

All Hallows', Lombard Street

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## Church and Organ Music

### THE SILBERMANN ORGANS AT DRESDEN

By JOHN MATTHEWS

As Saxony is likely to remain a *terra incognita* to most English organists of this generation, some particulars of the old Silbermann organs as they existed in Merkel's time may be of interest.

In 1885 their most characteristic features were absolutely unaltered. One might hear and play Bach under the same conditions as when Bach himself visited the city and gave a recital in the Frauenkirche. Equal temperament had long since been adopted, and one little peculiarity of Silbermann's corrected: he invariably omitted the lowest C# in the pedals, deeming it a needless expense with the limited range of keys allowed in the old system of tuning—to which he adhered in spite of Bach's refusal to consider an organ for Leipsic built under these conditions. No doubt new and more convenient pedal-boards—though still very wide in scale—had long since been added, but the old keyboards mostly remained. They were, of course, but little suited to our modern organ music, yet one certainly realised Bach as is not always possible even on a fine and up-to-date English organ.

With each great advance in the art of organ-building a different type of instrument is created\*, which in turn creates a style of its own in composition. One could not imagine a Widor Symphony or a Hollins Concert Overture on a Silbermann organ, and the Dresden organists had almost of necessity to keep to the well-known classics; I doubt if any of them were so much as even acquainted with César Franck.

The Silbermann organ I was best acquainted with personally was that in the Frauenkirche, where it stood in an elaborate case of white and gold in a commanding position behind the altar. The reader may imagine the dome of St. Paul's, reduced in size, and with four or five galleries encircling its interior. The tone floated away freely, though the echo was not so great as that in the Chapel of the Royal Court, and the twelfth-sounding ranks stood out rather prominently to modern ears. The touch was not unpleasant, and the mechanism quite reliable, as all these organs—in those days at any rate—were maintained in good condition, and mostly well in tune. This organ was a three-manual of forty-three speaking stops, as follows: Great, 14; Echo, 11; Choir, 10; Pedal, 8; yet, owing to the light wind-pressure, and the system of blowing by connecting six planks to stand on with separate feeders, students, by merely stepping from one plank to another whilst the others were slowly settling down could blow for each other's practice for a long time without fatigue. The draw-stops were huge china-faced knobs as large as door-knobs, set in a rim of brass inside rosewood. There were, of course, no composition pedals, but one or two knobs labelled 'Sperr ventil' cut off the wind from groups of stops such as the mixtures or reeds without withdrawing the stops themselves. The reeds would not find any admirers to-day, though they were not so crazy as those in Silbermann's organ in the Church of St. Sophia opposite the Opera House. The gambas and flutes

were good, the diapasons free and bold in tone, the twelfth-sounding ranks in the mixtures perhaps, as already noted, unduly prominent—but Silbermann, like our own Henry Willis, had certainly learnt the art of building up the tone into an artistic whole, expressing his own individuality. This feature with Silbermann was more noticeable than the excellence of any particular stop. I can fully endorse, from my own recollection, the following remarks of Dr. Albert Schweitzer:

'On going from a modern organ to one of Silbermann's a player feels at first only a lack of all the auxiliary devices which appeared indispensable for a delicately graduated interpretation of Bach's works. But in a short time there is a change. One begins to delight in the obligatory simplicity, and is surprised to see how little the refinement of the transitions is missed, and how characteristic, yet natural withal, are the effects now obtained, simply because one has control of but a few gradations of tone-power which cannot be shaded off into the other. There are works whose full beauty is manifested only under such conditions.'

The English organist who has never played a large organ without a Swell may be surprised to hear that one does not miss it so much as might be supposed when one has an ample number of foundation-stops in nice gradation as to power, and not differing very much in quality, with every stop blending in a free and open space. Under such conditions a fine *crescendo* can be built up with a friend to pull out the stops—each one a handful—in accordance with a carefully pre-arranged scheme. Although Merkel had no Swell pedal in any of the organs he played, he by no means despised it—in fact he praised the little Walker organ in the English church, and extemporized charmingly on it to my friend the former organist, Mr. B. S. Ward.

In the 'Church of the Three Kings' at Dresden Neustadt stands another Silbermann organ, where, in company with the late Mr. Franklin Peterson (formerly principal of Melbourne University), we met the organist Herr C. A. Fisher, who played to us. Here for the organist's use stood by the keys a large and ancient hour-glass, and the very organ-seat upon which Mozart once sat and played to the people of Dresden. What an opportunity for a novelist to describe how he enraptured the people—half a column of high-flown descriptive writing at least should follow. But, alas! the cold fact remains that Mozart, the 'divine Mozart,' left a record in the vestry stating that he 'could not warm the people by his playing.'

What the present condition of these Silbermann organs may be I do not know. Perhaps some reader will tell us if, during the war, in the great search for metal, any of them were stripped of their metal pipes. The bells in the English Church were broken up in the Church itself, but the organ was spared, as probably was the case with most organs in Saxony.

### ALL HALLOWS', LOMBARD STREET

This interesting old City church—the last that Wren rebuilt after the Great Fire, on the site of which a church has stood since 1067, mentioned in Domesday Book as All Hallows Grasschurch—is now having its organ rebuilt. The first organ was built in 1703, at a cost of £350, subscribed for by a few generous supporters of the church. It stood in

\* An organ was opened last December in Freiburg University (i/Br.) built in accordance with the directions in the *Syntagma Musicum* of M. Praetorius, in order to interpret the old organ music with historical correctness.

the west gallery (now demolished), and had one manual comprising nine stops (no pedal). The builder (or organ-maker as he was called in those days) was Renatus Harris, and the main condition of the contract was that if the congregation did not like it after six months' trial the organ was to be taken away and the gallery left in as good condition as it was previous to the erection of the instrument. The organ survived. The first organist was Renatus Harris, jun. He was paid £22 per annum, to play at the services and to keep the organ in maintenance. This organ did duty till 1870, when it was rebuilt and moved to the east end, south side. Seven of the old stops were retained, and formed the Great manual; a Swell manual of seven stops, a Choir manual of five stops, and a Pedal 16-ft. open diapason were added, with four couplers. This has existed to the present time, with tuning and minor repairs. The improvements now being carried out comprise cleaning throughout; existing manual action repaired; new standard R.C.O. pedal-board, with tubular pneumatic action—the 16-ft. Bourdon being borrowed from the Swell manual to make a second pedal stop; a new 8-ft. Oboe to tenor C on Swell manual; the existing Mixture on the Great taken out, and a Clarabella 8-ft. to tenor C in place thereof; the Choir organ to be enclosed in a Swell box; and the present Gemshorn 4-ft. on that manual to be replaced by a Voix Celeste to tenor C to undulate with the existing Dulciana. The cost of all this is being provided for by a worshipper at the church who wishes to be anonymous. Messrs. Gray & Davison are doing the work, and it is hoped shortly to complete the scheme by the addition of a mechanical blowing installation.

The original contract ('purchase deed') of the organ was found in the church-safe a few months ago. The verger at All Hallows' will be pleased to show it to any readers who are interested.

H.

#### ROYAL COLLEGE OF ORGANISTS

Candidates for the Associateship Examination are requested to note that the reference to the Peters' edition of the Trio in C minor (Bach), given in the regulations as Vol. 9, No. 7, relates to the old edition, and that in the new edition it is Vol. 9, No. 9.

#### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The fifty-eighth Annual General Meeting was held at the College, Kensington Gore, on Saturday, July 22, 1922, under the chairmanship of the President, Dr. Charles Macpherson. Among the members present were Dr. W. G. Alcock, Mr. H. J. Balfour, Dr. G. J. Bennett, Mr. E. T. Cook, Dr. Alan Gray, Dr. A. Eaglefield Hull, Dr. Stanley Marchant, Dr. H. W. Richards, Dr. F. G. Shinn, Dr. Davan Wetton, Mrs. M. Augood, Messrs. S. H. Baker, H. Batt, F. W. Belchamber, Miss M. G. Blundun, Messrs. H. Cartner, G. R. Ceiley, J. Coxhead, J. W. Croft, G. D. Cunningham, A. E. Danby, Dr. H. Darke, Messrs. H. P. Dean, E. M. Dent, E. E. Douglas-Smith, D. Edeson, Miss F. J. Fitch, Messrs. R. Goss-Custard, W. Goyné, H. Hall, W. Hancock, L. Harding, P. C. Hayes, H. Hodge, W. G. Hopkins, A. P. Howe, E. G. Hurst, L. M. Jones, W. H. Kirby, Mrs. M. Layton, Messrs. D. C. Leeke-Roe, W. Mallinson, C. A. Marks, O. D. Marsh, D. McIntyre, G. J. Metzler, C. E. Miller, T. T. Noble, W. E. Ogden, B. J. Orsman, A. C. Osman, L. A. Pattison, Dr. W. J. Phillips, Mr. W. J. F. Pugh, Miss M. Renton, Messrs. W. R. Simmons, W. A. Sims, Miss K. Cholditch-Smith, Messrs. S. Smith, H. Stubington, H. W. Sumsion, H. D. F. Taylor, Miss L. R. Trott, Messrs.

T. L. C. Tull, H. Uttley, G. T. Warren, Miss S. G. Watkins, Messrs. S. H. Way, W. G. Webber, H. Wharton-Wells, H. F. Wilkinson, Miss E. M. Williams, Messrs. L. Wilson, C. W. Wright, R. Yarrow, and Dr. H. A. Harding (hon. secretary).

The minutes of the last Annual General Meeting were read and confirmed.

Voting papers for the election of two London members of the Council were distributed to those members who had not voted by post.

Mr. G. R. Ceiley and Mr. Wharton-Wells were appointed scrutineers.

The hon. secretary, Dr. H. A. Harding, read the Annual Report.

#### FIFTY-EIGHTH ANNUAL REPORT.

Your Council have the honour to report that the past Session has been in every way characterised by complete success. There are unmistakable evidences of the steadily maintained prosperity of the College and of the usefulness of its work and mission.

The candidates entering for examination numbered 448, of whom 87 passed.

Your Council are much gratified that the Worshipful Company of Musicians have decided to present their silver medal triennially to the most distinguished candidate at the Fellowship Examination. The first presentation will take place on October 22, 1922, and the recipient will be Mr. G. C. Gray, organist of St. Michael-le-Belfrey, York, the Lafontaine prize-winner, who gained the highest number of marks in organ-playing during the last three years.

Your Council wish to acknowledge their indebtedness to the Worshipful Company of Musicians, and especially to Mr. H. Cart de Lafontaine, who, as Master of the Musicians' Company, used his good offices to make it possible for the candidates of the College to be eligible for this valuable distinction, which will prove a great incentive to our members to excel in organ-playing.

A new departure will be made at the distribution of diplomas. Your Council have decided that at these functions eminent organists shall be invited to play upon the College organ the pieces chosen for the Fellowship or Associateship examinations. It is hoped that members will avail themselves of these opportunities for hearing the test-pieces played by acknowledged masters of the organ.

The examiners appointed for 1921-22 were Sir Frederick Bridge, Sir Walter Parratt, Dr. E. C. Bairstow, Mr. H. J. Balfour, Dr. G. J. Bennett, Dr. Charles Macpherson, Dr. Stanley Marchant, Dr. Alan Gray, Dr. F. J. Read, Dr. H. W. Richards, Dr. F. G. Shinn, and Dr. E. T. Sweeting.

Your Council wish to accord their heartiest thanks to the hon. treasurer, Dr. C. W. Pearce; to the hon. secretary, Dr. H. A. Harding; and to the registrar, Mr. Thomas Shindler, for their assistance, so readily and so generously rendered on all occasions. Your Council also wish to express their obligations to the hon. auditors, Mr. O. D. Belsham and Mr. G. R. Ceiley, and to the professional auditors, Messrs. Pannell & Co.

The work of the College Staff is always characterised by promptitude and accuracy, and their efforts are much appreciated by your Council.

On the proposition of Mr. DOUGLAS-SMITH, seconded by Mr. BELCHAMBER, the Report was adopted.

THE PRESIDENT, in presenting the Annual Financial Statement, said: I am very sorry the hon. treasurer, Dr. Pearce, has not been able to come this morning. We all miss him very much. He had intended to be present, but was prevented at the last moment. If you would like to ask the hon. secretary any questions about this Statement he will be pleased to answer them.

Mr. HERBERT HODGE: There is one question I should like to ask with reference to the item for organ practice, and it is whether in view of the prosperous condition of the College it would be possible to reduce the fees charged for the use of the organ for practice? It seems rather a high price to charge 3s. 6d. an hour at the present time.

THE HON. SECRETARY: I can only say that I will report Mr. Herbert Hodge's suggestion to the Council, who will, I am sure, give it their careful and sympathetic consideration.