HANDEL, 1685—1759[1].
By K. E. LIMBERT.

GEORGE FREDERIC HÄNDEL is the full name of the composer we are to consider this term.

Various forms of his surname were used in this country for some time, but it settled down in the end to plain Handel. He was born at Halle, Lower Saxony, on the 23rd of February, 1685, and died in London, April 14th, 1759. So large a proportion of his long life was spent in England that his name became a household word to the English-speaking people. A fixed musical tradition in the public mind can become extremely irritating to experts in the art, and Handel's name nowadays inevitably gets coupled with that of the great and revered Bach, who holds a position in the musician's mind so jealously guarded that one might suppose Handel to have been guilty of an impertinence by daring to be born in the same year! It is true that Domenico Scarlatti committed the same indiscretion, but as his name is less prominent than Handel's he seems to be more easily forgiven.

But sooner or later the comparison between the two musical giants, Bach and Handel, will become known to children, and in order to be fair to both composers they should understand how widely the lives they led differed. Bach aloof, afar, practically unknown to the English public, working at the wonderful music we value so to-day. Handel on the other hand was in our midst, ever in the limelight;—a well-known figure in the London of his time. Each touched heights of grandeur, and appealed to the heart as well as the mind. But it may be that musicians specially prize the intimacy of the beauty unfolded to them in Bach; that radiance which is discovered after search; that glow which vivifies the finder, as one glory after another is revealed. Handel's touch is different, and partakes of that curious thrill which makes a whole multitude feel as one person. The emotions felt are those simple ones
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which are experienced by everybody and by many people at once. Perhaps most of the truest lovers of Bach find that they enjoy him best in solitude, but most people can enjoy Handel in common with others, and all the more because others share in the enjoyment. When George II. and his Court sprang to their feet on hearing the "Hallelujah Chorus" and so established the custom of standing during its performance, they were swayed by this one common impulse. Does it not seem palpable that the name of Handel has been familiar to the man in the street by his having composed the "Dead March in Saul"? He is impressed by the splendours of some great funeral, and when at last the velvety chords are heard over the deep throbbing of the drums, cold indeed must be the nature that is not stirred to awe by the majesty of the simple music. This, like all great things should be kept for great occasions. To let a child pick out the notes of the March on the piano would be ludicrous, and unjust to the music, but although we do not take children to funerals by choice, if the child hears the March played at a solemn moment by a good band, the hearing will mark an epoch.

Handel's life appears to have been one of incessant work. When Purcell died,—just after Mary II.,—Handel was a boy of ten, and deep in his musical studies. Pretty comprehensive too, they seem, for a boy of his age, as he was learning to play the organ, the harpsichord, the violin and the oboe, in addition to harmony and counterpoint! When he was eleven he went to the Court of the Electress Sophia Charlotte, at Berlin, and we may feel that his first contact with England began then, although some years had to pass before he became connected with her

son, afterwards George I. But he learnt and observed much during this visit. Italy and its musical glories became a sort of wonderland for the boy. But he could not go there, for his father had plans for his general education, and these could not be set aside. He went back to Halle and not very long after this his father died. He was only twelve when he was made an assistant organist at the Domkirche, in Halle, and five years later he had the full appointment at the same church. He entered the University to finish the study of Law, as his father desired, but in 1703, left Halle, its University and its Domkirche, behind him and set out for Hamburg, and opera. The lad of eighteen had had some years of hard work and carried studious habits with him into an atmosphere of pleasure

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and laxity. Opera was the form of music at which he aimed, and while he was beginning his compositions he earned a living by performing. He played the violin, and later, the harpsichord, on which instrument his wonderful powers soon became apparent. It was a busy life and a rather turbulent one too, for there are tales of duels which had to be fought, and probably at this period, Handel needed all his determination to keep steadily to his work. In 1705 his first opera, "Almira," was produced. This is worth noting, for the name of this opera, of "Rinaldo," and others, will be familiar to the eyes of those who see bits of Handel's music in modern editions. The story of the production of each of his operas would be a very long one, and truly, not of very great interest, but opera was the form to which he was drawn, and always at the back of his mind, was its home,—Italy.

Gaston de' Medici, a brother of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, was married to a German princess, and during this Hamburg period became attracted to Handel, and reawakened his longing. To Italy he went, poor as he was,—and stayed in the palace of Ferdinand de' Medici, at Florence. Here the study of the Italian language became his next object, and we find him presently, busy setting Italian words to music. A visit to Rome,—then a return to Florence, and the production of an opera there, "Rodrigo." This was a success, and Handel made good use of his time in Italy by gleaning everything he could of the methods of the Italian composers of the period. He met Alessandro Scarlatti, Corelli, and Leonardo Leo,—he gained a smooth facility in writing, and undoubtedly he learnt how to compose for the voice.

There is a story about his playing on the harpsichord at a masked ball in Venice, about this time, where Domenico Scarlatti was present,—he who was born in the same year as Handel and Bach. Now Scarlatti was a renowned composer for the harpsichord. Many of his pieces are now played on the piano, and if handled with the precision and delicacy that they need, have a wonderfully old-world charm. He therefore pricked up his ears at the performance of the masked youth and exclaimed, "That must either be the famous young Saxon, Händel, or the Devil himself!"

Rome saw him again in 1708, and his compositions were ever going on. "Il Trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno" is the alluring title of one of the works at this time, and some fine

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numbers from it, in the English form of "The Triumph of Time and Truth" are sometimes heard. It is interesting to think that "Acis and Galatea" was composed, or at any rate begun, in Naples, where he stayed nearly a year. The English Ambassador suggested his coming to London, but from Hanover came an offer not to be refused,—to be Kapellmeister to the Elector George.

He went there in 1710, but stipulated for leave to visit England, and after a few weeks,

set off,—revisiting Halle on the way and attending the wedding of a sister. So at last his connection with our country began. Those were the days of good Queen Anne, the *Spectator* and the *Tatler*. It was fifteen years since English music had been impoverished by the early death of our own great Purcell. Italian opera reigned, and Handel lost no time in composing an opera,—in a fortnight the story goes! It was "Rinaldo," and was successfully produced at the Queen's Theatre in the Haymarket. No doubt London seemed to be a very attractive place to Handel, but his duties in Hanover could not be set aside, and back he went, rather reluctantly, after six months here. But he managed to come to us again in the spring of 1712. His welcome seems to have been warm. He stayed with the Earl of Burlington, and composed busily. We hear of an Ode for the birthday of Queen Anne and a Te Deum for the celebrations of the peace of Utrecht (July 7th, 1713), and the time slipped away gaily enough. Hanover and his duties there no doubt seemed very remote and his return kept postponing itself until a very awkward situation arose, for in 1714, Queen Anne died, and Handel's much-enduring patron, the Elector of Hanover, was coming to reign over this country, as George I. So there was no longer any question of the return to Hanover, but how was Handel to maintain the foothold he had gained in London if he remained in disgrace with the Court?

However, Handel's quick brain set about a scheme for making the best of things, and so he worked until he effected a reconciliation with his royal master. We have a story about it too, but it should be remembered that tales of a more or less apocryphal nature always get built up round a popular personality, and polished more and more by use as time goes on. Bald indeed might some of the original facts appear if stripped of the embellishments popular fancy has added! But it is the

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old instinct for building Folklore, the feeling for Romance, which same has a hard fight in these well-lighted times. But in Handel's day newspapers, as we understand them now, did not exist. Such as there were could only be read by the few, and oral tradition still informed the multitude. Handel was for many years a popular figure in our midst, and no doubt gossip seized upon his doings pretty eagerly, so that his dilemma with regard to the new Sovereign would give room for plenty of speculation. But presently the gossips had a pleasing spectacle. A water pageant on the Thames, the splendour of the royal barge and those of the courtiers, with blithe music to he [sic] heard from another, which was filled with musicians performing what has since been known as the "Water Music."[2] Handel had composed this and arranged for the barge full of players to be near enough to catch the royal ear. It must have been a pretty scene, and the story is true enough, except for the slight doubt as to whether Handel had not managed to make his peace with the King even a little earlier. Forgiven he was, however; monarch and musician were reconciled, and Handel settled down happily to his long years of work in this country. He became attached as Kapellmeister to the Duke of Chandos, and much noteworthy music was composed at Cannons. A little parish church near still shows the organ on which he used to play, at Whitchurch, near Edgware.

Many were the operas he composed during these years. He became naturalised in 1726. George I. died in 1727, and Handel composed four anthems for the coronation of George II., the first being the well-known "Zadoch, the Priest."

It is now two hundred years since the "Beggar's Opera" was produced. Many of us have enjoyed the modern form in which it has been extremely popular, but poor Handel did not

enjoy it in 1728, for to him it brought disaster. He had gone on providing one Italian opera after another quite easily and had not foreseen any change in the public taste. The "Beggar's Opera" was a novelty and made a sad interruption to the steady flow of events as Handel understood them, for the opera had to close down. Now came a period of stress and struggle for Handel, who, indeed, had a good deal to fight generally. He had a rival in Buononcini,—(whose music was not destitute
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of charm if we may judge by the morsels of it accessible to us,) and these lines commented:—

"Some there are say that Buononcini
Compared to Handel's but a ninny.
Others aver that he to Handel
Is hardly fit to hold a candle!
Strange such a difference should be
'Twixt Tweedledum and Tweedledee!"

It is a weary story of these years of opera management; of the opposition of the Prince of Wales and his faction to Handel and the King, until at last in 1737, poor Handel was bankrupt. But it is comforting to reflect that some time after a benefit concert was given for him and he was able to pay his creditors in full. He had promised to do so, but the debt would have weighed heavily upon him but for this help.

Many are the stories of his operatic management,—his cook, who was no mean musician and was liable at any time to be called up from the kitchen to assist with his violin at some rehearsal,—the prima donna who objected to sing a certain passage and was threatened that she should be hurled from the window unless it was sung, and sung in the way Handel wished. She saved her neck and used her throat as he desired.

By this time he was past fifty, and his health began to feel the strain of this busy life. Paralysis threatened and he went to try the cure at Aix-la-Chapelle. More and more was he attracted to the form of oratorio. Now the history of this form explains how akin it was to opera, as understood in those days, and it may best be explained to children by the fact that in each were numbers,—songs or choruses, complete in themselves, and easily detached. Those who may have heard Wagner operas will appreciate the great difference that exists between the operas of to-day and those of Handel's time.

His knowledge of the English language must have been fairly complete by this time, and he became familiar with English poets, although their work was much slashed by ruthless librettists, who arranged these works for him. He was much at their mercy, but still he got at the heart of things and saw with the eyes of the English poets in a rather remarkable manner. One of these librettists, Charles Jennens, arranged Milton's "L'Allegro ed il Penseroso." In Handel's score it is called "L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato." Which, "Moderato" was the unblushing Jennens' own! But the fresh gaiety of Handel's music to the "Allegro" shows how
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thoroughly he perceived the spirit of Milton. Further, Newburgh Hamilton made a "book" for Handel from Milton's "Samson Agonistes," and again we notice the sympathy the composer had for the poet. We get Handel associated with Dryden in "Alexander's Feast," and Congreve

wears a new interest for us if we examine Handel's "Semele."

At last he wrote his renowned "Messiah," which is said to have been composed between August 22nd and September 14th, 1741. It was produced in Dublin, on April 13th, 1742, and had a great success, Handel had been invited to Ireland and gave a series of concerts, and the performance of the "Messiah" took place at one of these. It is sad to think it was not at first appreciated in London, in 1743,—but the popularity came later. Handel fell ill again and resorted to Tunbridge Wells for the cure this time. The next few years were crowded with work, and indeed the list of oratorios was long, as it began by a setting of the German "Passion according to St. John," 1704, but went on until at last after "Jephtha," in 1751, he settled down to a quieter life. His sight failed in spite of several operations and was completely gone by 1753. He died at his house in Brook Street in 1759,—just one year before George III. came to the throne.

So this naturalised Englishman stayed with us, a well-known figure right to the end.

The children's outlook upon Handel must depend a good deal upon their environment. It is always easier in large towns where concerts can be attended than in remote places. But one way or another they can get a good deal out of Handel. First, the gramophone records, then the chance of hearing some of the organ music in church, and lastly, private study. For the piano the choice is a wide one and many editions of Handel's works are to be had in all sorts of places, so that pieces by Handel are not hard to obtain, although discrimination is necessary as to what is best worth studying.

Beginners will enjoy a single Minuet from "Berenice" (Augener's Edition, 9d.). There is a March from "Scipio," too, met with in various editions and very simple and tuneful. A Fughetta in C (No. 1, 9d.), is useful for Form II., or for backward children in any Form. It gives an opportunity for the player to learn to listen for a theme played by the left hand, and the sooner this happens the better for the player. Far too often children are kept upon music with the interest of the

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melody limited to the right hand with an accompaniment in the left. This is one of the evils which, happily, is vanishing in these more enlightened days, but this Fughetta will be useful and is quite easy.

An "Allegro" in G minor will suit most children in Form III., and also the air, with its variations, known generally as the "Harmonious Blacksmith." Pieces will be found suitable for Forms III. and IV. in Beringer's "Easy Classics" Handel (Augener 5133, price 2/-) or "Easy Pieces, Handel" (Bülow), (Augener 8133, 2/-). The Organ Concertos as duets (Augener 2891 *a* and *b*) may be useful for Form V., and any players that are fairly advanced may explore among the Piano Suites (6502, *a* and *b*) 2 vols., 4/- each, or "Three Lessons" (5095, 2/6). But this list is merely suggestive, and teachers will use their own judgment as to suitability for each individual player.

Perhaps the painful moment has now arrived when it is necessary to allude to one of the pieces by which Handel is largely known to the general public, and called, simply, "The Largo." It is painful because it has been so rammed into the public mind, that people might be led to imagine that Handel invented the form! Quite small children will sometimes proclaim that they are learning "Largo" or "Allegro," as the case might be and it is surprising how often this mistake is made by children who are old enough to know a common noun from a proper

one, in English. Now if the teacher explains that a suite (or set), was a collection of pieces bearing the names of dances, such as a minuet or a gavotte, and that longer pieces of music were split up into several sections, some quick, some slow, gay, or solemn, as the case might be, each one bearing an Italian term indicating its character, the difficulty would go as the child learned that it was "a largo," not the one and only Largo ever composed. The tune is a very beautiful one and the public taste in loving it is perfectly sound. It first seems to have been used by Handel as a song called "Ombra mai fu" in one of his operas, and was to be sung by a smoothly sustained soprano. As a song the tune has gone through many vicissitudes, has appeared in divers editions and several keys. The original soprano key was G, but E-flat is easier for lower voices. If it is required that a child should play it on the piano, many arrangements may be found. But it would be well to choose the most simple one possible.
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Violinists will find many delightful bits in the violin sonatas, even though they also encounter some passages of forbidding difficulty; their teachers will guide them as to which portions they may attempt to play. But a gramophone record of a violin sonata in A major played by Isolde Menges (H.M.V. D1371, 6/6), should be heard by everybody who has access to a gramophone. When we reach the department of the solo voice we have our Handel at his best, or very nearly so. His studies in Italy gave him a habit of writing smooth, easy passages for the voice, and there are several of his airs that children may learn to sing, and enjoy. It should be remembered that in his day, what we now call "florid passages" were very general. They called them "divisions," and we generally speak of them as "runs." Handel, in using them, was only following the fashion, but we shall soon see how he broke away from it. In the "Messiah" we get examples of each kind, and let us now consider the very beautiful air "Come unto Him." In most editions it is in B-flat, found as a pendant to the contralto "He shall feed His flock" in F. Any child able to play the simple piano accompaniment might try to play and sing it at the same time. The charm is educative and the child should be shown how to sustain the phrases as far as possible and incidentally may take a valuable lesson in correct rhythm.

It will be seen that it is in the limping measure of crochet, quaver;—crochet, quaver, and so on. To preserve its solemn tranquility the air must be sung slowly, but in this lurks a danger not always perceived. The crochet occupies two-thirds of the bar, and the quaver, of course, the remaining third. But all too frequently, in performances of any music in this measure, an error steals in. The crochet becomes too short and the quaver too long so that the proportion is altered to this:—the crochet will be three-fifths and the quaver two-fifths. This weakening of the rhythm is unpleasant to hear, and leads to the division of the bar into halves, not thirds. One great use of quick dance-forms is that they establish the sense of rhythm, but much discomfort ensues when in a slower *tempo* this exactitude is lost. It must have been of a similar case that Shakespeare was thinking, when, in *Richard II*., he says: "How sour sweet music is, when time is broke, and no proportion kept!" If Shakespeare could hear certain performances which reach us by "mechanical means" to-day, he might repeat his remark,—with a few modern additions of a
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strong nature! But to readjust matters in the mind of a child it is well to find some piece in the same rhythm, but quicker speed, to illustrate the proportion, and it should then be easy to get the rhythm correct in the slow speed.

Much of the "Messiah" can be studied in the gramophone records, and a good deal can be investigated from the ordinary vocal score. The tenor in "Comfort ye," is very beautiful, and the Christmas music, as it is called, should be heard. Here again we get the crochet and quaver effect in the "Pastoral Symphony." Handel's time in Italy had left its impress, and the *pifferaio* were not forgotten, with the drone bass beneath. One can scarcely hear a really good performance of this, played softly by the strings, without the calm, thin tones suggesting the clear sky of the night of the Nativity and with the star of Bethlehem above, and the cool light breeze upon the cheek, until one is so rapt that the music stops almost unnoticed and the soprano begins to recite "There were shepherds abiding in the field."

There is a fine record of "I know that my Redeemer liveth," sung by Master E. Lough (H.M.V. B2656, 4/6), which everyone will enjoy. There is a story about a phrase in it which gave the first quarter of what we know as the "Westminster Chimes," and this phrase should be listened for, at the end of the fourth bar.

H.M.V. D1108 (6/6), gives two choruses which the children should hear. One is the very solemn "Behold the Lamb of God," and the other the celebrated "Hallelujah Chorus." The grandeur of this will be best felt if it can be heard given by a good choir in a large space, conducted by a musician who respects its dignity. The Handel Festivals at the Crystal Palace have come in for much derision from critics, and probably have deserved a great deal of it. But they have had some splendid moments all the same and one of them was in the impressive silence during the bar when the last echo of the great chorus had ceased, before the final Hallelujah. It calls to the mind the text in *Revelation*: "There was silence in Heaven." Whatever faults Handel had, and they were many, he had vision. We know how quickly the "Messiah" was composed, and it is said that he wrote this chorus with tears streaming from his eyes, and said about it: "I did see the heavens open and the great God Himself upon the throne!"

"Samson" was produced in London before the "Messiah"

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and was far more successful. The bright air "Let the bright Seraphim," in it is one that would attract a child, if well sung, and another air is the touching "Total Eclipse." Handel's eyes had been causing him trouble for some time, and he shows great feeling in the music he gives the poor blinded hero. "No sun," sings Samson,—then "no moon,"—and goes on, "all dark amidst the blaze of noon." Thanks to the respect accorded to Handel by many choral societies in the later part of the last century, a good many vocal scores are about, and a little search among them would bring to light a good many interesting airs, and amateur friends may be found who could sing some of them to children. Perhaps a bass of wide enough compass might be found to sing "O ruddier than the cherry," from "Acis and Galatea." It is always amusing to hear the giant roll forth his command: "Bring me a hundred reeds of decent growth to make a pipe for my capacious mouth," in the recitative that precedes the air. A very sleepy air, too, for deep bass, is sung in "Semele," by Somnus, called "Leave me, loathsome light," and the beautiful air for tenor called "Where'er you walk" could really be sung by children.

"Israel in Egypt" is not easy to bring to the notice of a child unless it is possible to hear it performed. But unless it can be understood how Handel played with the words he was setting when he composed the long chain of choruses describing the plagues of Egypt, a very fine side of his cleverness remains unknown. He makes you hear the buzzing of the flies, the darkness that could be felt, and above all, the patter of the hailstones. Easy enough for a modern

orchestra, but Handel did it with voices.

But already this list is too long, although it would be easy to find many more instances of an interest in the way he used his words.

Possibly a few readers possess a record which was used in the study of Purcell. It is H.M.V. 1314, and on one side of it is an organ concerto of Handel's in G minor. This will be useful for those who get no opportunity of hearing Handel's organ music played in church.

He remained all his long life a bachelor. He had many faithful friends, and although irascible had a generous, kindly nature. He gave an organ in 1749, and a copy of the score of the "Messiah" to the Foundling Hospital, and left it a bequest in his will.

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We read much just now of "vanishing London," and the recent removal of the Foundling Hospital takes away this Handelian association. Those who are familiar with the building and the spacious courtyard in front can conjure up pictures of the lumbering eighteenth century coaches rolling up with their hooped and bewigged occupants to the Sunday services. Handel played at the performances of the "Messiah" there, and it really was only the performance in 1750 there which caused the work to be appreciated.

Easy successes had come to Handel earlier in life, but this, the work we consider to be his masterpiece, had to meet with disappointment for a long time.

His harpsichord playing must have been very superb, and he embellished so much as he went on that in some MS. he gave only a figured bass to indicate the harmony on which be [sic] built up wonderfully elaborate passages, which probably would have wearied him to write out.

Rapid and energetic he must have been in writing also, for on some of his MSS. the sand from his pounce box had been sprinkled from the top to the bottom of the page, for the ink at the top had not had time to dry ere his page was filled. No dreamer was this man, but an honest, straightforward worker. His qualities were those that the English folk could understand, and we feel he deserved the honour of being buried in Westminster Abbey.

Thackeray in his "Four Georges" gives a glimpse of George III. in the intervals between attacks of his malady, playing Handel in the rooms at Windsor Castle, or hearing some of the airs sung by his daughters. In his youth, Handel was a familiar figure, and the Handel tradition remained long with us. Even now there exists a very well-known Handel Society, which does valuable work in giving very fine performances of his works, frequently bringing forward treasures that would be quite unknown to the public otherwise. But this Society does good musical work also in the performances of works of more modern composers, and by the contrast afforded Handel's music obtains its proper perspective.

For us, then, his position as a composer is unique, and we cannot grudge the attention he has won, which has so firmly welded him into the affections of the English race.

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[1] Music for the Spring Term in the P.U.S.

[2] A piano arrangement of the "Water Music Suite" is published by Murdoch, Murdoch & Co. (3/6).