

STERNDALE BENNETT.

IN MEMORIAM.



HE greatest English musician which this century has produced is dead. He lies in Westminster Abbey, near Purcell, of whom he is a worthy companion in the great Republic of Musical Art. On that grey morning of February 6th, 1875, many thousands gathered round his grave. The coffin was covered with a violet pall, and heaped up with fair white wreaths and crosses; and thus the rites of death seemed to lose something of their general gloom. And why indeed should they not, for one who had so long worn amongst us "the white flower of a blameless life?"

There was much in Sterndale Bennett, both as regards his personal character and his work, which made him fit to be held up as an example before the men of his generation. But his claims upon our interest extend beyond the present, and his life has other and wider significance than that of pointing a moral or adorning a tale.

Sterndale Bennett (born 1816) lived in what will be looked back to by our posterity as the sunniest epoch of musical art. The age of Beethoven, Cherubini, Weber, Schubert, Spohr, Rossini, Auber, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Gounod, Wagner, Brahms, and Liszt will be doubtless called the golden age of music; and although the late composer could not have said, as Ulysses said of himself and of the events of his age, *Quorum pars major fui*, yet those who shall hereafter look up into the musical firmament of the nineteenth century, will doubtless note that his star is not the least of those that glitter in the resplendent crowd.

Early in life, Sterndale Bennett was thrown across the path of that great and beautiful soul, Felix Mendelssohn. These two were soon drawn together by a community of tastes and dispositions, and a friendship was then begun which ended only with the death of Mendelssohn, now nearly thirty years ago. But ever since that time we have had a sort of living and embodied memory of him in the person of his attached friend and disciple, Sterndale Bennett. The same singleness of purpose—the same industry—the same loftiness of aim—the same beauty of conception and execution which all men loved in the greater master—

were seen reflected in his illustrious survivor. And yet it would be unfair to say that Bennett was the shadow of Mendelssohn either in his life or his work. His character was strongly pronounced and individual, and his work has a peculiar subtleness and fine but fleeting grace—like the mobile and evanescent colours of the rainbow. When we are told, as we are sometimes, that Mendelssohn's personal and artistic influence over Bennett was absolute, and that we owe to it all that is most precious in his compositions, we must remember that his best works, the C and F minor pianoforte concertos, the overtures to "Naiades" and "Wood Nymph," were written before he ever met



SIR WILLIAM STERNDALE BENNETT.

Mendelssohn — though of course not before he had heard some of his music. He took these things with him to Germany in 1836. There he met Mendelssohn, who received him like a brother; there he was introduced to Schumann, who writes—"The old prejudice which believed it impossible [that England should produce a good musician] has been already shaken by Field, Onslow, Potter, Bishop, and others, and now Sterndale Bennett has given it a harder blow than ever. How far his development was promoted by the careful instruction he received at the Royal Academy of Music in London, under masters like Crotch and Cipriani Potter, and by his own indefatigable studies, I know not. I only know that out of this chrysalis

has burst a truly glorious butterfly, fluttering through the summer air, now lighting on this flower, now on that, and leaving us to follow with eager eyes and outstretched hands."

But I said that Sterndale Bennett was in many ways an example to the world of art. He was a type of man much needed in these days of hurry, slovenly finish, and general time-serving, disastrous pandering to popularity.

It will be no unfit tribute to his memory if I dwell for a few moments upon some of those characteristics of him, which are surely none the less needed because they are the most generally imitable.

First, then, I notice about him and his work what I may call the GRACE OF SELF-CONTROL. There is a general, but false, impression abroad that the artistic temperament is necessarily full of wild, irrepressible,

and irregular emotion. It is full, doubtless, of emotion; but the highest men and the best artistes are not those who, having great emotions, are tossed and mastered by them, but those who work at them as a man will work at certain fiery steeds, patiently, strongly, and with indomitable courage, until he has mastered them. All the strongest work, whether of artist, sculptor, poet, or musician, has a certain restraint and sublime temperance about it, which lifts it high above the most fascinating exhibition of exuberant and unrestrained emotion. See how Shakespeare can pull up in the midst of passion; see how Beethoven, in his symphonies, rules the gradations of tone-tint which lend such inexhaustible splendour to his great climaxes. Remember the marvellous temperance of passion in that wondrous episode of the "earthquake" in Mendelssohn's "Elijah," where almost every note in the scale of human emotion has been touched, but which is restrained and disciplined in such a manner that the soul is left at the close not exhausted, but tender and responsive to the heavenly wave of tidal melody that flows in at last with the "still small voice."

No! want of self-control in art, or in life, is not admirable. It means weakness always—waste of power always; and, however gifted may have been the ill-regulated geniuses who have left much which the world will not willingly let die, yet these would have left more, and done better things, had they ruled instead of been ruled by their emotions.

I sometimes stand on the platform of a railway-station, and watch the shunting of some powerful engine. I know the steam is fully up, and that I am in the presence of a tremendous, though suppressed, force. Now I watch the engine gliding a few inches one way—then back again—then stopping in obedience to the lightest touch of the driver; but presently it is got into position, it is linked to its line of carriages: once more it moves onward; but this time, breaking into irresistible speed, it bounds along the rails. Who shall check it? That tremendous force of steam is still under control, and presently, after tearing for miles through field and hill-side, and meadow and town, the goal comes in sight; at a touch from the driver, the speed is slackened, the engine shows itself docile as a palfrey, and the long train glides gently and serviceably into the station, and soon lies motionless beside the platform.

Well, there is a symbol of emotion used and disciplined, but only so used because disciplined. And, depend upon it, no good work was ever done in this world without a certain measure of discipline. This is what makes Sterndale Bennett's work so perfect of its kind. It was indeed the reflection of his habits, both of mind and body, temperate, and full of quiet gentle thoroughness and mastery, even down to minute details, full of the GRACE OF SELF-CONTROL.

Secondly, I notice in him the GRACE OF COMMON WORK.

In these days, our young men complain of drudgery. They are too fine to do common work; no place is good enough for them; they are born for better things. They are poets, and have to keep accounts;

they are painters, and have to serve counters; they are men of genius and sensibility, and pass their time in turning over other people's money. Remember, then, that Sterndale Bennett spent the greater part of forty years in incessant drudgery. He, the master—the worthy friend and brother in art of Mendelssohn and Schumann, with a reputation as wide as the civilised world, and a commanding genius, the lustre of whose work does not grow pale beside those of the great gods of music—this man spent habitually about eight or more hours every day of his life in teaching children, and all kinds of pupils, the rudiments of music. Some regret this, and from an artistic point of view it is to be regretted, but from a moral point of view it is not. His example reproves the idle, the discontented, the conceited grumblers to be found in all ranks of society. He taught once more the lesson left us by the Divine Man, who was called the Carpenter's Son—the importance of lowly duties—the power of unpalatable toil—the GRACE OF COMMON WORK.

Yet one more feature of the departed master's life-work—one more grace—and I have done. I allude to the GRACE OF A HIGH IDEAL—never more needed than in the present day, when art is in danger of becoming a mere trade, and music and musicians are notoriously bought and sold without regard to anything but the passing caprice or popular fancy of a musically ignorant and vulgar public.

Sterndale Bennett would never pander to popular taste at the expense of art. Musical art as a true and balanced expression of human emotion, as a legitimate means of kindling, regulating, and recreating the feelings, he held to be sacred. All exaggerated, artificial, merely spasmodic or claptrap effect, which might take with the crowd, he condemned as beneath the dignity of his art. His pen was fastidious to a fault. All his published work is exquisite in balance, finish, proportion, truth, and transparent clearness of expression. To reproach him for want of strength is to reproach the gazelle for lacking the power of the elephant. We speak not now of such inevitable defects as may be found in almost all human work—of such narrowness or want of variety and wide sympathy as may be found in most human work—but we speak of this noble quality in him which may be imitated by all of us, that, to use the words of Goethe, as an artist "in all his striving he ever looked to the highest." It was impossible for him to do otherwise. He had seen it and conversed face to face with it; he had drunk of the unsullied fount of German inspiration, and he felt with Guinevere—

"We needs must love the highest when we see it."

It is this quality to which every action of his life, as far as he could see, and every stroke of his pen, as far as he knew, bore witness, which raises Sterndale Bennett so far above many of his contemporaries in this at once musical and unmusical country.

The interests of art were never jobbed by him; unworthy work was never puffed by him; no one was ever able to buy him; and no one ever induced him

to sell his name and high influence for money or the paltry prestige of a shallow and evanescent popularity. It has been said he was vain of his position and jealous of his rivals, but none will ever know to what extent in this silent and retiring man his so-called vanity was anything more than his deep sense of the important art-principle which he believed himself to be the chosen instrument of conserving, and in what degree his so-called jealousy is to be attributed to his anxiety lest any who loved self more and truth less than himself should take a permanent hold and exercise a baneful influence upon music in England.

That he failed to appreciate the Wagnerian tendencies of the time cannot sufficiently be deplored, but we must remember that he belonged to an earlier school, of which he himself was one of the brightest ornaments; and it is pleasing to reflect that almost his last work—"The Maid of Orleans"—was first introduced to the English public by Dr. Hans von

Bülow, the greatest of Liszt's pupils, and the most illustrious and indefatigable exponent of Wagner's music.

Sterndale Bennett was rather the product of a school than the founder of one, and though he has left no imitators, he has left many pupils whose style is adapted rather to interpret intelligently the great classical pianoforte works than to show off the capacities of the great pianoforte firms.

Gentle and unassuming in his life, he has left behind him a memory full of heartfelt regrets in thousands of English homes. His loss has been, and will continue to be, deplored throughout the civilised world, and the vast concourse of men and women distinguished in every branch of literature, art, and science, that thronged his funeral at Westminster Abbey, was no unfit or inadequate tribute to the virtues and the genius of the most refined, industrious, and earnest of musicians, and the gentlest and purest of men.

H. R. HAWEIS.

HOW TO MAKE DISHES LOOK NICE.



FEAR that, as a nation, taste is not our forte. I wonder, too, if there is a n y French expression that would fully convey the idea,

"Wanted, a good plain cook." I suppose this really means: Wanted, a woman who can convert joints of raw meat into some state sufficiently intermediate between blueness and cinders as to render them eatable, and who also can make certain plain puddings, more or less heavy as the case may be, but who has no more conception of artistic taste than a cabbage, and would be as incapable of making a dish look elegant as of singing the shadow-dance from "Dinorah." And yet many of these persons are good honest souls, who mean well, and do their best, but somehow or other it is not in them.

They have been born in an uncongenial clime. For instance, contrast the dress of an English workman's wife whose husband earns, say, £2 a week, with that of a Frenchwoman in a similar station of life; and yet probably the latter spends less in dress than the former.

We have already compared a French pastrycook's window with an English one, but if there is ever a time in which we feel that Waterloo is indeed avenged,

it is when we contrast a French salade with the ordinary English specimen.

We can well imagine a young wife in deep consultation with her next sister a week before her first dinner-party, the cookery-book between them.

"Oh! what a pretty dish," exclaims one, "let's have that."

But, alas! they have no idea what the appearance of the dish will be when done, or more probably leave it to the cook to do as she likes, with one or two little things from the pastry-cook's—an expensive way of going to work, it should be borne in mind. I have been asked several times in strict confidence the question, "But ought it to have looked like that?"—a question very often involving a necessary sacrifice of either truth or politeness.

Francatelli observes: "The palate is as capable and nearly as worthy of education as the eye and the ear." Now, without entering into the question as to whether a patty to eat is equal to a Patti to hear or see in the way of enjoyment, there is no doubt that the palate is to a great extent influenced by the eye. For instance, a large cold sirloin of beef on the sideboard at a good old-fashioned hotel, neatly decorated with bright green parsley and snow-white curly horseradish; the dish resting on an equally snow-white cloth; its companions consisting of as tempting-looking a York ham, and some bright silver flagons, the latter enabling the looker-on almost to realise the "nut-brown ale" talked about of old, though what it was like we have not the least idea. There is a common saying, "It makes one hungry to look at it;" or, "It makes one's mouth water." Yet contrast this same piece of cold beef with a joint I recollect being once brought up for supper at some lodgings, where Mary Ann was, to say the least, in-artistic. She brought it up just as it was in the dish in which it had got cold—the dish smeary round the