

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

SOME ASPECTS OF THE BRITISH RECEPTION OF GERMAN MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

by JOHN S. ANDREWS

DR. ANDREWS' interest in the history of hymnology is already familiar to our readers. Here he extends his study from words to music. Dr. Andrews, who is on the staff of the University Library at Lancaster, has been seconded for two years to serve as British Council Librarian at Cologne, Germany.

A RECENT linguistic and theological study of German hymns in current English hymnals¹ necessitated some consideration of the musical background, since the popularity of any hymn depends largely on the tune to which it is set. The following general and inevitably incomplete notes on the Victorian era may be of some interest to readers.²

Although other European countries had produced great musicians, no other country had been able to establish her musical reputation as firmly as Germany. Especially popular in England were the romantic compositions of Wagner, Richard Strauss, Mendelssohn, Schubert and Schumann. Later the more intellectual sections of the English public accepted the music of Brahms and Hugo Wolf.

German *Lieder* found a permanent place in English musical programmes. This peculiarly German *genre* had no counterpart in our lyrical world, a fact that possibly explained its popularity here; the sentimental style of singing appealed to us.³

The great popularity in Germany of Passion music and Church cantatas to some extent satisfied the need that in England was met by oratorios. Oratorios, especially those by Handel, won a

¹ J. S. Andrews, "A Study of German Hymns in Current English Hymnals" (2 vols., Leeds, 1966). Unpublished Ph.D. thesis.

² Biographical information has been taken usually from P. A. Scholes, *Oxford Companion to Music*, 9th ed. (London, 1955), the Historical Ed. of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (London, 1909), or J. Julian, *Dictionary of Hymnology*, rev. ed. (London, 1907). See also such multi-volumed encyclopedias as *Grove's Dictionary*, *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, and *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*.

³ The generalizations in this and the preceding paragraph are taken from H. Levy, *England and Germany: Affinity and Contrast* (Leigh-on-Sea, 1949), pp. 17-18.

popularity here more triumphant than in any other country. By the end of the eighteenth century the rage had spread from London to every market town in the land. In the last century the annual and triennial choral festivals (notably in Birmingham) and the choral societies (at Christmas virtually every Nonconformist chapel performed the *Messiah*) increased the hold of oratorio on the British people. It was at the Birmingham Festival that Mendelssohn produced his *Elijah* the year before he died. Since the early twentieth century few oratorios have been written, and the form appears to be awaiting a religious revival; for "the new order of thought initiated by Darwin and Huxley has probably, more than any other single cause, been the death of oratorio in Britain".⁴

It was in the Victorian era that the notion of a festive Christmas took hold of us. Dickens's *Christmas Carol* (1843) helped to set the ethos. The Christmas tree was introduced by some German families in Manchester, and afterwards by the Prince Consort at Windsor Castle in 1841. The Christmas tree was closely linked with Santa Claus. The first Christmas card was sent in 1846, although it was not until twenty years later that the sending of cards was popularized. This was the background for the publication of two major collections of carols: *Christmas Carols, New and Old*, by H. R. Bramley and John Stainer (1871), and *Carols for Use in Church*, by R. R. Chope (1875). These books found a ready market. Nevertheless probably the only German carols widely known here in the last century were Paul Gerhardt's *Fröhlich soll mein Herze springen* (in Catherine Winkworth's translation, *All my heart this night rejoices*) and Luther's *Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her* (again in a translation by Winkworth, *From heaven above to earth I come*). *Away in a manger*, often erroneously attributed to Luther, was of anonymous American origin. Josef Mohr's *Stille Nacht*, set to the tune by Franz Gruber, epitomized the German Christmas, cosy and child-centred, which was first becoming part of the English scene during the Victorian period; but the carol did not become popular here until the present century.⁵ It must be remembered that it was only recently that English hymnals included carols, as opposed to Christmas hymns, and

⁴ Scholes, s.v. "Oratorio" (sects. 3, 5, 7) and "Mendelssohn". See also E. R. Routley, *The English Carol* (London, 1958), pp. 170-1. This work is hereinafter cited as "Routley". Of Routley's many publications two in particular discuss German chorales: *The Church and Music* (London, 1950) and *The Music of Christian Hymnody* (London, 1957).

⁵ Routley, pp. 173-5, 181, 195-203, 220, and L. D. Ettlinger and R. G. Holloway, *Compliments of the Season* (London, 1947), p. 7.

Anglican compilers in particular have always stood aloof from them.⁶

The Victorian public was very ready to make its own music, and a piano or a harmonium soon gained recognition as a piece of furniture essential to the respectability of the home. This recognition lasted until first the gramophone, then radio and television sets entered as competitors. To meet the demand for music to play in the home there was a boom in the printing of scores. The Industrial Revolution had made it possible to print and multiply copies at an unprecedented rate. The foundation of the House of Novello in 1811 played an important part.⁷

The public was not, however, content with its own amateur attempts at music-making. A new era in London concert-giving began with the Crystal Palace concerts held from 1855 to 1901, with the German military bandsman, August Manns, as conductor throughout. Altogether "he directed quite 20,000 programmes, and more than any other single individual he taught the British public to love the orchestral classics and not to be timid in making acquaintance with the orchestral novelties".⁸ In Manchester the Hallé orchestra was founded in 1857 by the pianist and conductor Karl Halle (afterwards Sir Charles Hallé), a German émigré from the 1848 Revolution. He, like Manns, did much to raise the popular standard of musical taste by familiarizing the public with the classics.⁹

The musical affinity between the two countries went beyond an appreciation of *Lieder*, oratorios, and carols or the performances of the Crystal Palace and Hallé orchestras. German and English musicians and lovers of music exchanged frequent visits.¹⁰

Mendelssohn often came to Britain. His *Hebrides* overture and his *Scottish Symphony* were based on impressions gathered in this country. He came here first in 1829 and was warmly welcomed by the Philharmonic Society. He made his first appearance at one of their concerts, when he conducted his *Symphony in C Minor*. While young he became a friend of Queen Victoria and of the Prince Consort. The royal household still conversed in German and adored German music. Mendelssohn "soon became the *enfant gâté* of English society", according to Levy, who referred to Mendels-

⁶ For a brief analysis of recent hymnals in this respect see Routley, pp. 141-2.

⁷ See Scholes, s.v. "Pianoforte" (sects. 19, 22), "Reed-Organ Family" (sects. 6-7) and Routley, pp. 169-70.

⁸ Scholes, s.v. "Concert" (sect. 7).

⁹ See M. Kennedy, *The Hallé Tradition* (Manchester, 1960).

¹⁰ The next three paragraphs are based mainly on Levy, pp. 18-20.

sohn's close friendship with the Horsley family of Kensington.¹¹ Such friendship characterized the relationship of many German musicians with the English public, such as Hans Richter and Joseph Joachim. Richter had been a conductor in theatres at Munich, Budapest and Vienna before in 1879 he began his orchestral concerts in London. For some years he conducted the Hallé orchestra. Joachim was the foremost violinist of his time and a great teacher. Revered by concert-goers in this country he received honorary degrees from both Oxford and Cambridge.

In the 1880's and 1890's a select musical society met in London, composed mainly of German families or their descendants. Its members included Lady Hallé, the second wife of Sir Charles and herself a well-known violinist; Sir Edgar Speyer, a lover of music whose wife also was a violinist; Edward Speyer and his wife;¹² members of the Joachim family; Sir Felix Semon, the laryngologist who was physician to Edward VII and a keen amateur musician; and Sir George Henschel, the well-known singer, conductor and composer.¹³

Gatherings like this were much more common in Germany, which therefore became a leading resort for British students of music. These were attracted by the atmosphere surrounding musical circles in Leipzig, Berlin, Munich and Frankfurt. In such places one could listen to fine informal performances given by either professionals or amateurs. Few British musicians did not visit Germany at some time. Prominent among the visitors were: Dame Ethyl Smyth, the composer;¹⁴ Sir Donald Tovey, who became Professor of Music at Edinburgh; Leonard Borwick and Fanny Davies, the pianists; Sir Edward Elgar, whose choral works were popularized by Richard Strauss after they had been neglected in England; Frederick Delius, born at Bradford, though of German extraction; Ralph Vaughan Williams, who studied in Berlin with the composer, Max Bruch; Roger Quilter, the song-writer, who studied in Germany on leaving Eton; and Cyril Scott, the pianist and composer, who studied in Frankfurt-am-Main.

Composers of church music and hymn-tunes who visited Germany or other German-speaking countries included the founder

¹¹ F. A. Horsley, *Mendelssohn and His Friends in Kensington* (London, 1934), quoted by Levy, p. 19.

¹² See Edward Speyer, *My Life and Friends* (London, 1937).

¹³ See his *Musings & Memories of a Musician* (London, 1918).

¹⁴ She related her experiences in many German musical circles between 1877 and 1885 in her memoirs, *Impressions that Remained* (2 vols., London, 1919) and *Streaks of Life* (London, 1921).

of the music publishers, Vincent Novello, who composed both Roman Catholic masses and Anglican church music. He and his wife kept diaries of their visit in 1829 to Mozart's widow and sister in Salzburg.¹⁵ Both Sir William Sterndale Bennett, the editor of *The Chorale Book for England* (1863), for which Catherine Winkworth supplied the translations of the German words, and his successor in the Cambridge Chair of Music, Sir Charles Stanford, went to Germany as students. Mendelssohn invited Sterndale Bennett, aged only seventeen, to visit Germany "not as [his] pupil but as [his] friend". Accepting the invitation he was made much of by the Mendelssohn-Schumann circle.¹⁶ Frances Ridley Havergal, the daughter of William Henry Havergal, a hymn-writer and composer of hymn-tunes, inherited both of her father's interests. Much of her youth was spent in Germany, where she became acquainted with Ferdinand Hiller, the pianist, conductor and musicologist. Throughout her life she renewed her German contacts. Her much-used hymn, *I gave My life for thee*, was inspired by a portrait of Christ in the study of a German divine.¹⁷ Sir Arthur Sullivan had studied at the Leipzig Conservatory. He composed anthems, services, and hymn-tunes (e.g. "St. Gertrude" for *Onward, Christian soldiers*), and edited the 1874 music edition of the S.P.C.K.'s collection, *Church Hymns*. Less well-known British composers of hymn-tunes who visited Germany, mostly as students, included Charles Ainslie Barry; Gerard Francis Cobb; F. Everard W. Hulton; Bertram Luard-Selby; Sir Herbert Oakeley; and Robert Lucas Pearsall.¹⁸

England was much readier to borrow hymns and hymn-tunes from Germany than vice versa.¹⁹ According to Routley, up to the mid-nineteenth century both countries were self-supporting in church music. The sole difference was that while England was only beginning to learn the techniques of modern religious folk-song,

¹⁵ Novello's great-great-grandaughter, Nerina Medici di Marignano Gigliucci, has transcribed the diaries (*A Mozart Pilgrimage*, ed. by R. Hughes, London, 1955) and presented the originals to the Brotherton Library of the University of Leeds.

¹⁶ Scholes, s.v. "Bennett".

¹⁷ A recast of this hymn, *Thy life was given for me*, is sometimes found. Her German experiences are related in her *Memorials*, by her sister, M. V. G. Havergal (London, 1880).

¹⁸ This list, based chiefly on the entries in the Historical Ed. of *Ancient and Modern*, makes no pretence at completeness; many other composers might be added whose sojourn in Germany finds no mention in the brief biographies in that work.

¹⁹ See Andrews, vol. 1, pp. 13-16.

Germany had from the Reformation onwards "a tradition of first-rate religious poetry and musicianship . . . which had formed a solid tradition of good hymnody before the age of English hymnody began". By 1850 both the Romantic Movement in literature and the Oxford Movement in theology had influenced many Englishmen to look abroad for material "to enrich the depleted and corrupted store". Hymnologists found the material in the Genevan Psalters and the Lutheran chorale-books. The early editions of *Ancient and Modern* were packed with the results of their researches.²⁰

Whether the English store was so "depleted and corrupted" might be doubted. Whatever the quality of English tunes there was certainly no lack of quantity: Gauntlett believed that he had composed as many as ten thousand. On the other hand, since the early eighteenth century German Protestantism had been content to regard its hymn-tune repertory as complete. Since the time of Bach few had been composed; in Germany every hymn had its traditional tune (though sometimes several shared the same tune) and nobody disjoined the two. This at all events was the view of Percy Scholes, who concluded that we should now follow Germany's example and, except in rare cases, stop "the manufacture" of hymn tunes.²¹

According to Levy, there was in Germany a change in the court patronage of music towards the close of the century.²² The Empress Victoria, a daughter of Queen Victoria and wife of Friedrich III, remained loyal to the old traditions of German music that she had found in her adopted Fatherland. On the other hand, Wilhelm II was cavalier in his treatment of musicians. How far such treatment led to a deterioration in Anglo-German musical relations would seem to be doubtful.

Be that as it may, the faith of many Englishmen around the turn of the century in the superiority of German music was epitomized by A. J. Balfour in an address to a gathering in 1904. The occasion was the Diamond Jubilee of the first appearance in England of the violinist, Joseph Joachim. Edward Speyer reported the Prime Minister as saying that "if the music of all other nations were destroyed, we should be the poorer by many great masterpieces, but we might get on. If the music of Germany were destroyed we could not get on".²³

University of Lancaster

²⁰ Routley, pp. 190-1.

²¹ Scholes, s.v. "Hymns and Hymn Tunes" (sect. 16) and "Chorale".

²² Levy, p. 21.

²³ Speyer, p. 190.