HANDEL, 1685—1759.[1]

By K. E. LIMBERT.

George Frederic Händel is the full name of the composer we are to study 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. 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, whose position in the mind of the musician is 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 much 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 to 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 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 enjoy Handel in common with others, and all the more because others share in the pleasure. 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 other 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 this 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, harpsichord, violin and oboe, in addition to studying 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 our 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 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 won-
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derful powers soon became apparent. It was a busy life, and rather a 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 work in modern editions—albums, and such collections. The story of the production of each of his operas would be a very long one, and truly, not of very great interest to us, 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 he became attracted to Handel and re-awakened 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 Disinganro' [sic] is the alluring title of one of the works at this time, and some fine numbers from it, in the English form of 'The Triumph of Time and
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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 (June 7th, 1713), and the time slipped away gaily enough. Hanover and his duties there seemed very remote, no doubt, 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 old instinct for building Folklore, the feeling for Romance, which has a hard fight in these well-lighted times.
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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 be heard from another, which was filled with musicians performing what has since been known as the Water Music. 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, excepting 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 Edgware still shows the organ on which he used to play.

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.'

In 1728 'The Beggars' Opera' was produced, and in its modern form was much enjoyed a few years back, but to Handel 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, so that this novelty with its great success 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 by no means destitute of charm—and these lines

commented:

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

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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 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 detached numbers—songs or choruses, complete in themselves. Those who have heard modern operas—such as Wagner’s—which he, by the way, called ‘music-dramas,’ will appreciate the great difference that exists between operas of to-day and those of Handel’s time.

His knowledge of the English language must have been pretty complete by this time, and he became familiar with English poets, although their work was badly mutilated by the ruthless librettists, who arranged these works for him. He was much at their mercy but still got at the heart of things, and saw with the eyes of our poets in a rather remarkable manner. One of these librettists, Charles Jennens, arranged Milton ‘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 well 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. ‘In Alexander’s Feast’ Handel
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is associated with Dryden, and Congreve wears a new interest for us when we examine Handel’s ‘Semele.’

At last he composed his renowned ‘Messiah,’ which is said to have been written between August 22nd and September 14th, 1741. It was produced in Dublin, on April 13th, 1742, in a series of concerts given there by Handel. It is sad to think it was not appreciated in London at first, in 1743, but popularity came later. Handel fell ill again, and resorted this time to Tunbridge Wells for the cure. 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 environment, it being easier in large towns where concerts can be attended than in remote districts, but now that gramophone records are so tremendously improved children may learn a great deal of Handel from gramophone records alone, and they cannot do better than by hearing the excellent records now to be had. Columbia 9320 (4/-) gives us the Overture to the Messiah, and on the other side is the beautiful opening, 'Comfort ye my people,' sung by Hubert Eisdell. The overture is in what was then called the French form, a slow majestic opening followed by a quick fugal passage.

It should be remembered that in Handel's 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 broke away from it frequently.

Columbia 9326 (4/-) gives us the beautiful recitatives beginning 'There were shepherds abiding in the field,' sung by Dora Labbette, followed by the chorus 'Glory to God.' Then we get on Columbia 9337 (4/-), 'The trumpet shall sound,' and the grandeur of the chorus 'Worthy the Lamb.' It is remarkable

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how well the trumpet stands out, and this is a record the children should not miss, as also the 'Hallelujah Chorus' on H.M.V. C 2489 (4/-). It will be well to guard against too rapid a tempo on the gramophone for all these vocal works, and especially in the 'Hallelujah,' or the very impressive silence during the bar when the last echo of the great chorus ceases before the final Hallelujah comes will lose its effect. It recalls that text in Revelation, 'There was silence in Heaven.' Whatever faults Handel had, and they were many, he had vision. We know how quickly '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 before me and the great God Himself upon the throne!' This last record has on its second side 'And the glory of the Lord,' the first chorus in the work. If a score is used and children are made familiar with the words, and gain some knowledge of the themes from study at the piano, they will appreciate these records all the more and prepare for full appreciation of the great work when the time arrives for them to hear it in its entirety.

Handel made a magnificent combination of organ and orchestra and his concertos are very interesting and tuneful. One in B flat is very much a favourite, and is to be had on H.M.V. B 2890-1 (2/6 each). But if the number of records has to be restricted, H.M.V. DA 126 (4/-) should not be missed. First it gives No. 7 with its fascinating Bourrée, and then No. 13 ('Cuckoo and Nightingale') which will be a great delight to the children. Then in H.M.V. D 1371 (6/-) there is a fine violin sonata, beautifully played by Isolde Menges. It should not be missed, especially by those who are studying the violin.

A very delightful record is Columbia DB 1115 (2/6), Sonata No. 11, for Recorder, Viol da Gamba and Harpsichord, played by Carl, Millicent and Rudolph Dolmetsch, which will give a good idea of the tone-colour. It must not be forgotten that the harpsichord was the instrument upon which Handel chiefly performed, although he used the organ very much. It was said that the keys of the harpsichord he used became hollowed out, like shallow spoon-bowls, with constant use. Music intended for this instrument has quite a different effect

upon the piano, but still there is plenty of scope for study of Handel by the means of the
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piano. To begin with a few of the easiest pieces for Form II or quite elementary players, A Fughetta in C (No. 1, 9*d*.), Augener's Edition, is useful for any backward children. 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. A Minuet from 'Berenice' (Augener's Ed., 9*d*.) is tuneful and very easy. It is well arranged by A. Carse and is one of the outstanding tunes to remember. Then for players a little more advanced there is the air and variations known as the 'Harmonious Blacksmith' (Aug. Ed., 9*d*.). Ambitious pianists will find L. Borwick's Concert Transcriptions (Aug., 2/-) quite elaborate too. Form III children will like an Allegro in G minor, and Forms III and IV will find many suitable pieces in Beringer's 'Easy Classics,' Handel (Aug. 3133, 2/-), or in Bülow's 'Easy Pieces,' Handel (Aug. 8153, 2/-), and advanced players may explore among the Piano Suites (6502, *a* and *b*, Aug.), 2 vols, 4/- each, or the useful 'Three Lessons' (Aug. 5095, 2/6). Also those who care to try the 'Water-music Suite' can get it for 3/6 also at Augener's. There is an ear-haunting Allegro in the Water Music which is to be found in 'Six piano duets' (Handel) (Aug. 8531, 3/-). This set of duets is very valuable to teachers of small players, and this short Allegro in F is one that is particularly fascinating. Its speed should be quite fast, so young players will have a goal to reach, and it will lend itself well for memorising sometimes. The Organ Concertos as duets (Aug. 2891, *a* and *b*, 2 vols, 4/- each) may be useful for Form V, and it will be interesting to discover in these volumes pieces already made familiar by hearing on the gramophone records. One more record may be mentioned, H.M.V. DB 1901 (6/-). It is quite a new record of the song 'Ombra mai fu,' and is the original form of the well-known 'Largo,' from *Xerxes*, sung by Gigli. The tenor has a massive, powerful voice, and perhaps one wishes for a little less energy at times, but the fact remains that he gives some splendid notes, and it is well for the original form of this beautiful piece to be heard. A slow speed on the gramophone is very desirable in this record. The effect of this air when played by a good orchestra quite accounts for its immense popularity. There is an easy arrangement of it, too, for the piano, by E. Pauer (Augener's Edition, 6*d*.), and a more difficult one arranged by
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E. Kuhlstrom (Aug., 1/-). Teachers should explain that a suite (or set) was a collection of pieces bearing the names of dances, such as a minuet or 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. For reference to any of these 'movements' one speaks of 'an Allegro,' 'an Adagio' from such and such a suite, concerto or symphony, or 'the Andante' in so and so, never using these terms as if they were proper nouns, needing no prefixing article. It irritates musicians to hear it said, 'I am learning Largo,' or to see in the columns of a local newspaper that an organist played 'Allegretto' and so forth, so that a little explanation to children on the subject of 'movements,' given early, is very helpful.

To return to the study of the 'Messiah.' The 'Pastoral Symphony' which precedes the soprano recitatives we hear on Columbia 9326 is worth a little study on the piano to familiarise the mind with its beautiful tranquillity. Handel had not forgotten the drone bass of the *pifferari* of Italy. It is said that they used to play certain traditional airs before Christmas morning dawned, and certainly when this is well played by the strings, the calm thin tones suggest the clear sky of the night of the Nativity, with the star of Bethlehem above, so that one can almost feel the cool light breeze upon the cheek, until the music

stops almost unnoticed and the voice begins alone. The record is so good that if this much preliminary study be taken it will be enjoyed much more fully.

As a pendant to 'He shall feed His flock' (in F) is the air (in B flat), 'Come unto Him.' This is greatly to be recommended for private study by the children. It can be used in schools as a unison song, and, privately, can be sung to the children. Any child able to play the piano part might try to play and sing it at the same time. Its charm is educative and the child should be shown how to sustain the phrases, and, incidentally, may take a valuable lesson in correct rhythm. For the limping measure of crochet and quaver, easy enough in quick dance forms, holds a danger in the slow speed necessary for this air, and often the crochet becomes shortened and the quaver lengthened, altering the proportions. So that instead of the crochet taking up two-

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thirds of the bar it only has three-fifths and the quaver consequently gets two-fifths instead of its one-third. This weakening of the rhythm is unpleasant to hear, and 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!' Careful teachers always guard against this danger, but in this air the beauty depends so much upon the gentle rocking rhythm that this little warning may be useful. In difficult cases it is useful to play some other piece in the same rhythmic figure but far quicker tempo, to fix the right proportion in the mind.

'I know that my Redeemer liveth' should also be studied, although it presents some difficulty and is more suitable for the higher Forms. There is a story about the phrase at the end of the fourth bar. It was said that it gave the first quarter of what we know as the 'Westminster Chimes,' and that it was developed into the whole four. Also, that Dr. Crotch, when a choir-boy, had suggested its use, probably after singing the air.

Handel's writing for the voice was, in one way, strictly conventional, according to the Italian methods of the time, in the form of his arias and the lavish use of 'runs.' For example, in the 'Messiah,' the soprano air, 'Rejoice greatly,' is extremely florid, as also the bass air, 'Why do the nations?' But on the other hand, his dramatic sense in fitting the words suitably broke utterly away from such conventions, and we find this in 'The people that walked' (*bass*), 'He was despised' (*contralto*) and the tenor air, 'Thou shalt break them.' There is a very long list of his airs from both oratorios and operas which children would enjoy, and possibly friends may be found in some cases who would sing them to the children, out of lesson-time. In 'Samson' are several which should be heard. 'Let the bright seraphim' (*soprano*) is a most tuneful song, with a trumpet *obligato*, and is a fine example of the florid style, as also the bass air 'Honour and arms,' with boisterous bounce befitting the Philistine giant. This is very often heard. But perhaps one of Handel's greatest moments is in the touching 'Total Eclipse' (*tenor*), where Samson sings in his blindness, 'No sun,' 'no moon,' and goes on, 'all dark amidst the blase of noon.' There is real feeling in this, possibly because Handel's own eyes had been causing him trouble

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for some time. The bass air, 'O ruddier than the cherry,' from *Acis and Galatea*, is florid, and needs wide compass. It is always amusing to hear the giant roll forth his command, 'Bring me a hundred pipes of decent growth, to make a pipe for my capacious mouth,' in the recitative that precedes this air. This is a great favourite, difficult though it be. Much less well known is the deep bass air which Somnus sings in *Semele*, 'Leave me, loathsome light,' in which Handel ingeniously conveys the feeling of overpowering sleepiness. This was given on the wireless not long since, and the effect was quite striking as a specimen of Handel's

dramatic treatment. The calm air, 'Where'er you walk,' is very beautiful, and though intended for tenor can be very effective when sung by a soprano, and can quite well 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.

'Angels ever bright and fair' is a tranquil, slow air for sopranos that could well be studied by children. It is frequently given by teachers of singing to students and may often be heard.

The operas give us Italian words, and one of the best-known airs is 'Lascia, ch'io pianga,' for contralto. It is said to have been composed first as a Saraband, and is certainly in that fascinating measure. 'Lusinghe più care' for soprano is a florid air, and a most tuneful one. A much longer list might be given, but if these are listened for on the wireless, it is quite likely that some of them may be met with. Space prevents a full list of publishers, but Novello's, Wardour Street, London, W.1, publish many of these separately, and of course, the scores of all the oratorios. But Augener's (School Department), 18 Great Marlborough Street, W.1, will procure anything that may be required by the P.U.S.

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Handel remained all his long life a bachelor. He was irascible, yet had a generous, kindly nature. In 1749 he gave an organ to the chapel of the Foundling Hospital (founded in 1739). Those familiar with the spacious courtyard in front of this building can conjure up pictures of the lumbering eighteenth century coaches rolling up with their hooped and bewigged occupants when he directed the 'Messiah' performances, annually. His sight failed in 1753, after one or two unsuccessful operations, six years before his death in 1759. He was much beloved in London, and we feel that he deserved the honour of being buried in Westminster Abbey.

Thackeray in his *Four Georges* gives a touching picture of George III in the intervals between attacks of his malady, playing in the galleries at Windsor, and, when blind and ill, choosing the music for one of the series of 'Ancient concerts' then being given, the music and words chosen being from *Samson*, having reference to the blindness and affliction. 'Total Eclipse,' mentioned above, is the very striking air in this selection.

Handel's figure was long familiar in London and the tradition has stayed long with us, so that now his position as a composer is unique, and he remains firmly welded into the affections of the English race.

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