A Biographical Essay of Anton Bruckner
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To include among the " little masters " a man who has written eight symphonies, one of which suffices for an entire concert, is, perhaps, to stretch the term to its utmost limits; but, judging from the quality and value of his work, rather than by its pretensions, Anton Bruckner finds here his legitimate place. The composer is one who must command the respect of all true lovers of art, for he has worked for art's sake alone with a singleness of purpose and a real unworldliness that are entirely estimable. He has waited long for his reward, but in later years he has obtained a great measure of recognition, and if that recognition is mainly found in one section of the German musical world, it is the section which, no doubt, Bruckner is most anxious to please. He is the symphonist of the extreme Wagnerians, who consider him to possess that small portion of Beethoven's spirit which failed to descend upon the Bayreuth master. So late has his day been in coming that it is difficult to realize that he has recently entered upon his 70th year.

Born at Ansfelden in Upper Austria, September 4, 1824, Bruckner began to study music under his father, a village schoolmaster, when he was nine years of age. About three years later the death of the father left the family in extreme poverty, and the prelate of St. Florian, a Jesuit college at Kalksburg, gave the boy a free berth on that foundation, as a chorister. His musical education was well looked after, for not only did he learn the violin from a certain Gruber, a pupil of Schuppanzigh, known to readers of the Beethoven literature, but he was taught harmony and counterpoint, and had lessons from Dürnberger at Linz. In 1841 he received his first appointment, as a school-teacher at Windhaag, with the incredible salary of two florins a month considerably less than a shilling a week. He managed to scrape along somehow by playing dance-music at weddings, etc., for 25 kreuzer a night.

In1845 he returned to Kalksburg as deputy organist and teacher, and in 1851 became principal organist, with an annual salary of 8 pounds, and an additional salary as teacher of 3 pounds, 12s. His post gave him plenty of opportunities for the composition of sacred music, and many masses, psalms, etc., date from this time. He also visited Vienna, and ultimately became pupil of the famous Sechter for counterpoint and composition. He attracted the notice of the best musical authorities by his astonishing powers of improvisation, and his extemporaneous performance of a regularly-constructed fugue on the organ procured him the place of cathedral organist at Linz in 1855. He continued his studies in Vienna, and in 1861 the authorities of the Conservatorium gave him a certificate of proficiency. For two years after this, so wanting was he in the false pride which academical success too often generates, he studied orchestration with Otto Kitzler, a man ten years his junior, and in 1864 his first symphony was played at Linz. In 1867 he was appointed professor of the organ, harmony and counterpoint at the Vienna Conservatorium, and in the following year he succeeded his old master, Sechter, as Court organist. (Sechter, it will be remembered, was the master of J. L. Hatton, and of many other distinguished musicians.)

Bruckner's fame as an organist had spread so far that in 1869 he visited Paris, after a successful competition at Nancy, and gave recitals there, and was invited in 1871 to give recitals on the new organ in the Albert Hall in connection with the International Exhibition of that year. The fame of his extempore playing was used, most injudiciously, as a "puff preliminary," and, as a natural result, some critics were disappointed. The Monthly Musical Record of September 1871, remarks: "Herr Bruckner is a very respectable player; but really great improvisations are productions peculiar to genius, and of that we perceived no proof." At the same time due allowance has to be made for the difficulty of managing a strange organ effectively, especially when the curious acoustic properties of the hall at Kensington are considered. During the same visit to England, while he was playing at the Crystal Palace, he was so carried away by the course of his ideas in improvisation that the exhausted blowers could not maintain the supply of wind, and the piece came to an abrupt end. A parallel story to this is told of the competition for the post of Court organist at Vienna, where a space of twenty five minutes was allowed to each candidate for the development of a theme given by the judges ; Bruckner got so interested that he had to be reminded that the allotted time had expired. Not even then did he cease, and after nearly one hour's playing he left off, greatly satisfied with himself, and entirely regardless of the effects of his performance upon those who were to adjudge the post. It is to the credit of these worthy gentlemen that they bestowed it on the unruly candidate.

In 1872 the distinguished critic, Dr. Hanslick, wrote a glowing account of Bruckner's mass in F minor; his opinion of the composer and of the work changed completely in the course of time, and those who care to ferret out the weaknesses of eminent critics may be referred to the Musikalisches Wochenblatt for 1893, p. 280. It is not without significance, to those who are acquainted with the position of parties in the German musical world, that Bruckner's open allegiance to the cause of Wagner's music should have been made in the year after Hanslick's first article appeared. In 1873 Bruckner took the three symphonies, which then represented his work in that kind, to Bayreuth, and Wagner was so delighted with them that he willingly accepted the dedication of the third, in D minor. Its predecessor, in C minor, was performed for the first time at a concert organized by the composer for the closing of the Vienna exhibition of 1873.

Wagner must have had reason to believe in Bruckner's powers, for he allowed the final chorus of “Die Meistersinger " to be given under his direction at a " Liedertafel " concert at Linz, several years before the comedy was performed as a whole.

In 1875 he was appointed University Reader at Vienna for musical theory and harmony; a pupil of his, Dr. R. Wallaschek, describes the admiration he excited in the students by working out extemporaneously fugues and canons, on themes given him at a moment's notice, with as much resource and clearness as if he had thought them over for a long time. Such vogue as the composer has enjoyed in his own country did not fall to his share until 1884, when his seventh symphony, in E major, was given at Leipzig under Arthur Nikisch, at a concert in aid of the Wagner Memorial Fund. The adagio of the symphony is an elegy on Wagner, and the whole work is very decidedly Wagnerian in character; the theme introduced as the “Non confundar in aeternum " in a " Te Deum " of Bruckner's own, is a

prominent feature in this adagio. [1] The work is throughout melodious and often effective, but it is so deeply tinged with the Wagnerian influence that it can scarcely be regarded otherwise than as a reflection of his spirit, and the scherzo has been described as a mere transcription of the " Walkiirenritt." Its popularity was rapid and extensive; Herr Richter conducted it at one of his London concerts in 1887, when it was received with favour, though with far less enthusiasm than it obtained in many towns of Germany. In 1891 another work of Bruckner's was given at the same concerts, viz., his symphony in D minor, No. 3, already referred to as being dedicated to Wagner. The scherzo, very certainly the best of the four movements, was to have been introduced to the English public years before, but Herr Richter found no opportunity of bringing it forward at his earlier seasons. The composer has here taken almost the identical theme of the first movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony for his own opening section the finale is cleverly constructed, but it cannot be said to have been very successful in London. Six months before, in Vienna, the repetition of the scherzo was so vigorously demanded, that Richter had to explain that it could not be repeated owing to the lateness of the hour. At the close of last year the same conductor, who is devoted to Bruckner's music, brought forward, also at Vienna, the eighth of his symphonies, in C minor; as its performance occupies an hour and a half, there is not room for much else in the programme, in a country where the musical digestion is better understood than it is with us. The adagio alone takes twenty six minutes in performance, and yet the success of the work is said to have been beyond dispute. In the finale the composer has worked up contrapuntally the chief themes of the three preceding movements, and the instrumentation of the whole is very highly spoken of, even by those who least approve of the composer's " modern " tendencies. The composer's chief production in the department of chamber music is a quintet in F major, which was brought forward on two occasions by the Hellmesberger quartet in Vienna with the greatest success. It is rumoured to be one of the most difficult works of its class in modern music, and is regarded apparently by both Wagnerians and anti- Wagnerians as an application of the Bayreuth master's methods to chamber music, a proceeding which can hardly be expected to be more successful than that of putting new wine into old bottles. Beside these works, a setting of Psalm cl. for soli, choir and orchestra, and a chorus, " Der Germannenzug," for male voices and brass instruments, are highly spoken of.

In character Bruckner is extremely straightforward, naive, sincere and simple; in fact he seems hardly to belong to the present day, so complete is his disregard for the many *convenances* of Austrian musical society. It has been absolutely impossible to him to push his way onward in the world, and he has been content to let his symphonies remain

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[1] The following note from the composer himself perhaps shows that the passage was at first intended for the words to which it was afterwards set, not at first conceived instrumentally " I composed the " Te Deum" in 1884, the symphony in 1883. Therefore I wrote the passage you refer to in the year 1883, just at the time of the death of our immortal master, who had
predicted great things of me." He adds that his " Te Deum" is dramatically conceived, and that the trombones are supposed to reflect the sense of dread conveyed in the final words of the hymn.

unplayed some for a quarter of a century, without making any efforts to get a hearing for them. He is still very much of a rustic, and rather a "rough diamond" in many ways, and he is of those who hold that a musician's education is none the worse for not extending beyond the limits of his own art. In 1886 he received the cross of the Franz Joseph Order, in 1890 the Upper Austrian Landtag bestowed upon him an annual pension of 400 gulden, and in 1891 the Vienna University made him Doctor of Philosophy *honoris causa.*