STUDIES OF GREAT COMPOSERS

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by

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PREFACE

The following short studies were originally written for a periodical for young people. They, therefore, do not attempt to deal with the profounder and more abstruse questions which are of interest to advanced musicians and students, and professed masters of artistic philosophy.

Though the conditions of their first publication necessitated their being cast in a form which admitted of each article's being separately intelligible, they were not from the first intended to be absolutely distinct or independently complete, but a connected and continuous series.

The object of the work as a whole was to help people of average general intelligence to get some idea of the positions which the most important composers occupy in the historical development of the art; by showing their relations to one another, and the social, personal, and historical conditions which made them individually the representatives of various branches and phases of musical art.

The biographical portions were intended mainly to show the circumstances which made them severally what they were, and the immediate external influences

and traits of character which had so much to do with the style of their works, and the lines of art which they pursued.

As the authorities which must obviously be used to get and check sufficient trustworthy details of the lives of the most famous composers are to be numbered by hundreds, it has not been thought necessary to cumber so slight a work with references; but the writer is glad to acknowledge his special indebtedness for biographical matter to the admirable and exhaustive articles in Sir George Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians;* on Haydn, by C. F. Pohl; on Wagner, by Edward Dannreuther; and on Beethoven, Schubert, and Mendelssohn by the Editor.

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CHAPTER I

PALESTRINA

People often talk of music as the modern art, but it is not probable that they always realise clearly how very modern it is in the shape we know it. The sister arts, which comprise painting, and sculpture, and architecture, and decorative work of various kinds, can show masterpieces which still impress us as perfect and complete objects of beauty, though they were made or carried out more than two thousands of years ago. But if we go back as much as two hundred years in music, we feel as if we were among things in a crude and incomplete condition, like barbarous examples of the sister arts of races and nations even before history began. It seems indeed as if all other arts began with the beginnings of civilised life, but music came only with its well-advanced development.

The ancients had some sort of music, but it certainly was a very slight and unimpressive kind of thing; not calculated to please us much, or to move us at all. Such as it was, however, its system, and some of its actual melodies, lasted on through the dark ages between the collapse of the great states of ancient times, like

Greece and Rome, and the days when modern states like Germany, France, and England were rising towards the condition they are in now. Something in the way of art of various kinds was just kept going in monasteries, and such places; where priests and monks lived together, and kept their intellects alive with study and work and interchange of ideas. But music was in such a low state that as little as eight hundred years ago people had not even the means of putting down a tune in which the notes were of unequal length; and they did not dream of such things as bars till quite four hundred years nearer to our time. About the time of our William the Conqueror they were beginning to puzzle out elementary details, and were trying to come to some sort of understanding as to how music might be put down on paper or parchment, and how sundry scales could be settled which would be fit to make music in. But they worked very slowly, and for a long time they did not even get so far as to find out how to make two voices go together in parts, nor even how to sing the simplest second to a tune; and some modern speculators on these subjects think that when they did discover how to do it, it was quite by accident—as if somebody was singing one tune, and somebody else for fun sang another, and as they found the effect amusing, they tried a little more of it, till by slow steps they really found out how to make a couple of voices or so sing different parts in a tolerably agreeable manner. But when they began to consider part-singing or counterpoint—as they called it—seriously, and to make rules to control composers, they became very particular, and would only allow very simple chords

indeed. In fact they were puzzled to know what to do with discords, and probably thought they were just ugly and nothing more, so of course they had not much to make effective music with. A composer nowadays uses more discords in one page than musicians in those days did in a week; and if he was not allowed to use them as freely as he pleased he would certainly give up composition as hopeless. But though their music was so limited the mediævals managed to enjoy it; and the plain-song, which was the traditional music they sang in churches, had a fine dignified character about it which still impresses moderns as well worthy of the occasions and purposes for which it was reserved.

In that part of the world's history which we call the middle ages, from about the days of the Norman Conquest onwards, Italy was the artistic centre of the world. This was partly because it was in the best position for commerce, and partly because the land itself was so very rich and productive; and the great cities like Rome and Milan and Florence, which had been established in the days of the ancient empire, and had lasted on in tolerable prosperity through troublous times, served as seats of learning and centres of activity. Here painting and poetry began to thrive very early, and here, too, music began, after a time, to be appreciated. But curiously enough it had to be fetched from other countries; for it was not among the Italians, but among the Dutch, that it first made the most successful strides; and the most distinguished members of choirs and church establishments in Rome and Venice and elsewhere for a long time were Dutchmen. The most successful of all

of these was a composer called Josquin de Prez, who lived from about 1450 till 1521. He was in his time the great and favourite composer of Europe; and though his works, which are all for voices, seem to most people nowadays singularly unexciting and severe, there is no doubt that they were as much in request amongst musical people of the time as successful operas and oratorios are in the present day. He was even personally courted and made much of by princes, and grandees, and dignitaries of the Church. For instance, there were Louis XII of France, and the Emperor Maximilian, and great Italian dukes like Hercules of Ferrara, in communication with him at different times; and it is particularly interesting to us to know that Henry VIII was acquainted with his music, and that unfortunate Anne Boleyn is somewhere recorded to have learnt to play arrangements of some of his works on the little keyed instruments which served in those times in the place of the pianoforte.

Josquin was really a great and remarkable genius, and produced works which have real beauty in them; but all the Dutchmen were not by any means wise enough to aim, like him, at beauty. In fact, they got altogether upon a wrong tack, and began to mistake learning and ingenuity for art. They invented queer musical puzzles which had nothing to recommend them but their difficulty, and spent all their lives in working them out; and the consequence was that the pre-eminence in composition passed away from them; and then it was that it took root and flourished among the Italians, and with them it arrived before long at a

very high pitch in the peculiar style of the time—so much so indeed that some people still speak of the age just after Josquin as the golden age of music.

This was indeed a very extraordinary time in many ways. Things had got into a very bad state among the very people who ought to have set the best example to the rest of the world. There were of course some very good priests and monks, but there were also plenty of very bad ones. And not only priests and monks, but even higher dignitaries, such as cardinals and popes, lived the most worldly and disreputable lives. When Luther came and the Reformation, that frightened them into a better frame of mind; but it did not mend matters all at once, for the corruption in the old Church was too general and deep-seated. But their evil ways came to a climax in the end, for after such a pope as Alexander VI it was almost impossible that they could get worse; and then the reaction began, and for some time it certainly was the object of most men of authority and power to get a better tone into the papal court, and to elect men as popes, not for worldly motives, but because they were most likely to adorn the high position they occupied, and to purge out the accumulation of abuses which had crept into the Church.

It was about this period that the greatest composer of the age came into the world. The name he is generally known by is Palestrina, but this is in reality only the name of the town in which he was born, which is in the Campagna near Rome. His full name given in Italian is Giovanni Pierluigi Sante da Palestrina, and one of the most famous Italian authorities on the music of that

time calls him J. P. Aloysius. His parents were poor people, and that appears to be all that is known about them; and even the date of his birth is not known for certain. It probably was somewhere about 1524; so it must have fallen just at the beginning of the reign of the most unfortunate of all popes, Clement VII, and would be making him come to years of discretion just at the time when a better spirit was coming over the papal court; which was no small matter for him, and influenced his career in a healthy way.

As usual there are stories about the early years of Palestrina, as there have been about most celebrated musicians and artists; and they are probably not less mythical in his case than in most others. At the same time these myths, even if not true in details, often have a germ of value in them, in so far as they put under the vivid form of anecdote something which at bottom is characteristic of the man or his circumstances. It is of course in reference to his poor origin that the story is told of his having been taken out of the street and put in his choir by the principal musician of the church of Santa Maria Maggiore, who happened to hear him singing; and no doubt the anecdote was attached to that particular church because Palestrina in later life was so closely connected with it; and it makes the story more interesting to join his childhood and manhood together in that way. But whether actually true or not, it does point to the germ of truth that Palestrina was of very humble circumstances. People might have been able to find out something about his early history with more certainty but for the fact that the registers of his town

were destroyed a few years later by the soldiers of that same terrible Alva with whose name we associate such a host of horrors and massacres in the wars between Spain and the Netherlands. The first thing we really do know for certain is that Palestrina settled in Rome and became the pupil of a certain Flemish or French composer called Claude Goudimel. This fact does not on the face of it seem particularly interesting, but it is really rather curious, and worth taking note of. What is known of Goudimel is that he was born near Avignon, and having great musical abilities naturally moved to Rome, where he set up as a teacher of music. He first wrote quantities of music after the manner of the Roman Church, such as masses and motets; but later he is said to have become a Protestant Huguenot, and was one of the earliest composers who set a metrical version of the Psalms to music. It had been one of Luther's great ideas that if the people had the Psalms in a metrical form with metrical tunes to sing them to, it would be a great help to their religion; he himself carried it out with great success; and we still sing some of the splendid tunes written for the purpose by himself and his followers, and very much finer and nobler they are than anything that is produced for the purpose in modern times. Luther's tunes were of course written to German words, Goudimel's to the French version by Marot and Beza. Goudimel is said to have become rather prominent as a Protestant in consequence of this work, and the fruit of it all was that when that terrible night of St. Bartholomew came in 1572, and the French Catholics treacherously set upon the Huguenots

in Paris and other great towns of France, Goudimel was one of those who were massacred in Lyons. And this certainly gives additional interest to the curious fact that Palestrina, the greatest representative of Roman Catholic music before 1600, was the pupil of one of the earliest representatives of Protestant music—but of course Palestrina's music is not like the music which Protestant composers wrote for their metrical Psalms, but to the earlier music of his master, which was in the ecclesiastical style of the old Church.

Palestrina probably came to Rome about 1540, and for eleven years we hear nothing much about him. He must have been working hard, and learning to master all the science of music as it was then understood; and it is clear that he was also learning some of the quaint puzzles and ingenuities which the Dutchmen thought the highest aim of art; for in the earliest work which he made public there are traces of this pernicious influence. The first actual post that he was appointed to was that of chapel-master in the Capella Giulia in the Vatican in 1551, and it was soon after this appointment that he published his first musical work above mentioned, which was a set of masses. This book he dedicated to the pope of that time, Julius III,[1] and it is said to have been the first musical work that was ever published and dedicated to a pope by a native-born Italian. In return for this Pope Julius made him one of the singers in his private chapel. But this was not a very fortunate

[1] See the frontispiece in which Palestrina is seen presenting his work to the pope.

or wise thing to do, for it is said that Palestrina had a very poor voice as a man, whatever he may have had as a boy; and, besides this, he was a married man, which ought properly to have excluded him from such an appointment. But popes were able to do pretty much as they pleased in those days, for people had not begun to be so very particular about details as they became shortly afterwards; so it may have appeared a pretty fair and promising advance for Palestrina at the time. But in the end it stood him in very poor stead, for he had to resign his first appointment when he was promoted to the new office, and therefore had nothing to fall back upon if the latter fell through.

When Pope Julius died, a most excellent and earnest man was elected, who was called Marcellus II, and his election marks a sort of turning-point in the history of the Church. But Marcellus himself, after making people hope much from him, only survived twenty-three days. The man who succeeded him, called Paul IV, though not quite such a good man, still had his mind set on doing well and honestly, and began at once to reform in all directions, small as well as great. Poor Palestrina was one of the first sufferers. The pope rightly turned his attention to the affairs of his own household, and finding that some of the singers in his own private chapel had no right ever to have been appointed if the regulations about laymen and married men had been properly observed, promptly turned them out. So poor Palestrina, after being fourteen years in Rome, with a wife and a family of several growing boys, was turned adrift upon the world without any post or definite

occupation that could bring him any money—for composition did not put him in funds any better than it did Schubert or Mozart, or hosts of other composers who have starved for their noble devotion to their art.

For the time Palestrina was completely beaten down. He despaired utterly of his prospects, and became seriously ill. All the pope could do for him was to allow him a very small pension, which can have been hardly enough to keep his head above water. But, fortunately, Palestrina was not destined to be forgotten or neglected. He was, after all, only without a regular post for about a couple of months; for towards the end of the same year he was made chapel-master at the Lateran, and the pope allowed him to keep his pension as well; so he was not so very badly off considering, though his whole pay seems to have been ridiculously small. He next stepped on to a still better position, namely, that of chapel-master at Santa Maria Maggiore, and here he remained for a long while; and this is how it comes about that his name is so strongly associated with that church, and why it was singled out to give point to the story of his being taken out of the streets in his childhood.

This was no doubt a happy and contented time for him. He had enough to keep himself and his family, and his care must chiefly have been to make his music as good as he possibly could, and to further the musical part of the services at the church with which he was connected. He also took his children's musical education in hand, and three of them promised to do exceedingly

well in his own line, which must have afforded him no little contentment.

After Palestrina had been a few years in this position a very important event in his life and in musical history took place, which made him stand out as the champion of the Church music of his day. In order to understand how this came to pass it is necessary to go back to some of the abuses which had got into the services of the Church in the lax and evil times before referred to.

The Dutch composers who invented the perplexing puzzles and ingenuities which became the fashion just before Palestrina's time applied them very unsuitably to the services of the Church. This soon had very bad results; as the music appeared to have next to nothing to do with the sentiment of the words either in character or expression, and only proclaimed itself as so much dry science and barren cleverness. But this was not the only evil nor the worst. Composers in those days, as now, were obliged to have some sort of principle to work upon, and one of their favourite methods of making a piece of music was to take some old bit of plain-song and give it to the tenor voices to sing, and then to add other parts for the other voices to sing with it. If they wanted a long movement they put the tune into very long notes, and made the music last just as long as the tune lasted in this form, the other voices singing the words over and over again to different kinds of melodies—counterpoints, as they were called—and ending when the tune ended. They used to vary the process in different ways—as, for instance, by writing

the principal tune for the voices to sing backwards; and though this seems rather absurd to us, still, as the effect depended more on the way in which the other voices were managed than on the style of the tune, the composer was often able to insure very good general results all the same. But then they did not always choose tunes which had been originally connected with sacred words. Sometimes they chose common secular tunes, and set the sacred words to them; and there were certain secular tunes which were particularly in favour for such a purpose, as, for instance, one called *L'homme armé,* which was used by many different composers. This practice seems to have answered very well at first, but by degrees composers got lax in their choice of tunes, and used some which were associated with frivolous and absurd words; and tunes, too, which the people who went to church were quite familiar with. And the consequence is said to have been that when the music was performed the choir used to sing the sacred words as arranged in the books, but a great part of the congregation used to take up the secular tune with gusto, and even sing the secular words to it. Of course this produced a very discreditable medley of sacred and profane, and the wiser and more earnest men among the ecclesiastics were very much scandalised; and finally it was decided that the subject should be taken seriously into consideration at one of the great ecclesiastical councils which were held at Trent. The difficulties in the way of reform were so great that they almost despaired of curing the evil any how but by making a clean sweep of all the more elaborate Church music, and returning to the picturesque but rather crude simplicity of the

early plain-song. Fortunately for art there was among the cardinals a great and notable man called Borromeo who believed firmly in Palestrina; and he persuaded the rest of the ecclesiastics to give him a trial as a last resource; and it was understood that if he failed the most uncompromising measures were to be taken, and Church music of any artistic value was practically to be reformed away altogether. Palestrina turned his hand bravely to this crucial task, and so as not to rely upon one experiment only he wrote three masses at once.

They were all three sung privately first, and as they were generally thought promising, the pope allowed them to be performed in the Vatican. The trial took place in 1565, and the result was an extraordinary outburst of enthusiasm. The pope and the cardinals and everybody concerned were quite carried away with delight at the effect they produced, and all sorts of curious sayings are recorded as having been made by distinguished persons on the occasion, from apt quotations from the poets to comparisons to the music thought likely to be sung by angels. And the fruit of it all was, that artistic Church music was held to be saved by the genius of the composer; and the cardinals were spared the necessity of framing rules for the regulation of style, which would certainly in the end have proved either impossible or ruinous to the art. The most successful of these masses is Palestrina's most famous work, and is known as the *Missa Papæ Marcelli,* after the good pope of that name. In recognition of his achievement the pope made Palestrina composer to the pontifical choir, which was probably in those days the highest

musical position in the world, and a few years later he was reappointed to the office of chapel-master in the Capella Giulia.

His financial position was not, however, much improved by these appointments; in fact, Palestrina must have been very poor throughout the whole of his lifetime. The posts which he occupied were worth absurdly small sums; as his salary as chapel-master at Santa Maria Maggiore was only sixteen scudi a month, and for the work in the pope's chapel he had nine more, amounting in all to a little over five pounds of our money. To this he could have added very little from other sources. He had scarcely any pupils except his own sons, and his compositions can have brought him in next to nothing. It is possible that he may have had presents from great people for whom he wrote works, but that could have only been an occasional windfall, not much to be trusted to help him with the daily wants of his family. However, we cannot tell that he suffered from his poverty, for there is not much information to be got about his private life. In those days people were ready enough to record events, and even the sententious remarks, of people of high birth and position, but they had not developed the taste, which has become so conspicuous in later times, for keeping and handing down characteristic deeds and words of really great and able men. It seems likely enough, too, that Palestrina's life and character is all told in his musical work. His education in lines apart from music must have been very slight, and his opportunities of social distinction scanty, for the relations of musicians with great people, even

up to the time of Mozart, were singularly subservient. The grand people hired composers or performers just as they would butlers or valets, and treated them much in the same way. They often made much of them, and petted and praised them, and were really proud if they had a musician of mark in their service; but their praise and pride alike were much of the same quality as if they had been concerned with clever cooks or coachmen. The musician waited on his employer with his work, and received his criticisms without having the option of explaining or defending himself; and when the verdict was unfavourable, if he was worldly wise, he went home and tried to make something which would go more in accordance with his master's views. A curious story has been told in connection with a mass called *Assumpta est Maria,* which Palestrina wrote in 1585 for Pope Sixtus V, and it gives a very good picture of the sort of way in which popes and grandees were considered to have taste and judgment on all subjects, and how their remarks were received in a meek spirit by people who generally knew much more about the subject than their critics. The story is that Palestrina wrote a mass for the pope when he was elected, early in 1585, and the pope did not find it to his taste; and instead of praising the composer as he came out of church, he said, "Pierluigi has forgotten the *Missa Papæ Marcelli* and the *Motets on the Canticles;"* by which enigmatical remark he evidently meant that the new mass did not please him, and he thought it showed a falling off from such great works as those he quoted. What Palestrina said is not recorded, but he certainly was not happy at

the rebuff. However, he took the most sensible course on the whole, which was to set to work upon another mass at once, to try and please the pope better. This new work was performed first on the Feast of the Assumption, and was received by the pope in a very different manner. For when he came out of church this time he said, "The mass of this morning is of an entirely new character, and could only have been written by Pierluigi. On Trinity Sunday we found fault with his music, but to-day he has fully satisfied us, and we hope that he will often revive our devotion as sweetly." This is perhaps quoted after a historian's manner, and may be a little more grandiloquent and sententious than the actual words of the pope were, but it still gives a good idea of the feelings which men had about the relation between musician and employer in those days. The great people of the day had, however, the taste and sense to realise what a genius Palestrina was, and he had many friends in high places. Cardinal Borromeo has already been mentioned, as it was chiefly owing to him and another cardinal, called Vitellozzi, that Palestrina had the opportunity of producing the famous masses which decided the difficult question about the reform of Church music. Another great helper and admirer was Cardinal Ippolito d'Este, to whom he dedicated an important volume of motets. A more interesting friend and patron was Filippo Neri, who after his death was canonised. He was founder of a religious body called the "Congregation of the Oratorians," and had a great idea of extending and strengthening the influence of religion generally by giving a more popular character

to some kinds of Church music, something after the manner that Luther had done for his people. Among these ideas was that of performing music in connection with sacred or biblical subjects, such as the history of Job, or the Prodigal Son. These performances were begun in 1540, and took place in the oratory of his convent, and from these circumstances we get the name of "oratorio," which we use in modern times for a class of work of much more elaborate and dramatic character but of the same main principle. Actual oratorios they were not, but rather a kind of play interspersed with hymns and such music; but it is a curious coincidence that the first work which can be fairly called an oratorio was performed in 1600 in the oratory of Filippo Neri's church, and it is likely enough that the composer, whose name was Cavalieri, took his idea from Neri's earlier attempts. And this Neri was one of Palestrina's best friends, and was probably the one whom in the end he most valued.

This connects Palestrina remotely with one of the most important kinds of modern music, but he himself had nothing to do with oratorio of any kind. His art was all of one description, namely, the highest and purest kind of choral music. In his time instrumental music had scarcely begun, and there were hardly any instruments sufficiently well constructed to be fit to play anything worthy of the name of music upon. Such things as sonatas, and symphonies and overtures had never been attempted; and there was not anything as yet in existence like our familiar kind of vocal music with accompaniments, such as songs and recitatives, and

accompanied choruses and cantatas. All such things had even yet to be begun. What Palestrina and his fellows had to make music for was sets of more or less numerous voices; and this he did in the most beautiful and refined way possible. It was the most ideally perfect religious music that could be conceived—pure and serene, free from agitation or excitement, though rising at times to a high pitch of exaltation and vigour in the expression of praise and thanksgiving. There was no sentimentality in it, and when he was at his best no affectation. The means he used were the very simplest; for he used very few discords, and those which he did he used so carefully as to take away a great deal of their harshness. Men who live in the exciting mental atmosphere of the nineteenth century can hardly get into the condition of mind to understand and feel the beauty of his work. After going through all the turmoil of operatic music, and the powerful effects used by composers of instrumental music, it is difficult for them to enter into anything which is not made exciting with discord or captivating with pretty and effective tunes; and their musical senses have got so far blunted with great volumes of sound and brilliancy of effect that they can hardly realise for themselves the excessively delicate beauty of such music as Palestrina's. Almost the only chance they have of enjoying it is to hear it in its own home—in some great church, where it can echo down the aisles and float in the great spaces of choir and nave, and where all the old associations are still strong enough to give it a poetry and a tone which in a concert-room must always be wanting. It seems

to belong almost to a different world from ours, and people who have not wide sympathies and a feeling for what is loftiest and noblest in religion have hardly any chance of entering into it in the fullest sense. And so it comes to pass that the name of Palestrina has a sort of mysterious halo round it, and men know and feel the sanctity that belongs to his work without being able to come within the circle of its influence themselves.

But though the number of people who can enjoy such music thoroughly is limited, it never can become old-fashioned in the conventional sense. When people use the words old-fashioned they generally mean that the thing they refer to is not thoroughly and completely good and mature, but depended for such success as it had upon some fancy or affectation of the time when it was produced. Second-rate art and second-rate music become old-fashioned very soon. People often win success by hitting some trivial fancy which has taken hold of the public, and as long as that fancy lasts their works please the world; but when the light humour comes to an end, if the work has not something solid and thorough behind its tricks and manners, it is only fit for the dust-bin or the fire-grate. It often happens that people in their younger days read books and see pictures and hear songs that strike them as delightful; and when, after a few years, they come back to them, they are utterly astonished to find them dull, stupid, and without any character except affectation. They themselves may not have improved in judgment, but they have passed out of the mood that was tickled by the special kind of affectation, and they find nothing

else left to care for. But if, on the other hand, they have had the good luck to come across some really good and sound work, and to have been pleased with it when they were young, they may come back to it twenty, thirty, or even more years afterwards, and their children and grandchildren too, and yet it will never become old-fashioned. Palestrina's music is of this kind. It is like Greek statuary, or the painting of the greatest Italian masters, or the architecture of the finest English cathedrals; its beauty is so genuine and real that the passage of time makes no difference to it. As long as religion and religious emotions last Palestrina's music will be the purest and loftiest form in which it has been expressed.

Palestrina wrote very little secular music, and what he did write strikes people who are not familiar with refinements of style as being very like his sacred music. The only difference they can see is that the words are not sacred. In truth, people in those times liked a much more solid kind of art than they do now. They could be carried along by music as music without the help of tunes or dance rhythms; and even in their secular music they appreciated beauty of a more refined and delicate kind than is popular in our time. Palestrina had not the chance of being led astray by opportunities of writing either for money or display; everything tended to keep his work up to the highest level, and it is wonderfully to the credit of the taste of his day that the works which made his fame even in his own life-time were those which have been felt by the most intelligent of his admirers in later times to be really his loftiest and most

perfect achievements. His principal encouragement must of course have come from the people of high rank in Church and State, but one popular demonstration in his honour is recorded. This was in the year 1575, which was called the year of jubilee, according to some arrangements made by popes in the Middle Ages for the purpose of getting money. In this year people flocked to Rome for ecclesiastical or religious reasons; and one of the bodies of devout worshippers who came were fifteen hundred men and women from the town of Palestrina, in the Campagna, who marched into Rome in procession singing all together the music of their great fellow-townsman. It must have been a very extraordinary scene, and to us in these days almost inconceivable. But no doubt the organisation of the Church was then more able than it would be now to drill their flocks to such a remarkable feat as marching into a town in a body of fifteen hundred singing such difficult and austere music as Palestrina's. If such a thing could be done in these days it would be worth going some hundreds of miles to see.

Palestrina at this time was passing middle age, but his steadfastness to work was not flagging, and never did flag to the last. He lived for his work, and the great turmoil of the world, and the exciting scenes of warfare and intrigue which went on in Italy, and indeed all over Europe, in his life-time, do not seem to have affected him. In his own home trouble and sorrow came upon him in his declining years. His wife Lucrezia, to whom he appears to have been constantly devoted, died in 1580; and the three sons who showed most promise

all died before coming to years sufficient to make any mark in the world, leaving him only one extremely worthless son Igino, who not only did his father no credit in his life-time, but disgraced his name as soon as he was dead by a fraudulent use of it as a means to get some money. Beyond these family matters the story of the latter part of Palestrina's life is little more than the record of the production and publication of successive works, such as motets, masses, litanies, offertories, and madrigals. The popes tried to do what they could for him in the way of bettering his circumstances; but it appears that his fellow-musicians stood in the way, for what reason we cannot say—possibly from jealousy; and they tried to prevent the popes conferring on him the title of Maestro as late as 1586. At any rate he could never have been at all well off, and we can only fancy him spending a simple life, unenlivened by gaieties or luxuries, in the constant production of music. It went on so to the last, and without apparent falling off of his powers. Of course his works were not all at the same level of beauty and perfection. People generally hold that he never surpassed the famous mass called *Missa Papæ Marcelli,* which was written in 1565, but he kept on producing works of the very highest beauty till the end of his time. At the beginning of 1594 he was busy looking after the publication of a collection of his masses, when he was taken ill with pleurisy. He was soon too ill for any hope of saving his life, and his son Igino and Filippo Neri attended his bedside. To Igino he gave directions about the publication of some of his works which were still in manuscript, "to the glory of the most high God, and the worship of His holy temple,"

and then bade him farewell, and spent the rest of his few hours of life in the company of his friend, in whose arms he died on February 2nd.

It had been a curiously quiet and uneventful life, devoted as far as we can discover almost entirely to work. Of the character of Palestrina it is almost impossible to guess anything. That he was devout in the highest sense we can be certain of from his music, and that he was patient and steadfast we can guess from the enormous amount which he produced. But as to his manner of living, and his affections and so forth, record is blank. His music itself was of course, from the moment of its triumph in 1565, recognised as the model for composers of Church music to imitate; but, curiously enough, the perfection of his art was so great and wonderful that it took the heart out of composers who would have followed in his steps. It seemed impossible to compete with him, or to produce anything of the same kind which was worth hearing by the side of his work. Some few did try, but the effort did not continue long, and within a few years after his death composers had started on an entirely new line, which was almost as far removed from Palestrina's style as could be. They began to try and make music for solo voices with accompaniment, like recitatives and airs, and as they understood next to nothing about it they had to begin at the beginning. Instead of being elaborately and completely beautiful like Palestrina's music, theirs was for a while childishly simple and elementary; but it led to great things in the end, no less indeed than all the great triumphs of modern music.

Palestrina's art of his own kind was complete with him; and in order to do anything more in art it was necessary to begin on another road. It is much as if men had been climbing a big mountain for a long while. When Palestrina finished his work they were at the top, and could not go any higher that way; and in order to get to the top of another high point they had to go back almost to the bottom again.

CHAPTER II

HANDEL

After Palestrina the world had to wait nearly a hundred years for another great composer of the highest rank. In reality the time that passed before works of anything like as great calibre as his were produced again was considerably over a whole century, but to count from the year of his death to the year when Handel and Bach were born is actually ninety-one years. This certainly seems a very long while, and it seems the more remarkable if it is compared with the ninety-one years immediately before the present day. In that time some of Haydn's best symphonies have been written, and his *Creation* and his *Seasons,* all Beethoven's symphonies and masses, and his opera *Fidelio,* and Weber's *Freischütz;* and Schubert's songs, Mendelssohn's oratorios, and Chopin's pianoforte music, and Schumann's many beautiful productions, and all Wagner's immense music dramas; and if the time is expanded just to a century it will take in all the greatest of Mozart's symphonies and his *Requiem* as well; so it seems to hold almost all that is most interesting in thoroughly modern music. And in the same amount of time, from Palestrina's death onwards, the world

was, musically speaking, almost dumb. But it is not really so strange as it looks on the surface; for in that hundred years there was an enormous amount of work to be done before men could climb to the top of the next mountain—quite enough to have taken a hundred years, and more, if composers and musicians had not worked very hard.

It was quite clear enough to men's minds that Palestrina had made the best music possible in his particular style. There were just a few composers who went on trying the same line, but most musicians turned their energies into new directions, where they had chances of new effects; by using instruments and combining voices and instruments in ways that were quite different from the old style of Palestrina and Josquin. In fact, within six years after Palestrina's death they had almost abandoned the grand old style and were trying their hands at little operas, and oratorios, and cantatas, which were not much like what people understand by such names now, except in principle, and were even more utterly unlike in appearance as well as principle to anything Palestrina had ever done.

In reality these works were only unlike modern works of the same names because they were first attempts, and because everything that makes modern music what it is had to be found out. Composers knew next to nothing about chords and keys, and such effects as men can produce by them now, and they only began to use chords by themselves in the ways modern composers do, as a sort of experiment; and keys and modulations they had to find out, more

or less by accident. Besides these drawbacks they had scarcely any serviceable instrument, and those few they had they did not know how to play upon; and even if they had known how to play on them tolerably they did not know how to combine them with effect. Then, again, though they had done an enormous quantity of singing in combination, and some of it very difficult and elaborate work, they had scarcely tried at all to write anything artistic for single voices with accompaniment, and consequently the development of solo singing had still to be gone through.

So in reality it is not such a wonderful thing that it took a hundred years to come to another great composer; the wonder ought to be that they could get through all the work they did in the time. To any one who understands the music of the early part of the seventeenth century it seems as if composers made the most wonderful strides. In comparison with the infantile experiments of that time the works of Cesti and Salvator Rosa, who wrote about fifty years later, are surprisingly rich and definite; while Lulli and Alessandro Scarlatti seem already like full-grown men in many respects compared with their predecessors. For Lulli and Scarlatti could both write very effective airs of some size, and, with good luck, even effective movements for instruments alone; and their operas as wholes have some sort of mature completeness about them, which is an amazing advance to have made from such beginnings, and in the face of such difficulties, in so short a time. While in other lines men had not only found out how to make some of the most beautiful

instruments the world has ever seen, in the shape of the famous old Italian violins—which the world cannot even match in these days—but they were finding out how to make real musical effects with them, and how to write agreeable and thoroughly artistic music such as Corelli's for them. And, in the same way, they cultivated their voices so successfully that they were within a short distance of having some of the most beautiful singers that have ever been heard, if report is to be believed.

This is not bad work to spend a hundred years over; and while so many elementary difficulties had to be contended against it is not to be expected that any composers of the highest rank would make their appearance. But, at length, when men had by manifold and most invaluable labours arrived at a mastery of their artistic resources, the climax came, and in the same year (1685) two of the greatest composers in the history of the world made their appearance together—and not only in the same year but within a month of one another. Handel was born on the 23rd of February and John Sebastian Bach on the 21st of March. Handel was therefore a little the older of the two giants, and as he looked back and linked himself more closely with what had been done before him than Bach did, it will be as well to consider his life first.

How Handel came to be so great a musician is one of the strangest things to unravel for people who believe in the special directions of hereditary genius. No doubt it would be easier to understand if we knew more about his mother; from his father he ought apparently to have got next to nothing to help him in his art, unless it was

that obstinacy which may be much the same thing in the end as dogged perseverance. His father was a surgeon in Halle, in Saxony, who had a very singular contempt and aversion to music, and a strong determination that no child of his should devote himself to it. If accounts may be believed he was horrified at the appearance of musical gifts in his son George Frederick, and did all he could to stamp on them and turn his energies in another direction. He thought it would be a good thing to make a lawyer of him; but it would certainly have been a difficult thing to get him properly taught even the rudiments of legal science; for his horror and dread of musical infection was so great that he would not send him to school for fear of his finding any opportunities of hearing music or getting any encouragement or help while he was away from the strict watchfulness of the parental eye. But, as the story goes, the parental eye was not sufficiently active and penetrating to prevent the dreaded evil coming to pass, even within the walls of the house to which the boy was in this manner confined; for somehow or other, a small and very soft instrument, probably one which is known as a clavichord, was smuggled into the house, and away into some corner where the father rarely troubled himself to go, and there the boy began to puzzle out his own education. Luckily keyed instruments were not in those days of the sonorous and rattling description moderns are familiar with. If, as is extremely probable, it was a clavichord that the young musician got conveyed into the higher regions of his father's house, no ingenious trickery of damping the strings for moderating the sound would be

wanted, for the father might go even into the next room and hear nothing; for though it is a very expressive and sweet-toned instrument it is so soft that it is difficult to hear it even in the same room at any distance from it. At any rate the boy appears not to have been interrupted, and no doubt he managed to learn something of the way to use his fingers before he was seven years old. At this age the crisis of his early years arrived. His father went off to a place called Weissenfels to visit a relation who was in the service of a duke of Saxe-Weissenfels, and the little boy managed to persuade his father into taking him with him. While there he was naturally drawn to make friends with the musicians whom the duke, like most great German magnates in those days, kept in his household; and he somehow gave them such an idea of his abilities that the duke was told of it, and after hearing him play set to work to persuade the reluctant father to allow his son to study the art thoroughly with the view of devoting his life to it. Of course the father was difficult enough to persuade, but the duke was too great a person not to have his way, and so it was arranged that the obvious inclination of the boy should not be any longer thwarted.

It is a pity there is no account of the state of mind the boy must have been in at this all-important decision. No doubt he was stubborn and tough enough to have stood a great deal of bullying and opposition on the score of his beloved art; and he would most likely have had his way in the end, however much his father had driven him towards the law. But it must have been a triumphant moment to have the obstacles removed,

and to find himself in the way of being thoroughly helped by competent musicians, instead of having laboriously to grope his way in the dark, and find out everything for himself. The master to whom the task of developing and guiding him was first confided was the organist of the Liebfrauen Kirche, at Halle, where they lived, whose name was Zachau. This very excellent man accepted the responsibility with enthusiasm, and exercised his pupil severely. He helped him to learn four different instruments, and made him study and copy out the compositions of the most famous musicians then known, and put him through long courses of counterpoint and such forms of composition as were then understood; and expected him to produce such things as *motets* as weekly exercises. So it went on for three years, at the end of which time Zachau's wits were exhausted, and he thought his pupil so proficient that he had better go elsewhere to develop himself further, if it were possible. So the young musician went to Berlin for a while, where he made a great impression on every one who heard him play, whether courtly amateurs, or able musicians, like the Italians Buononcini and Ariosti, who were there at the time; but he does not seem to have arrived at any definite conclusion how to pursue his education further. He wanted to go to Italy, but could not find the means, and, as nothing else could be contrived, in the end he went back to Halle, and began to work again nominally under Zachau. But very soon he had to turn his powers to practical account, and develop them in a different way. His father died, and he was left to provide for himself and also for his mother;

so he had to look about for such musical employment as would bring him funds at once.

The first place he went to was Hamburg, where there was a famous German opera-house in the hands of Rheinhard Keiser, who was one of the very first men who ever attempted musical settings of German plays after the manner of an opera. Handel got a place in this establishment among the inferior violin players, and in this slender way began his public career. But he was not destined to remain in such a subordinate position for long. The bands which were used in operas in those days were very different from what they are now. Among a moderate number of violins, and a considerable number of hautboys and horns, the harpsichord—the old counterpart of our modern pianoforte —was a very prominent instrument. In fact, there commonly were two harpsichords in an old opera band: one for the man who answered to a modern conductor, who kept the band in order as he sat at the instrument; and another for a man who did great part of the accompanying of the recitatives and even airs. Both were important positions, and required able musicians; and through the lucky accident of Keiser being one day absent, Handel had the opportunity of showing his abilities on this instrument and his efficiency as a musician, and he was thenceforward no longer called upon to play a subordinate violin part, but to take the prominent duties of harpsichordist. This very shortly brought him into collision with the man in Hamburg who was, in course of time, his best friend and admirer—a collision which was not far from bringing his career to an abrupt

termination and depriving the world of some of the greatest of musical masterpieces.

There was in Hamburg at this time an eccentric and very clever young man called Mattheson, who had studied law and was an able *litterateur,* and at the same time a composer and a singer. In 1704 an opera of his called *Cleopatra* was performed, and in it the composer himself took the part of Antony. It was not uncommon in those days for the composer of an opera to preside at the harpsichord, and Mattheson evidently considered that playing a part on the stage did not annul his right to play a prominent part also on that instrument; so when he had done acting the part of Antony, he came down into the orchestra to take his place there. Handel, however, had no inclination for giving up his seat, and refused to move. Mattheson must have looked rather foolish, and was certainly in a great rage, but he could not give vent to his feelings on the spot, and had to wait till the performance was over. Then, as they were going out of the theatre, he appears to have warned Handel to be on his guard by trying to box his ears, whereupon they both drew their swords and fought. It is most likely that Mattheson was the better fencer—at all events he got through Handel's guard, and if the story is true, as he himself told it in later years, Handel's life was only saved by a big brass button on his coat, which broke Mattheson's weapon. After that friends stepped in and prevented further fighting, and the two combatants were very soon good friends again; and it is to this same Mattheson that the world owes great part of the information it has about Handel's earlier years.

The very next year the first of Handel's numerous operas was produced at the Hamburg theatre. This was called *Almira,* and he did not wait long before bringing out another called *Nero.* They both appear to have been pretty successful; but his style can hardly have been mature by this time, nor completely characteristic of the composer as the world knows him in his later works, for much of his familiar style was gained through later experiences in his life, when he was in Italy. He appears to have stayed on in Hamburg for only a year or so more, and this is the part of his life about which least is satisfactorily and clearly known. He produced two more operas at Hamburg, and it must have been finally about the year 1706 that his most important journey to Italy took place. He had long been wanting to go there, to study on the spot what were then considered the classical models of composition, and to meet the representative Italian composers; but funds had been wanting, and when some Italian grandee offered to take him, Handel could not bring his independent spirit to submit to the appearance of charity. But, however it was, it is clear from dates which are found on the manuscripts of his compositions of this time that he did manage to get to Italy and to visit Venice and Rome and Naples.

This Italian journey was a very important point in his history, and certainly coloured his style for the rest of his life. He may have gained something of an Italian manner even before that time, through his acquaintance with Italian operas, which were almost the only models of that branch of composition; but in

all the compositions of his maturer years the influence of Italian style is so strong as almost to counterbalance the native German element; and there is nothing which distinguishes him so strongly from his countrymen, especially Bach, as the softness and suavity which he got from more intimate acquaintance with the Italian musicians. Some of the most characteristic turns and figures in his music come from Corelli; and his types of melody and even the style of his counterpoint are much more like those of the Italian than the German school.

The details of his life in Italy are unfortunately the reverse of full, and it is quite impossible to piece together a continuous account of it. There is no doubt that he impressed musicians and amateurs alike with his wonderful powers. One of the stories which illustrates this most strongly is that of his first meeting with Domenico Scarlatti. This famous musician was the son of the Alessandro Scarlatti who was one of the most powerful and versatile composers of the time between Palestrina's death and Handel's birth. Domenico, following his father's steps, tried his hand in opera and Church music at first, but ultimately settled down exclusively to playing on the harpsichord, and writing for it; and in this province he had no rival in Italy. The first time he heard Handel play seems to have been by accident, as he must have come upon him unexpectedly and without knowing who he was; and his exclamation of astonishment is recorded to have been, "It must either be the devil or the Saxon," for the fame of *il Sassone,* as they called Handel, had gone before him. But these great minds seemed to have been above jealousy, and

they were easily brought to a point of friendly rivalry, in which each readily acknowledged the superior merits of the other, wherever they were perceptible. Scarlatti had, no doubt, the greatest agility and the greatest brilliancy of style; but Handel had the greatest solidity and breadth. It is recorded of Scarlatti in his later years, much to his credit, that his admiration of Handel's harpsichord playing remained unimpaired, and when his name was mentioned he would cross himself in token of his respect; while, if anybody praised his own playing, he would turn it off gracefully by reference to his early rival.

About the time that Handel was in Italy, the Italians had no very great love for the harpsichord, as they were beginning to understand and feel the superior qualities of the violin; and the great school of Italian violin-players was just beginning to flourish in the person of its first master, Corelli; but, all the same, they had enough interest in the keyed instrument to be amazed at Handel's performances, and were inclined to think that there was magic at the bottom of them. Handel seems to have come into contact with all the greatest of representative Italian musicians in the course of his stay. At Rome he met Alessandro Scarlatti, Domenico's father, then in the very zenith of his powers and reputation; but there is no information to be had about the circumstances of their acquaintance. With the famous violinist and composer Arcangelo Corelli he must have come into frequent contact, and Corelli—then getting on in years—found considerable difficulty in coping with the passages Handel wrote for him to play. On one

occasion Handel is said to have seized hold of the violin Corelli was playing, in a fit of impatience, in order to show how he wanted a passage to be played. Whereat the gentle Corelli remonstrated a little, saying, "But, my dear Saxon, the music is in the French style, which I don't pretend to understand." The place where this happened was the house of a certain Cardinal Ottoboni, who was a great patron of the arts, and altogether one of the most magnificent grandees of the time, drawing enormous revenues from the Church, which he spent in a most princely and effective way; while at the same time he held numerous ecclesiastical offices, among which was that of secretary of the Inquisition; which did not prevent him from being very good friends with the staunch Lutheran Handel. The Cardinal used to have meetings of musical amateurs at his palace, for whom he provided the best performers and the best music to be had; and here Handel won some of his most important triumphs while he was in Italy, one of these being his first Italian oratorio called *La Resurrezione,* which was probably written at Cardinal Ottoboni's suggestion. But, indeed, he seems to have been received with enthusiasm wherever he went, whether it was to Rome or Naples or Florence or Venice. His first *bona fide* Italian opera, called *Rodrigo,* was produced at Florence in 1707, and was such a success that the Grand Duke gave him a grand service of plate and a great present in money; while the principal singer, Vittoria Tesi, was so infatuated with the music that she got leave to follow Handel to Venice to sing in his second Italian opera *Agrippina,* which was performed there in 1708, with,

if possible, even a greater success; for the people went on shouting '*Viva il caro Sassone*' all through the opera, whenever a pause in the music gave them a chance. It had what was considered in those days a wonderful run, and was played later in Hamburg as well.

In the midst of his successes he was learning all he could from the Italians. It was a characteristic trait in him, as it was later in Mozart, that he was always ready to absorb the best qualities of the styles of the people with whom he was brought into contact. Even when he was working under Zachau, it is curious what various schools he took his models from, and how many composers' works he copied out by way of learning their methods of art. Under that worthy master he had learnt all the most solid things to be known; with Mattheson at Hamburg he had learnt a good deal of dramatic art, and had no doubt improved his ideas of melody; but he appears to have been deficient in the art of writing with full effect for the voice. When he came amongst the Italians he was in the midst of the most admirable school of vocal writing in existence, and by the time his Italian journey came to an end he was as great a master in that respect as he was in every other; and no trait is from that time more characteristic of his music than its peculiar smoothness and singableness. The Germans, as a rule, as was the case with the great John Sebastian Bach, were always inclined to express their music better for instruments than for the voice; and when they wrote for voices they often gave them rugged passages which were much more fit for instruments to do; but with Handel after this time it was quite the

reverse, and his instincts seemed to be more towards what was vocal than what was instrumental. The origin of this spontaneous instinct of Italians for vocal music is easy enough to understand when it is remembered that their language is the easiest and most natural to sing in the world; while German and all northern or Teutonic languages are by nature difficult to sing, and incline to produce harsh sounds unless managed with considerable art. Italian words produce beautiful sounds when pronounced just as in ordinary speech, but in most other European languages an artificial way of pronouncing has to be learnt before it is possible to produce really good musical tone in singing; and there has consequently been a strong influence among the northern races against the development of a natural instinct for a pure vocal music of a high order.

Handel in these respects ceased very early to be like the rest of his compatriots, and he really represents a compound of different schools, combining the solid and intellectual qualities of the Germans with the softness and smoothness of the Italians. The circumstances of his life were all against his making any return in the direction of pure German style, for he was never again in the whole course of his life subjected to German influences for any space of time together, but always met with warmest encouragement and found his most cordial sympathisers among people of other nations.

This most important visit to Italy came to an end in 1710, the last place he visited being Venice, from whence he went to see his mother once more in his native town of Halle. He could not have stayed there long, for he

was very soon in Hanover, where the Elector made him his *Kapellmeister,* without being very exacting as to his attendance to his duties. Here again he certainly stayed but a very short time, for before the end of the same year, 1710, he made his first appearance in England. What led him to this step is not known. He certainly met several distinguished Englishmen in the course of his stay in Italy, and he was as certainly highly appreciated by them; and it is very probable that they may have suggested to him the visit which had such important consequences.

At that time music in England was in rather an unsatisfactory condition. National opera had made one short start with Purcell, but with his early death, fifteen years before Handel came, it had collapsed. But people were evidently inclined for entertainments of the kind, and as there was no one to supply them with a satisfactory native product, they were beginning to content themselves with Italian works; and as the managers could not bring together entire Italian companies the opera had to be performed partly in Italian and partly in English. Buononcini, whom Handel had met as a boy in Berlin, was one of the first Italian composers whose works were represented in London in this way. His *Camilla* was performed at Drury Lane in 1707, with a mixed company, who sung it in different languages at once. In 1708, *Pirro e Demetrio,* by the great composer, Alessandro Scarlatti, was played, and several other operas followed in succession up till the year 1710; so that English audiences were by this time beginning to get quite into the habit of going to operas,

and looked upon it as a matter of course that there should be a regular supply. Handel came just at the right moment; for his fame had gone before him, and there were in those days what there are not now, enough people of spirit and taste among the richer classes to support really good work when they could get it. No time was lost in inviting him to write a work for the same company who had been playing the other operas, which contained some of the finest singers to be found. A subject, under the name of *Rinaldo,* was chosen, and an Italian poetaster, called Rossi, was set to work to throw it into verse. Handel began to write the music at once; and he wrote so fast that the unfortunate poetaster had terrible work to keep up with him; and in the end was reduced to beseech the leniency of the public for his deficiencies in the following terms—"I implore you, discreet readers, to consider the speed I have had to work, and if my performance does not deserve your praises, at all events do not refuse it your compassion, or rather your justice; for Signor Handel, the Orpheus of our age, has scarcely given me time to write it; and I have been stupefied to see a whole opera harmonised to the highest degree of perfection in no more than a fortnight." Fortunately for composers in those days, operas were not what they are now, or the fortnight would have been an absolute impossibility. But even as they were, Handel must have worked furiously hard, and written as fast as his pen could travel to get it finished; and notwithstanding the speed, the fruit was the finest work of the kind in every way which had been produced in England up to that time, and

the musical public seems to have been worthy of it. The first performance was on February 24, 1711, and it was then played for fifteen nights in succession, which in those days was considered a wonderful run. The famous sopranist, Cavaliere Nicolini Grimaldi, better known for short as Nicolini, took the principal part of Rinaldo, and the other parts were well filled. The opera was put on the stage with unusual magnificence; one of the features of the entertainment being that hundreds of little birds were let loose on the stage in a scene which represented an enchanted garden. But even without all this unnecessary show the music would have made it the most successful work of the kind ever presented in London up to that time. Selections from it were played and sung by every person with any pretensions to taste in the kingdom. The march in it was adopted by the band of the Life Guards, who played it for forty years. A song, called *Il tricerbero umiliato,* was turned into a popular drinking song, and when that singular concoction, the notorious *Beggars' Opera,* was put together, the robbers' chorus, "Let us take the road," was borrowed from the same source; while the beautiful air, *Lascia ch'io pianga,* which was adapted from a Sarabande in an earlier opera, can scarcely be said to have lost its popularity even at the present day. The fortune which the publisher Walsh made out of it was so great, and what the composer got was of course so proportionately small, that Handel suggested to him that next time Walsh should write the music and he should publish it.

When the opera season came to an end, it was high time for him to attend to his duties as *Kapellmeister* to

the Elector of Hanover, and he appears to have remained in Germany for a year, during which time he managed to go and see his mother again at Halle; but very little of importance to his musical career happened. Finally, in November, 1712, he got back to London, and in a short space of time produced two new operas, *Il Pastor Fido* and *Teseo;* and by January, 1713, he had completed a work in a new line of great importance. All his operas had hitherto been after the Italian manner, and all those that had been performed in England had been set to Italian words. When the peace of Utrecht was finally concluded, it was determined to hold a great festival of rejoicing, and Handel was desired to set the *Te Deum* and *Jubilate* for the occasion. This was his first English work, and therefore the first in that line which led to his greatest masterpieces, *The Messiah, Israel in Egypt, Judas Maccabæus,* and so forth. The first performance took place in St. Paul's Cathedral in July, 1713, and was received with enthusiasm. Queen Anne was ill at the time and could not go, but she had a performance for her own benefit at the Chapel Royal, and gave Handel a pension of 200 *l.* a year for the rest of his life, as a recognition of his success.

It must have been about this time that Handel was on friendly terms with a curious character called Thomas Britton, who is known to history as the Musical Small Coal Man. This man lived close to Clerkenwell Green, in a house which had been a stable, and was now divided into two stories. The bottom part of it held the coals which he retailed in the day time, and the upper—a long, low room, in which a tall man could barely stand

up—served as his concert-room. He seems to have had an enthusiasm for instrumental music, and attracted the most famous players of his time to his meetings, and a most distinguished audience; the ladies among whom, such as the Duchess of Queensberry, who was a famous beauty of those days, must have found it by no means easy of access up the rough flight of stairs which is described as little better than a ladder. But, whatever the place, and however difficult and out of the way it was to get to, Thomas Britton's house is famous in history as the first place in England where concerts of instrumental music were attended by an appreciative audience. And here, at one time, Handel was frequently to be heard playing upon the harpsichord, or upon a very small organ which Britton had managed to squeeze into his singular concert-loft. Britton's career began some time before Handel's appearance in England, and it only lasted till 1714, when he died, in consequence of an unfortunate practical joke.

Handel had promised, when he left Hanover, in 1712, that he would not long desert his duties there. But there was too much to be done in England; and by one thing or another he was kept from going back till things turned in a direction which was rather awkward for him. Queen Anne died in 1714, and on the same day Handel's master, the Elector of Hanover, was proclaimed king of England. The new king arrived very soon, and was crowned in October. Handel was consequently in disgrace with the whole court of the country where he had now cast his lot, and for a long time he was ignored. Members of the royal family were present at a

performance of one of his new operas, called *Amadigi;* but no notice was taken of him personally till far on in the year 1715. Several of his friends were at work to bring about a reconciliation, but no opportunity occurred, till an occasion when the royal family went for a water-party in the royal barge from Whitehall to Limehouse and back. It was then suggested that Handel should write music for a band to play in another boat, as a sort of water-serenade to the royal party on the way home. The performance came off successfully under Handel's own direction, and the king was very pleased, and only waited a short while for a fit occasion to receive Handel again into favour. The opportunity arrived in the person of a violinist, Geminiani, Corelli's famous pupil, who was to play certain violin concertos at the palace. He said it was necessary for him to have Handel to accompany him, and the suggestion was favourably received. Handel came, and after making his excuses, was not only readily forgiven, but allowed an extra pension from the king of 200 *l.* a year over and above that which he had already received from Queen Anne. The music which was the cause of this very successful reconciliation is well known under the name of "the Water Music," and it was again performed on a grand scale later for the benefit of the king and royal family, on an occasion when they went to a grand party given in Chelsea in 1717.

The next time the king went to Hanover he took the precaution to take Handel with him to make him attend to his duties there. Fortunately they did not stay very long, for it was not the place to stir Handel to any

important musical work. The only thing he appears to have done in this journey to Germany was to write a second Passion Oratorio in German, for performance in Hamburg. The first he had attempted in this line was in 1704, and this was on a much larger scale, to which he was probably moved by the rivalry of several other composers who had lately been engaged on the same subject. Very little is known of its reception beyond the fact that Mattheson records that his own setting was preferred. This was the last time that Handel attempted to set a work of any size in his own native language, which is not much to be regretted as he was always more successful in setting a foreign tongue than in dealing with his own.

He most probably came back to England early in 1717, to look after fresh performances of his operas *Rinaldo* and *Amadigi;* and when the opera season ended in June of that year his occupations in connection with opera ceased for some years, as there were no performances of the kind till 1720.

In the mean while he found a magnificent patron in a certain Duke of Chandos, who appears to have amassed a colossal fortune in the same way as Charles Fox's grandfather did earlier; namely, through the singular opportunities the office of paymaster of the forces afforded for waylaying public property. The duke built himself a palace called Cannons near Edgeware, in which everything was devised on the most expensive and luxurious scale. He kept a regular guard, which was no doubt necessary to protect him from highwaymen, with whom he had several collisions on his way home

from London; and he also had a private chapel, which is now Whitchurch parish church, and is the only vestige remaining, after the short space of a hundred and fifty years, of the whole of the enormous and extravagant establishment. At this chapel the services were conducted on a splendid scale, with instrumental band and choir, after the manner customary with German grandees and princes. Dr. Pepusch was his first *Kapellmeister,* but in 1718 it was somehow arranged that Handel should take his place. This was in many ways an advantage for Handel as things then were, as it brought him into contact with many of the very distinguished men whom the duke assembled at Cannons, and led to the composition of some important works. Among these were several compositions for performance at the services of the chapel, which are known as the *Chandos Anthems,* and two settings of the *Te Deum*. But far more important than these was his first English oratorio, *Esther,* which was written for the duke, and performed on August 20, 1720. This work, though of course not on a level with the great oratorios which he wrote later, has many fine movements in it, and is specially interesting as the first of the series of works upon which the greatness of Handel's name really depends. It was followed by another choral work of lighter quality, which has surpassed it in prolonged popularity; namely, the Pastoral, *Acis and Galatea,* which was also written for performance at Cannons. It is not quite certain when the first performance took place, but it was probably either in 1720 or 1721. And yet another work, which is among his most popular and

enduring productions, made its appearance about the same time. This was the first set of *Suites de Pieces,* or Lessons for the harpsichord. The work was advertised in the *Daily Courant* of the 2nd of November 1720, to appear on the 14th. In a few days the publication had to be pushed on, and when the first edition came out there was an amusing note on the title-page from Handel himself, saying that he had been obliged to push on the publication because surreptitious and incorrect copies had got abroad, and he concluded—"I have added several new lessons to make the work more useful, which, if it meets with a favourable reception, I will still proceed to publish more; reckoning it my duty, with my small talent, to serve a nation from whom I have received so generous a protection."

These *Suites,* or lessons, as they were called in England, were probably the most successful high-class pieces ever written for the harpsichord. They were reprinted in every civilised country, and have maintained their position so well that the greatest pianists of the present day, such as Liszt and Bülow, have played them at their pianoforte recitals. The *Suite de Pieces* was the best and completest form of instrumental music in those days, answering for players on harpsichords to what sonatas do for players on the pianoforte in our time. Most of the *suites* written by all sorts of composers consisted of strings of dance tunes all in one key, and there was a regular order in which they followed one another; Handel followed the order in some cases, but he as often varied it according to his humour with fugues and airs with variations. Among

these latter is the celebrated set on the air popularly known as *The Harmonious Blacksmith.* The amount of discussion which has gone on about this piece and the strong diversity of opinion which exists among men of judgment are bewildering. The most familiar account of it is, that Handel was caught in a shower of rain while walking near Cannons and took refuge in a blacksmith's shop, where he found the blacksmith whistling or singing the famous tune to the accompaniment of the ringing sound of his anvil. Another account is, that the air was republished by a certain Lintott in Bath, and he called it *The Harmonious Blacksmith* in honour of his father, who had been a blacksmith, and was fond of the tune. In the early editions of the *Lessons* it is merely called *Air et Doubles,* which was the common way of describing any theme with variations in the days when *Suites* were popular. How it received its familiar name, and why, is now most likely beyond the possibility of discovery; but a great many people believe in the blacksmith and the shower of rain—and the very anvil which is said to have accompanied the tune on the momentous occasion is still preserved.

Handel's connection with the Duke of Chandos did not last very long. No doubt the quiet ways of life at Cannons were not altogether satisfying after the excitement of his operatic experiences; and when a very important venture, called the Royal Academy of Music, was started with a view of giving fresh performances of operas, Handel did not want much persuasion to throw himself into the work. This "Royal Academy" was supported by a grand array of peers and distinguished

men, headed by the king himself, who subscribed 1,000 *l.* towards the venture. Handel was invited to take the management of the musical part of the business and to find the singers, and with him were associated Buononcini and Ariosti. He had to go abroad to find his company of performers, and travelled to Düsseldorf and Dresden, and also to Halle once again to see his mother. While he was there John Sebastian Bach, who was at Cöthen, heard of it, and thought to seize the chance of seeing his great brother composer, and went over to Halle with that object, but unfortunately Handel had started on his return journey to England the day before; and so it came to pass that the two giants in the course of their long lives never once met.

Handel was back and ready to begin operations by April, 1720, and the new undertaking was begun with an opera called *Numitor,* by a certain Porta. This, however, soon gave place to another opera of Handel's, called *Radamisto.* Anticipation about this work was wrought up to the very highest pitch, and the excitement over the first performance was of the most extraordinary description. All the royal family came, and the demand for tickets was such that many had to be refused even at extravagant prices, while others who had the apparent luck to procure tickets had the bad luck not to be able to get in; and the struggling and scrambling of the *élite* of London society was such that dresses were torn to pieces and unfortunate ladies had to be carried out fainting. The enthusiasm with which Handel was received was unbounded, and the opera was the mainstay of this

first successful season of the Royal Academy of Music till its close in June.

Its second season began before the year was out, and with even greater promise than the first, for on the first night one of the most celebrated male singers in the world made his first appearance in London, in an opera of Buononcini's called *Astarte.* This was Francesco Bernardi, who is known to after ages by the name of Senesino, from the place of his birth. Handel had come to terms with him at Dresden the year before, but Senesino had not been able to present himself during the first season. His appearance at this time must have seemed the harbinger of complete success to Handel's career as a manager, but he was destined in the end to be one of the main causes of its failure. Another element of danger very shortly made its appearance. This was the fruit of a curious idea of the directors that it would be a good stroke to get the three composers, Ariosti, Buononcini, and Handel, to write an opera together. The subject chosen was *Muzio Scevola*. The play was divided into three acts, of which the first was to be written by Ariosti, the second by Buononcini, and the third by Handel. It is not certain whether the first act was carried out as intended, but the other two were, with the natural result that Buononcini was eclipsed, and a dangerous jealousy was roused in his not too friendly breast, which more than counterbalanced the temporary excitement of the public over such a curious experiment. However, for the present the matter was tided over, and the Royal Academy went on. In the

next season a new star was introduced in Cuzzoni, who was, according to Horace Walpole's account, "short and squat, with a cross face but a fine complexion," but nevertheless took the public by storm with her splendid singing, and even arrived at the point of setting the fashions for ladies' dresses. Handel and she fell out over *Ottone,* the first of his works she was to appear in, and she refused to sing a certain aria which he had written for her; whereupon Handel gave her a terrific rating, and seizing her by the arms threatened to hurl her there and then out of the window. At which form of conciliation she was so far taken aback as to agree to attempt the air in question; and, no doubt much to her surprise, made a great success with it.

Handel went on producing opera after opera, and every new work had something which arrived at a high pitch of popularity. In *Ottone* there was a gavotte which, according to Burney the historian, was played on every instrument in the land from the organ to a salt-box. In *Rodelinda,* the next but one, was a song called "Dove sei, amato bene," which still holds its place in churches and cathedrals as "Holy, holy!" And then came *Scipio,* the march from which is played by the band of the Grenadier Guards still, as it was more than a hundred years ago, and probably has not worn out a tithe of its popularity.

Just before the appearance of *Scipio* Handel went through the ceremony of becoming, as far as the law could make him, an Englishman and a British subject. An Act was passed for his naturalisation; and he took the oaths of allegiance on February 20th, 1726.

Very soon after this the Directors of the Royal Academy prepared for themselves a new danger. They had got one star of the first magnitude in Cuzzoni, and were paying her 2,000 *l.* a year; and they thought to make their prosperity even greater and more secure by engaging Faustina Bordoni, who was almost the only remaining star in Europe who was likely to rival her. To Handel was intrusted the herculean task of getting them to work together. It is a perfect marvel that for a time he succeeded. In a new opera called *Alessandro* he provided them parts with such wonderful ingenuity that it was impossible to tell which had the preference. He even managed so that they should sing a duet together. But it was a combination which could not possibly last. They soon carried their jealousy of one another wherever they went; and the scenes they caused at parties to which they were invited caused amusement to the public and trouble to their entertainers in about equal proportions. The great ladies in society, after finding it amusing for a certain time, ended by entering into the quarrel, and formed themselves into parties on the sides of the rival singers; and they carried it so far that they used to applaud and to hiss alternately according as the singer they supported or her rival was on the stage, without the least consideration of the merits of either. The signs of the Royal Academy's approaching collapse were thus already becoming apparent on the one hand in the behaviour of its audiences; and matters were getting quite as bad on the other with its financial condition. The salaries paid to the rival singers were so enormous that the directors

were incessantly losing money, although the tickets were run up by competition to a price of five guineas or so a night. They got through the season however, and began a new one on January 7th, 1727. For this, Handel produced an opera called *Ammeto,* which was very successful indeed. It was followed, after a good run, by Buononcini's *Astyanax,* which was the signal for a wild outbreak of partisan excitement; and the voices of both Faustina and Cuzzoni were drowned in the hisses and shouts of their respective supporters.

This was the last work Buononcini wrote for the Royal Academy, and before Handel was called upon for further services in the same direction he had to turn his hand again to the writing of sacred music. George I died, and was succeeded by George II, who was crowned on October 11th, 1727. Handel had to write the music for the coronation, which consisted of the fine work known as the "Coronation Anthem."

Then the Royal Academy of Music resumed its career; but it was already tottering. Handel did all he could to save it, and produced opera after opera. But people were beginning to be tired of the wild behaviour of the partisans of the rival singers, and began to drop off. More of their audience too was drawn away by the extraordinary success of the *Beggars' Opera,* which had been started at a theatre in Lincoln's-Inn Fields; and when the season ended in June the directors found they had lost 50,000 *l.* over the affair, and had no chance of getting it back again; and so it was decided to put an end to the undertaking and let the rival *prime donne* and the rest of the admirable company go where they would.

For this institution Handel had written no less than fourteen operas, all of which contained solid as well as attractive music, and attained unbounded popularity in their time.

His faith in the future of operas in England was not extinguished by the failure, the causes of which he could clearly see were not in his music nor even Buononcini's, and he soon made up his mind to try a new venture at his own risk. He entered into partnership with a man called Heidegger, who was chiefly famous as the ugliest being in London, and they took the King's Theatre to begin another course of operas as soon as possible; and Handel went off to the Continent at once to secure singers. While on this journey he heard that his mother, who was by this time getting old, was very ill after a stroke of paralysis. He hurried off to Halle as soon as he could and found her better than he could have expected, but blind. He stayed there as long as his duties would allow him, and then bid her farewell for the last time, as he was not destined to see her again. She died at the end of 1730, nearly eighty years of age, and was buried by her husband.

Before this sad event took place Handel had got his new company together, and had started his venture at the King's Theatre with a new opera called *Lotario*. His undertaking prospered fairly well for a time, and passed on through several seasons with the production of several new operas, and the reproduction of such old favourites as *Rinaldo* and *Rodelinda,* while in Lent, 1733, he brought forward his second English oratorio *Deborah.* He re-engaged Senesino for a considerable

salary, and had a company worthy of him to carry on the work, and things must have looked smooth and promising enough. But meanwhile Buononcini had plenty of time for working underground. His plan of operations was to make a strong party among the aristocracy by paying court to great ladies. His tactics were successful, and were aided by the treachery of Senesino, who, for no comprehensible reason, suddenly left Handel's company, and took with him several of the most important performers. A sort of reaction seemed to set in against Handel in all quarters, and scurrilous articles and letters against him appeared in the papers; and to make the danger more pressing, a rival opera-house was started at the end of 1733 with the support of Buononcini's aristocratic patrons, with Senesino and others of Handel's own company as singers, and Porpora (a new rising composer, destined later to be the friend and master of Haydn) as conductor and composer to the establishment. Buononcini had been obliged by this time to leave the country. He just lasted long enough to give rise to the well-known epigram of Byrom:—

> Some say, compared with Buononcini
> That Mynheer Handel's but a ninny;
> Others vow that he to Handel
> Is scarcely fit to hold a candle.
> Strange all this difference should be
> 'Twixt Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

However, his departure and the death of his most prominent patron, the Duchess of Marlborough, did not put an end to the contest. The rival opera-house was practically started, and it was inevitably come to a case

of war *à l'outrance*. But Handel was not a man to be easily beaten. He filled up the ranks of his company, and had the good luck to secure a splendid singer called Carestini, who quite made up for the defection of Senesino. The campaign was carried on with extraordinary vigour, and must have been very amusing to the aristocrats who were trying to ruin Handel at this crisis. As soon as Handel's lease of the King's Theatre came to an end they secured it, and drove him to the little theatre in Lincoln's-Inn Fields, made famous, a little while before, by the success of the *Beggars' Opera*. They engaged the most famous sopranist in Europe, Farinelli, and the old favourite of the London public, Cuzzoni, as well. Handel a little later moved to Covent Garden Theatre and carried on the campaign by producing yet more fresh operas, one after another; and supplementing them by bringing forward new works of the Oratorio order, such as *Athalia* and the ode called *Alexander's Feast,* and by all other devices he could think of.

In the rival house the operas played were chiefly by Porpora and Hasse, both rising composers: the latter destined before long to be the most popular opera writer in Europe, and the husband of the famous Faustina Bordoni as well. The contest was kept up till 1737, when the opera supported by the aristocracy collapsed. Handel had at least the satisfaction of holding on for another fortnight, but when finally he too was forced to bring his undertaking to a conclusion, he found that he had lost over 10,000 *l.* in the struggle; and the fruit of the cruel strain of work and anxiety was a break-down in health of a serious paralytic kind,

which necessitated complete rest for some time, and a visit to Aix-la-Chapelle in the hope that the sulphur waters there might revive him.

Handel must certainly have been a man of immense strength of constitution, for by November in the same year he was back in England again and at work. Apparently the first task undertaken by him was the sad one of writing the funeral anthem for Queen Caroline, who had been a good friend to him, as she had been to all men of intellectual ability in her time. The work is known as *The ways of Zion do mourn,* and is a most noble production, worthy both of the composer and the subject, and showing no traces of such failing as might have been expected after such a serious illness.

But though he got the better of his illness so soon, the disastrous failure of his experiments as an opera manager marks an important period in the story of his life, for he only wrote very few operas after this time. Heidegger made one more attempt to draw the public to performances at the King's Theatre in the Haymarket in 1737, and the few last operas Handel wrote were performed under his auspices. The last of all was *Deidamia,* which he finished in 1740; but by that time his attention was already being drawn away to a different class of composition; and though he was considerably over fifty years old, the greater portion of those works for which the world hold him in highest honour had yet to begin.

Mention has been made of the performance in the opera-house of *Deborah* and *Alexander's Feast.* These

works were to all appearance of somewhat similar construction to operas, but were performed without dramatic action, and depended for their effect more upon choruses than solos. In operas big and elaborate choruses are impossible, because of the difficulty of learning them by heart. But in the class of works which are known as oratorios there are all the advantages of the story and the dramatic outline, with the additional impressiveness of great effects which can be produced by a large choir; and it is this admirable balance of chorus and solo which has given the oratorios the lasting popularity which the constant alternation of recitative and aria in the opera failed to maintain. The English public had already showed signs of a liking for this kind of work. *Esther* had been received with every sign of delight when Handel first produced it for the Duke of Chandos, and the same had happened with the *Acis and Galatea.* They had been revived many years after with great success, and Handel had thereupon gone on to the production of *Deborah* and *Alexander's Feast.* The latter drew an immense crowd, and produced such evident satisfaction that Handel—though for some time afterwards continuing to devote much of his strength to operas—must certainly have felt that there was a great opportunity still open in this new direction. Moreover, now that he was getting on in years it seems as if he thought a more serious style of art than opera would be more fitting; and even before he had put his hand to writing the score of the last opera, he had finished the most complete and effective oratorio which had appeared in the world up to that time. This

was *Saul,* which he finished in a little over two months, in the year 1738. In this oratorio Handel gave the public the benefit of a story full of human interest, much as they were accustomed to in operas; and together with splendid and characteristic choruses, such as "Envy, eldest-born of Hell," an attractive quantity of solo music.

In his next venture in the same line he tried what could be done by putting all the weight upon his choruses, taking out most of the human interest of the story and reducing the prominence of the solo portion of the work. This was *Israel in Egypt,* which he finished very soon after *Saul,* in the same year, 1738. This time he appears to have tried his public too much. Though they liked choruses and solos, in tolerably equal proportions, they were not quite ready for a work in which the choruses were all-important. And though the work impresses people of later ages as among the greatest and sublimest of his productions, he was obliged in the end to help the audience of his day by putting opera airs for his favourite singers in between the choruses. In modern times any one with any pretence to musical feeling understands the great descriptive choruses which deal with the plagues and storms and other terrible operations of the forces of nature; but in those days people were unaccustomed to anything of the kind, and they did not know how to take it, and so it fell comparatively flat. *Israel in Egypt* has been the subject of a good deal of discussion on the score of Handel's curious ways of reproducing parts of his own early works in the works of the later part of his life; and also, sometimes, of reproducing parts of other people's works

too. He used to write at most extraordinary speed, and always had an immense quantity of work to do besides composition, and whether it was for the sake of saving time, or for bringing forward afresh music which was more or less lost in some earlier work, he exercised remarkable ingenuity in adapting old materials to new situations. In *Israel in Egypt* there is more of this sort of thing than usual. Some of it is borrowed, without doubt, from another composer's work, whose name was Kerl. More, again, seems to be borrowed from another composer called Stradella; while a very large quantity was taken from a *Magnificat,* which some people think to have been written by a certain Erba, because his name is written on the manuscript, and other people think to have been an early work of Handel's own. The music forms the duller part of the oratorio as it stands, but whether it was originally Erba's or Handel's is a question which it seems impossible to settle decisively one way or another. At any rate, whichever way it was, such borrowing was not regarded in the sort of light it would be now; and, on the other hand, if all that was reintroduced into *Israel in Egypt* from other sources was taken out again, there would still be left all the finest part of the work, and all which no one but Handel could have written.

After *Israel* was done with, and the series of his operas had ended with *Deidamia,* Handel turned his hand at last to the noble work upon which his great fame mainly rests. Fortunately he was very careful in dating all his works, if not always at the beginning, almost invariably at the end. In the case of the *Messiah* every

part is successively dated. The beginning is dated 22nd of August, 1741, and the conclusion, including some extra touches and filling in, the 14th of September. So that the entire writing of one of the most important musical works in existence took him only twenty-four days. No doubt he had been thinking about parts of it before he actually began to put any of it down; and sketches exist of some of the more elaborate parts of the choruses. But, notwithstanding such qualification, it certainly is a most extraordinary feat to have accomplished in such a short time.

Curiously enough, London was not destined to have the honour of being the first place where it was performed. In the same year that he wrote the *Messiah* he had several invitations to pay a visit to Dublin, which was in those days blessed with lively and cultivated society of its own, which was very appreciative of music. From the accounts he received he gathered that it might be a very favourable opportunity, and so in the latter part of the year he started for Ireland. He was delayed a good while on the road, to the advantage of the famous musical historian, Burney, who saw him at Chester, and gave a most amusing account of the attempt of a Chester musician to sing at sight some of this new work, the *Messiah,* which Handel was taking with him to Dublin, and the wrath of Handel at his incapacity. Handel arrived safely in Dublin and was welcomed cordially. He began his campaign with *L'Allegro,* and *Acis and Galatea,* and the *Ode for St. Cecilia's Day,* playing organ concertos between the parts, as was his custom. And at last, on the 13th of April, 1742, the

new oratorio, the *Messiah,* was performed for the first time in the music hall in Fishamble Street. The people of Dublin seem to have been worthy of the honour, for they considered it the finest music that had ever been written. It certainly was the finest they had ever heard, and it is most creditable to their discernment that they found it out so quickly. They asked to have it performed again later; so it was given, with organ concertos between the parts as usual, as the last of the series of oratorios before Handel went back to England. In fact, the people of Dublin appreciated him as well as ever he was appreciated anywhere in his life, and he no doubt was sorry to leave the many friends he had made there; but London, even in those days, was a still more important centre, and supplied the real field for a composer of his powers, and to London he had to return, and arrived there towards autumn in 1742.

The *Messiah* does not, however, seem to have been performed at once in London, and it seems strange to most people now to think how slow people were to appreciate it fully in this country. Even that clever but singular character, Jennens, who was the author of the book of the words, seems to have been disappointed with the music, though he was an enthusiastic admirer of Handel's. He thought there had been gross faults in the composition at first which he had with difficulty persuaded Handel to correct; and that there were "some passages far unworthy Handel, but more unworthy of the *Messiah*." The musical public in these latter days think that it would be difficult for anything to be more worthy either of the composer or the subject; but in

those days people were in no hurry to come to a better mind, and when Handel came back the first new work brought forward was not the *Messiah* but *Samson.* This work Handel had begun very soon after he had finished the *Messiah,* and before he started for Ireland; but it had been interrupted for an unusual length of time, and the whole was not finished and dated till a year later, when he was back again in England. Then he determined to start a series of performances of oratorio with the best singers he could get; and *Samson* was the first oratorio given, on February 18th, 1743. The first performance of the *Messiah* soon followed, on March 23rd of the same year, when it was described merely as "a sacred oratorio." It certainly made an impression upon the more sensible portion of the audience, and it is said that the regular established custom of standing up during the "Hallelujah Chorus" first began from the spontaneous impulse of the king and the audience, which caused them to do so on this first occasion. The oratorios, as a rule, do not seem to have been appreciated with such spontaneous outbursts of enthusiasm as had been the case with the operas. It took longer for them to take complete hold of people's minds, but when they once had done so the hold never relaxed again; and no works in the history of music have had such wide and lasting popularity.

For the rest of his life Handel reserved most of his energies for this class of composition. The most important of the later works were the *Judas Maccabæus,* which he wrote in July and August, 1746; *Joshua,* which appeared in the next year; and *Solomon* in 1748.

Theodora, which Handel himself thought very well of, was produced in 1749; and the last, and certainly not the least in beauty and interest, was *Jephtha,* which he wrote in 1751. One other very important work he wrote in this late period which does not come under the head of oratorio. This was the *Te Deum,* which was written for the occasion of the national thanksgiving for the victory of Dettingen, in June, 1743, when George II had himself been in command of the army. This noble work was fully appreciated by the public of that time, who thought it worthy both of him and of the occasion.

It was about this same year 1743 that symptoms of failing health began to make their appearance. It appears that some troubles similar to those which attacked him in 1737, after the struggle between the rival opera companies, again presented themselves, for which Handel tried the once fashionable cure of the Cheltenham waters for a short time. Besides these troubles there were also symptoms that his eyes were going wrong. Things continued to get worse with him for successive years, and about the time that he was composing *Jephtha* his spirits began to fail as well. The troubles of his eyesight show themselves in the peculiarities of his writing; while the condition of his mind seems to be shown in the fact that his system of writing straight on with a sort of certainty of inspiration, began to give way to alterations and changes more frequently than of old. Besides which, according to the dates which Handel put in at various points, the work was often interrupted, and for at least one long period at a stretch. He began it in January, but he did

not get it done till the end of August, which was a very long time for him.

Soon after *Jephtha* was finished it became necessary that Handel should undergo an operation to his eyes; and as the malady he suffered from, namely *gutta serena,* or cataract, has frequently been cured, it was hoped that his eyesight might be restored. But the operation ended in failure, and the announcement of a contemporary journal of the sad event ran in the following terms:—"Mr. Handel has at length, unhappily, quite lost his sight. Upon his being couched some time since he saw so well that his friends flattered themselves his sight was restored for a continuance, but a few days have entirely put an end to their hopes." Yet he struggled against this misfortune with all the strength and courage of his disposition, and made his appearance at performances of the *Messiah* and other works, and played concertos and accompaniments as usual.

The hostility of the aristocracy, which had lasted on even after the rivalry of the two opera-houses, gave way in his later years, and the apparent reaction against him about the time he produced the *Messiah* turned again, and towards the end of his life he attained to all the reverence and admiration possible, while his blindness roused such feelings of tender sympathy as are akin to love. People began to understand the greatness of the *Messiah,* and from 1751 Handel gave regular annual performances of it for the benefit of the Foundling Hospital, which was one of the many charities in which he took an interest. In 1757 he began to be convinced that his strength was definitely

giving way, but he did not give up work, or make any apparent alteration in his ways of life. In 1759 the usual season of oratorios was undertaken. Handel directed nine of the performances, and for the tenth, on April 6th, the *Messiah* was advertised. Handel duly made his appearance and directed the work as usual; but after the performance was over an ominous faintness came on, and he foresaw that the end was coming. It was indeed the final seizure. The immense strength which had again and again reasserted itself after previous collapses was at last worn out, and the long life, devoted to strenuous and almost incessant labour, ended peacefully and nobly in the early morning hours of Saturday, April 14, 1759.

He had certainly filled well the measure of his days, and it has been the lot of very few men to do so much so thoroughly. Though he seems always to have written at a most astonishing speed, the rapidity did not affect the completeness or thoroughness of his work. The scale on which he worked was always large and free; but the details are not carelessly dealt with, but are generally worthy of the ideas upon which the work is based. His mastery of his art was supreme in almost every branch, but most especially when he was dealing with voices, whether as solos or in choruses. This he had gained by his intercourse with Italians, as he had gained a peculiar kind of sentiment and smoothness of style; while from his German blood he gained force and depth of feeling. And this is a thing which gives him rather a peculiar position in the history of music, for he is, as has been before said, as much Italian as he is German.

In him, too, some of the most valuable qualities of the school of Palestrina, which had been neglected by the early composers of the seventeenth century, make their reappearance; combined with the fruits of the work which the new school had done during the intervening century.

In character and person he was, as he was in his music, large and powerful. Even his appetite seems to have been like a giant's, while his temper was perfectly volcanic. Many characteristic and amusing stories are told of its explosions, for when he was roused he was entirely without respect of persons, and was quite as likely to rage and swear at a prince as at a drummer or a parish clerk; and the people who understood him bore his outbreaks without ill-will. He had humour of a robust kind, and a vein of poetry too, and a considerable amount of dramatic feeling, which comes out in his oratorios as well as in his operas. But one of the strongest elements in his composition appears to have been a deep religious sense, of a healthy and generous cast, which found its finest expression in the *Messiah*.

His style has suited the English better than any other nation, owing probably to its directness and vigour and robustness; and also, no doubt, because the nation has always had a great love for choral music, of which he is one of the greatest masters that ever lived. His influence has been extremely strong upon the English composers who succeeded him; but he so thoroughly worked out the possibilities of his style that very little more could be done in the same direction without failing in freshness and character; while it was scarcely likely that the force

and power which is such a conspicuous element in his work would be likely to appear again very soon in another composer after such a pair of giants as Handel and J. S. Bach.