

MUSIC

A PASSIONTIDE CANTATA.

TWO thousand people or more packed St. James' Cathedral, Toronto, to hear Dr. Albert Ham's new Passiontide Cantata, the Passions of Solitude, Wednesday evening of last week. I remember being at St. James once before in such a crowd, in 1890, when Frederick Archer opened the then rebuilt organ. But that was only an organ recital. This was a new choral and solo cantata given by the choir of 60 men and boys with Dr. Ham, the composer, at the organ. The work lasted an hour and 40 minutes. Had the five incidental hymns been deleted it would have run about 10 minutes past the hour.

Dr. Ham never had a more attentive audience, even at the National Chorus, of which he is conductor. His devotion to church atmosphere is well known. Much of it came out in this cantata, the words of which were composed by Canon Welch, former rector of St. James, now Vicar of Wakefield. The work is in the same category as Stainer's Crucifixion, Dubois' and Mercodante's Seven Last Words and Gounod's Redemption. When so much had already so eloquently been said on this theme it required courage in Dr. Ham to produce anything new. To every man his message. Dr. Ham is a prolific composer. His cantata constitutes no exception. As sung by choir and two soloists it seemed to proceed with an almost persuasive facility; fluency everywhere. No climaxes—but one on the Praetorium. Mainly sad, slow, introspective music, with few chorales, too many recitatives, very few themes and twice too many interpolated hymns—that broke up the sequence of the musical narrative. The work seemed to be a series of modulations rather than motifs. Its prevalent colouring was sombre of course, its tempi, lento in the main, its general characteristic dolorosa. There was but one choral climax—in the Praetorium; and that seemed so different in colour, character and movement from the rest of the piece that it felt almost like an interpretation. There was no end of sadly missing comment, and no beginning of dramatic narrative.

The choral passages all told amounted to less than 30 minutes. Half the rest of the time was taken up with recitatives and a certain resemblance to arias. Evidently the composer intended to adopt the rather modern method of letting the soloists talk musically instead of singing definite, open melodies. It rather resembled a pair of monologues with a sort of Greek choral comment at intervals. Within this deliberate medium there was no lack of variety. The baritone solo work of Mr. Barney Oldfield contributed a good deal of vocal, but not temperamental vitality to the work. Oldfield has a superb bass-baritone voice and would have done much better with more chance to let it out on a big aria somewhere. The tenor, who seemed rather constricted in utterance, did not rise to the level of the work allotted to him by the composer. The boys' voices seemed unaccountably cribbed up. There was seldom or never a resounding climax and clarion attack such as makes boys' voices in a cathedral so peculiarly effective. I think women would have done the work better.

Dr. Ham handled the organ with his customary skill and judgment. He is an old hand at conducting from the organ bench and the audience had the full benefit of a well-known composer getting all there could be got under

the conditions from a work necessarily so monotonous in character. As a contribution to the musical literature of a parish this Passiontide Cantata is a valuable piece of work.

AMERICA AND GERMAN MUSIC.

WILL going to war drive Wagner out of the Metropolitan Opera? Scarcely. When Ambassador Gerard rose in a box at the Metropolitan and called for three cheers for the Stars and Stripes, and when by order of Gatti-Casazza the orchestra played the Star Spangled Banner, there was no Fritz in the orchestra who dared keep his seat. The country that can make Fritz play an anti-German tune—at least for the time being it was anti-German because America does not purpose going to war with any other nation but Germany—can afford to keep right along using up German music. This is not a war on dead musicians, but on living anarchists. The time for fighting Germany by boycotting German music is clean gone by. If anybody cares to put Strauss on the retired list well and good. Modern Germany has very little to hope from her music-makers. The mental state of modern Germany, even before the war, was not making much progress along sound musical lines. Violence was killing the music of Germany. Strauss is an apostle of violence. Are there any big modern Germans in music who are trying to develop anything else but violence? None of whom public opinion knows much or anything. Wagner must live. His orchestral music alone would entitle him to that. Much of Strauss will live. The best that Germany has ever done in music will continue to enrich the world's art. But it will be a long while before Germany can contribute anything to modern music worth the world's while to listen to.

We may expect, rather, more from some of the other countries. But for some time to come music creation will not be as big an item on the world's programme as it used to be. We shall all take more time to understand the big works already written by any nation. And in so doing we shall learn to quit going crazy over a new cult in music just because it happens to smash a lot of agreeable old-time images and make a tremendous noise.

ADIEU TO THE KNEISELS.

AMONG the recent retirements from active service must now be numbered the Kneisel Quartette, who have decided to disband because the leader wishes to have more time for teaching. This corps of players are well known here. Years ago they used to be regular comers to Association Hall, Toronto. They did much to stimulate a love of "ensemble" music in this country at a time when it was sadly in arrears. In those days Montreal was much further advanced than Toronto in chamber music. The Dubois Quartette, I believe, are the oldest ensemble group in Canada, perhaps as old as the Kneisels, who date back twenty-five years. Toronto about twenty years ago began more or less seriously with the Klingensfeldt Trio. F. Herr Klingensfeldt afterwards went to Brooklyn. I don't know whether Herr Ruth and Harry Field were the other members of this trio, or whether Signor Dinelli (not Italian, however, but English), was the pianist. Ruth and Dinelli and Ruth and Field were habitual cronies with cello and piano. Dinelli went to Pittsburg; Field to Germany; Ruth—I don't know where. Their departure, along with Klingensfeldt's, put a temporary stop to chamber music in English-speaking Canada. About fifteen years ago it had a sporadic revival, but for a long while the

Kneisels with their somewhat coldly chaste perfection of tone poetry and the Yuncq Quartette from Detroit were the chief sources of this kind of music among Anglo-Canadians.

The Kneisels have not been here for a decade. For a couple of seasons they were replaced as visitors by the Flenzaley Quartette, who introduced us to a somewhat new blend of temperamental technique. But we already had our pioneer chamber music corps in quartette form in the personnel of the Toronto String Quartette. The members of this corps were: Frank Blachford, Roland Roberts, Frank Converse Smith and Dr. Fred, Nicolai (cello). The last mentioned went back to Belgium when war broke out. After doing considerable service he has since been invalided back to Canada. His place at the cello was taken by Leo Smith, a virtuoso ensemble player, now working with the Academy Quartette, during an off season with the pioneer body. About six years ago we got the Hambourg Trio—Jan at the violin, Paul Hahn, cello, and Richard Tattersall, piano. That was superseded at the arrival of Boris Hambourg by the Hambourg Concert Society, who gave several seasons of more or less historical programmes of high order and are still giving each year a limited number of programmes with Mr. Georges Vigneti as first violin, Broadus Farmer as second, and varying pianists.

Four seasons ago a third local quartette was organized as the Academy Players by Luigi Von Kunits with Arthur Ely as second, Alfred Bruce, viola, and George Bruce, cello. Leo Smith has since replaced George Bruce, who went to the front. The Academy Quartette struck out along quite as individual lines as the T.S.Q. and the Hambourgs.

Of course chamber music in any community is largely an affair of the heart. Nobody ever made any money out of this kind of music. Probably nobody ever will. The passing of the Kneisels is one more proof that good music of this perfectly intimate sort must be as Coleridge said of poetry—like virtue—its own exceeding great reward.

THE STAR SPANGLED BANNER.

WE remind ourselves that The Star Spangled Banner is now one of the tunes of a world war. The most unsingable national air in the world is also a non-military marching tune because no battalion ever could march to it, for the same reason that no regiment ever could march to God Save the King. The S.S.B. is not written in march time. Like our own Imperial anthem, it is in 3-4 measure—or 6-8, really matters not, since you can't keep step to any multiple of 3. So we shall expect the army of Uncle Sam to do its tramping to the tune of Marching Thro' Georgia, Dixie, and Red, White and Blue. Apart from its non-marching character the tune of the S.S.B. that brings Americans up standing anywhere under the sun is the most ungraciously refractory piece of tune-writing ever inflicted on a tolerant public. Its range is most exacting—from the B flat below middle C, to F, an octave and a half above. The only other rival to it in range is Die Wacht Am Rhein, which has exactly the same reach. God Save the King is one tone less than an octave. La Marseillaise is one tone more than the octave. The Russian is exactly the octave, from tune to tonic. O Canada

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