

Our Famous Living Organists.

By Dr J. Lance Tomlinson

WHAT music is comparable to that of the organ? What human instrument has the power to thrill and exalt in an equal degree, to uplift the soul of man, to sway him by mere volume of sweet tones, to bathe his whole being in a deep flood of harmony? Is there any sound made by man to approach the majesty of that "sound of a great Amen" as uttered on the great organ of Westminster Abbey, with Sir Frederick Bridge at the keys? A famous old monk once called the king of instruments *Vox Dei*—God's voice—"for if Jehovah were to speake He would speake in our eares like unto a greate Cathedral organ with all ye stoppes pull'd out."

Yet how different the organ indifferently played to the same noble instrument in the hands of a master! Great organists are rare—there are scarce a handful of them in all Europe—so that it must be a satisfaction to Englishmen to know that in no country are there so many supreme performers as in England.

In France, Italy and Germany, the piano-forte has elbowed the organ aside; and although here and there

a great organ genius like Guilmant or Reubke arises, yet the great bulk of the playing, even in the most celebrated cathedrals, is of a mediocre quality as compared with our own. The last few years has seen a marked revival of interest in organ music, as well as huge strides in the art of producing it. Our successful organists are in demand everywhere—particularly in America. The recitals of these men now draw thousands of auditors where twenty years ago they would

scarce have attracted hundreds, and, moreover, as a striking illustration of the esteem in which the art is held by the King and nation, we may mention the accumulating honours which are descending on the heads of its master exponents, and a fame which is justly universal.

And yet how many of our readers, if the question were put to them, would be able to recount the ten leading organists of the kingdom—not to say of the world? The ten leading pianists, from Paderewski to Hofmann—yes, they might manage that; perhaps even the ten leading violinists, from Sarasate to the latest fiddling importation; but of the great masters of the king of instruments, how many could name more than four or five? Or, if they could name them all, how many could apportion rank and precedence? Would they not be inclined to judge by factitious circumstances and accessories, and say that because a man plays a big organ he must therefore be a great organist?

The organ at St. George's Chapel, Windsor, is, comparatively speaking, a very small instrument, and

yet Sir Walter Parratt stands at the head of his profession. How incomplete is the organ at many provincial cathedrals, and yet how superb is the result obtained by men who have given their lives to the one object of playing!

The last phrase is no figure of speech, as it might be of ordinary professions. It will be noticed that most of the men described in the present article began to play the organ as mere children. Some began as choir-boys,



SIR WALTER PARRATT

At the Organ, St. George's Chapel, Windsor.

From a Photo. by Geoffrey Parratt.

and showing talent and inclination for the organ, were encouraged by their masters to learn that instrument, and in time become deputy-organists. It deserves to be remembered that Purcell, Orlando, Gibbons, Sullivan, Stainer, Goss and Barnby were all originally choir-boys. They can give their whole careers to quiet study and reflection, which is why they are, as a class, singularly alike, and differing totally from the professional pianist and violinist, who has to undergo so much absurd lionising and unhealthy excitement that it renders him *blasé* and worldly-minded. The organist, on the

Cathedral, from whence, in 1875, he went to Westminster Abbey. He is widely known as a brilliant, dashing player, peerless in effective execution. Away from his organ, which, with him, as our readers will hardly need to be reminded, has figured in many notable recent events, from the Queen's Jubilee, the funeral services of Darwin, Browning, Tennyson and Gladstone, to King Edward's Coronation, Sir Frederick is an enthusiastic fisherman, genial and unassuming. He lives with Lady Bridge in a wing of the ancient and venerable Abbey whose history he knows so well.



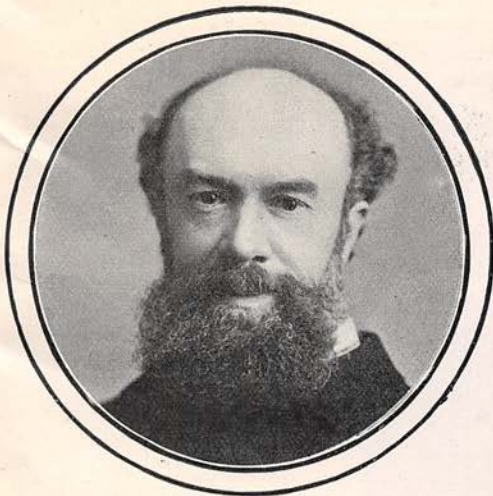
SIR J. FREDERICK BRIDGE
Playing upon the Organ at Westminster Abbey.

other hand, is often a scholar and a thinker as well as an artist.

Perhaps no organist in the kingdom enjoys greater fame, and deservedly, than Sir J. Frederick Bridge, chief organist of Westminster Abbey. A wit has designated him "Westminster Bridge," in order to distinguish him from his brother, also, as we shall see, a noted musician. He began as a choir-boy at Rochester Cathedral, and he often recalls humorously how he had occasionally to "blow" the organ with another boy in the organ loft in the days before present blowing contrivances were invented. Sir Frederick's first appointment was at a village church, and when he was twenty-four he was appointed organist at Manchester

Sir Walter Parratt is not only an organist, but he is likewise "Master of the King's Musick" at Windsor Castle, an office 350 years old. Nevertheless, merely to fill such a high post as that of organist at St. George's Chapel—under the eye and direct patronage of the Monarch—one must be a distinguished musician. It has always been so, and is so to-day. Sir Walter Parratt inherits his peculiar talent, for he is the son of an organist and was born at Huddersfield sixty-one years ago. Of course he was taught music at an age when most children are learning the alphabet,

Jan 23.
John W. Mill



SIR GEORGE MARTIN,
Organist of St. Paul's Cathedral.

Photo. Elliott and Fry.

twenty Parratt was appointed organist of St. Paul's, Huddersfield, and from 1872 to 1882, as organist of Magdalen College, he was one of the chief musical figures of Oxford. In the latter year he succeeded Sir George Elvey as organist of St. George's Chapel, Windsor, being knighted ten years later. Sir Walter has composed a number of anthems, hymn-tunes, etc., but his special strength lies in his organ playing, which is so masterly as to leave him with few rivals, if any. There is no organist who develops so fully the artistic capacities of the instrument, and his recitals are always thronged by musicians as well as by the general public, a sure tribute to his powers.

Sir Walter is not only a gifted musician, but a fine chess player, and his abilities in both capacities may be judged from the following, related by Dr. Shinn. In one of the lodgings attached to St. Michael's College, Tenbury, some eight or ten men were assembled. Von Holst and Sir Walter played on the piano in turn such music as was asked for, and always from memory. This went on for some time, when the chess-board was brought out,



DR. J. KENDRICK
PYNE,
Organist of
Manchester
Cathedral
and Town
Hall,
together
with a
facsimile of
his score.

and was so precocious that at the tender age of seven he was able to play and did play the whole of the service at church. But this was nothing to what the future master of the King's music was able to do at ten years, for he then performed the marvellous feat of executing the whole of Bach's forty-eight preludes and fugues from memory! This would tax the powers of most adult musicians, and is probably a unique effort for a child of ten.

A year later, little Walter Parratt became organist of Armistage Bridge Church, but soon afterwards was sent to school in London, where he also studied the organ under the once famous George Cooper. At



Photo. A. Brookes.



AT THE
ORGAN IN
MANCHESTER
TOWN HALL.

J. Kendrick Pyne

and Sir Walter proposed to play two men in consultation while he remained at the piano, playing anything asked for, whether from Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, or Chopin. He never looked at the chess-board, but continued to converse with those around, who did all they could to distract him, although without success. His memory never failed him for at least an hour, when the game was won by him, and he told us how he had been watching the chances of a poor fly which had become entangled in a spider's web. Sir Walter has a strong prejudice against the "overblown and overgrown" church organs of the present day. An "old sweet-tone stopped-diapason on the choir organ" is a special favourite. Bach's music, and perhaps that master's "Pedal Fugue in E," is dearest to this master organist's heart.



Duke of Buccleuch at Dalkeith.

"It was a charming post," he once said, "and I didn't wish to leave, but the position of sub-organist and master of the choir was not to be refused." And so he came to London more than a quarter of a century ago, and took his place at the famous old organ upon which Handel and Mendelssohn have played. Father Smith (or Schmidt), whom Sir George has called the Stradivarius of

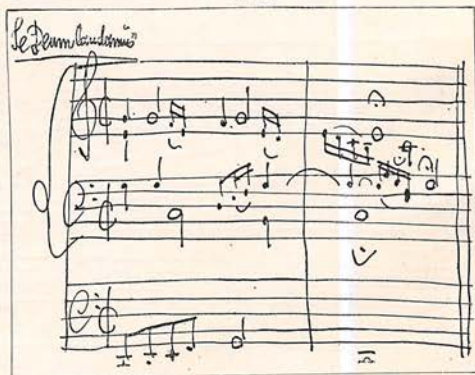
DR. TURPIN,
Dean of the
Faculty of Music
in the London
University, with
facsimile of his
score.

Photo. Elliott and Fry.

Sir George Martin, chief organist of St. Paul's Cathedral, may be said to have commenced his musical career as private organist to the



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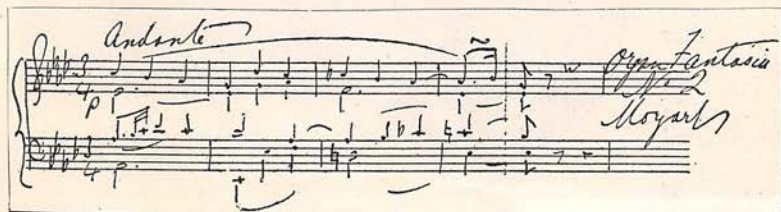


the organ, built it. He was the architect of twelve other organs in England before that of St. Paul's. Its case, the screen, and the carved woodwork are the achievement of Grinling Gibbons. A few years ago the organ underwent its latest renovation, which practically transformed it into a modern and beautifully equipped instrument.

Despite the fixity of organ tones and the artificial character of its mediums of expression, the master organists are able largely to give voice to their own personal methods of thought. With perhaps no living organ player is the power of individuality so clearly expressed on his instrument as in the case of Dr. J. Kendrick Pyne, organist of Manchester Cathedral and Town Hall.

Photo. Hartley Bros.

DR. A. L. PEACE,
Organist of St. George's Hall, Liverpool, together with one of his favourite scores.



Here is an example of transmitted gifts in music, for both his father (who was organist of Bath Abbey for fifty-three years, and an excellent composer) and his grandfather were prominent musicians. At the age of eleven young Pyne became organist of All Saints, Bath. A little later he was pupil of Dr. S. S. Wesley, and

DR. JOSEPH C. BRIDGE of Chester Cathedral, together with a holograph favourite.



assistant organist of Winchester Cathedral. Certain of the Chapter once complained of the youthful appearance of Dr. Wesley's assistant, and it was finally suggested that the lad should be provided with a long coat and spectacles in order to impart to him a more venerable look. The suggestion was not adopted, and Dr. Pyne's boyishness has never left him, in spite of his vast store of



Photo. Brandenburg.

Joseph C. Bridge



MR. GEO. RISELEY,
Organist of Bristol Cathedral, and the city's Musical Conductor.

musical knowledge. He is an executant of the highest type, and is celebrated for his phrasing. He is said to be able to make a fugue by Bach interesting to a common uneducated audience. Besides his work at the Cathedral, Dr. Pyne is organist to the Manchester Corporation. He is also professor at the Royal College, Manchester, and lecturer on Church music at Owens College, Victoria University, giving regular concerts at the Town Hall. When holiday-making, he is a keen golfer, and an ardent antiquary.

Dr. Pyne's favourite organ composition is Bach's "Fantasia in G minor," which he plays with marvellous skill and effect. He has written Church and organ music. Amongst the former his Communion Service in A flat is well known, and an "Elegy" of his is a special favourite at his Saturday recitals.

Dr. Turpin is the *doyen* of our famous organists, having been born in 1835, and was playing before Sir Walter Parratt or George Martin were born. In addition to numerous honours, he has lately been appointed Dean of the Faculty of Music in the



John Turpin
Tertius Noble

MR. TERTIUS NOBLE OF YORK.
Photo. Thwaites.

London University. He has written many church services, and is the author of lectures and essays on musical subjects.

Of all church music, Dr. Turpin says he loves most Bach's "Te Deum Laudamus." It is a curious circumstance how many of our great organists are drawn to the impressive compositions of "Master Sebastian."

The talented organist of St. George's Hall, Liverpool, is a Yorkshireman, and was born at Huddersfield. It is a curious circumstance that the year 1844 should have brought into the world three of our most distinguished organists, Bridge, Martin, and Dr. A. L. Peace. One of the achievements of which Dr. Peace is most proud is the great part he has played in introducing the king of instruments and organ music into Scotland. It may not be generally known in the southern half of this kingdom how modern an institution Scottish church organ playing is, although it is now, thanks to Dr. Peace's

popularity at Glasgow Cathedral, spreading in the Presbyterian and kindred churches. The Liverpool organist is specially known for his imitations of orchestral effects on the organ, and in *this* direction frequently performs orchestral overtures and operatic selections for the delectation of his popular Saturday night Recitals. He is said by some to enjoy the privilege of playing on the finest organ in the United Kingdom—built by Willis. Dr. Peace's favourite piece is Mozart's "Organ Fantasia, No. 2," in the execution of which he has no living rival.

It is a curious circumstance, not only that two brothers should rise to be famous organists, one at Westminster Abbey, and the other, Dr. Joseph C. Bridge, at Chester Cathedral, but that the latter should not have cared particularly for music as a boy. But fate was too strong for him, and when his elder brother went to Manchester Cathedral, young Joseph accompanied him as his assistant. From thence he went to Oxford as a University student, and finally accomplished his ambition of taking both his arts' and musical degrees and becoming a cathedral organist. For a full quarter of a century he has presided over the beautiful musical services of Chester. Dr. Bridge is popularly supposed to be a somewhat stern disciplinarian with his choir, but those who know him best are aware of his kindly



ONE OF MR. NOBLE'S FAVOURITE ORGAN SCORES.

manner and that keen sense of humour which he shares with his brother, Sir Frederick. He is a successful organist, choir-trainer, conductor and composer, and last, but not least, away from these labours, a gardener!

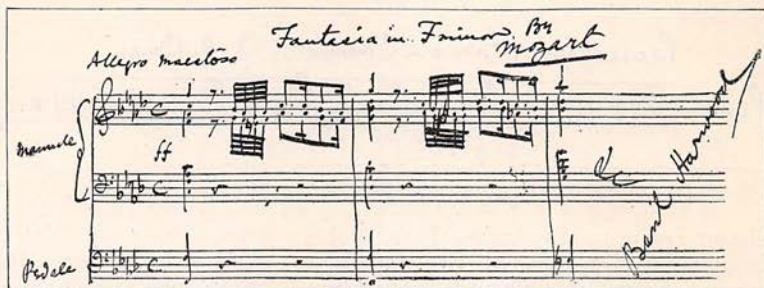
The Second Sonata of Merkel has found greatest favour with him; of his own compositions, his Symphony in F has been very successful.

It is remarkable at how youthful an age many of our leading organists began their careers. Mr. George Riseley, who is not only organist at Bristol Cathedral, but controller and conductor of that city's leading musical events, when only seven years of age succeeded in gaining a post as chorister in the Cathedral from among a number of competitors. In 1862 he was articled to the then well known Bristol organist Mr. J. D. Corfe, and for the next ten years, in addition to acting as his deputy organist, Riseley held appointments at various churches in the vicinity.

In 1870 he was appointed organist to the Colston Hall Co., with absolute control of the splendid Willis organ erected in that hall, at once devoting himself heart and soul to a steady and persistent effort to master his instrument and his art. He set on foot regular recitals of classical and popular organ music, which has continued to the present time, thereby educating the musical taste not only of his native city,—where, by the way, we forgot to mention he was born fifty seven years ago—but of the whole district. It may be said that as an organ soloist

Mr. Riseley has few equals. His technique is well nigh perfect. In both ancient and modern schools he is alike masterly and is an equally capable adapter of orchestral works.

In 1889, a dozen years after he had suc-



ONE OF MR. BASIL HARWOOD'S FAVOURITE SCORES.

*Yours faithfully
Basil Harwood*

ceeded his old master as organist and choir master of the Cathedral, he gave a special organ recital at Luton, in the presence of his present Majesty, Queen Alexandra, the Prince of Wales and many others, who were enthusiastic in their appreciation of his skill. He had previously played a number of times on the great Albert Hall organ to large audiences. In 1895, as a token of recognition of his work as a conductor, Queen Victoria sent him a handsome satin-wood baton, mounted in gold and jewels.

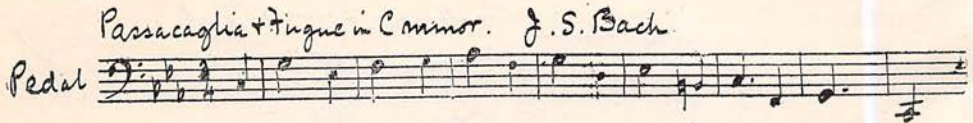
Another west of England musician who has become famous as a Cathedral organist is Mr. Tertius Noble of York. He was born at Bath thirty-five years ago and, being from his early childhood very fond of music, when only ten could play many of Bach's Forty-eight preludes and fugues on the piano. At the age of thirteen he went to Colchester on what was meant



MR. BASIL HARWOOD,
Organist in Christchurch Cathedral, Oxford.
Photo. Elliott and Fry.

to be a short visit to the Rector of All Saints, but before he left he agreed to become organist there. When in 1885 he became a student at the Royal College of Music, and after his graduation he went to Trinity College, Cambridge, as

Harwood is an old Charterhouse boy and from thence became an undergraduate at Trinity College, Oxford. Yet even while studying for his B. A. degree he was organist of his college. He graduated indeed in music before doing so in Arts, taking both



ONE OF MR. PERKINS'S FAVOURITE SCORES.

assistant organist. In August 1892, Noble was appointed organist at Ely and is a most popular and able organist. At present a new organ is being erected by Messrs. Walker and Sons of London, which will rank among the first in the kingdom.

Some of Mr. Noble's church music has found its way into many of the Cathedrals of Great Britain. Among his many friends in organ music he has found it difficult to decide; but Bach's "Prelude in B minor" is given as one of his favourites.

Every Oxford man every temporary resident of Oxford—must treasure memories of the organ playing in Christchurch Cathedral. The organ itself used to attract attention by reason of its history, being originally built by the famous Father Schmidt in 1680. But not even so expert an organist and musical scholar as Mr. Basil Harwood could continue to do himself justice on so antiquated an instrument. Those who regretted its displacement in favour of the present Willis instrument, did so only for a day. Mr.

degrees by 1881. On the organ he was a pupil of Mr. George Riseley of Bristol. In 1883 young Harwood was appointed organist and choir-master at St. Barnabas, Pimlico, and four years later went to Ely Cathedral, where he played the organ for five years. When he left it was to go to Oxford, where in addition to his present appointment, he holds others of great musical significance at the University. Mr. Harwood has composed several organ sonatas and services, and is deservedly popular.

Well deserving inclusion among the group of leading organists of the kingdom, is the well known executant of the Birmingham Town Hall, Mr. C. W. Perkins. Mr. Perkins was a pupil of Mr. Andrew Deakin; his first appointment was at the Waltham Road Church, Birmingham, and afterwards at St. Michael's, Paddington. He has had the honour of playing several times before the present King and Queen, and also before the German Emperor. His method is all his own, and in the execution of certain pieces he has few rivals.



MR. C. W. PERKINS,
Organist of Birmingham
Town Hall.

*Organs faithfully,
C.W. Perkins*