(*From a photo by Elliott & Fry.*)

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MOMENTS WITH MODERN MUSICIANS:

SIR ALEXANDER MACKENZIE AT WORK.

By F. Klickmann.

THE majority of our "Moments" have been spent with musicians when they were at home. Sir Alexander Mackenzie, however, was at the Royal Academy of Music, in the midst of his work, when I recently interrupted him to discuss matters musical and personal—this article being prominently in the foreground of my mind.

If it be true that a man unconsciously reveals character by his every movement, then Sir Alexander must have a large amount of activity yet waiting to be reduced to black and white notes on MS. music-paper, for the whole of the time that he was talking to me he never ceased walking to and fro across the room, a kind of suppressed energy in every step.

"It is a strange thing," he began, "that, though I am usually credited with being a Scotchman to the backbone, some of my earliest reminiscences are German. My father was a musician of wide reputation in his time. I was born in Edinburgh, but when I was nine my father took me to Germany—where he himself had also been trained—to study music. Now it is a very queer thing, but for some time after my arrival in Germany my life is on the whole a blank page to me. I can't fix definitely on anything until one day, when I remember I could speak German as glibly as could the other boys with whom I was studying. I know I must have spent some time acquiring the language, but however long or short it was I have no recollection whatever. I spent five years altogether studying in Germany. When I ultimately came to England I was a helpless foreigner, knowing practically no English, and during my student days the other fellows at the Royal Academy used to tease me unmercifully about my broken English and my terrible accent."

"How long did you remain at the Royal Academy?"

"Over two years; though I only paid fees for the first three months. It was not my original intention to study at the institution. My father had been a pupil of Sainton, and I wished to follow his example. It was Sainton himself who suggested that I should enter the Academy. He had also seen one or two of my attempts at composition—and feeble things they were! He advised me to try for a scholarship shortly falling vacant, and in the end I was elected 'King's Scholar.'"

"Which did you find the more interesting country to work in, Germany or England?"

"At *that* time, most decidedly Germany. Things were so entirely different in England then to what they are nowadays. I had been a pupil of Ulrich Stein, a marvellously clever man, who was Kapellmeister at Schwarzburg-Sondershausen, a town not very far distant from Weimar; that was from 1857 to 1862, when Liszt was in his zenith, you must recollect—when Weimar was the centre of that musical revolution that was fast spreading throughout Germany, though it had scarcely touched England. I was fortunate in very soon obtaining an appointment in the ducal orchestra, and many of the works we performed there were at that time unheard of in this country. For example I well remember Liszt bringing over his 'Mazeppa' in MS. for us to try through. This was the first time it was ever played. He brought it to Sondershausen because Stein's orchestra was better than the one at Weimar. I also played in a performance of Gounod's 'Faust,' before the work had been heard in England.

"Then again, Sondershausen was the second town in which a performance was given of 'Lohengrin.' It was a great success there, and did much to cheer Wagner, who was in St. Petersburg at the time, and in low water. Liszt's 'Faust' Symphony was another work in which I was fortunate enough to take part at that period.

"Therefore, having been accustomed to play all the newest and most advanced of modern works, and having lived in an atmosphere that was simply saturated with Liszt, Berlioz and Wagner, you will easily understand that the musical life in London seemed to me to be a trifle behind the times when I entered upon an orthodox curriculum at the Academy."

From a photo by] [*W. H. Bunnett.*

THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF MUSIC, TENTERDEN STREET, HANOVER SQUARE, W.

"Then you think it advisable that musical students should spend a certain number of years abroad before their education is completed?"

"No, not as things are now in England. Thirty-five years ago matters were different, very different. In the present day there is not the slightest occasion to go further than London; everything that is worth having can be had here. It is the greatest mistake to think that anything beyond the language is to be gained by going to a foreign country. I do not say this because I am myself interested in an English school of music. I should say precisely the same thing if I were non-interested, and residing abroad, as I was for some time before I became officially connected with the Royal Academy."

"Were you living in Germany at that time?"

"No, I was in Florence. I had become thoroughly run down through overwork, and had to leave everything and try what a complete rest would do for me. Some great friends of Liszt's, the Hillebrands, were living in the same house that I was staying at in Florence; and here I renewed my former acquaintance with the great pianist. Naturally I had altered since he had seen me a boy at Sondershausen, but he remembered me. Curiously enough this meeting was actually the cause of Liszt's last visit to England, though in a somewhat roundabout way.

"I had been invited to lunch with the Hillebrands one day when Liszt was there and several other musicians. At the table I was telling some story which greatly amused those near me. Liszt was getting deaf—though he hated to have to own to it; he heard the laughter, but the only word he had caught was 'Tausig.' He immediately jumped to the conclusion that I had been ridiculing Tausig—who had been a great favourite of his—in some way. He got very angry; but our host explained matters to him and endeavoured to mollify him. Then Liszt apologised to me, saying he was slightly deaf, and had misunderstood me. This was a trifling incident, and most people would not have given it a second thought; but Liszt was an unusual character, and it seemed as though the little *contretemps* had quite upset him. He was annoyed with himself that he should have 'given himself away,' so to speak, in public; he was vexed that he had misjudged me, and irritated that he had had to make an apology. Actually there was no occasion for him to have done so, considering the trivial circumstances;

From a photo by] [*Elliott & Fry.*

THE LATE ABBÉ LISZT.

nevertheless his high sense of honour compelled him to do so.

"After lunch he was restlessly ill at ease, and said he would go and pay some calls. I went back to my own rooms and determined to stay there. When Liszt returned to the house supper was ready, but he said no, he wanted to hear the two compositions I had brought up earlier in the day. I was not there, so he turned to Sophie Menter and asked her if she couldn't play the duet arrangement of my Scottish Rhapsodies with him. They played one, and then Hillebrand insisted on his having some supper. After the meal was over he said now he would have the other work. Madame Hillebrand came down to me and begged me to join them. 'It will smooth everything over if you come now, and Liszt keeps on asking for you,' she said. I went up again, and directly I entered the room Liszt asked me if I had the full score of the work, as he wanted to see it. I fetched it, and he said, 'I am going to Pesth, and I shall take this with me and have it performed there.' This was the man's keen sense of honour; he was anxious to make reparation a hundredfold for an injustice which he imagined he had done me.

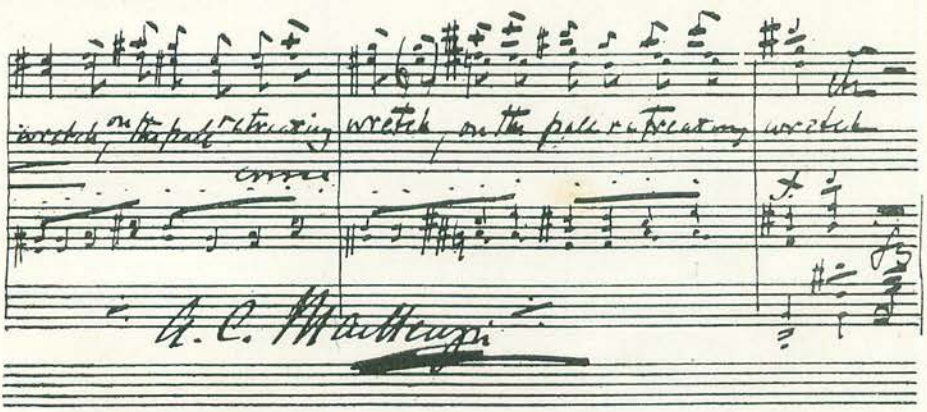
"He took the score to Pesth, but the people there were more conservative than he had calculated for, and were not too anxious then to produce the work of a foreigner. The work was not given there, and Liszt was so annoyed that he did not go near the town again for three years."

"But how did this affect his coming to England?"

"I was going to tell you that. Liszt was evidently still anxious to do anything he could for me. The managers of Novello's choir contemplated giving a performance of his 'Saint Elizabeth,' and the idea occurred to us that it would be a splendid opportunity to invite him to come here again. I had but little hope that he would come however, he had refused so many other invitations. Still, we wrote and asked him, and, as you know, he came. I am always very glad he had the enjoyment of that visit here (for it *was* an enjoyment to him); it was like a final blaze of fireworks for him. He had been out of public life for some little time, and it was refreshing to him to a certain extent, to taste it once again."

"But was not the excitement rather much for him at his age?"

"No, I don't think it would have been too much for him had he been content to do less. But there was no keeping him back. He wanted to do twice as much as his strength would have allowed. And then you must recollect that he had already lived through what would have made three lives for ordinary men. Some people said that the visit to England was the cause of his death; but he was not at all well when he came, and in the ordinary course of events could not have lived very much longer. When I think of the vast amount of vital nervous energy that man was spending broadcast all his life, the marvel is to me how he ever lived to the age he did. I remember how he would be up before six in the morning when he was going to Rome. We would go with him to the station in the cold mornings and see him off by the seven o'clock train. And he would travel second-class—never first. He grudged spending money on himself; but was always giving it away to other



FACSIMILE OF MS. BY SIR A. C. MACKENZIE.

people Even now I can recall his cigars; they were wretchedly bad. He would have considered it waste to spend his money on expensive ones. That was the great difference between Wagner and Liszt. Wagner lacked that unselfish disregard for personal wants. Far from travelling second-class, when the clouds on Wagner's horizon cleared sufficiently to enable him to do it, he would engage a special saloon carriage to take him on his railway journeys."

Sir Alexander Mackenzie was devoted to Liszt, and the virtuoso entertained a great regard for the Scotch musician. The last music he ever wrote was a few bars of a transcription he had contemplated of Mackenzie's "Troubadour." The MS. was found after his death just where he had left it. The remembrance of this prompted me to ask—

From a photo by] [*W. H. Bunnett.*

PROFESSOR WALTER MACFARREN GIVING A LESSON AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF MUSIC.

"What is your opinion of Liszt as a composer?"

"I think he seldom has a fair chance here. Directly his name is mentioned critics with one accord invariably raise a howl against him. He has written some inferior stuff, I admit; but then he has also written some beautiful music, so beautiful that it ought to be allowed to atone for the other."

"How about Wagner?"

"He was wonderfully great, but he is not everything. I think he was the finest stage-manager that ever lived; but his music is essentially the music of the theatre, and should be judged from that standpoint. When he spoke of founding a new religion with 'Parsifal,' I think he went somewhat beyond the line of common sense. It is likewise a mistake, in my humble judgment, to attempt to compare two such men as Wagner and the mighty Beethoven, and to decide which is the greater. Their lives, their environments, and their personalities were so entirely dissimilar. We do not know what Beethoven might have done had he lived in the feverish age of Wagner and spent his life in the atmosphere of the stage. For myself, the longer I live the more and more I am enamoured of Mozart. When I was younger I went through an acute Schumann period, but Schumann had gradually given way to Mozart. In fact for *recreation* give me Mozart and Auber."

"Turning to purely personal matters, may I ask what has recently led you in the direction of comic opera?"

"Several things. In the first place I consider a composer should be an all-round worker, able to deal with any subject. But in addition to this, if you desire me to be strictly truthful, composers are but human after all, and they require the wherewithal to live."

"Then is comic opera a profitable form of composition?"

"If it be successful, yes. At present matters stand like this: One writes folios and folios of, we will say, orchestral music, which may perhaps be performed a few times. But as to its even paying for the paper it is written upon——! Nevertheless we continue as we began. For instance, I spent last winter's leisure in writing a Scottish concerto for Paderewski. Again, the composer may write oratorios, which the various festival committees may from time to time be kind enough to include in their programmes. In many cases he pays his own expenses, goes to the festival, wherever it may be held, spends several days over the rehearsals and the performance—all for the cause of art, and for the personal gratification it may be to himself. That it is a gratification I do not deny. No man is

so utterly disinterested in himself, I presume, not to be glad to know that his works are getting a hearing; only sometimes he wishes there were 'performing rights,' or some other financial advantage, to be discerned in their near vicinity.

"Now a successful opera has a bigger field to run in. It is not confined to England, as are most oratorios, but may go the round of the theatres abroad. There is just a chance that it may make money, you see; whereas if it does not it is only in the same predicament as the other forms of classical composition. Taken all round, a composer has but small chance of making money nowadays, and therefore, unless a man has independent means, he has to do something else in addition to his composition."

"Do you tell your students all this?"

"Oh, no. On the contrary, I try to smooth matters for them, where I can. But so many of them want to begin at the wrong end. They start upon an orchestral composition, such as 'Satan's Apostrophe to the Sun,' or some equally involved theme, and then are surprised if the result is not entirely satisfactory! Besides, those at the Royal Academy of Music who devote themselves entirely to composition are necessarily in a minority. Our chief aim is to make good all-round musicians of our students. Composers must 'dree their own weird'!"

"Have you any special theories in regard to the training necessary for musical students?"

"I think they should certainly have the most thorough, all-round education possible, and that not only in music, but in all other things beside. For instance, a musician cannot have too much of good literature. I think that it is a mistake to lay down a hard and fast rule as to the methods of teaching the professors should adopt. If the men are capable of teaching, and worthy of being on the staff of such an institution as ours, then it is an insult to suppose that they are not the best judges as to the individual requirements of the various students. One ought to have sufficient confidence in them to allow them a free hand. In Paris, for instance, all the professors have to teach according to a fixed plan, which must be irksome, I should think.

"There is another point I would like to mention. While I am naturally most anxious to favour the adoption of anything tending to improve the training and future position of our students, I must confess that I think there is a tendency to overdo the public appearances of musical students. At the Royal Academy we give every year seven public performances, namely, three chamber concerts, three orchestral concerts, and an organ recital at Queen's Hall. In addition, we usually give two concerts at the Imperial Institute during the winter season. I fancy you will agree with me that these are ample for the good of the students. If to these were to be added obligatory and costly public operatic performances, I think it would not be to their advantage, since the preparation of an opera for *public* performance involves a vast amount of labour, which diverts the attention of those who participate in it from their ordinary studies, and in some cases encroaches upon the time of the students for an entire session. In no other country is so much attention given to the public appearance of students as such; yet at the same time I am sure that in no other country are the performances of students of such excellence as they are in England. Still, we do not neglect the very important branch of musical study, operatic performance, and as an aid to it we have added still further classes to the school's curriculum. We have stage dancing, fencing, and physical drill, and we have quite lately established a dramatic class, under the direction of Mr. William Farren, the actor."

Here our conversation was brought to a close by a call to the orchestral practice, which is the one and only department of the school's work in which Sir Alexander himself actually teaches. During the rehearsal one had ample opportunity to endorse the remarks the Principal had so recently made; and it would be difficult to find students' performances of a higher degree of excellence.