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DVORAK'S "THE SPECTRE'S BRIDE."

To-night Antonin Dvorak's dramatic cantata, "The Spectre's Bride," will be performed in Glasgow for the first time. It was originally composed from the libretto of Karel Jaromir Erben (English translation by the Rev. Dr. Troutbeck) for the Birmingham Festival of last year, the date of performance being Thursday, 27th August, and was not performed in London till Tuesday, 2d Inst. The story is founded on Burger's famous ballad "Lenora," with a locale in Bohemia, of which country the composer is a native, he having been born at Králov on the 8th September, 1851. It was not till he was advanced in years that he took to music as a profession. He is chiefly known as a composer of operas and instrumental works, and if the truth must be said, "The Spectre's Bride," from a vocal point of view, cannot be pronounced a success, though this is somewhat redeemed by effective instrumental colouring. The story, as is stated, is founded on a Bohemian legend, but it has its parallel in many countries, and among them our own, where the legend runs that "the dead lover, William, came to fetch his bride, Margaret." The legend before us differs only slightly from those of other countries. A lovely maiden is found on her knees before a picture of the Virgin, deploring the loss of her father, mother, sister, and brother, and also speaks of her absent lover, who at parting enjoined on her to spin in the first year, bleach in the next, and prepare wedding garments the third year, when they were to be joined in holy wedlock. Her lover at the end of the third returns not, and in great despair she prays to the Virgin that her lover may be brought to her or that she may go to him. While engaged in prayer her lover enters the room, and to all appearance alive in the body, but in reality a spectre. He urges her to fly with him at once, but she wishes him to delay till the morning, when the storm might be over. However, he will not delay, but says that "day is night, and night is day, the day I like to deep away, ere yet this passing night is done shall we in wedded bonds be one." The maiden is persuaded to go, and during the midnight journey on foot over rocky ground, and above the din of the storm is heard the yelling of the dogs, the howling of the wolves, and the crying of the screech-owl. On through marshy land and swamps with corpse candles in double row, like a funeral train, and the sound of creaking frogs, and "on he went with rapid gait, and she behind, she might not wait," and "wherever her footstep fell, with blood the track was marked as well." At each ten miles he made her cast away some of her most cherished articles. First of all, her book of prayer, which he said weighed her down like a stone; second, her chaplet, which he declared was like a snake, and frightened him; and third, the cross which her mother had given her. They have now travelled thirty miles, and arrive at a churchyard, which the bride is informed is her new home, and asks her to leap over the wall with him; but she, after asking where his house is, and discerning a terrific fire burning in his eyes, becomes frightened, but hides her fear by saying "Thou hast before me ever gone; by risky paths I followed on, still think it is the first to be; make thou the leap, I'll follow thee." He leaps over the high wall at her bidding, and so soon as he is out of sight the maiden runs off, and is guided to a lonely house by the way, and makes the door fast. It proves to be a tomb, with a corpse laid out on a plank of wood. Her lover, when he finds that she has fled, pursues her and coming to the house knocks at the door, and calls on the corpse to open it and let him in or to put out the living body. The maiden prays the corpse not to undo the bolt. The corpse is anxious to open the door, but the pleading of the maiden overcomes it, and shortly the cock is heard crowing, when all spirits go to bed; and as the people who are going to early mass pass the churchyard, they find the maiden pale and trembling, and garments scattered over the graves. To describe the various scenes and actions of this work the composer has given a short introduction to the orchestra, in which the leading subjects in the cantata are heard, the first being the Spectre Motif, as it has been termed. This is played by the violins noted and without any accompaniment. The second theme is played by the horns, and the third and fourth by the trombones, flutes, and clarinets. The first chorus, "The stroke of midnight soon will sound," is opened by the voices alone, with a passage of 16 measures in A Minor. The work throughout is written in free style, and very often the choruses are merely echoes of the preceding solos. If the work takes with the public it will be on account of the instrumental colouring, and not for any special merit in the choral parts. No doubt several very fine melodies abound in the work both vocally and instrumentally, and these will, of course, meet their due reward. The work abounds in simple and complex transitions and modulations, enharmonic and otherwise, which are quite in accord with the varied scenes. The maiden is represented by a soprano voice, the lover by a tenor, and what may be termed the narrative recitations are undertaken by a bass. It is intended that a few voices placed at a distance from the other singers should deliver the lines, "The body must to death be brought, and woe to him who ill has wrought." This is while the maiden is supposed to be in the dead-house. The chorus, "There crew a cock," is supposed to imitate the announcing of sunrise by the feathered member of the poultry yard, and the sounding of the bell will be noted as the calling of the people to mass. Quite in keeping with the above work, the orchestra will play Raff's "Lenore" symphony, which derives its title from the same source as "The Spectre's Bride," and being played before the latter, it may not inappropriately be termed the "grand overture" to the cantata. The symphony is divided into three distinct divisions, two of which only are to be played to-night, namely, Part I.—Love and happiness. *Allegro* (E Major) *Andante quasi Larghetto* (A flat); Part II.—Farewell, *Tempo di Marcia* (C and F). This latter movement represents the departure of the lover to the wars. It is a bold, spirited march, introduced by the drums and clarinets, at first pianissimo, but gradually increases in volume and vigour.