

**LETTERS OF SAMUEL WESLEY TO MR.
JACOBS, ORGANIST OF SURREY
CHAPEL, RELATING TO THE
INTRODUCTION INTO THIS COUNTRY OF
THE WORKS OF JOHN SEBASTIAN BACH**

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Letters of Samuel Wesley to Mr. Jacobs, organist of Surrey Chapel, relating to the introduction into this country of the works of John Sebastian Bach by Eliza Wesley

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ELIZA WESLEY

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JACOBS, ORGANIST OF SURREY
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LETTERS
OF
SAMUEL WESLEY
TO
MR. JACOBS,

ORGANIST OF SURREY CHAPEL, RELATING TO THE INTRODUCTION INTO THIS
COUNTRY OF THE WORKS OF

JOHN SEBASTIAN BACH.

(NOW FIRST PUBLISHED.)

EDITED BY HIS DAUGHTER,
ELIZA WESLEY.

"Good will towards men" is at the bottom of it, and when Sebastian flourishes here, there will be at least more musical "Peace on Earth."
SAMUEL WESLEY.—Letter xviii. p. 44.

"Samuel Wesley was one of the greatest musical geniuses that England has ever produced."

VINCENT NOVELLO, 1849.—*British Museum.*

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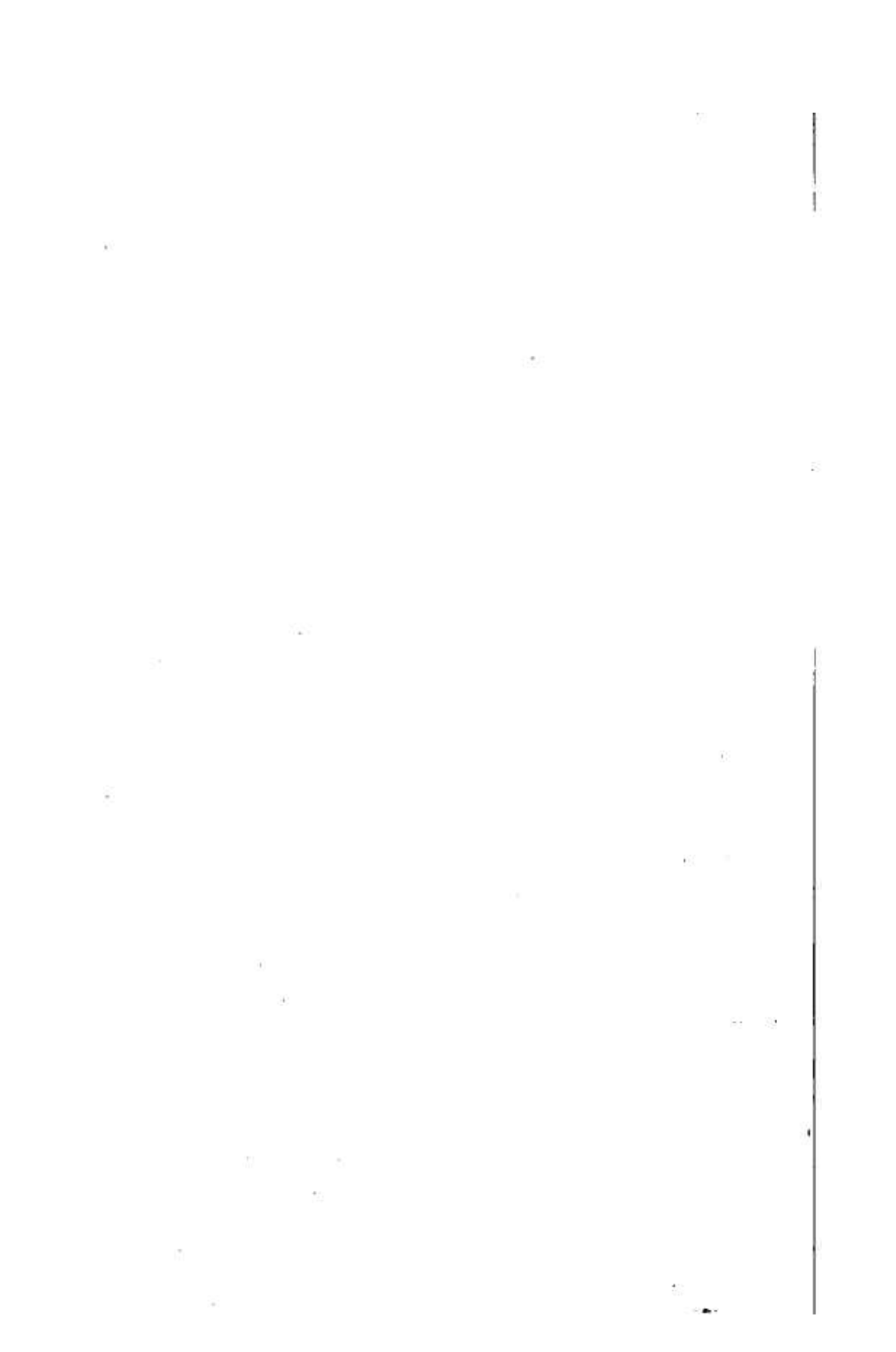
1875.

IN sending forth to the Musical Public the accompanying Letters of my Father, I am impelled to publish them by a sense of duty to his memory, in order to show that it was to his discernment and zealous perseverance that Bach's transcendent genius was made known and appreciated (although tardily, and through much opposition) by the English Musical World. I refer with pride to the result of his exertions in what he called "the cause of Truth and Justice."

Having Copies of the Letters by me,—now, when Bach's Music is so well known and appreciated,—I have thought it an appropriate time to gratify the long desired wish to publish them, so that the award of "Honour to whom Honour is due" may be inscribed to my Father's memory.

E. W.

May 11th, 1875.



LETTERS.

LETTER I.

September 17th, 1808.

DEAR SIR,—I am much obliged by your ingenious and circumstantial Detail of your success with *Saint Sebastian*, as you very properly term him, and am rejoiced to find that you are likely to regard his Works with me as a musical Bible unrivalled and inimitable.

I am grieved to witness in my valuable Friend Doctor Burney's Critique (for he is a man whom I equally respect and love), so slight an acquaintance with the great and matchless Genius whom he professes to analyze: and I have however much satisfaction in being able to assure you, *from my own personal experience*, that his present judgment of our Demi-God is of a very different Nature from that at the Time he imprudently, incautiously, and we may add, *ignorantly* pronounced so rash and false a verdict (although a false Verdict is a contradiction in Terms), as that which I this Day read for the first Time upon "the greatest Master of Harmony in any Age or Country."

It is now I think nearly a twelvemonth since I wrote to the Doctor respecting my profound admiration (and Adoration if you like it as well) of *Sebastian*: I stated to him that I had made a Study

of his Preludes and Fugues, adding that his compositions had opened to me an entirely new musical World, which was to me at least as surprising as (when a child) I was thunderstruck by the opening of the Dettingen Te Deum, at the Bristol Cathedral with about an hundred Performers (a great Band in those Days). I went into something like a general Description of what I conceived to be his characteristic Beauties, and particularly specified *Air* as one of the chief and most striking. I have by me the Doctor's reply to my letter, although I cannot at the present moment advert to it, but I fully remember his observing in nearly the following Words:—"In order to be consistent with myself with regard to the great Sebastian Bach, before I precisely coincide with you, I must refer to what I have written at various Times and in various Places of my History, Travels, &c., in which I had occasion to mention him; but I shall feel exceedingly gratified in hearing his elaborate and erudite Compositions performed by you (for I never yet HEARD any one of them), and can tell you that I have a very curious and beautiful Copy of *his Fugues*, which was presented to me many years since by his Son Emanuel, and which I shall have much pleasure in shewing you."

When I waited on my venerable Friend he had been kind enough to previously lay upon his Music Desk, the MS. in question (together with several other beautiful and superb Works of our immortal Master); but when I came to examine this said rare Present, how much was I surprised to find it so full

of *scriptural* Faults, that it was not without some Difficulty I could manage to do justice to one of the Fugues which I had been formerly the most familiar with ; and although I did not *boggle*, yet I played with extreme Discomfort. My Friend, however, was extremely delighted, and the very first Part of his Critique expressed his Wonder *how such abstruse harmony* and such perfect and enchanting melody could have been so marvellously united !

What a convincing Proof this is, that his *former* criticism upon our matchless Author was an hasty and improvident Step !

I conceive that the Fact stands thus : When Burney was in Germany, the universal Plaudits and Panegyrics upon the Father of *universal Harmony* were so interesting that it would have been impossible for him to have avoided giving such a Man a Place in his Account of Musical Authors in his General History : Nevertheless it appears very evidently from the erroneous Sentence he has pronounced therein upon the Comparative Merit of him and Handel, that he never could have taken due Pains to make himself Master of the Subject, otherwise his late candid acknowledgement would not have been made, and is proof sufficient that he only wanted *experience* of the *Truth* to make him ready and willing to own it.

I must also tell you another Piece of News ;—namely that this imperfect and incorrect volume, this *valuable* and inestimable Gift of Sebastian's dutiful Son, happens to contain only the 24 *first* Preludes and Fugues ; all written in the Soprano

Clef (to make them more easily understood, I suppose), and the Preludes so miserably mangled and mutilated that had I not met them in such a collection as that of the learned and highly illuminated Doctor Burney, I verily believe that I should have exclaimed, "An Enemy hath done this." I should have at once concluded that such a manuscript could have been made only by him who was determined to disgrace instead of promote the cause of correct Harmony.

Ever since I had the privilege of so great a triumph (for I can call it nought else) over the Doctor's Prejudice, he has evinced the most cordial veneration for our Sacred Musician, and when I told him that I was in Possession of 24 *more* such precious Relicks, he was all aghast in finding that there could be any Productions of such a Nature which he had not seen: this again is another proof of his having hastily judged, and also how remiss the Germans must have been not to have made him better acquainted with the Works of their transcendant Countryman.

I am told by the Rev. Mr. Picart (one of the Canons of Hereford Cathedral) that Seb. B. has written Pieces for *three* Organs, and innumerable others, which are not sent to England purely from the contempt which the Germans entertain of the general state of Music in this Country, and which unfavourable sentiment I am sorry to say has but too much foundation on the Truth.

You see that there are others who have as much cause to apologize for the length of Letters as you, if