representative themes from the score. I can only say that without Mr Bennett's assistance I should not have identified one of them, save only Fare you well, my own Mary Ann.

## HERR MOTTL'S INSIGHT

*The World, 25 April 1894*

I must entirely applaud Mr Henschel's spirited cutting-in between Herr Felix Mottl and the expectant public with a Wagner program identical, save as to one item (the Flying Dutchman overture), with that announced for Herr Mottl's first appearance in England. I have heard people say that such a challenge was in bad taste; but in this case, as in ninetynine out of a hundred others in which the same complaint is made, good taste would have meant simply moral cowardice, a quality in which we in England are always anxious to be kept in countenance. Mr Henschel was quite right, in the face of the flourish of trumpets which heralded Mottl's arrival, to decline to admit the pretensions of the stranger to give us lessons in Wagner conducting; and he could only protest effectively by at once offering a performance by his own band as a sample of what London can do, thus tacitly daring Herr Mottl to beat him.

Nothing could be fairer; nothing could be bolder; nothing could be more entirely creditable to the challenger. If I could add that the invader had been put to shame—that he had done nothing that Mr Henschel had not done as well, or better, then indeed it would be a proud day for London. But to that length I must not go. Mr Henschel, in the heat of his spirit, underrated his adversary. He was not bad; but Mottl bettered him in



every bar. Before the Rienzi overture was half through it was evident that London was going to have a most exemplary beating from Karlsruhe. One after another the blemishes and stupidities to which we have become so inured here that we have ceased to record them against our conductors vanished under Mottl's hand.

Let me, before speaking of his highest qualities, give an illustration or two of his resources as a manager of the orchestra. We all know the overture to Tannhäuser by heart by this time. Well, have we not often shrunk from the coarse and unsatisfactory effect of the three trombones at the climax of the pilgrims' march in the first section of the overture? With Richter it is rather worse than with the others, since he insists on the full power of the fortissimo. Mottl effected a magical transformation. The chant was as powerful as Richter could have desired; and yet it was beautiful, broad, easy, with a *portamento* which an Italian singer might have envied.

How was this brought about? In the simplest way in the world. Instead of keeping strict Procrustean time for the florid work of the violins, thus forcing the trombones to chop their phrases so as to fit the accompaniment, Mottl gave the trombones a free hand, allowing them to give the time to the whole band, and making the violins wait, when necessary, between the bars, so to speak, until the slow-speaking brass instruments had turned their phrases with unembarrassed majesty. The effect was magnificent. In exactly the same way, and with still more splendid effect, he gave us the great passage at the end of Die Walküre, where the trombones reaffirm the last words of Wotan.

Again, take the Flying Dutchman overture. In the second half of this, the contrast between the furious raging of the storm on the one hand, and the consolation of the salvation theme on the other, should be so obvious, one would think, to any ordinarily imaginative conduc-

tor, that Wagner thought it sufficient to indicate the necessary changes of tempo by such hints as *ritenuto*, *stringendo*, and the like, depending on their apparent inevitability for their full comprehension. Yet we are accustomed to hear our bands dragged tearing through the salvation theme at almost the same speed as through the storm, some attempt being made to strike a balance by taking the one too slow and the other too fast. Mottl varied his speed from *allegro* to *adagio*, managing the transitions with perfect address, and producing the full effect which everybody except our conductors knows to be what Wagner intended.

His *allegro*, too, was a true *allegro con brio*, as marked, and not the customary *allegro pomposo*. His treatment of those batteries of chords which lead up to the first *forte* in the quick movement reminded me of Wagner himself, whom I once saw stamping to them with his foot, and, I am afraid, swearing at the band between his teeth because they would not hit them out tremendously enough for him. He would certainly have been satisfied with the cannonade which Mottl got from the drums in this passage. It is one of Mottl's salient characteristics as a conductor that he seizes on the accents of the music with immense energy, always using them to obtain force of expression, and never merely to set people dancing, in the manner of an Austrian band.

This distinction came out strikingly in the instrumental version of Tannhäuser's pæan to Venus in the overture, commonly played as if it were something between a march and a galop, under which treatment the two trumpet blasts with which the opening notes are emphasized sound like a rather boyish bit of decoration, as if someone had tipped two out of a row of iron railings with gilding for no particular purpose, except to see the gold glitter. In Mottl's hands these two trumpet notes explained themselves at once as necessary reinforce-



ments to two all-important accents; and the effect was not to make the movement still more march-like, but, on the contrary, to entirely prevent any such suggestion, and to produce the true accent of oratorical passion, the intensive impulses of which are no more like the merely go-ahead lilt of a march or dance than a furnace is like a skyrocket.

In short, though Mottl is a very forcible conductor, and, in spite of all that has been said about his slowness, a very fast conductor when the right tempo happens to be very fast, he is not in the least an impetuous one: his self-possession is completed instead of destroyed by excitement; and his speed and energy are those of a strong man on level ground, and not those of an ordinary one going downhill. It must not be supposed that this intensive, concentric force, characteristic of the true art passion, is always manifesting itself in the energetic way in him.

For example, his conducting of the Lohengrin prelude was quite a study in physical expression of just the opposite mode of musical feeling. Needless to say, the band fell considerably short of the ethereal perfection of sound at which the composer aimed. Mottl's face and gesture, entreating, imploring, remonstrating, deprecating, pleading, would have softened hearts of stone; and the violins made it as easy for him as they could, which was perhaps not very easy, especially in the first section.

In the Tannhäuser, too, the fine tone and expressive phrasing of the violoncellos at their first entry in the pilgrims' march was something to be for ever grateful for; while the perfect freedom allowed to the clarinet to develop all the sweetness of the Venus strain (which I heard then, for the first time in my life, as it was meant to be heard) produced an effect only surpassed when, at the end of the Tristan prelude, the Liebestod, usually

murdered by being taken too fast, came stealing in, with the conductor doing exactly what Wagner declared to be the whole duty of a conductor, "giving the right time to the band." Is it vain to hope that nobody will ever take it too fast again?

Perhaps the most convincing instance of Mottl's delicacy of touch was the way in which he managed to veil the cheapness and Rossinian tum-tum of the Rienzi overture, which Mr Henschel had stripped naked with a ruthless hand. But it is unnecessary to multiply illustrations. Those which I have given will serve to shew that I am not merely turning an empty phrase in compliment to a Bayreuth reputation when I say that Mottl is a conductor of the very first rank, with, to boot, immense physical energy and personal influence. I was filled with admiration by his efficiency and insight; and I imagine my feelings were shared by all present who were capable of discriminating between one conductor and another. It is greatly to be desired that Mr Schulz-Curtius should follow up the great success of his enterprise (the room was crammed, and the seats had all been sold months in advance) by establishing an annual series of concerts under Mottl. A second concert is already announced for May 22; but the program will have to be changed in one particular. As it stands at present, Beethoven is represented by the overture to Egmont only. This—with due respect to the authors of the program—is all nonsense. Mottl must conduct the C minor symphony: that is the sample of Beethoven for which all his qualities mark him out. By all means, however, let us have Egmont as well, and sacrifice one of the Wagner selections.

And this brings me to the question of that recent artistic phenomenon, the Wagner program, which, as we are assured by the directors of the Crystal Palace, is the most attractive program nowadays. It may be so;



but it is an artistic misdemeanor all the same. In satisfying our craving for the sound of Wagner's music, the concert room is, against its own nature, doing the work of quite another social organ—to wit, the theatre.

We have, unfortunately, no Wagner theatre here; and we must either leave Wagner unheard, or else stuff our concert programs with selections arranged for orchestra alone, as in the second part of a Covent Garden promenade concert. For an arrangement of the Liebestod for a band is really not a bit more defensible at a first-rate concert than an arrangement of the Miserere scene from Il Trovatore or a Pinafore *pot-pourri*. It is better to hear the Bayreuth music done in this way than not to hear it at all, perhaps; but it need not on that account be allowed to squeeze concert music proper out of our concerts. I confess that towards the end of Mr Henschel's program my attention began to wander; and if I had seen Mottl conducting as often as I have seen Mr Henschel, I doubt whether even his concentrated power could hold me with the Parsifal prelude played as postlude to ninety minutes' music.

Indeed, to make the confession complete, I may as well add that my attention to the last piece at the Mottl concert cost me a distinct effort. Something comparatively cheap and violently self-assertive, like the Walkürenritt (which Mottl very properly left out of his scheme) is needed to end long concerts, if long concerts must be inflicted on us. Indeed it would be far more reasonable to take these chronological-order programs backwards, so that we could give our unwearied attention to the best pieces first, and reserve the Rienzi overture to waken us up and demoralize the band when our edge has been well dulled.

I have one other strong reason for desiring to see Mottl established here as a conductor. His greatest rival, Richter, is so far above the heads of the public that he

has no external stimulus to do his best in London. Only a very few people can perceive the difference between his best and his second best; but the difference between his second best and Mottl's best would be felt at once by a considerable body of amateurs. Now I do not suggest that Richter ever consciously does less than his best; but I am materialist enough in these matters to believe that even the best man does more work under pressure than in a vacuum. Mr Henschel, for instance, whose concert was not up to his own standard, much less to Mottl's, will be quite able, now that he is put on his mettle, to surpass himself.

It is so long since I have mentioned the pianoforte in this column that I must add, before concluding, that Sophie Menter and Sapellnikoff are in London. I was unable to attend the Philharmonic when Sapellnikoff played there on Thursday last; but I heard Madame Menter at the Crystal Palace on Saturday. She is still irresistible; but there were signs of wear and tear on her playing of the two transcriptions from Schubert. Probably she has played them too often; at all events, there was more of her old power and audacity in her playing of the concerto (Liszt in E flat).

Mr Frederick Dawson has given a recital. He is a pleasant, frank-looking, somewhat irresponsible young gentleman with a technique which enables him to rattle off Beethoven's sonatas quite cheerfully. His best effort, as far as I heard, was Mendelssohn's Variations Sérieuses, in which he seemed to be quite in his depth. With Beethoven and Schumann he was just a little too light-hearted.

## RUSKIN ON MUSIC

*The World, 2 May 1894*

I have been indulging in five shillings' worth of Ruskin on Music, in a volume just published by Mr George Allen. As it happened, the first sentence I lighted on when I opened the book was "the oratorio, withering the life of religion into dead bones on the Syren sands." Immediately I woke up; for the fact that modern oratorio is mostly a combination of frivolity and sensuality with hypocrisy and the most oppressive dulness is still sufficiently a trade secret to make its discovery by an outsider interesting. A few pages off I found Mr Ruskin describing the singing he heard south of the Alps. Usually the Englishman in Italy, carefully primed beforehand with literary raptures concerning a nation of born musicians speaking the most vocal language in the world, is sufficiently careful of his own credit as a man of taste to discover a Giuglini in every gondolier and St Cecilia's lute in every accordion.

Mr Ruskin innovated so far as to use his own judgment; and here is the result: "Of bestial howling, and entirely frantic vomiting up of damned souls through their still carnal throats, I have heard more than, please God, I will ever endure the hearing of again, in one of His summers." I take the liberty of squeezing Mr Ruskin's hand in mute sympathy with the spirit of this passage. In Italy, where the chance of being picked up off the streets and brought out as *primo tenore* at the Opera occupies the same space in the imagination of the men as the chance of selecting a Derby winner does in England, you cannot get away from the ignoble bawling which Mr Ruskin describes so forcibly—and yet not too