

MERIDIAN.

HARK! Like some sudden, wild, mysterious chime,
Striking the startled ear with measured beat
Of deep pulsations, melancholy-sweet,
Life's horologe, that marks an arc of time,
Peals out high noon—a warning voice sublime.
I hear its music, and my weary feet
Pause on a mount where many pathways meet
That downward slope, and few that upward climb.
Look back! There lie the valleys of delight
Wherein I've loitered since the day began,
Forgetful of the journey and the night.
Look up! The desert sears the eyes that scan,
And far, ah, far above me frowns the height
I should have reached at life's meridian.

Charles T. Dazey.

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS.



SINCE it is not the contemporary public but the critical historians who write down the names of the partakers of immortality (the term in musical history meaning a period of from 25 to 150 years after death), it is safe to say that Charles Camille Saint-Saëns will appear to posterity as the greatest French musician of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. I make the distinction between the verdict of the public and the judgment of the critics with a special purpose; for, though the fame of M. Saint-Saëns is now at its zenith, I have been unable to discover that his music is more popular than it was ten, fifteen, or even twenty years ago. Then Paris was glad to do honor to the brilliant performer on the pianoforte and organ, and listened with pleasure to his "Danse Macabre" and "Rouet d'Omphale," but would have none of his operas. The attitude of the city is the same now, though the press records *succès d'estime* where formerly it wrote down failures. Even the stirring events connected with the "Lohengrin" struggle nine years ago, when it seemed as if M. Saint-Saëns must profit because of his patriotism where he had failed with his art, left no lasting results. To those who were enabled, by distance from the field of battle, and by non-relationship with the combatants, to judge impartially both the merits and the conduct of the struggle, it seemed at the last as if France had missed an opportunity, and was resolved not to benefit by her experience in the case of the composer whose artistic career in many respects resembles that of M. Saint-Saëns. It was Dr. Hanslick who made the observation that the Berlioz cult, which sprang into such sudden and hectic life in France twenty years ago, was less an artistic than a political phenomenon. It followed hard

on the heels of the Franco-Prussian war, and was promoted by the desire to find a French instrumental composer who might supplant some of the Germans who till then had held undisturbed possession of the French concert-rooms. The step could not disturb the equanimity of the Germans, who reflected that the tool chosen for their discomfiture was the same Berlioz who throughout a long life had sought in vain among his countrymen for the appreciation, understanding, and encouragement which he had received, almost without the asking, from the traditional enemies of his people beyond the Rhine. At that time M. Saint-Saëns was strongly tinged with Teutonism; but when in 1884 he took sides with Rochefort and the Parisian mob against the proposed production of "Lohengrin" at the Opéra Comique, and, in consequence, was insulted in Berlin by the wild young men of the Wagner Verein, and provoked the promulgation of a *tabu* against his operas by the director-general of the German Theaters Royal, it seemed only natural that he should be hailed in France as the successor of Berlioz. And so he was; but not by the public. Evidently the wise men of the East and the farther West had overlooked the one great lesson of Berlioz's life, which is, that it is only in the opera-house that a French composer can win popularity in France. Neither "Henry VIII.," produced in March, 1883, "Proserpine," produced in March, 1887, nor "Ascanio," produced in March, 1890, won an enduring success. A few months ago the National Academy of Music performed a long-neglected duty, and placed "Samson et Dalila" on its list. After failing with "La Princesse jaune" (1872), and "Le Timbre d'argent" (1877), in Paris, Saint-Saëns had sent this opera to Weimar for its baptism of fire. Meanwhile Wagner has

conquered the privilege of being heard in Paris, and the largest and most fascinating repertory possessed by the modern lyric theater has thus been opened to the Grand Opéra. Possibly the circumstance will help in the long run to an appreciation of the scores of M. Saint-Saëns, but for the present he must content himself, as well he may, with the contemporary reputation which neither German nor Briton, neither Italian nor American, will deny to him as the first of living French composers of orchestral and chamber music. And if posterity adds a degree to the honor, and pronounces him the greatest French musician of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, it will still fall short of the opinion once expressed in the heart of the enemy's country. It was in the early '70's, at Wagner's villa, that Dr. Von Bülow, after hearing M. Saint-Saëns read the score of "Siegfried" at the pianoforte, declared that he was then the greatest living musician save Wagner and Liszt.

It is interesting and instructive to note the resemblances and differences between Berlioz and Saint-Saëns. The parallel is confined to their artistic careers. No two men could be more dissimilar in their personal attitude toward the public, or in their training. Saint-Saëns was a musical prodigy as a child. He began the study of the pianoforte before he was three years old, and at twelve (when Berlioz would have us believe that he discovered his musical talent through jealousy of his uncle and the black-eyed divinity in pink boots whom he loved, and who was six years his senior) Saint-Saëns entered the Conservatoire a sound player. The wisdom of a good mother and of a sage great-aunt prevented the introduction of abnormal elements in his intellectual development. As a little child he edified his guardians by analyzing the differences of pitch and timbre in the various clock-chimes at home, and announcing his discovery that a visitor in an adjoining room walked in trochees. He was born in Paris, October 9, 1835; won the second prize at the Conservatoire for organ-playing at fourteen, and the first at sixteen, at which latter age he composed his first symphony. After failing twice to win the much-coveted Prix de Rome, he won the prize offered by the Commissioners of the International Exposition of 1867 with a cantata entitled "Les Noces de Prométhée," and was declared by Berlioz to be one of the greatest musicians of his epoch. From 1858 to 1877 he was organist of the Madeleine, and in February, 1881, he was elected member of the Institute in the place vacated by the death of Henri Reber. The most distinguished musicians of France are his colleagues in that august body, but he enjoys a distinction among them similar to that en-

joyed in his time by Berlioz: in the department of orchestral and chamber music his compositions outnumber those of all his fellow academicians combined. Like Berlioz he has sacrificed popular applause to lofty ideals. Like Berlioz he followed the lead of romantic Germany for a space, then thought it necessary to the salvation of his own individuality to turn back with a cry of protest; yet again, like Berlioz, he achieved his finest successes in the field where Germany has always been supreme. Like Berlioz he has hungered and thirsted for the rewards which the lyric theater bestows, and has been turned away empty-handed. Like Berlioz he has supplemented his work as a creative musician with critical writings for journalistic literature. Like Berlioz he found comfort in admiration for Liszt when constrained to disagree with Wagner.

Unlike Berlioz, however, he is the most secretive and elusive of public characters; ever and anon even his whereabouts is a Parisian mystery. When not in hiding he travels from place to place, playing the pianoforte and conducting performances of his orchestral compositions, but always modestly, unassumingly, indifferent to public *réclame*. He has gone the length and breadth of France, Germany, Austria, Spain, Italy, Russia, Portugal, and England, and is now expected in the United States. In characterizing him as the best grounded of living musicians, with the possible exception of Brahms, I have reference not only to his more complete knowledge of the mechanics of composition, his marvelous mastery of harmony, counterpoint, construction, and orchestration, but also to his wonderful assimilation of the spirit of all the great musicians from Bach to Wagner. That there has been a devouter student, or a more ardent lover, of the music of Bach than M. Saint-Saëns since Mendelssohn, I do not believe. No other composer has given such beautiful and convincing testimony to that study and love as has he in the introduction to his concerto for pianoforte in G minor, and in the all too little known "Psalm XIX." They are the fine flower and fruit of his early organ study. Nor has there been a more learned and versatile composer. If he follows Berlioz in extravagance of instrumental apparatus and looseness of form in his symphony in C minor, he leads him in dignity and solidity of constructive invention, and uses like a master the instrumental devices to which Berlioz pointed the way. Schumann's dictum concerning Wagner, on hearing "Tannhäuser" in 1847, is singularly applicable to Saint-Saëns: "Were he as melodious a musician as he is an intellectual, he were the man of the period."



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