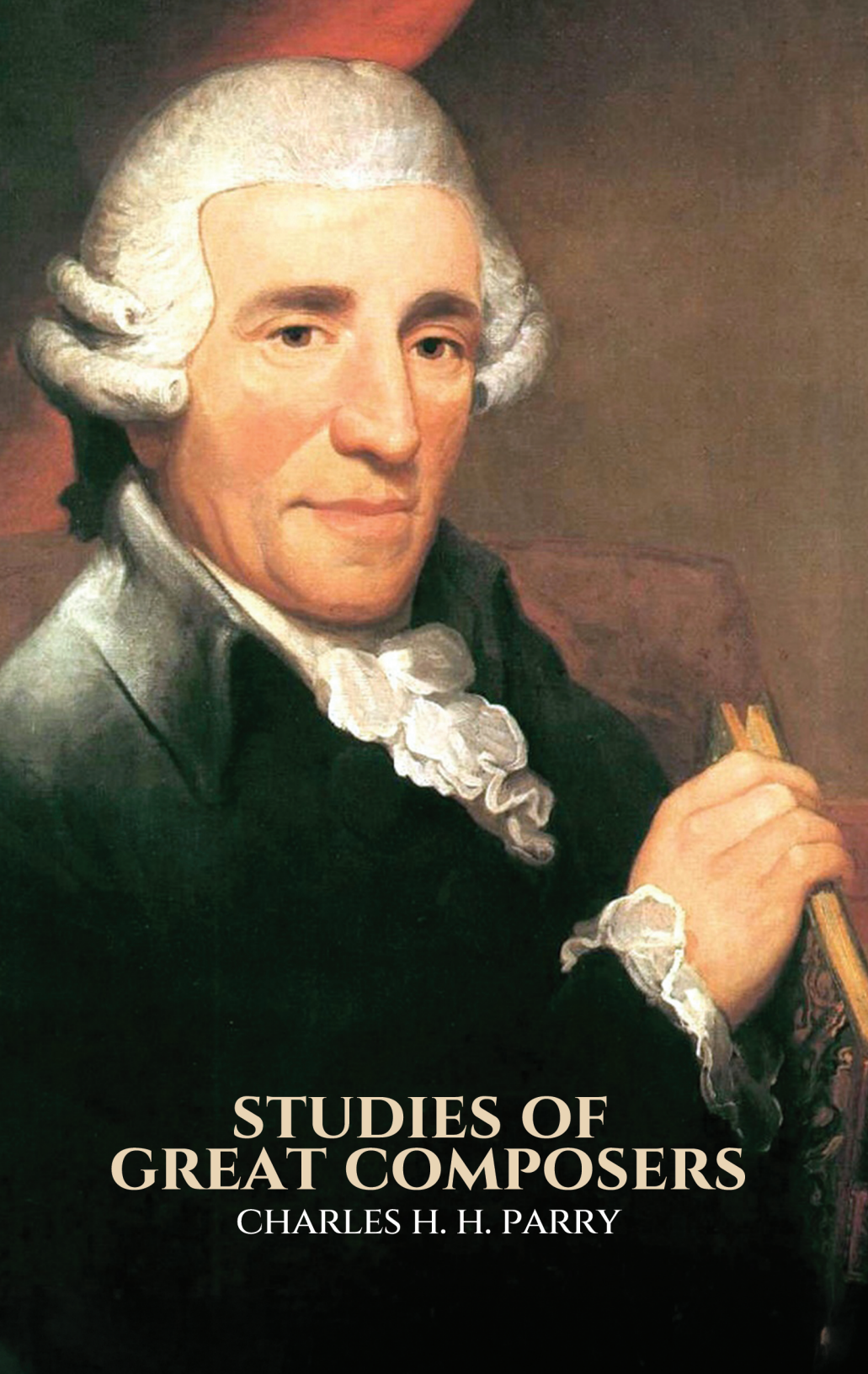

STUDIES OF GREAT COMPOSERS

CHARLES H. H. PARRY

This edition published 2024
by Living Book Press

ISBN: 978-1-76153-841-4 (hardcover)
978-1-76153-802-5 (softcover)

First published in 1887.

A catalogue record for this
book is available from the
National Library of Australia

Studies of Great Composers

by

Charles H. H. Parry

PALESTRINA.

Contents

1.	PALESTRINA	1
2.	HANDEL.	17
3.	JOHN SEBASTIAN BACH.	47
4.	HAYDN.	71
5.	MOZART.	92
6.	BEETHOVEN.	121
7.	CARL MARIA VON WEBER	152
8.	FRANZ SCHUBERT.	174
9.	MENDELSSOHN.	199
10.	ROBERT SCHUMANN.	225
11.	RICHARD WAGNER.	251
	CONCLUSION.	279

PREFACE

THE following short studies were originally written for a periodical for young people. They, therefore, do not attempt to deal with the profounder and more abstruse questions which are of interest to advanced musicians and students, and professed masters of artistic philosophy.

Though the conditions of their first publication necessitated their being cast in a form which admitted of each article's being separately intelligible, they were not from the first intended to be absolutely distinct or independently complete but a connected and continuous series.

The object of the work as a whole was to help people of average general intelligence to get some idea of the positions which the most important composers occupy in the historical development of the art; by showing their relations to one another, and the social, personal, and historical conditions which made them individually the representatives of various branches and phases of musical art.

The biographical portions were intended mainly to show the circumstances which made them severally what they were, and the immediate external influences and traits of character which had so much to do with the style of their works and the lines of art which they pursued.

As the authorities which must obviously be used to get and check sufficient trustworthy details of the lives of the most famous composers are to be numbered by hundreds, it has not been thought necessary to cumber so slight a work with references; but the writer is glad to acknowledge his special indebtedness for biographical matter to the admirable and exhaustive articles in Sir George Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*; on Haydn, by C. F. Pohl; on Wagner, by Edward Dannreuther; and on Beethoven, Schubert, and Mendelssohn by the Editor.

I
PALESTRINA

PEOPLE often talk of music as the modern art, but it is not probable that they always realize clearly how very modern it is in the shape in which we know it. The sister arts, which comprise painting, sculpture, architecture, and decorative work of various kinds, can show masterpieces which still impress us as perfect and complete objects of beauty, though they were made or carried out more than two thousand years ago. But if we go back as much as two hundred years in music, we feel as if we were among things in a crude and incomplete condition, like barbarous examples of the sister arts of races and nations even before history began. It seems, indeed, as if all other arts began with the beginnings of civilized life, but music came only with its well-advanced development.

The ancients had some sort of music, but it certainly was of a very slight and unimpressive kind, not calculated to please us much or to move us at all. Such as it was, however, its system and some of its actual melodies lasted on through the dark ages between the collapse of the great states of ancient times, like those of Greece and Rome, and the days when modern states like Germany, France, and England were rising towards the condition they are in now. Something in the way of art of various kinds was just kept going in churches and in the monasteries where monks lived secluded and kept their intellects

alive with study and work and interchange of ideas. But music was in such a low state that as little as eight hundred years ago, people had not even the means of putting down a tune in which the notes were of unequal length; and they did not dream of such things as bars till quite four hundred years nearer to our time. About the time of our William the Conqueror, they were beginning to puzzle out elementary details and were trying to come to some sort of understanding as to how music might be put down on paper or parchment, and how sundry scales could be settled which would be fit to make music in. But they worked very slowly, and for a long time, they did not even get so far as to find out how to make two voices go together in parts, nor even how to sing the simplest second to a tune; and some modern speculators on these subjects think that when they did discover how to do it, it was quite by accident — as if somebody was singing one tune, and somebody else, for fun, sang another, and as they found the effect amusing, they tried a little more of it, till by slow steps they really found out how to make a couple of voices or so sing different parts in a tolerably agreeable manner. But when they began to consider part-singing or counterpoint — as they called it — seriously and to make rules to control composers, they became very particular and would only allow very simple chords indeed. In fact, they were puzzled to know what to do with discords and probably thought they were just ugly and nothing more, so, of course, they had not much to make effective music with. A composer nowadays uses more discords in one page than musicians in those days did in a week; and if he was not allowed to use them as freely as he pleased, he would certainly give up composition as hopeless. But though their music was so limited, the mediaevals contrived to make some fine effects with it, and the plain-song, which was the traditional music they sang in churches, had a dignified character about it which still impresses moderns as well worthy of the occasions and purposes for which it was reserved.

In that part of the world's history which we know as the middle ages, from about the days of the Norman Conquest onwards, Italy was the artistic center of the world. This was partly because it was in the best position for commerce and partly because the land itself was so very rich and productive; and the great cities like Rome and Milan and Florence, which had been established in the days of the ancient empire

and had lasted on in tolerable prosperity through troublous times, served as seats of learning and centers of activity. Here painting and poetry began to thrive very early, and here, too, music began, after a time, to be appreciated. But curiously enough, it had to be fetched from other countries; for it was not among the Italians but among the Netherlanders that it first made the most successful strides, and the most distinguished members of choirs and church establishments in Rome and Venice and elsewhere for a long time were Dutchmen or Belgians. The most successful of all of these was a composer called Josquin de Prez, who lived from about 1450 till 1521. He was, in his time, the great and favorite composer of Europe; and though his works, which are all for voices, seem to most people nowadays singularly unexciting and severe, there is no doubt that they were as much in request amongst musical people of the time as successful operas and oratorios are in the present day. He was even personally courted and made much of by princes, grandees, and dignitaries of the Church. For instance, there were Louis XII of France, the Emperor Maximilian, and great Italian dukes like Hercules of Ferrara, in communication with him at different times; and it is especially interesting to us to know that Henry VIII was acquainted with his music, and that unfortunate Anne Boleyn is somewhere recorded to have learnt to play arrangements of some of his works on the little keyed instruments which served in those times in the place of the pianoforte.

Josquin was really a great and remarkable genius and produced works which have real beauty in them; but all his compatriots had not the sagacity to aim so surely as he did at genuine artistic beauty. In fact, they got upon a wrong tack and began to mistake learning and ingenuity for art. They invented queer musical puzzles which had nothing to recommend them but their difficulty and spent all their lives working them out; and the consequence was that the pre-eminence in composition passed by degrees away from them; and then it was that it took root and flourished among the Italians, and with them, it arrived before long at a very high pitch in the peculiar style of the time — so much so, indeed, that some people still speak of the age just after Josquin as the golden age of music.

This was, indeed, a very noteworthy time in many ways. Things had got into a very lax condition among the very people who ought

to have set the best example to the rest of the world. There were, no doubt, good priests and monks to be found, but the influence of the bad ones preponderated. And not only those in the lower ranks of the clergy, but even the highest dignitaries, such as cardinals and popes, lived the most worldly and disreputable lives. When Luther came and the Reformation, that frightened them into a better frame of mind; but it did not mend matters all at once, for the corruption in the old Church was too general and deep-seated. But their evil ways came to a climax in the end, for after such a pope as Alexander VI, it was almost impossible that they could get worse; and then the reaction began, and for some time it certainly was the object of most men of authority and power to get a better tone into the papal court and to elect men as popes, not for worldly motives, but because they were most likely to adorn the high position they occupied and to purge out the accumulation of abuses which had crept into the Church.

It was about this period that the greatest composer of the age came into the world. The name he is generally known by is Palestrina, but this is in reality only the name of the town in which he was born, which is in the Campagna near Rome. His full name given in Italian is Giovanni Pierluigi Sante da Palestrina, and we find it Latinised into Joannes Petraloysius Preenestinus, or J. P. Aloysius. His parents were poor people, and that appears to be all that is known about them; and even the date of his birth is not known for certain. It probably was somewhere about 1524; so it must have fallen just at the beginning of the reign of the most unfortunate of all popes, Clement VII, and would be making him come to years of discretion just at the time when a better spirit was coming over the papal court, which was no small matter for him, and influenced his career in a healthy way.

As usual, there are stories about the early years of Palestrina, as there have been about most celebrated musicians and artists; and they are probably not less mythical in his case than in most others. At the same time, these myths, even if not true in details, often have a germ of value in them, in so far as they put under the vivid form of anecdote something which at bottom is characteristic of the man or his circumstances. It is, of course, in reference to his poor origin that the story is told of his having been taken out of the street and put in his choir by the principal musician of the church of Santa Maria

Maggiore, who happened to hear him singing; and the anecdote has a peculiar appropriateness through his close connection with that Church later in life. And indeed it is extremely probable that his career began in such a way, as did those of so many other great composers, who were thereby subjected to solid and dignified influences from their earliest years. People might have been able to find out something about his early history with more certainty but for the fact that the registers of his town were destroyed a few years later by the soldiers of that same terrible Alva, with whose name we associate such a host of horrors and massacres in the wars between Spain and the Netherlands. The first thing we really do know for certain is that Palestrina settled in Rome and became the pupil of a certain Flemish or French composer called Claude Goudimel. This fact does not on the face of it seem particularly interesting, but it is really rather curious, and worth taking note of. What is known of Goudimel is that he was born near Avignon, and having great musical abilities, naturally moved to Rome, where he set up as a teacher of music. He first wrote quantities of music after the manner of the Roman Church, such as masses and motets; but later he is said to have become a Protestant Huguenot and was one of the earliest composers who set a metrical version of the Psalms to music. It had been one of Luther's great ideas that if the people had the Psalms in a metrical form with metrical tunes to sing them to, it would be a great help to their religion; he himself carried it out with great success; and we still sing some of the splendid tunes written for the purpose by himself and his followers, and very much finer and nobler they are than anything that is produced for the purpose in modern times. Luther's tunes were, of course, written to German words, Goudimel's to the French version by Marot and Beza. Goudimel is said to have become rather prominent as a Protestant in consequence of this work, and the fruit of it all was that when that terrible night of St. Bartholomew came in 1572, and the French Catholics treacherously set upon the Huguenots in Paris and other great towns of France, Goudimel was one of those who were massacred in Lyons. And this certainly gives additional interest to the curious fact that Palestrina, the greatest representative of Roman Catholic music before 1600, was the pupil of one of the earliest representatives of Protestant music — but of course Palestrina's music is not like the

music which Protestant composers wrote for their metrical Psalms, but like the earlier music of his master, which was in the ecclesiastical style of the old Church.

Palestrina probably came to Rome about 1540, and for eleven years we hear nothing much about him. He must have been working hard, and learning to master all the science of music as it was then understood; and it is clear that he was also learning some of the quaint puzzles and ingenuities which the Dutchmen thought the highest aim of art; for in the earliest work which he made public there are traces of this unsatisfactory influence. The first actual post that he was appointed to was that of chapel-master in the Capella Giulia in the Vatican in 1551, and it was soon after this appointment that he published his first musical work above mentioned, which was a set of masses. This book he dedicated to the pope of that time, Julius III.,[1] and it is said to have been the first musical work that was ever published and dedicated to a pope by a native-born Italian. In return for this, Pope Julius made him one of the singers in his private chapel. But this was not a very fortunate or wise thing to do, for it is said that Palestrina had a very poor voice as a man, whatever he may have had as a boy; and, besides this, he was a married man, which ought properly to have excluded him from such an appointment. But popes were able to do pretty much as they pleased in those days, for people had not begun to be so very particular about such details as they became shortly afterwards; so it may have appeared a pretty fair and promising advance for Palestrina at the time. But in the end, it stood him in very poor stead, for he had to resign his first appointment when he was promoted to the new office, and therefore had nothing to fall back upon if the latter fell through.

When Pope Julius died, a most excellent and earnest man was elected, who took the name of Marcellus II, and his election marks a sort of turning point in the history of the Church. But Marcellus himself, after making people hope much from him, only survived twenty-three days. Paul IV, who succeeded him, though not a man of quite so high a stamp, still had his mind set on doing well and honestly, and began at once to reform in all directions, small as well as great. Poor Palestrina was one of the first sufferers. The pope rightly turned his attention to

1 The portrait subjoined is taken from the title-page of the second edition of this collection, in which Palestrina is seen presenting his work to the pope.

the affairs of his own household, and finding that some of the singers in his own private chapel had no right ever to have been appointed if the regulations about laymen and married men had been properly observed, promptly turned them out. So poor Palestrina, after being fourteen years in Rome, with a wife and a family of several growing boys, was turned adrift upon the world without any post or definite occupation that could bring him any money — for composition did not put him in funds any better than it did Schubert or Mozart, or hosts of other composers who have starved for their noble devotion to their art.

For the time, Palestrina was completely beaten down. He despaired utterly of his prospects and became seriously ill. All the pope could do for him was to allow him a very small pension, which can have been hardly enough to keep his head above water. But, fortunately, Palestrina was not destined to be forgotten or neglected. He was, after all, only without a regular post for about a couple of months; for towards the end of the same year he was made chapel-master at the Lateran, and the pope allowed him to keep his pension as well; so he was not so very badly off considering, though his whole pay seems to have been ridiculously small. He next stepped on to a still better position, namely, that of chapel-master at Santa Maria Maggiore, in the choir of which church he is said to have sung as a boy; and there he remained for fully ten years, during which time he definitely formed his style, achieved some of his greatest masterpieces, and gained a very high position among composers.

This was no doubt a happy and contented time for him. He had enough to keep himself and his family, and his care must chiefly have been to make his music as good as he possibly could, and to further the musical part of the services at the church with which he was connected. He also took his children's musical education in hand, and three of them promised to do exceedingly well in his own line, which must have afforded him no little contentment.

It was moreover while he was connected with this church that a very important event in his life and in musical history took place, which made him stand out as the champion of the Church music of his day. In order to understand how this came to pass it is necessary

to go back to some of the abuses which had got into the services of the Church in the lax and evil times before referred to.

The Dutch composers who invented the perplexing puzzles and ingenuities which became the fashion just before Palestrina's time applied them very unsuitably to the services of the Church. This soon had very bad results; as the music appeared to have next to nothing to do with the sentiment of the words either in character or expression, and only proclaimed itself as so much dry science and barren cleverness. But this was not the only evil nor the worst. Composers in those days, as now, were obliged to have some sort of principle or basis to work upon, and one of their favourite methods of making a piece of music was to take some old bit of plain-song and give it to the tenor voices to sing, and then to add other parts for the other voices to sing with it. If they wanted a long movement, they put the tune into very long notes and made the music last just as long as the tune lasted; in this form, the other voices sang the words over and over again to different kinds of melodies — counterpoints, as they were called — and ending when the tune ended. They used to vary the process in different ways — as, for instance, by writing the principal tune for the voices to sing backwards; and though this seems rather absurd to us, still, as the effect depended more on the way in which the other voices were managed than on the style of the tune, the composer was often able to ensure very good general results all the same. But then they did not always choose tunes which had been originally connected with sacred words. Sometimes they chose common secular tunes and set the sacred words to them; and there were certain secular tunes which were particularly in favour for such a purpose, as, for instance, one called *L'homme armé*, which was used by many different composers. This practice seems to have answered very well at first, but by degrees, composers got lax in their choice of tunes and used some which were associated with frivolous and absurd words; and tunes, too, which the people who went to church were quite familiar with. And the consequence is said to have been that when the music was performed, the choir used to sing the sacred words as arranged in the books, but a great part of the congregation used to take up the secular tune with gusto, and even sing the secular words to it. Of course, this produced a very discreditable medley of

sacred and profane, and the wiser and more earnest men among the ecclesiastics were very much scandalised; and finally, it was decided that the subject should be taken seriously into consideration at one of the great ecclesiastical councils which were held at Trent. The difficulties in the way of reform were so great that they almost despaired of curing the evil anyhow but by making a clean sweep of all the more elaborate Church music and returning to the picturesque but rather crude simplicity of the early plain-song. Fortunately for art, there was among the cardinals a great and notable man called Borromeo who believed firmly in Palestrina; and he persuaded the rest of the ecclesiastics to give him a trial as a last resource; and it was understood that if he failed, the most uncompromising measures were to be taken, and Church music of any artistic value was practically to be reformed away altogether. Palestrina turned his hand bravely to this crucial task, and so as not to rely upon one experiment only, he wrote three masses at once.

They were all three sung privately first, and as they were generally thought promising, the pope allowed them to be performed in the Vatican. The trial took place in 1565, and the result was an extraordinary outburst of enthusiasm. The pope and the cardinals and everybody concerned were quite carried away with delight at the effect they produced, and all sorts of curious sayings are recorded as having been made by distinguished persons on the occasion, from apt quotations from the poets to comparisons to the music thought likely to be sung by angels. And the fruit of it all was that artistic Church music was held to be saved by the genius of the composer, and the cardinals were spared the necessity of framing rules for the regulation of style, which would certainly in the end have proved either impossible or ruinous to the art. The most successful of these masses is Palestrina's most famous work, and is known as the *Missa Papa Marcelli*, after the good pope of that name. In recognition of his achievement, the pope made Palestrina composer to the pontifical choir, which was probably in those days the highest musical position in the world, and a few years later, he was reappointed to the office of chapel-master in the Capella Giulia.

His financial position was not, however, much improved by these appointments; in fact, Palestrina must have been very poor throughout

the whole of his lifetime. The posts which he occupied were worth absurdly small sums; as his salary as chapel-master at Santa Maria Maggiore was only sixteen scudi a month, and for the work in the pope's chapel, he had nine more, amounting in all to a little over five pounds of our money. To this, he could have added very little from other sources. He had scarcely any pupils except his own sons, and his compositions can have brought him in next to nothing. It is possible that he may have had presents from great people for whom he wrote works, but that could have only been an occasional windfall, not much to be trusted to help him with the daily wants of his family. However, we cannot tell that he suffered from his poverty, for there is not much information to be got about his private life. In those days, people were ready enough to record events, and even the sententious remarks, of people of high birth and position, but they had not developed the taste, which has become so conspicuous in later times, for keeping and handing down characteristic deeds and words of really great and able men. It seems likely enough, too, that Palestrina's life and character is all told in his musical work. His education in lines apart from music must have been very slight, and his opportunities of social distinction scanty, for the relations of musicians with great people, even up to the time of Mozart, were singularly subservient. The grand people hired composers or performers just as they would butlers or valets, and treated them much in the same way. They often made much of them, and petted and praised them, and were really proud if they had a musician of mark in their service; but their praise and pride alike were much of the same quality as if they had been concerned with clever cooks or coachmen. The musician waited on his employer with his work and received his criticisms without having the option of explaining or defending himself; and when the verdict was unfavourable, if he was worldly wise, he went home and tried to make something which would go more in accordance with his master's views. A curious story has been told in connection with a mass called *Assumpta est Maria*, which Palestrina wrote in 1585 for Pope Sixtus V., and it gives a very good picture of the sort of way in which popes and grandees were considered to have taste and judgment on all subjects, and how their remarks were received in a meek spirit by people who generally knew much more about the subject than their

critics. The story is that Palestrina wrote a mass for the pope when he was elected, early in 1585, and the pope did not find it to his taste; and instead of praising the composer as he came out of church, he said, "Pierluigi has forgotten the *Missa Papa Marcelli* and the *Motets on the Canticles*," by which enigmatical remark he evidently meant that the new mass did not please him, and he thought it showed a falling off from such great works as those he quoted. What Palestrina said is not recorded, but he certainly was not happy at the rebuff. However, he took the most sensible course on the whole, which was to set to work upon another mass at once, to try and please the pope better. This new work was performed first on the Feast of the Assumption, and was received by the pope in a very different manner. For when he came out of church this time, he said, "The mass of this morning is of an entirely new character, and could only have been written by Pierluigi. On Trinity Sunday, we found fault with his music, but to-day he has fully satisfied us, and we hope that he will often revive our devotion as sweetly." This is perhaps quoted after a historian's manner and may be a little more grandiloquent and sententious than the actual words of the pope were, but it still gives a good idea of the feelings which men had about the relation between musician and employer in those days. The great people of the day had, however, the taste and sense to realize what a genius Palestrina was, and he had many friends in high places. Cardinal Borromeo has already been mentioned, as it was chiefly owing to him and another cardinal, called Vitellozzi, that Palestrina had the opportunity of producing the famous masses which decided the difficult question about the reform of Church music. Another great helper and admirer was Cardinal Ippolito d'Este, to whom he dedicated an important volume of motets. A more interesting friend and patron was Filippo Neri, who after his death was canonised. He was founder of a religious body called the 'Congregation of the Oratorians' and had a great idea of extending and strengthening the influence of religion generally by giving a more popular character to some kinds of Church music, something after the manner that Luther had done for his people. Among these ideas was that of performing music in connection with sacred or biblical subjects, such as the history of Job or the Prodigal Son.

These performances were begun in 1540 and took place in the ora-

tory of his convent, and from these circumstances we get the name of "oratorio," which we use in modern times for a class of work of much more elaborate and dramatic character but of the same main principle. Actual oratorios they were not, but rather a kind of play interspersed with hymns and such music; but it is a curious coincidence that the first work which can be fairly called an oratorio was performed in 1600 in the oratory of Filippo Neri's church, and it is likely enough that the composer, whose name was Cavalieri, took his idea from Neri's earlier attempts. And this Neri was one of Palestrina's best friends and was probably the one whom in the end he most valued.

This connects Palestrina remotely with one of the most important kinds of modern music, but he himself had nothing to do with oratorio of any kind. His art was all of one description, namely, the highest and purest kind of choral music. In his time, instrumental music had scarcely begun, and there were hardly any instruments sufficiently well constructed to be fit to play anything worthy of the name of music upon. Such things as sonatas and symphonies and overtures had never been attempted, and there was not anything as yet in existence like our familiar kind of vocal music with accompaniments, such as songs and recitatives, and accompanied choruses and cantatas. All such things had even yet to be begun. What Palestrina and his fellows had to make music for was sets of more or less numerous voices; and this he did in the most beautiful and refined way possible. It was the most ideally perfect religious music that could be conceived — pure and serene, free from agitation or excitement, though rising at times to a high pitch of exaltation and vigor in the expression of praise and thanksgiving. There was no sentimentality in it, and when he was at his best no affectation. The means he used were the very simplest; for he used very few discords, and those which he did he used so carefully as to take away a great deal of their harshness. Men who live in the exciting mental atmosphere of the nineteenth century can hardly get into the condition of mind to understand and feel the beauty of his work. After going through all the turmoil of operatic music and the powerful effects used by composers of instrumental music, it is difficult for them to enter into anything which is not made exciting with discord or captivating with pretty and effective tunes, and their musical senses have got so far blunted with great volumes of sound

and brilliancy of effect that they can hardly realize for themselves the excessively delicate beauty of such music as Palestrina's. Almost the only chance they have of enjoying it is to hear it in its own home — in some great church, where it can echo down the aisles and float in the great spaces of choir and nave, and where all the old associations are still strong enough to give it a poetry and a tone which in a concert-room must always be wanting. It seems to belong almost to a different world from ours, and people who have not wide sympathies and a feeling for what is loftiest and noblest in religion have hardly any chance of entering into it in the fullest sense. And so it comes to pass that the name of Palestrina has a sort of mysterious halo round it, and men know and feel the sanctity that belongs to his work without being able to come within the circle of its influence themselves.

But though the number of people who can enjoy such music thoroughly is limited, it never can become old-fashioned in the conventional sense. When people use the word old-fashioned, they generally mean that the thing they refer to is not thoroughly and completely good and mature but depended for such success as it had upon some fancy or affectation of the time when it was produced. Second-rate art and second-rate music become old-fashioned very soon. People often win success by hitting some trivial fancy which has taken hold of the public, and as long as that fancy lasts, their works please the world; but when the light humor comes to an end, if the work has not something solid and thorough behind its tricks and manners, it is only fit for the dust-bin or the fire-grate. It often happens that people in their younger days read books and see pictures and hear songs that strike them as delightful; and when, after a few years, they come back to them, they are utterly astonished to find them dull, stupid, and without any character except affectation. They themselves may not have improved in judgment, but they have passed out of the mood that was tickled by the special kind of affectation, and they find nothing else left to care for. But if, on the other hand, they have had the good luck to come across some really good and sound work and to have been pleased with it when they were young, they may come back to it twenty, thirty, or even more years afterward, and their children and grandchildren too, and yet it will never become old-fashioned. Palestrina's music is of this kind. It is like Greek statuary or the painting

of the greatest Italian masters or the architecture of the finest English cathedrals; its beauty is so genuine and real that the passage of time makes no difference to it. As long as religion and religious emotions last, Palestrina's music will be the purest and loftiest form in which it has been expressed.

Palestrina wrote very little secular music, and what he did write strikes people who are not familiar with refinements of style as being very like his sacred music. The only difference they can see is that the words are not sacred. In truth, people in those times liked a much more solid kind of art than they do now. They could be carried along by music as music without the help of tunes or dance rhythms; and even in their secular music, they appreciated beauty of a more refined and delicate kind than is popular in our time. Palestrina had not the chance of being led astray by opportunities of writing either for money or display; everything tended to keep his work up to the highest level, and it is wonderfully to the credit of the taste of his day that the works which made his fame even in his own lifetime were those which have been felt by the most intelligent of his admirers in later times to be really his loftiest and most perfect achievements. His principal encouragement must of course have come from the people of high rank in Church and State, but one popular demonstration in his honor is recorded. This was in the year 1575, which was called the year of jubilee, according to some arrangements made by popes in the Middle Ages for the purpose of getting money. In this year, people flocked to Rome for ecclesiastical or religious reasons; and one of the bodies of devout worshippers who came were fifteen hundred men and women from the town of Palestrina in the Campagna, who marched into Rome in procession singing all together the music of their great fellow townsman. It must have been a very extraordinary scene, and to us in these days almost inconceivable. But no doubt the organization of the Church was then more able than it would be now to drill her flocks to such a remarkable feat as marching into a town in a body of fifteen hundred singing such difficult and austere music as Palestrina's. If such a thing could be done in these days, it would be worth going some hundreds of miles to see.

Palestrina at this time was passing middle age, but his steadfastness to work was not flagging and never did flag to the last. He lived for

his work, and the great turmoil of the world and the exciting scenes of warfare and intrigue which went on in Italy, and indeed all over Europe, in his lifetime do not seem to have affected him. In his own home, trouble and sorrow came upon him in his declining years. His wife Lucrezia, to whom he appears to have been constantly devoted, died in 1580; and the three sons who showed most promise all died before coming to years sufficient to make any mark in the world, leaving him only one extremely worthless son Igino, who not only did his father no credit in his lifetime, but disgraced his name as soon as he was dead by a fraudulent use of it as a means to get some money. Beyond these family matters, the story of the latter part of Palestrina's life is little more than the record of the production and publication of successive works, such as motets, masses, litanies, offertories, and madrigals. The popes tried to do what they could for him in the way of bettering his circumstances; but it appears that his fellow musicians stood in the way, for what reason we cannot say — possibly from jealousy; and they tried to prevent the popes conferring on him the title of Maestro as late as 1586. At any rate, he could never have been at all well off, and we can only fancy him spending a simple life, unenlivened by gaieties or luxuries, in the constant production of music. It went on so to the last, and without apparent falling off of his powers. Of course, his works were not all at the same level of beauty and perfection. People generally hold that he never surpassed the famous mass called *Missa Papa Marcelli*, which was written in 1565, but he kept on producing works of the very highest beauty till the end of his time. At the beginning of 1594 he was busy looking after the publication of a collection of his masses when he was taken ill with pleurisy. He was soon too ill for any hope of saving his life, and his son Igino and Filippo Neri attended his bedside. To Igino, he gave directions about the publication of some of his works which were still in manuscript, "to the glory of the most high God and the worship of His holy temple," and then bade him farewell, and spent the rest of his few hours of life in the company of his friend, in whose arms he died on February 2nd.

It had been a curiously quiet and uneventful life, devoted as far as we can discover almost entirely to work. Of the character of Palestrina it is almost impossible to guess anything. That he was devout in the highest sense we can be certain of from his music, and that he

was patient and steadfast we can guess from the enormous amount which he produced. But as to his manner of living, and his affections and so forth, record is blank. His music itself was, of course, from the moment of its triumph in 1565, recognized as the model for composers of Church music to imitate; but, curiously enough, the perfection of his art was so great and wonderful that it took the heart out of composers who would have followed in his steps. It seemed impossible to compete with him, or to produce anything of the same kind which was worth hearing by the side of his work. Some few did try, but the effort did not continue long, and within a few years after his death composers had started on an entirely new line, which was almost as far removed from Palestrina's style as could be. They began to try and make music for solo voices with accompaniment, like recitatives and airs, and as they understood next to nothing about it they had to begin at the beginning. Instead of being elaborately and completely beautiful like Palestrina's music, theirs was for a while childishly simple and elementary; but it led to great things in the end, no less indeed than all the great triumphs of modern music. Palestrina's art of his own kind was complete with him and in order to do anything more in art it was necessary to begin on another road. It is much as if men had been climbing a big mountain for a long while. When Palestrina finished his work they were at the top, and could not go any higher that way; and in order to get to the top of another high point they had to go back almost to the bottom again.

II.

HANDEL.

AFTER Palestrina the world had to wait nearly a hundred years for another great composer of the highest rank. In reality, the time that passed before works of anything like as great calibre as his were produced again was considerably over a whole century, but to count from the year of his death to the year when Handel and Bach were born is actually ninety-one years. That certainly is a very long interval, and it seems the more remarkable if it is compared with the ninety-one years immediately before the present day. In that time some of Haydn's best symphonies have been written, and his *Creation* and his *Seasons*, all Beethoven's symphonies and masses, and his opera *Fidelio*, and Weber's *Freischütz*, and Schubert's songs, Mendelssohn's oratorios, and Chopin's pianoforte music, and Schumann's many beautiful productions, and all Wagner's immense music dramas; and if the time is expanded just to a century it will take in all the greatest of Mozart's symphonies and his *Requiem* as well; so it seems to hold almost all that is most interesting in thoroughly modern music. And in the same amount of time, from Palestrina's death onwards, the world was, musically speaking, almost dumb. But it is not really so strange as it looks on the surface; for in that hundred years there was an enormous amount of work to be done before men could climb to the top of the next mountain — fully enough to have taken more than a hundred years, if composers and musicians had not worked very hard and wisely.

It was quite clear enough to men's minds that Palestrina had made the best music possible in his particular style. There were just a few composers who went on trying the same line, but most musicians

turned their energies into new directions, where they had chances of new effects by using instruments and combining voices and instruments in ways that were quite different from the old style of Palestrina and Josquin. In fact, within six years after Palestrina's death they had almost abandoned the grand old style and were trying their hands at little operas, and oratorios, and cantatas, which were not much like what people understand by such names now, except in principle, and were even more utterly unlike in appearance as well as principle to anything Palestrina had ever done.

In reality, these works were only unlike modern works of the same names because they were first attempts, and because everything that makes modern music what it is had to be found out. Composers knew next to nothing about chords and keys, and such effects as men can produce by them now, and they only began to use chords by themselves in the ways modern composers do, as a sort of experiment; and keys and modulations they had to find out, more or less, by accident. Besides these drawbacks, they had scarcely any serviceable instruments, and those few they had they did not know how to play upon; and even if they had known how to play on them tolerably they did not know how to combine them with effect. Then, again, though they had done an enormous quantity of singing in combination, and some of it very difficult and elaborate work, they had scarcely tried at all to write anything artistic for single voices with accompaniment, and consequently the development of solo singing had still to be gone through.

So, in reality, it is not such a wonderful thing that it took a hundred years to come to another great composer; the wonder ought to be that they could get through all the work they did in the time. To anyone who understands the music of the early part of the seventeenth century it seems as if composers made the most wonderful strides. In comparison with the infantile experiments of that time the works of Carissimi and Cesti and Salvator Rosa, who wrote about fifty years later, are quite rich and definite; while Lulli and Alessandro Scarlatti seem already like full-grown men in many respects compared with their predecessors. For Lulli and Scarlatti could both write very effective airs of some size, and, with good luck, even effective movements for instruments alone; and their operas as wholes have some sort of mature completeness about them, which is an amazing advance to

have made from such beginnings, and in the face of such difficulties, in so short a time. While in other lines men had not only found out how to make some of the most beautiful instruments the world has ever seen, in the shape of the famous old Italian violins — which the world cannot even match in these days — but they were finding out how to make real musical effects with them, and how to write agreeable and thoroughly artistic music such as Corelli's for them. And, in the same way, they cultivated their voices so successfully that they were within a short distance of having some of the most beautiful singers that have ever been heard, if report is to be believed.

This is not bad work to spend a hundred years over; and while so many elementary difficulties had to be contended against, it is not to be expected that any composers of the highest rank would make their appearance. But, at length, when men had by manifold and most invaluable labours arrived at a mastery of these new artistic resources, the climax came, and in the same year (1685) two of the greatest composers in the history of the world made their appearance together—and not only in the same year but within a month of one another. Handel was born on the 23rd of February and John Sebastian Bach on the 21st of March. Handel was therefore a little the older of the two giants, and as he looked back and linked himself more closely with what had been done before him than Bach did, it will be as well to consider his life first.

How Handel came to be so great a musician is one of the strangest things to unravel for people who believe in the special directions of hereditary genius. No doubt it would be easier to understand if we knew more about his mother; from his father he ought apparently to have got next to nothing to help him in his art, unless it was that obstinacy which may be much the same thing in the end as dogged perseverance. His father was a surgeon in Halle, in Saxony, who is said to have had a very decided aversion to music, and a strong determination that no child of his should devote himself to it. If accounts may be believed he was horrified at the appearance of musical gifts in his son George Frederick, and did all he could to stamp on them and turn his energies in another direction. He thought it would be a good thing to make a lawyer of him, but it would certainly have been a difficult thing to get him properly taught even the rudiments of legal science; for his