

An Interview with Humperdinck at Cologne

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I submit the foregoing remarks to the sober judgment of thoughtful amateurs—it is useless to appeal elsewhere—and I warn all musicians that there is danger ahead for the masterpieces of our art. “What is the use?” exclaims the pessimist, “nobody cares for your masterpieces; nobody respects authority; nobody acknowledges restraint.” If that be true, there is no hope for the present generation, and all who think with me must put faith in the inevitable reaction, and trust in the justice of

one seemed to know anything about his movements. The composer of “Hänsel und Gretel” does not like being lionised, and, therefore, sent no herald to announce his arrival. Monday came, and still no news of him. But his “Pilgerfahrt nach Kevlaar” was to be rehearsed on the following morning and performed in the evening; he was therefore bound to put in an early appearance. In the course of the afternoon I met Mr. E. van der Straeten, the violoncellist, and knowing that he was on



the future, albeit Shakespeare makes his Henry IV. exclaim:

O, if this were seen,
The happiest youth—viewing his progress through,
What perils past, what crosses to ensue,
Would shut the book, and sit him down and die.

Whatever our prospective views may be, we shall not do this. The world, like Bunyan's Pilgrim, goes through the Slough of Despond and into Doubting Castle, but is ever nearer the Celestial City.

JOSEPH BENNETT.

AN INTERVIEW WITH HUMPERDINCK AT COLOGNE.

(BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT).

ON Sunday (the 2nd ult.), the first day of the Lower Rhenish Festival, everyone was asking “Has Humperdinck arrived?” No one, however, had seen anything of him; and, further, no

intimate terms with the composer, I made enquiry of him. He, too, was quite in the dark. But he suggested that we should call on Dr. Wette, the husband of Humperdinck's talented sister, the authoress of the libretto of “Hänsel und Gretel,” and see if we could glean any information. Dr. Wette's second daughter received us, informed us that Humperdinck and his wife had just arrived, and asked us in. It was somewhat bold thus to break in on a family gathering, but we met with a cordial reception, and were asked to sit down and join the family coffee-party; Frau Wette was there, surrounded by her children. Humperdinck at once remembered having seen me before; we had, in fact, met at the Beethoven Festival, Bonn, in the previous year, though only for a few minutes. I was fortunate enough to

see much more of him this time—I may well say fortunate, for even to get to speak to him is no easy matter. I asked Humperdinck about his Italian trip. He told me that he had just returned, and from his conversation he had evidently much enjoyed himself. He admires the Romans; with the Neapolitans, however, it is otherwise; in the former he finds traces of that nobility which distinguished their ancestors. After chatting for a time, he rose and walked about the room. Then he stood

door nearest to the platform, and as he walked through the big Gürzenich hall, right to the back seats, many eyes were turned towards him, and many ineffectual attempts were made to get at him. On his left sat a young man who has lately been much talked about in Germany. This was Max Schillings, composer of "Ingwelde," a three-act music-drama, produced with immense success some months back by Herr Felix Mottl at Carlsruhe. Herr Arthur Smolian has declared that it furnishes



before the pianoforte, and put his fingers on the keyboard, striking in the bass register a third inversion of a chord of dominant ninth, following it by an *arpeggio* first inversion of tonic chord. I hoped it was only a prelude, but, and, apparently, deep in thought, he moved away from the instrument, and, indeed, out of the room. He, however, soon returned, and showed us some interesting "Hänsel und Gretel" photographs. The *dramatis personæ* were none other than his charming little nieces. Above are two of the pictures, the situations of which will be at once recognised.

Humperdinck's wife, by the way, is a bright, energetic little woman, and it was quite evident, from certain remarks which she made, that she is her husband's man of business. My next meeting with the composer was at the rehearsal next morning. He was standing by the entrance

an answer in the affirmative to the question whether Wagner has left a "school." I was seated on Humperdinck's right. It was interesting to watch his countenance during the rehearsal of his work; he was evidently listening most attentively. At such moments one cannot speak to a composer. When the morning rehearsal was over, he said that he must go and see Dr. Wüllner respecting one or two points in the performance of his work; he, however, soon returned and then I was with him for some time. He spoke about England, and said he thought his "Pilgerfahrt nach Kevlaar" would suit the English, and I hastened to assure him that I was of the same opinion. It is, in fact, a charming little work. From the vocal score one gets but little idea of the music; the characteristic colouring—for Humperdinck is a master of orchestration—greatly enhances

the effect. The success of his opera in England appeared to afford the composer great satisfaction. But what has not met his approval are the premature reports which have appeared in the papers concerning the music which he has furnished for "Schneewittchen." In answer to the question why he did not finish a Symphony which he has had for a long time in his portfolio, he replied that, for the moment, he was occupied with some songs and choruses for "Die Königskinder," a play written by his sister.

My next meeting with Humperdinck was in the evening after the Concert. His cantata had been performed with brilliant success; at the close, indeed, he was summoned to the platform, and received an enthusiastic ovation. The composer is not spoiled by success; he seems to accept it as a necessary evil accompanying greatness. After the concert he was quite as simple and genial as before. I had arranged to see him, but just as I was approaching, the worthy Herr Degen, Amtsgerichtsrath of Bonn, came up to me, and with vasty voice, said: "There is only one Beethoven, and Wüllner is his Prophet."

This was the closing sentence of a short speech made by M. Vincent d'Indy, the French composer, at a gathering in honour of Dr. Wüllner after the Beethoven Festival at Bonn last year. These were Herr Degen's farewell words to me when I went to take leave of him on quitting Bonn. After thus reminding me of pleasant days in the past, he turned to Humperdinck, and for a moment the life of the composer appeared in danger. The worthy Councillor Degen is of Falstaffian proportions, and was so overjoyed at meeting his old friend that he clasped him tightly in his arms; it seemed as if Humperdinck, who is not a man of big stature, would be killed by the kindness and enthusiasm of the greeting. But he emerged from the embrace unharmed, and I was able to congratulate him on the success of his work. I ventured to remark, however, that it had one fault—namely, that of being over-brief. With a twinkle in his eye, he assured me he thought that no fault, but rather an advantage.

I was to see him the next morning, but there is often a slip between the appointment and the meeting; business elsewhere necessitated, as I found on consulting the time tables, an earlier departure from Cologne than I had anticipated, and I saw no more of the composer of "Hänsel und Gretel."

FROM MY STUDY.

JULIE DORUS GRAS, whose portrait is now before the reader, was born at Valenciennes in 1807, her father being conductor of the orchestra in the theatre there. This gentleman's name was Steenkiste. He had been a soldier, but probably found himself more comfortable in the

peaceful pursuit of music. At any rate, he put himself beyond the reach of war's alarms, as far as was possible in those days, and met with more success in the orchestra than he could have hoped for on the field of battle. Steenkiste had two children, both of whom reached eminence in their several ways. One, a boy, became famous as a flautist; the other was our heroine. They worked under different names. Young Steenkiste kept his patronymic, the non-euphonious character of which led to the adoption, by his sister, of their mother's name, Dorus, and as Mdlle. Dorus, Julie appeared at a concert in her native town, she being then in her fourteenth year. At that time the municipality of Valenciennes contained, strange to say, some discerning and liberal men, possessed of the enlarged sense of duty which takes in more than the town pump. These persuaded their colleagues, and, not having the fear of discontented ratepayers before their eyes, the urban council adopted little Julie, sending her to the Paris Conservatoire for three years, with an annual allowance of 1,500 francs. She entered in December, 1821, had lessons from Blangini, and in 1822 won a first prize for singing. Paër and Bordogni next took her in hand, and completed her academical training. It is worth while adding, as an instance of gratitude, that the young student sent the wreath received as "first prize" from the hands of Cherubini to the municipality which had made possible its acquisition. It should also be noted that, while yet a student, Paër obtained her appointment as chamber-singer to the king.

Leaving the Conservatoire in 1825, Mdlle. Dorus went on an extended concert tour, and in due time reached Brussels, where her brilliant voice and facile execution attracted the notice of the Royal Intendant, who invited her to accept an engagement for the opera. She had theretofore made no studies for the position, but six months of hard work enabled her to appear at the Monnaie with great success. In 1830 the young artist accepted an engagement in Paris, and at once entered upon the most brilliant period of her career, making her first appearance in Rossini's "Le Comte Ory." She is described as being then equally agreeable in person and voice. "She was of middle stature, light and graceful in form, and exceedingly pretty, with blue eyes and blonde hair. Her voice was thoroughly French, possessing all the beauties and all the defects of the school to which she belonged. Its compass was two octaves (from D to D), but the tone was weak in the lower notes; in the high notes, on the contrary, her voice gained volume, penetrating power, and extraordinary brilliancy." At this period, too, Escudier wrote: "She shines above all in floriture and the ornaments of vocalisation. Passages the most eccentric, caprices the most varied, roulades the most daring, offer no obstacle to