

LONDON MUSICAL SHRINES

THE Collector had been glancing over THE CHOIR with his friend, and remarked upon the article 'Wanted, a Musician's London' (see June number, p. 109).

'The whole of London is a mass of musical shrines, and if folk do not go to worship at them it is because people are too indifferent.'

'Or lack the knowledge that they exist,' suggested the Musician.

'They go abroad to gaze with reverence upon the birthplace of this or that foreign composer, but they won't take a penny 'bus or a twopenny tube to muse for ten minutes over the many hallowed places - places of even greater interest than mere musical association - that exist in their own London.'

'Would you rank my humble birthplace and my present attic in Kensington as among the coming shrines?' asked the Musician, with mock conceit.

'They may be. When, for instance, you have composed your musical setting of the famous epic "Who killed Cock Robin?" with all its thrills rendered in Blank's descriptive manner; but meanwhile some few fellows, like yourself, might make a pilgrimage round Westminster, and endeavour to catch a little of the inspiration that may yet cling round the tomb and haunts of Henry Purcell. You might go down to St. Ann's Lane, Old Pye Street, and see if there are any remains of the composer's birthplace. There were in 1881. You might even pick your way among the cabbages and bananas of Covent Garden, and trace the wanderings of Dr Arne. While there you might give a glance down Maiden Lane and try to realize that the great Joseph M. W. Turner, the landscape painter, first opened his eyes upon vegetables and oranges in that narrow thoroughfare. This fact (according to one of his biographers) had some bearing upon his gorgeous colouring. Also, while on your rambles, please turn your footsteps to the bottom of Leicester Square, and see with your own eyes the mansion that Fanny Burney made bright with her dainty presence, and which her father made melodious with his music, and which their friends made brilliant with wit and talent. You will find it all right in St. Martin's Street.'

'But you will add that, being a Londoner, the historic parts of the metropolis have no interest to me.'

'Yes, I will add that. You people remind me of an old woman I once met in Yorkshire. Her cottage was within a quarter of a mile of a celebrated waterfall, and her chief income was derived from letting lodgings to, and providing teas for, people who travelled from all parts to see it. She frankly confessed to me that she had never troubled to go down the glen to see that object of general interest; and it is so with you Londoners.'

'Meanwhile, please expound,' asked the Musician, lazily turning over in the easy-chair and tempting his friend to indulge in a notorious weakness that he possessed, in common with encyclopaedias and other works of reference.

The Collector swallowed the bait.

'Of course the early musical shrines are the cathedrals, for all arts centred round them; but we need not go into details about the early musicians who were attached to the Abbey of Westminster and to St. Paul's before its re-erection. We may, however, say that even in quite late times there are plenty of musical associations to be found clinging round the great churches of London. In the 17th century the principal music-shops were in and about St. Paul's Churchyard, and this may be taken for a sign that musical life - apart from its ecclesiastical aspect - was in full swing "round about St. Paul's." London was pretty well clustered within the City bounds, and open spaces intervened between these and Westminster.

'The printing industry of the 17th and early 18th centuries principally found its home in Little Britain and near Smithfield - just near enough for the hack writers of Grub Street (now Milton Street) to be within ready call of the printer's devil for delayed copy.

'John Playford, the printer, in succession to William Godbid, with whose widow Anne he was for some time in partnership, had his printing-office in Little Britain, and it was over the City gate, Aldersgate, that John Day, that master of early music printing, during the 16th century had his extensive works - so extensive that he built upon the City wall itself.

'Then, as I expect you know, the Temple was not without its musical associations. Was it not "by the church door" that the great John Playford had his little cramped shop, the resort of the best musicians of Charles' day? Even Mr. Pepys, an amateur of skill, came here, no doubt, to have a chat with such worthy company and to laugh over the new book of catches which the two "honest Johns" (Playford and Hilton) had concocted between them. As we pass down Fleet Street and up Ludgate Hill into St. Paul's Churchyard, musical interest thickens. Here was the Queen Anne Tavern (singers were always dry), where congregated the singing men of the cathedral and others to hear the latest musical gossip. Close to it was the shop of Richard Meares, from which (in 1714) Handel obtained Mattheson's lessons try over on the harpsichord that the tavern possessed.

'Then at the sign of the Dolphin and Crown was the shop of John Young, over which Talbot Young and his friends commenced their afterwards famous concerts. In St. Paul's Churchyard, too, was the shop of John Clarke, at the Golden Viol, taken over afterwards (late in the 17th century) by John Hare. And now let me make the suggestion that, as it is known that Jeremiah Clarke lived in St. Paul's Churchyard, that Jeremiah was the son of John, the music-seller, and that this unfortunate composer, who shot himself (it is said for love), was born within the precincts of St. Paul's.

'The great firm of Thompson was at the west end of St. Paul's Churchyard - near the corner of Ludgate Hill.

'The writer quoted in THE CHOIR is very much in error when he speaks of a Thompson in Exeter Change. No music publisher of that name ever had a shop in that strange building, of which the lower portion was a menagerie of wild beasts and the upper devoted to millinery and knick-knacks. Jonathan Fentum was here (upstairs, please you) from about 1760 to about 1770, and perhaps a few years earlier so was Richard Bride, both of them music-sellers and publishers. Exeter Change was on the north side of the Strand and adjoined Burleigh Street. But, my dear young friend, I see you are getting sleepy over my old-fashioned talk.'

'Not at all - enjoyed it immensely,' said the Musician, stifling a yawn.

'Then,' said the Collector, with that relentlessness that his victims know so well, 'we will continue. You know, as all the world does, that Handel lived much of his time in a house in Brook Street, near Hanover Square.

'It was on the south side, and is (or was recently) numbered 57.

'He lived there and paid rates at a rateable value of £35 from 1725 to 1759. Even great men have such common-place things as rate notes thrust upon them. But Handel is, of course, to you moderns, a back-number, and we will leave him alone. I suppose also that Haydn is also a past name. But let me tell you that when John Bland the music-seller went to Vienna to bring over the great master, he, for the first few nights, lodged him in his own house - over the music-shop - at 45 High Holborn. Any admirer of the great musician, and incidentally, of the memory of worthy John Bland, the music-seller, may enter the building that stands on the site - the West Central post office next to the "First Avenue Hotel," and muse for a moment while the _young lady supplies him with a penny stamp.

'Then,' continued the Collector, lugging forth a thin oblong folio, 'Bland took lodgings for him in a more genteel neighbourhood. Here we have Haydn's first English publication, with his own autograph on the title-page.

‘*Ariana a Naxos*, printed for the author and sold by him at No. 18 Great Pulteney Street.” Fancy knocking at the door and buying from the great doctor of music a copy of his cantata! That was in 1791, but Haydn again came to London in 1794, and from this book, said the Collector, producing a thin upright folio,’ we see that “Dr. Haydn's VI. Original Canzonettas” was “printed for the author and sold by him at No. 1 Bury Street, St. James”.

This, my dear fellow, also bears his written signature, and contains the first printed example of that charming song "My mother bids me bind my hair." As you probably know, it was at No. 33 Great Pulteney Street that the great Broadwood firm was located, and Haydn, lodging in 1791 a few doors off, was a frequent and welcome visitor there. Those charming old business premises are now swept away by a modern building which has crushed out of existence all the musical memories that clung to them.

It was once my privilege to go over the old place with the late Mr. Hipkins, who had been with the firm since the forties.

If you are a Dickensian, you may have penetrated into Camden Town, the home of the Dickens family when they came to London. But perhaps you do not associate Camden Town with Charles Dibdin, who lived for a number of years in Arlington Street, and died there in 1814. He is buried, you will find, if you care to see his tomb, in St. Martin's Burial Ground, in the near neighbourhood. But really, my dear young friend, I must not detain you with any more of my talk.'

FRANK KIDSON.