LECTURE I.

ITALY.

DIVISION OF MUSICAL HISTORY INTO PERIODS—THEIR CHARACTERISTICS—THE PERFECT CADENCE—MUSICAL COMPOSITION IN THE MIDDLE AGES—EXPRESSION—ANTICIPATIONS OF MODERN TONALITY—ARCADELT—HYMN, "AVE MARIA"—THE RENAISSANCE—MUSICAL DECLAMATION OF THE GREEKS—THE FLORENTINE ACADEMY—MONTEVERDE—ARIA PARLANTE, "LASCIATE MI MORIR"—CARISSIMI—THE ORATORIO—TRIO, "TURBABUNTUR IMPII"—OPERA—CAVALLI—SONG, "VAGHE STELLE"—CESTI—DUETTO, "CARA E DOLCE LIBERTÀ"—INSTRUMENTAL ACCOMPANIMENT—THE VIOLIN—BASSANI AND CORELLI—ALLEGRI—HIS QUARTET FOR STRINGED INSTRUMENTS.

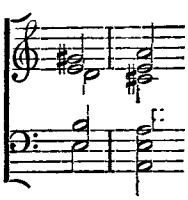
LECTURE I.

ITALY.

In a former Course of Lectures, delivered in this place, I gave a rapid and of necessity very incomplete account of the History of Modern Music from its earliest appreciable beginnings to the present time. I then divided modern musical history into four "Periods." To the beginning of the first of these I did not pretend to assign a date, but I considered it to have ended about the year 1400. My second period included the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; my third the century and a half from about the year 1601 to the year 1750; and my fourth extended from about 1751 to the present time. As you will easily believe, I have had frequent occasion to review this division; I have found no reason for disturbing it. Actually, no doubt the periods of modern musical history are but two; for the word period, sometimes applied to epochs in which mere changes of style—superficial and obvious variations of form—in an art have been made, should, I think, be limited exclusively to successions, whether of centuries or of years, during which certain ascertained principles prevailed in the theory of that art and certain strongly marked peculiarities—expressions and results of this theory—showed themselves in the practice of it. In my first course I explained at some length what the principles and peculiarities which severally characterized the musical theory and practice of the second and of the fourth periods were. I cannot of course do this again now; and I must content myself with following the well known example of a late eminent physician, by advising those who want further

information on this subject to "read my book." Let it suffice for the present that the great difference, obvious surely to the least cultivated ear, between the music of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and that of our own time—between the music of the Old Masters and that of our immediate predecessors and contemporaries—results from the former having had views of the nature of a "scale" or key which were very different from ours. From this cause it is that a number of effects, which to them were possibly pleasing, certainly tolerable, are, to those whose tastes have been formed exclusively on contemporary music, unpleasing, if not intolerable; and that, *vice versâ*, combinations which the old theorists one and all forbade, and which only the most audacious of their immediate successors hesitatingly and tentatively ventured upon, are now matters of every-day experience, and have even become essential—nay, indispensable—means of musical expression.

It is, I know, hard to believe, for instance, that the "perfect cadence" or discord of the dominant seventh and its resolution, with which everybody is now so familiar, which concludes ninety-nine pieces of modern music out of every hundred, and which presents itself so frequently—often too frequently—in every composition, long or short, grave or gay, which comes under a modern hearer's notice;—it is hard to believe, I say,



that this effect was once not only unfamiliar, strange, and startling, but that there was a time when all the theorists in Europe combined their voices into one savage howl of indignation against the musician who first had the courage—not to like, but—*to say* he liked it. For, that his confession rather than his taste was Monteverde's great offence is very certain. For centuries before his time the theoretical and practical musicians, the scholars and the men of impulse, the learned and the unlearned, the talkers or writers and the doers (call them what you will), had been

moving, however slowly, in the same direction, but with a wall of Chinese height and breadth between them; as little influenced by, as ignorant of, one another's doings as though their aims had nothing in common; without a conception that these were really identical, and that they could never be attained without mutual sympathy and help. Not to go further into this matter, for which we have no time, it is enough to say that the modes of operation of the musical schoolmen of the Middle Ages resembled rather mathematical demonstration than anything we should now call composition; the popular musicians —the minstrels, the jongleurs and others—on the other hand, simply giving themselves up to the expression of their own impulses, alike ignorant and heedless of the dogmas of the learned. That in the passionless process of what he would have called composition, the mediæval scholar in music should strive to express anything in his own soul, any condition of his own being, can never have so much as occurred to him as possible or to be desired; that the operations of the minstrel could ever be subject to law can never so much as have occurred to *him*. It is a question whether before the time of Josquin Despres, who flourished about the end of the fifteenth century, any so-called musician had attained to anything beyond the vaguest conception of the *effect* of what he was putting upon paper. It is recorded of that great composer—and the record implies that the practice was a new one—that he was in the habit of gathering about him his pupils and friends skilled in singing, and of putting before them various combinations and successions of musical notes, in order that he might himself hear and judge *how they sounded*. No man could have known better whether or not they were what his predecessors and contemporaries were pleased to call according to rule; but the truth was dawning on Josquin that music would some day come to be tested by the ear as well as by the eye, by its operation on the affections as well as on the understanding.

To know exactly how that which he puts upon paper will sound—what will be its effect on his own ear as well as on that of others—to hear (so to speak) with his eyes—is the greatest difficulty with which a musical student has, and always will have, to deal;—indeed it is the power of all others the possession of which constitutes what in modern times is called a "musician." Long and special training, some would say rare and special gifts, are needed to enable the artist in combined sounds—polyphonic music—to be sure of the effect of that which he writes, or, what comes to the same thing, to be sure that he is representing that which he has conceived. Without this training he may no doubt put notes into juxtaposition and make combinations follow one another, in a way which may be tolerable to a cultivated ear; nay, he may, by adhering to accepted rules, make music—good, bad, or indifferent, as the case may be; but he can never be sure that it is *his* music or the music he means it to be; nor can he even test the correctness or incorrectness of its execution by others. This was, I conceive, more often than not the condition of what was called a musician in the Middle Ages.

But the *popular* mediæval musician knew nothing of these difficulties. His aim was restricted to the production of melody, accompanied, if at all, by a few simple combinations and successions the effect of which admitted of easy proof. As to the melody itself, its effect would be ascertained in the very act of making it: for the mere melodist may be at once composer, performer, and auditor. As the painter sees the result of every touch on his canvas, and the sculptor of every chip on his marble, so the melodist can, if he pleases, hear the effect of every note as he joins it on to the notes which have gone before.

To express in the fewest words what I conceive to have been the state of music down to about the end of the fifteenth century, I should say that in the scholastic music there was no Art, and in the popular music no Science; whence it is that the former

has ceased to please and the latter has for the most part perished utterly. Everything musical that can now give pleasure, everything that can hope to live through the day of its creation, must result from sentiment the expression of which is subject to law:—in a word, Music is both an art and a science.

The music of the sixteenth century, especially of the second half of it, presents numerous instances and affords numerous proofs of a craving, on the parts of the men of science, for more art; as indeed do some of the very few works of the men of art which have been preserved to us, of a craving for more science. The somewhat supercilious charge of want of expression, so often brought against the Old Masters, can no doubt frequently, though not universally, be proven. There is no want of that general accordance between the style of their music and the sentiment of the words to which it is set which is the first condition of musical expression. But this accordance is never more than general. That anything like that close following in music of the various changes of feeling expressed in poetry to which we moderns are habituated ever suggested itself to a composer of the second period is sufficiently disproved in one of the greatest works of the greatest of them. Palestrina has set these words, "Incipit Lamentatio Jeremiæ Prophetæ, Lectio I." ("Here beginneth the first Chapter of the Lamentations of the Prophet Jeremiah"), to music as noble and as affecting as any suggested to him by the most touching passages which follow in the "Lamentations" themselves. As a solitary instance this might not be worth much. Indeed it might admit of explanation if not justification. But all concurrent testimony, direct or indirect, is in favour of the truth of my assertion; and, more than this, the musical incidents which begin the seventeenth century prove beyond a doubt that the development of the music of the second period had reached its limits, and that advancement was only possible with a scale-system, or "tonality," based in nature, and therefore new.

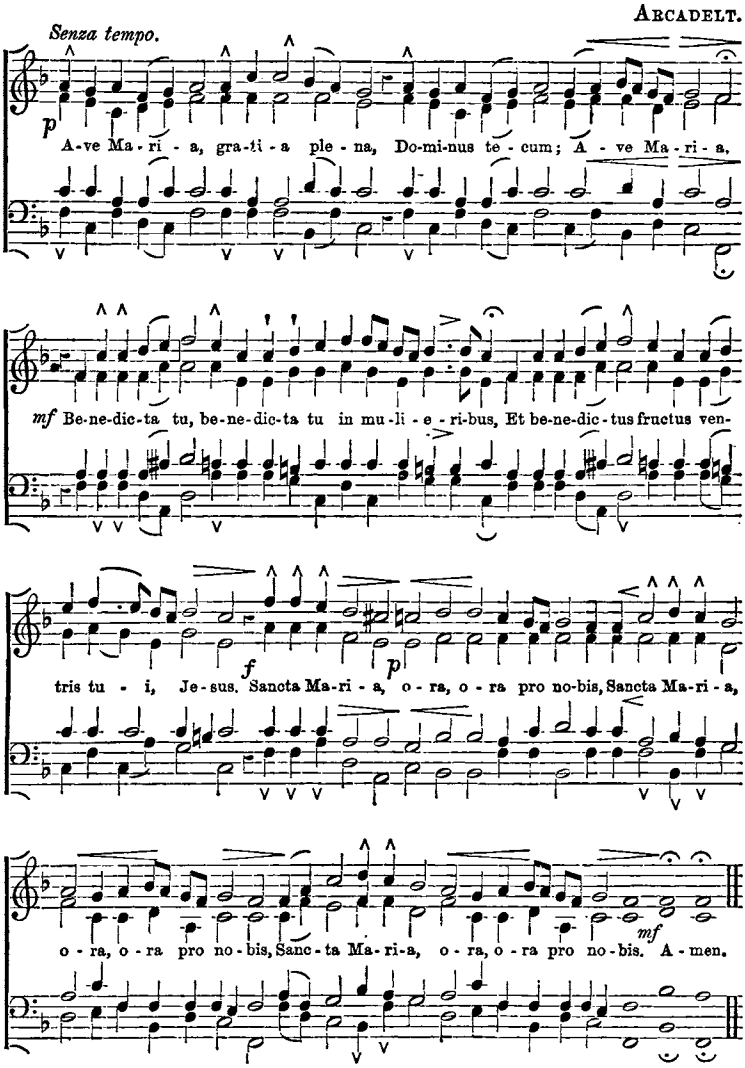
It is certain that this, which the composers of the third period proved, was more than suspected by some of the most inventive of the second. A very pleasing exemplification of it, among many that might be adduced, is presented in a short composition by Arcadelt, one of the most illustrious of that body of Gallo-Belgian musicians who, in the first half of the sixteenth century, laid the foundations of what afterwards became the Roman School—the musicians, in fact, who were the teachers of Palestrina and his contemporaries. This composition is the more remarkable for its precocity, as being—not a piece of secular music, nor even of "measured" Church music, but—a piece of harmonized "plain-song,"—*i.e.*, melody in which "time" is supplemented by "rhythm," and the relative duration and emphasis of notes are subjected altogether to the quantity and accent of the syllables to which they are set.*

It is not without an effort that a modern musician is enabled to realize this timeless music, the traditional mode of performing which, possibly recoverable, has been for some time partially if not wholly lost. It is not by accident that we moderns invariably speak of music as consisting of time and tune—never, of tune and time. The measured, though monotonous, beats of a drum appeal far more intelligibly to our musical sense than the most varied succession of unproportionate sounds. Nevertheless, whatever its shortcomings, plain-song is a variety of music in the utter neglect of which modern practice would seem to have lost a good deal,—if only because it is a variety.

* No existing notation can express more than approximately the relative duration of the sounds in Plain-Song,—the so-called "Gregorian" notation no more than our own. In the accompanying copy the semibreves, minims, crotchets, and quavers must not be estimated according to their usual relative value; they must be regarded only as indicating notes to be performed *somewhat* quicker or slower than one another. The words are the only safe guide in the performance of this kind of music.

HYMN.—AVE MARIA.

ARCADELT.



I have not presented this Hymn of Arcadelt as an average specimen of the music of his epoch, but as an exceptional one. The

vocal music of the second period was generally characterized by breadth, coherence, and high finish; but for the most part it seems to us vague, from the continual overlapping of one phrase by another, and inconsequent, from its unsatisfactory "tonality;" a piece, as a modern musician would say, often or generally ending in a different scale or key from that in which it began, or, what is worse, ending with a half-close, or "imperfect cadence,"—leaving the hearer in expectation that the composer is going to say something more, when, as it proves, he has said all he has to say, and has, wisely of course, come to end. Music like this, though still, on account of its beautiful texture, always performed with pleasure, and generally listened to with respect—for though it may be sometimes dull it is never trite—was far from realizing the ideal of the new race of scholars and savants engendered by that astonishing, and for the time irresistible force—the Renaissance.

I have on a former occasion given an outline of the action of the Renaissance of Music—the last of the arts affected by it: how certain Florentine gentlemen and scholars, united and stimulated by their love of poetry and music, set to work to re-unite these too long dissevered powers; how similar and possibly unconnected essays were made at the same time in Rome and other places; how, with the usual impetuosity of out-and-out reformers, they confounded the good with the bad, arming themselves with bran-span new brooms wherewith to sweep into the limbo of used-up things the science of Counterpoint, with all its accessories of canon, fugue, imitation, inversion, augmentation, diminution, and a hundred other musical artifices, with a view to putting in its place something or other—they knew not yet exactly what—which they were pleased to call the restored "Musical Declamation of the Greeks."

This attempt of course failed; but the effects which indirectly resulted from it acted on the Musical Art most beneficially. Few experiments were needed to show to these vehement Classicists