising of stop-names, since you object to our use of fragments of foreign tongues, I hope you will practise what you preach.

Musicus.—How?

Organicus.—When next your pianoforte needs the tuner's attention, you will of course send him a card, asking him to come and tune your 'soft-loud!'

(To be continued.)

THE ORGAN IN THE CENTENARY HALL, BRESLAU.

By ERNEST E. ADCOCK.

The inauguration of the giant organ in St. Michael's Church at Hamburg, and the publication of the great Liverpool Cathedral scheme (*Musical Times*, January, 1913), caused no small stir and controversy in the organ-building world, and now we have to record the erection of an even larger instrument in the 'Jahrhunderthalle' at Breslau. The two first-named organs have 163 and 167 speaking-stops respectively, but the Breslau organ boasts a total of 187.

The builders of the new organ are the well-known firm of Wilhelm Sauer of Frankfort-on-Oder, the present proprietor of which is Herr Paul Walcker, a son of Eberhard Friedrich Walcker, one of the founders of the famous Ludwigsburg firm. Herr Walcker appears, therefore, to have a splendid opportunity of combining the excellence and traditions of the Sauer and Walcker houses. The following is a short list of the largest organs turned out by the Frankfort firm:

				Speaking-stops.
Breslau	...	Jahrhunderthalle	...	187
Berlin	...	Cathedral	...	113
"	...	Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church		94
Leipsic	...	St. Nicholas's Church	...	94
Jena	...	St. Michael's Church	...	94
Leipsic	...	St. Thomas's Church	...	88
Wesel	...	St. Willibrord's Church	...	80

The specification of the Centenary Hall organ was drawn up by Herr Karl Straube, organist at St. Thomas's Church, Leipsic, who holds the position once occupied by the immortal Bach. The building of the instrument possibly creates a record for rapidity of construction, for the work occupied only ten months. The order was placed in November, 1912. By March, 1913, the first portions were despatched to Breslau; and the inauguration of the completed organ took place on October 5.

The Hall which contains this huge instrument is an amphitheatre capable of seating about 5,000 persons, and is said to be the largest auditorium in Germany that is set apart for music. It was erected to commemorate the defeat of Napoleon by the Nations at Leipsic in 1813.

The action of the organ is electric, the power for which is supplied by a motor and accumulating battery, which are from the workshops of P. Hardeger & Co., of Berlin. Wind is supplied to the main organ by an electric motor of 12 H.P., and to the Echo organ by one of 1½ H.P. Both of these were installed by Poltrich & Co., of Leipsic—a firm which apparently does a great deal of this class of work.

The Echo Organ (Fernwerk) is played from Manual V., and is placed in an elevated position at a distance of 80 metres (about 260 ft.) from the main organ. The cable which connects it with the console, however, is 360 metres (1,180 ft.) in length. The Echo Organ, it will be observed, possesses 31 speaking stops, 23 of which are assigned to the manual, and eight to an independent pedal. It is therefore a complete organ in itself.

It should also be noted that all the stops of Manual IV. are borrowed upon either Manual I. or Manual II.; so that although there appear to be 200 speaking-stops in the organ, there are in reality only 187.

As will be seen from the illustration, the case is exceedingly plain, and one is forced to express the opinion that the authorities would have been better advised to have made their organ of smaller dimensions, and thus have had sufficient funds to provide a more artistic exterior. Had the front only been relieved by a judicious mixture of semi-circular and V-shaped towers of pipes, much would have been gained in dignity. As it is, owing to the almost uniform length of the front pipes, and the deadly dull flatness of the centre, the case does not present an imposing appearance. There is a good deal of truth in the saying that the eye can assist the ear, or at least the reverse is true that what troubles the eye may also trouble the ear.