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Watson's Art Journal.

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INTELLECTUAL ADVANCEMENT OF MUSIC IN AMERICA.—GEORGE F. BRISTOW'S NEW ORATORIO.

The progress of a country must be judged not alone by the amount of political and personal freedom it insures to its people and its increased material wealth, but, also, by its intellectual development in the higher walks of art. In the mechanical arts, in the means of freeing the hands and multiplying the produce of their labor, America has taken the lead of all other nations.

In Literature, Painting and Sculpture she has made herself everywhere felt, and has given to the Old World as results of the lessons of the past, the fruits of her youthful vigor in characteristic productions, which bear the true American type. In these the advance is manifest, positive and acknowledged.

In Music, the eldest sister of the Arts, we may be said until recently only to have arrived at the practical point, for with but few exceptions we are wholly dependent upon foreign productions for the uses of our opera houses, our concert halls and our drawing-rooms. They form our tastes at our public amusements. They permeate our home-circles, and even the praises of God are sung in our churches to foreign tunes,—although of psalm tunes we manufacture, from foreign materials, thousands per year, the so-called new, not being good, and the good not being new.

So long as we were a people musically non-creative, a state of things such as we have described was inevitable; but we can now assert a claim to be ranked with other nations, as creators in that beautiful science, which is, of all the arts, the most general in its uses, and the most humanizing in its influences.

The progress to this point has been so gradual, that we can almost count its steps. In sacred music, the first pronounced attempt was a cantata, called "Eleutheria," by Geo. W. Curtis, which possessed merit, but not of a character sufficiently striking to render it standard.

Many years elapsed between the production of this work and the next, which appeared in the Symphonic form, and was from the pen of George F. Bristow.

Two Symphonies written by that gentleman were performed by our Philharmonic Society, with much eclat. Their merit was of a positive character; they were full of beauties, and displayed learning and a command of the orchestra, which compelled respect and admiration; but they were shelved for works far less deserving in a true musical sense.

In the Opera, the first notable production was "Leonora," by the late William H. Fry, a Grand Opera written in the Italian school, containing much that was admirable, and affording promise of higher excellence,—a promise which was fulfilled by a later work from the same pen. But for the bitter party opposition of the critical element, "Leonora"

would have certainly held possession of the stage, and we predict that before many years its revival will reverse the judgment of partisan opinion, and posthumous justice will be done to one, whose influence on the progress of the music of his period, has not been fairly estimated.

The second operatic effort was truly American, both in subject and treatment. It was called "Rip Van Winkle," the libretto of which was written by J. H. Wainwright, the music by George F. Bristow, both Americans, and may be justly claimed as the first American opera. It was produced at Niblo's by the Pyne troupe, and had a successful run of nearly thirty nights, a success which would have warranted its frequent repetition; but as opera, in the native tongue, has no permanent resting-place in our great city, the auspicious beginning, which should have resulted in giving us a native repertoire of operas, ended then and there. An attempt was recently made to revive it in an Italian dress, but the promise to produce it was not fulfilled, and it will have to bide the time, when some bold patriot shall dare to risk many shekels on an American work, in the midst of our Italian-Germanized society.

The next important work by an American composer, was the "Praise to God," an oratorio by George F. Bristow, who, by this composition, completed the circle of the great styles—the oratorio, the opera and the Symphony, proving in all his mastery of the schools.

"Praise to God" was a masterly work; serious and solid, somewhat too scholastic, perhaps, but marked by bold and brilliant treatment, chorally and instrumentally. It was performed twice and met with unqualified success, but the lukewarm taste of our public for such compositions offered no encouragement to risk the expense of repeating it.

Meanwhile, the musical under-current of song writing was rapidly developing, hand in hand with salon pieces for the piano-forte, and to-day we can point to writers in these minor but important branches of the art, whose works will bear comparison with the best in their styles.

But the most important musical work yet produced by an American is Mr. George F. Bristow's new oratorio "Daniel," which was recently performed by the Mendelssohn Union. We recognize the oratorio as the highest species of musical inspiration; for it comprises in its designs all the other great forms, the symphony, the recitative, the scena, and the concerted element. Its expression is of prayer and admiration; of warning, of faith, of hope and consolation. It is the outward expression of inward belief; it is, in its perfect form, the noblest and the most spontaneous tribute which genius can offer at the shrine of the Creator. It is a work which cannot be taken up idly; to exclude the secular cadence, the passionate expression of mere human love, and still to invest the work with the graces of melody, without which music is worthless, requires the strictest isolation from worldly associations—requires that the soul should be permeated by a deep sense of Divine love and mercy, and be sustained by an humble and earnest belief. Sacred inspiration can be derived from no other source: mere musical instinct could not produce a work of that character which would last for a day. The uncompromising, earnest faith of Handel gave us the "Messiah" and the Israelites in

Egypt; the pure, tender faith of Haydn, the Creation!

But to these conditions must be added the strictest rules which hedge round such compositions: the stern cadence; the Doric simplicity of design; the fugue form, which, in its mathematical exactness and symmetrical perfection, seems a tonal type of the unerring systems of the creator—all these trammel the free flow of thought, and must be subjected and moulded by an inspiration which rises superior to them all, and has its origin in the first instinct of a created being, to lean upon and to worship the infinite, which he knows not, but which speaks to him through every inner sense and through every outward and visible thing.

Such are the conditions necessary to produce so great a work, in all the essential points, as the Oratorio of Daniel, by Mr. George F. Bristow.

It is our intention in this article, simply, to indicate the progress of the musical art in this country, up to the point of the development of the high creative Faculty, by which alone we can assert our intellectual equality, with the intelligence of the old World. The work shall receive the attention which its importance deserves, after its second performance, which takes place on the 30th of January. This much we will say: comparing the Oratorio of Daniel with his previous works, secular and sacred, we find in it a greater maturity of thought and style; a greater freedom in handling his material; a broader manner and a more impassioned expression; a finer and yet bolder sense of coloring, vocally and instrumentally, and, above all, a deep felt earnestness, which gives vital force to every phrase of the composition, and which is the inspiration he sought for, and found it at the only source from which it flows.

ENGLISH OPERA—ACADEMY OF MUSIC.

The production for the first time in this country of the latest operatic work of Wm. Vincent Wallace, attracted a large audience on Monday evening last, at the Academy of Music. We knew the music of "The Desert Flower" well, and while recognizing its many beauties, we knew that it was the weakest of the operatic works of its great composer. The libretto, having the advantage of being written by two people, is more stupid than the work of one man could have been. There is not a respectable character in the plot. The white woman is a nonentity; the Indian woman is a fierce virago, and is therefore appropriately called "The Desert Flower," meaning a tiger-lily, we presume; the hero is a false knave; the comic man, a buffoon; and the villain is a contemptible rascal. To treat such characters musically must have taxed the endurance of the composer, as from them hardly a single inspiration could have been drawn. Wallace did with it all that could be done, redeeming it partially by some lovely morceaux, and by some masterly dramatic writing. All the ballads possess points of beauty, but the leading subjects, though smooth and flowing, are wanting in freshness and individuality. They are, however, worked up with rare artistic skill, which rounds them off most effectively. They bear the stamp of an accomplished musician, but they are not the offspring of his genius. They are, however, such as the publishers like, for they are calculated to