

Interviews with Eminent Musicians.

No. 3. — SIR ARTHUR SULLIVAN.

Sir Arthur Sullivan's career has been a particularly brilliant one. Characterised by a fervent love for his art. The chief aim of his life has been to devote himself heart and soul to the achievement of a maximum of true excellence in his composition. From his earliest infancy he was surrounded by musical elements, for his father, to whom he was passionately attached, was an enthusiastic musician, who for many years held the position of bandmaster at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. Mr Sullivan fostered his little son's sensibilities with the warmest care, and encouraged the child to accompany him daily to the band rehearsals, thereby initiating him in the mysteries of instrumental practice. Incredible as it may seem, little Arthur had barely reached the age of eight when he was thoroughly acquainted with, and could play, all the wind instruments, save two.

The father's watchful eye having detected exceptional signs of musical instinct in his son, Thomas Sullivan lost no time in prevailing on Sir George Smart, who, in his turn, induced the Rev, Thomas T. Helmore, the then Master of the Children of the Chapel Royal, St. James, to hear the boy's voice. A meeting took place and the master was delighted at the sweet, pure rendering of "With Verdure Clad" by little Arthur Sullivan, who accompanied himself on the pianoforte. So deep an impression had the boy's singing made upon Mr. Helmore that a few days after the meeting he notified to Mr. Sullivan that his son might join the choir of the Chapel Royal.

With his entry to the Chapel Royal practically began a very remarkable and zealous career, for it was during his three years' sojourn there that the young musician made his first attempts at musical composition.

"What was the name of the very first song you composed, Sir Arthur?" I enquired, when I called upon the famous composer at Queen's Mansions.

"'O Israel' and it was shortly followed by an anthem, which was sung in the chapel. Bishop Bloomfield, who was then Dean of the Chapel Royal, on hearing that one of the Chapel boys had composed the anthem, sent

for me," continued Sir Arthur "and gave me half-a-sovereign, with an affectionate pat on the back and some words of kindly encouragement. I remember I felt extraordinarily proud on that occasion, for it was the first money I had earned for myself.

"In 1856 I competed for the Mendelssohn Scholarship with invaluable advice and assistance of the Rev. Mr. Helmore, who urged to me to work very hard, so that on

the result of the stringent examinations being made public, I was delighted and surprised to learn that I had been elected the first "Mendelssohn scholar."

"Who were your masters, Sir Arthur?" I asked, presently.

"For two years I studied harmony and counterpoint with Goss," was his reply, "and the pianoforte with Sterndale-Bennett and O'Leary. After that time my voice broke, and it was then decided that I should go to Leipzig. Here I entered the Conservatoire, and my masters were Hauptmann, Rietz, Moscheles and Plaidy.

"Did you work very hard in Leipzig?"

"Sometimes," replied Sir Arthur with a smile; "but you know what a student's life means: loafing as well as working."

"Who were your ideal composers in the early days of

your career?"

"Mendelssohn, Schumann and Schubert appealed most strongly to my feelings, and 'Tannhauser' and 'Lohengrin' of Wagner was especial favourites of mine: but I am very eclectic in my tastes."

Sir Arthur composed an overture called "The Light of the Harem" in Leipzig, which was received with acclamation at the student's annual concert, and received warm commendation from the press.

Spohr was in Leipzig at the time when Arthur Sullivan's successful overture was followed by the production of a string quartette. Young Sullivan was then a mere lad, and on being introduced to Spohr, surprised the master by his youthful appearance. Spohr, moreover, could scarcely believe that so excellent a composition was the creation of so young a man.



SIR ARTHUR SULLIVAN.
photo by Walery, Regent Street.



FACSIMILE OF SIR ARTHUR SULLIVAN'S MANUSCRIPT.

The incidental music written to Shakespeare's "Tempest," which was produced in Leipzig in 1861, and afterwards made a sensation in London at the Crystal Palace Concerts, where it was repeatedly given, proved that the young musician's powers had not been over-rated. Sir Arthur's early career was brightened and made pleasurable to him by reason of his association and friendship with many great musical men. Amongst

those of whom he remembers with keen delight is Rossini. The Italian maestro took more than an ordinary interest in Sullivan's talents and was particularly attracted by "The Tempest" music, which he used to play over repeatedly with the young musician, who had arranged several of the numbers as pianoforte duets.

"I think," said Sir Arthur, speaking of Rossini, "that he first inspired me with a love for the stage and things operatic, and this feeling and departure led to my undertaking the duties as organist at the Royal Italian Opera, under the conductorship of my friend Sir (then Signor) Michael Costa. At his request I wrote a ballet, entitled "L'Ile Enchantée," and my necessary intercourse with the stage employees, dancers and others gave me much insight in the blending of music and stage management, which became very valuable to me as time progressed."

From '62 to '66 Sir Arthur was called on to produce a great variety of compositions, and his truly inspirational knowledge, accumulated by this time with astounding copiousness helped him to prove himself equal to any unexpected requirement or sudden emergency. An anecdote illustrative of this of this capacity is worthy of record here.

One night "Faust" was being performed, with Michael Costa as conductor and Arthur Sullivan at the organ and in the midst of the church



THE STUDY.

much I was touched to hear those strains, which carried me back so many thousands of miles to home!"

In his capacity as a conductor it should be stated that as in all his actions, musical and otherwise, Sir Arthur is vigorously prompted by the soundest instincts of justice and common sense.

Who would imagine that, experienced and celebrated as Sir Arthur is, he could feel the anguish of nervousness? And yet he told me that on a first night he suffers tortures ere the moment the moment arrives for him to take his seat and conduct his new work.

"For an hour before the curtain rises," he said, "I shot myself up in the little room adjoining the orchestra and refuse to see anyone. The suspense is horrible, I assure you. It is not because I fear that the work will not please the public, for they are so kind to me that perhaps even if this were the case they would not tell me so; but it is the reflex of mental excitement I have undergone during the elaboration of the opera. Then I am so overcome by the kind welcome and warm reception accorded to me when I appear at the orchestra door that I feel as though I must burst into tears. But from the moment I am seated, and have taken the *bâton* in my hand, my nervousness vanishes like a dream. I am no longer the composer, but a part of the orchestra, aiming to pull the work successfully through before the most critical and important public in the world."

Sir Arthur is a great favourite with the Royal Family, if I may judge by the many photographic and other souvenirs which adorn his home. Her Majesty Queen Victoria holds, of course, the place of honour in the musician's drawing-room. A pretty story is told of Her Majesty in connection with that portrait. The background being very sombre, she inscribed her name on it, contrary to her custom, in white ink. When handling the photograph to a trusted envoy who was commanded to convey it to Sir Arthur, the Queen said naively, "Mind you tell that I wrote my name in white ink so that he would be sure to see it!"

One cause of serious worry to Sir Arthur Sullivan is his enormous correspondence. "It is the burden of my life," he explained to me, somewhat aggrievedly, "I receive about forty letters a day, and I assure you that thirty-five of these are, as a rule, begging letters. Is it not curious," he continued, "that people should ignore the fact that a composer's life is fraught with hard work and consequent anxieties, and that one's time is not one's own to devote to letter-writing? You would be surprised to see some of the letters I receive. Not only do they mostly contain demands for money, but even persons who are utterly unknown to me ask me for letters of introduction to managers and musical people generally."

The lesson which Sir Arthur teaches us in his Art may be learned over and over again in his apartments in Queen's Mansions. During his vast travels abroad he has amassed a large collection of rare antiquities, his taste apparently inclining him towards those curios from the far East.

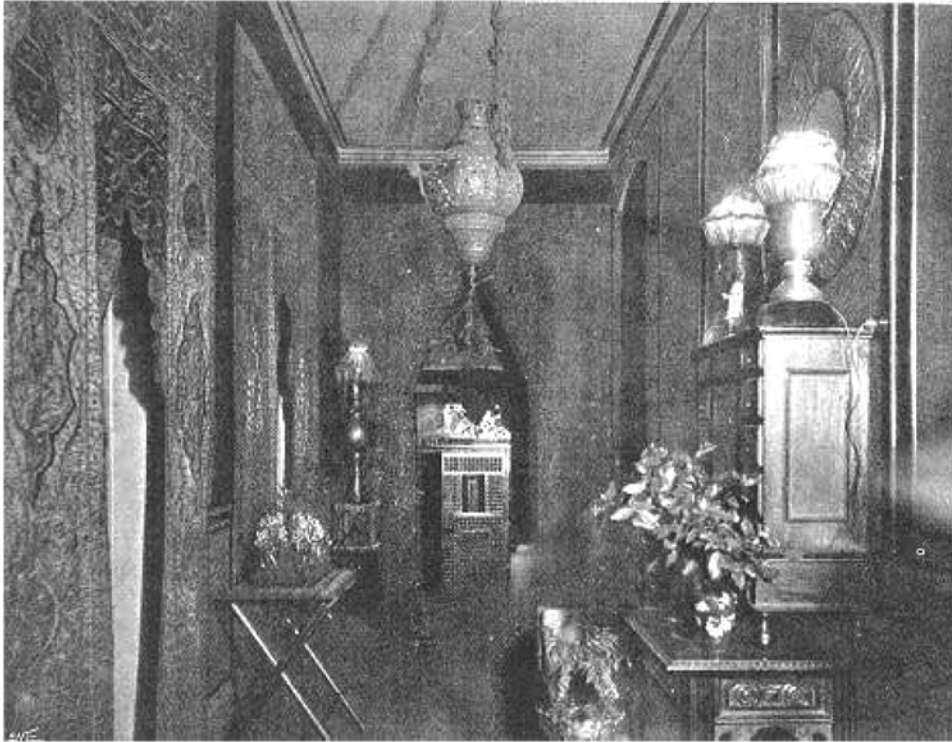
In his extreme hall Arabian lamps hang, giving out their mysterious quaint lights in softly sombre rays, while you peep through a lovely screen of old Cairo wood-work before reaching the dwelling rooms. The doors are

artistically draped with elaborate Persian and Greek hangings and, nestling beneath the spreading leaves of rare palms, you meet with large restful divans upon which Oriental silks of great beauty and price are carelessly thrown.

Sir Arthur's material surroundings convey to the casual visitor an impression of artistic calm and physical comfort. The harmonious colouring of the Persian tiles affixed to the walls is so soothing to the eye, the exquisite taste and judiciousness characterising the adventitious decorations are so perfectly in keeping with the personality of the *genius loci*, that Sir Arthur's home may be accepted by the æsthetic and the worldling alike as the aptest of "modern instances," or typical of the "eternal fitness of things."



CORNER OF DINING ROOM.



THE CORRIDOR.

scene the wire connecting the pedal under Costa's foot with the metronome stick at the organ gave way. Such an untoward occurrence might have meant trouble for the organist had not his usual presence of mind and *savoir faire* come to the rescue, for it is easy to understand that under the circumstances the organist would be unable to hear anything save his own instrument, and therefore it would be impossible for him to keep time with the conductor of the orchestra.

A brilliant thought struck him instantly. He summoned a stage-carpenter, and whispered to him, without further ado, "Run sharp, and tell Mr. Costa that the connecting wire has broken, and that he must keep his ears open and follow me." This happy inspiration saved the situation, and all went without a hitch. No one was more delighted or grateful than the illustrious conductor himself, who loudly praised Mr. Sullivan for the apt manner in which he had saved the situation.

It was in 1866 that Sir Arthur Sullivan produced, together with Mr. Frank Burnand, an adaptation of J. Maddison Morton's farce, "Box and Cox," under the title of "Cox and Box."

"That was quick work," said Sir Arthur, smiling at the reminiscences of his early feats in the direction of rapid composing and scoring: "for the operetta was announced for public production one Saturday, while upon the previous Monday evening I had not yet written one note for the orchestra!

'Cox and Box' had been performed several times in private, and I had generally extemporized the accompaniments when they were required on those occasions. But we had arranged to give a performance at the Adelphi Theatre, for the benefit of a fund organised by the staff of *Punch*, and I was to conduct a full orchestra on the afternoon of the Saturday in question. Where there's a will there's a way, however, and I made up my mind to complete the orchestration in good time. I succeeded by dint of perseverance, and having completed the score by 11 A.M., at 12 the dress rehearsal took place, followed two hours later by the performance."

"The Contrabandista" was composed, scored, and rehearsed within 16 days; while, incredible as it will seem to all, Sir Arthur began the overture to "Iolanthe" late one night and finished it by seven o'clock on the following morning.

I asked Sir Arthur to tell me something about his method of work.

He replied characteristically, and in a very few words. Taking bulky volumes from his huge bookcases, he showed me his compositions admirably scored and faultlessly inscribed therein in a minute hand, while I observed that they were completely scored for full orchestra.

"But," I exclaimed, "you sometimes jot your ideas down in the rough before notating them with this precision in your books?"

"Oh yes," said Sir Arthur, "I make a hieroglyphic sketch before writing out the full score, as I know exactly which instruments I require in order to produce the desired effects, combinations and harmonies. I never use a piano when composing, for it would limit my ear as to the effects I want; therefore, while writing I score the compositions right off for a complete band, and I do not hear the result of my creations until they are performed and I am conducting them."

Speaking about the difficulties of composition and the scant of something suggestive and sympathetic oft-times to the aid the writer. Sir Arthur told me two touching incidents connected with his work. He had been asked to compose an overture for the Norwich Festival in 1866, and could find no subject suitable to the style of composition which recommended itself to his creative mood at the time. He confided the cause of his trouble to his father, who would not hear of his son giving up the commission entrusted to him.

"Try again, my boy," said his father: "something is sure to occur to direct your thoughts into a new channel. Don't give it up."

Thomas Sullivan's words proved to be strangely and solemnly true, for in three days he suddenly died of aneurism of the heart, and his son, who was passionately attached to his father, flung himself into his work on the night of the funeral in order to take refuge from his overwhelming grief.

"In Memoriam" contained all the pent-up passionate sorrow which Arthur Sullivan experienced at the irretrievable loss of his best friend, and the funereal, mournful strains which burst from the tear-stained paper he inscribed them on proved how intensely the subject, which had so suddenly come upon him, had stirred his innermost feelings.

The other anecdote relates to "The Lost Chord," Sir Arthur's most popular song, which Madame Antoinette Sterling renders so magnificently.

This, as "In Memoriam," was the production an overwrought brain, racked by much mental anxiety and suffering.

"I was nursing my brother through severe illness," said Sir Arthur, meditatively, "and had hardly left his bedside for several days and nights. Finding one evening that he had fallen into a dose, I crept away into a room adjoining his, and tried to snatch a few minutes rest. I found this impossible, however, so I roused myself to work, and made one more of many attempts during four years to set music to Adelaide Proctor's interesting words. This time I felt that the right inspiration had come to me at last, and there and then I composed "The Lost Chord." That song was evolved under this most trying circumstances, and was the outcome of a very unhappy and troubled state of mind."

I gathered from facts which Sir Arthur touched upon, dealing with his career, that he never felt the



DRAWING ROOM.



DRAWING ROOM (ANOTHER VIEW).

slightest inclination for teaching. In spite, however, of his disinclination, he was persuaded to accept the post of principal to the National Training School for music (1875). The National Training School became, after some years, the Royal College of Music, on which occasion the Queen conferred the honour of knighthood upon the composer simultaneously with Professor Macfarren.

Speaking about his early works, and especially concerning those with which Mr. W. S. Gilbert has aided him in earning a world-wide reputation, Sir Arthur told me that he decidedly preferred "The Yeomen of the Guard" to all others. His operettas have achieved a universal renown, and once, when he was traveling in the United States, a very funny incident occurred, which he related to me.

"Together with a party of friends," said Sir Arthur, "I was traversing a rather uncivilized district in the state of California when we stopped at a mining camp for some refreshments, The driver informed me that I was expected there, and feeling rather gratified to hear this, I made my way towards the whisky store. Three or four fellows were lounging about, and one approached a big, sturdy man, who was standing near me, and said to him, 'Are you Mr. Sullivan?' The man shook his head and pointed his finger in my direction. After looking me up and down, the man demanded, 'What do you weigh?' 'Bout 162 pounds,' was my reply. 'Pooh!' said

my interrogator, 'that's a queer start. Do you mean to tell me you gave J. Blackman fits in Kansas city?' 'Certainly not,' I answered. 'Well who are you, anyway?' I answered that my name was Sullivan. Quite disappointed, he said, "Oh ain't you John L. Sullivan, the slugger?" 'No, I am only Arthur Sullivan,' I replied. 'What!' he said, with evident surprise, 'are you the man as put "Pinafore" together?' I said 'Yes' and smiled at him. 'Well, I never!' he answered: 'but I'm glad to meet you anyway. Come and have a drink with us.'"

Another, and this a curious coincidence—for, of course, it was nothing more—occurred upon the occasion of Sir Arthur's first visit to San Francisco. He told it me as follows:—

"I had arrived one morning, and was strolling about the hotel, waiting in a rather undecided way for something to turn up. Quite by accident I met a lady whom I had known in London, and she was just about to step into her carriage to take a drive, she invited me to accompany her to the promenade, where an excellent band was to be heard every day. I accepted her invitation and we had a delightful drive, finally drawing up near the band-stand. Imagine my surprise, nay, I must add, my deep emotion when the bandmaster, as if by enchantment, struck up 'The Lost Chord' which was played admirably from beginning to end. It was pure accident, of course, for my visit to California was not known to anyone at the time; but I need not say how