Bertie, Charles Henry
Isaac Nathan

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AUSTRALIA'S FIRST COMPOSER

A LECTURE DELIVERED AT THE CONSERVATORIUM OF MUSIC, SYDNEY

BY

CHARLES H. BERTIE

(FELLOW ROYAL AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY)

WITH A FOREWORD

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HENRI VERBRUGGHEN

DIRECTOR OF THE CONSERVATORIUM

AUSTRALIA

ANGUS & ROBERTSON LTD.

CASTLEREAGH STREET, SYDNEY.

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FOREWORD.

Tradition is perhaps the one thing which the new countries can envy Europe. Western civilization has been transplanted here "en bloc," but the stem of it, "tradition," remains in the old world. Yet who knows what the future has in store for us; who can predict what the conditions of the world will be two thousand years hence; what cataclysms may occur and what changes will take place? Possibly, according to the laws of development and decay, Australia may then be the supreme force in the world, as Egypt, Persia, Greece and Rome once were. The early activities of this country will then be of the greatest interest and the records of the past will be searched for information as to the process of evolution.

History is being made every day, and in regard to music, the name of Nathan should be duly recorded. Not that he may be claimed to rank as a great musician but because, together with a few others mentioned in this pamphlet, he was among the first to stimulate and gratify a taste for music of the best type. His connection with Lord Byron gives him added historic importance, and it is to be hoped that copies of this lecture will soon be found in every official library in Australasia. It was delivered at the Conservatorium at my instance, and was very much enjoyed by a large gathering of cultured enthusiasts, who fully realised that in the realm of art, Nathan's activities were of equal importance to those of any of the other illustrious pioneers, and it is with feelings of real gratitude that I thank Mr. Bertie for compiling this record of his life and early influence upon music in Australia.

H. VERBRUGGHEN.

ISAAC NATHAN.

From a painting in possession of Mr. V. V. Nathan.

ISAAC NATHAN.

THE first sub-title I selected for my lecture this evening was "Australia's First Musician," but on second thoughts and a consideration of the history of music in Australia, I came to the conclusion that the title would not be fair. We had at least two men worthy to be classed as musicians before Isaac Nathan arrived.

In 1836, there arrived in Sydney, William Vincent Wallace, who, after a period on a station, returned to Sydney and gave some concerts. It is very probable also, that he composed here part of the opera "Maritana." In the same year there arrived in Tasmania the Deane family, the head of which had been a performer in the London Philharmonic Society's concerts. This family afterwards settled in Sydney and in conjunction with Wallace gave the first string quartette performance in Sydney. The Deanes for many years occupied a foremost position in the musical life of Australia.

But I think we can safely claim for our subject the title of "Australia's First Composer." Wallace was only a bird of passage, and did nothing of an Australian character, whereas, as we shall see, Isaac Nathan set to music a number of aboriginal airs and was the composer of the first opera written and produced in Australia. He had, moreover, a great influence on the musical life of the young community, and was the first musician of wide reputation to settle in Australia.

Isaac Nathan was born of Hebrew parents at Canterbury, England, in 1790. His forebears, according

to tradition, were refugees from Poland. His father was a man of wide knowledge, and Isaac in after years told how his father would gather his family round him and tell them stories gleaned from legend, history and mythology. Young Isaac was destined for the Jewish ministry and to that end was sent to Cambridge in 1805. But the Church did not call the youngster; there was another love in his heart. Like the Spirit in "Comus" he could say:

> I was all ear,
> And took in strains that might create a soul
> Under the ribs of Death.

All his pocket money went in the purchase of music paper. The call of music was so strong, so insistent, that his parents listened to the call and Isaac was apprenticed to Domenico Corri, and devoted his energies to singing and composition. We are told that the "embarrassments" of Mr. Corri kept the youngster sometimes long without a lesson, which "added stimulus to his own exertions." In the attic of his father's house was an old harpischord, considered as useless, and this the young student made the seat of his indefatigable efforts. "At this instrument did he regularly place himself by four o'clock in the morning, and so intent was he on application that no inducement would tempt him from it, his provisions often remaining untouched the whole day." This quotation gives the keynote to the character of the man. As the supreme test of greatness, I rank getting up, of one's own free will, at four o'clock in the morning to study. Eight months after his apprenticeship to Corri, Nathan produced his first song, "Infant Love," which was followed in subsequent years by some two hundred.

In 1813, Lord Byron published "The Bride of Abydos—a Turkish Tale." The imagery and the music of the verses so captivated Isaac Nathan that in

a few hours he composed, and afterwards published, the music to those lines beginning "This rose to calm my brother's cares." Other lines soon followed, and then came the day when he was introduced by the Hon. Douglas Kinnard to Lord Byron. There followed a partnership and Nathan emerged from obscurity when he became associated with Byron during the years 1814-22 in the production of the "Hebrew Melodies."

The association of these two men appears to have been a happy combination. Byron wrote the poetry—in many cases especially for Nathan, who composed the melodies. In his introduction to the published work Nathan explains the origin of the melodies in these words:

> The Hebrew Melodies are a selection from the favourite airs which are still sung in the religious ceremonies of the Jews. Some of these in common have, with all their sacred compositions, been preserved by memory and tradition only; their age and originality, therefore, must be left to conjecture; but the latitude given to the taste and genius of their performers has been the means of ingrafting on the original melodies a certain wildness and pathos, which have at length become the chief characteristics of the sacred songs of the Jews.

And of form he says:

> Recitative may be traced many centuries before its having been heard of in Greece, for it was known and in general use in the earliest patriarchal times of the Jews; it was then, and still is, materially connected with their religious ceremonies: every word of prayer offered to the Deity, whether in their private or public devotions, is given in a kind of chant; which although it may not come under the exact character of legitimate recitative, still bears the sound of song.

When the "Melodies" were in preparation for the press, Byron and Nathan were, as the latter informs us, "in frequent communication." Byron on one occasion

referred to him as "Sun-burn Nathan." In the volume of "Hebrew Melodies," Nathan has interspersed anecdotes of Byron and observations upon the subject of the verse, which enliven the pages. Time will not permit me to quote extensively, but I must give two or three as illustrations of the relations of the author and composer, and illuminating the verses as well as the character of Byron.

Of the poem "SHE WALKS IN BEAUTY," Nathan writes:

> When arranging the first edition of the Hebrew Melodies, it was remarked that his Lordship generally requested to hear this melody sung and not infrequently join in its execution.

Nathan was of the opinion that the lines were inspired by Byron's sister, "whose countenance was as beautiful as her disposition was amiable. . . . . This opinion is much strengthened by the anxiety he betrayed whenever the composition was executed in her presence."

"IF THAT HIGH WORLD."—The first verse of this poem runs:—

> If that high world, which lies beyond
> Our own, surviving love endears;
> If there the cherish'd heart be fond,
> The eye, the same except in tears:
> How welcome those untrodden spheres!
> How sweet this very hour to die!
> To soar from earth, and find all fears,
> Lost in thy light—Eternity!

Nathan told Byron that the "If" would doubtless form the basis of charges of Atheism. The prophecy was correct and Byron in subsequent conversation said: "They accuse me of Atheism; an Atheist I could never be; no man of reflection can feel otherwise than doubtful and anxious when reflecting on futurity. . . . . Alas!

Nathan, we either know too little or feel too much on this subject, and, if it be criminal to speculate on it (as the gentlemen critics say), I fear I must remain an awful offender."

"IT IS THE HOUR."—There appears no relevancy in a discussion on the pronunciation of Byron's name and this poem, but Nathan relates that as such a discussion was raging, Byron entered the room and was asked which he thought correct, By'ron or Byr'on. "Both were right," he replied, but catching the eye of a beautiful young lady near him, he asked which she preferred. "Oh, By'ron, certainly," said she. "Then henceforth," said he, "By'ron it shall be."

He told a lady discussing the subject of happiness in a future state, that his idea of such happiness was "The pleasure, madam, of seeing you there."

"THE HARP THE MONARCH MINSTRELS WEPT."—When Nathan received the lines of this melody they terminated at

Its sound aspired to heaven and there abode.

This did not complete the verse, as the first verse had ten lines and the second only five. He spoke to Byron, who said: "Why, I have sent you to heaven, it would be difficult to go farther." "My attention," continued Nathan, "for a few moments was called to some other person, and his lordship, whom I had hardly missed, exclaimed, 'Here, Nathan, I have brought you down again,'" and presented him with the additional five lines.

"MY SOUL IS DARK."—This poem was composed by Byron in Nathan's presence, without a word being erased.

"WE SAT DOWN AND WEPT BY THE WATERS OF BABEL."—This beautiful lament comes from the period when the Jews were carried captive to Babylon

and were solicited by the Babylonians to sing one of the Songs of Zion, to which the captives replied "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land ?" and then "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its cunning." To me the most haunting and pathetic words in the language.

Nathan published in 1829, a small book called "Fugitive Pieces and Reminiscences of Lord Byron."

There is only one recorded instance of Nathan's appearance on the stage and even that was more or less enforced. When one of those periods of financial embarrassment (to which we are all, more or less, subject) fell upon our composer, he was pressed by his creditors to take the stage and reluctantly consented. He appeared at Covent Garden as Henry Bertram in "Guy Mannering," and in the unaccompanied duet "elicited enthusiastic applause" (I quote from a biography), "but when accompanied by the band, his want of sufficient power totally deprived him of the advantage which his acknowledged science would otherwise have given him and failure was the consequence." I have been told by one who has heard Isaac Nathan sing, that even at three score and ten he possessed a sweet voice.

In 1823, Nathan published in London a work called "An Essay on the History and Theory of Music and on the Qualities, Capabilities and Management of the Human Voice." A second edition enlarged and improved, was published in 1836, under the title "Musurgia Vocalis."

I cannot claim sufficient knowledge to criticise this work from the point of view of a musician, but even to a layman it is evident that the author was a man of wide knowledge and radical musical views. Here, for instance, are his views on opening the mouth :—

> Opening the mouth to the fullest extent is by many

persons considered the very acme of perfection; and the more persevering a master may be in distending that beautiful feature beyond nature's limits, the greater becomes his success and reputation as a profound and well-studied professor. Those pretty mouths, which at other times are watched with the anxiety of maternal vigilance, lest they should exceed the dimensions of a moderate sized button-hole, are suffered, under the all-commanding sway of the singing-master, to distend wide enough to admit a friend.

The voice can neither improve in strength, nor in quality, if the mouth be distorted like that of a person writhing in convulsions, or suffering under violent corporeal agony. All extravagances are absurd, and destroy the very purpose which they were intended to promote. When the countenance is so painfully disfigured, however surprising may be the singer's abilities, the principal pleasure anticipated by an audience with impatience, must be the conclusion of the performer's exertions.

Here again is the beginning of his views on Expression:

On the subject of expression, I can scarcely find language sufficiently nervous to impress the singer with a just sense of this invaluable and soul-exciting charm; this mental polish to harmony, which stealing to the inmost recesses of the heart, fills it with chastened, yet exquisite, sensations of rapture, such as none but the sensitive can feel, and none but the sensitive impart.

Judicious expression is the very acme of the art: it is the charm that leads to the highest estimation of the singer, the finishing stroke to the works of the painter, poet, and musician. This excellence may be acquired by great observation and perseverance, but true expression can only be the result of natural feeling, the child of innate sensibility, instructed by the Muses and the Graces; without whose aid, the most perfect voice and rapid execution, though they may astonish for a time, can never reach the heart. An insipid singer, who has not sufficient judgment to vary his expression, may with propriety be compared to a marble statue, the symmetrical proportion of which please the eye, but, wanting the animation of existence, compel us to turn, after a while, tired by its inanity, to contemplate a less beautiful object of life.

Be it remembered, these words were written a hundred years ago.

One is struck, in turning over the leaves of this book, at the appositeness of the illustrations given by the author. He draws on a well stored memory, garnished by a well read mind. In his chapter on the swelling and dying of the voice, Nathan gives no less than two pages of quotations from Shakespeare, Milton, and other authors to illustrate his theme. How well they illustrate let me show by the first quotation. The subject, as I have stated, was the swelling and dying of the voice.

> . . . Soft as evening dews
> Sinks in the heart, and the soul subdues.
> Sweet as Æolian sounds, that gently rise,
> As blows the fragrant breeze, or languid dies ;
> Now tremulously sweet the Zephyr's wing
> Touches with tones of heav'n the trembling string ;
> Now gradual swells, as on the distant shore,
> At crimson eve, the crested billows roar.
>
> —(Rome, Pt. 1, line 344.)

The author is no less happy in emphasizing a point by an anecdote. He had, for instance, occasion to refer to Abbot de Baigne, and in a footnote he gives a story of the Abbot which I am sure fixed his name immovably in the minds of his readers. Perhaps, as an interlude, you will allow me to fix the name in your minds.

> The Abbot de Baigne, a man of great wit, had invented many things relating to musical instruments ; and being in the service of the king, was once commanded by him to procure him harmonious sounds from the cries of hogs, imagining the thing was absolutely impossible. The Abbot was not in the least perplexed at such a command, but asked the king money to perform it, which was immediately delivered to him, and he effected the most surprising and remarkable thing that was ever heard. He got together a large quantity of hogs, all of different ages, and put them into a tent or pavilion

covered with velvet, before which tent there was a wooden table all painted. and he made an organical instrument, with a certain number of stops, so contrived that, when he hit upon those stops, it answered to some spikes, which, pricking the hogs that stood behind in due order, made them cry in such harmonious manner that the king and all the attendants were delighted with it.

With the fame acquired by his production of the "Hebrew Melodies" and his connection with Lord Byron, Nathan found that the way was open to him to the operatic stage, and I have unearthed the following operas which he composed and produced in London. Part of the music to "Sweethearts and Wives"—a comedy which was staged in 1823, at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, was written by Nathan. One of the songs in this piece, "Why are you wandering here, I pray?" became very popular and ran into a number of editions.

A comic opera, "The Alcaid, or the Secrets of Office," the libretto of which was written by James Kenney, was first performed at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, on Tuesday, August 10th, 1824.

In 1827, an operatic farce was produced with Nathan as the composer, called "The Illustrious Stranger." This opera was staged at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane.

That Isaac Nathan had a definite standing in the musical community of his day is demonstrated by his appearance at Drury Lane, and the fact that such favourites as Madame Vestris, Miss Paton, Mrs. Geerin, Mr. Harley, and Messrs. Liston and Braham were associated with his operas and his songs places this beyond doubt. Not one of the operas has lived, however, they have gone to join that vast array of musical ghosts—unwept and unsung.

Judging from an advertisement, Mr. Nathan, in

the late twenties, was in business as a music seller. At the bottom of a page announcing his works, it is stated "The whole of the above compositions may be had of I. & B. Nathan, at their music warehouse, Mount House, Assembly Rooms, opposite the Asylum, Westminster." In 1835, he appears in a new light. He gave evidence in a case on behalf of Lady Langford against her husband, and in a subsequent disagreement with Lord Langford, Mr. Nathan relates that he was "compelled to knock his lordship down." He was tried in October, 1835, for the heinous offence and acquitted. I am not surprised in reading this. Isaac Nathan did everything intensely. When he deals with a critic it is with no uncertain voice. One who dared to discover a false accent in one of the Hebrew Melodies emerges from a deluge as a "grovelling critic," a "rusty brained gentleman," a "snarling critic," a "self dubbed critic," and is finally consigned to oblivion as "The critique of this long eared gentleman, so like that specie of animal on which Balaam rode." Lord Langford received the equivalent of this translated into more primitive language.

We now arrive at the period when Isaac Nathan decided to leave England for Australia, and I am sure you will ask why a musician with an established reputation should of his own free will embark on such a venture. I think it necessary to emphasize the words "of his own free will." Quite a number of professors of the arts arrived in Australia in its early days, but they were unwilling guests—they "left their country for their country's good." Not so with Mr. Nathan, he made his own choice, and the events which culminated in his departure have an air of mystery and romance surrounding them.

On March 9th, 1837, he wrote to His Majesty, King William IV., offering his services to carry out a mission "seeking only your Majesty's Royal promise of protec-

tion and indemnity from expense." Although Nathan printed the letter to His Majesty in the "Southern Euphrosyne," a magazine he published in Sydney, he leaves out all the parts descriptive of the objects of the mission and replaces them with a series of tantalizing dots. He states that he does so "from motives too pure for Whigs to appreciate." His offer was accepted, and he embarked on his quest. Success followed, but a "ruinous liability" of £2326 was incurred. The King died, however, before Mr. Nathan could present the result of his labours, and on November 29th, 1837, he handed to the Duke of Sussex the documents in the case. The receipt he received gives us an inkling as to the purpose of the mission. It is therein stated that "Mr. Nathan stating his decided feeling that such documents might, in improper hands (such as they have been in hithertofore) be the cause of much mischief." Mr. Nathan endeavoured after delivery of the documents to recover the £2326 he had become responsible for. We cannot follow him in his innumerable interviews and communications with the members of the Melbourne Government, but all that he could recover was £326. This was in 1839, two years after the expense was incurred. In 1840, Mr. Nathan, in a letter to the "Sunday Times," ventilated his grievances, then, as he says, "After this letter appeared in print, we became so annoyed and harassed by our creditors that we sacrificed what little property we possessed, discharged as many claims as possible, and quitted England for Sydney, where we have resided for nearly eight years, the victims of Loyalty, prosecuting our profession among a depressed people, and in consequence, without that success which our professional standing would otherwise have commanded." Mr. Nathan arrived in Melbourne on February 5th, 1841, where he gave some concerts prior to his departure for Sydney. While in Sydney, he had five hundred copies of a memorial

printed which he sent off to England for presentation to both Houses of Parliament, but the circulars, he says, by "some hobgoblin or hocus pocus freak" vanished from the Customs House and never reached their destination.

This then, is how Sydney came by her first resident musician of any standing, and Sydney has reason to be grateful that His Majesty William IV. ardently desired certain documents and that the Melbourne administration refused to honour His Majesty's promise. But for Mr. Nathan it must have been a most unwelcome change. He says that he exercised his profession amongst a "depressed people," and it was a fit adjective to use. The Colony in 1841 was still in the throes of convictism, and in the early years of the forties it passed through a financial depression which swamped any interest in such unfinancial things as the arts. But our subject was not of the type to be suppressed by circumstances, he rode over them. As an illustration of his indomitable character and of the difficulties faced by our pioneer, let me quote from an introduction he wrote to one of his pieces published in Sydney. "The most High and Wonderful Geometrician of the Universe," he says, "has in His infinite mercy and goodness granted me that health and strength which enables me to stand over my letterpress and music fount, nightly and daily, week after week, for at least twenty hours out of every four and twenty, setting up type for the whole of my musical works, with my own fingers, thus doing the duty of compositor and composer. Worthy critic, I have not, for the last five and forty years of my life, taken more than two hours sleep out of the 24 hours of each day, nor do I desire more. I drink two gallons of water daily—not after the fashion of 'Mynheer Van Dunk'—but in its perfect purity: I find, however, that my memory at three score and ten is not so good as 'it used to was' [then follow direc-

tions as to adding the time to a previous piece]—" and kindly bear in mind that I work as a compositor, not from choice, but from necessity—to satisfy the vulgar inward cravings of bairns who are still unprovided for—strange as it may appear, among the many first rate printers in Sydney, there is not one of them can set up music type."

Surely a man who could survive twenty hours' work, with two hours sleep and two gallons of water " pure et simple," per day, deserves a niche in the hall of fame.

Soon after his landing in Sydney, Mr. Nathan was invited by the clergy of St. Mary's Cathedral to give an Oratorio on the occasion of the opening of the fine organ in that building. He has left us a humorous account of the occasion. " In the selection of music on that occasion," he writes, " were performed two beautiful fugues, one from Beethoven's Mass in C, and the other from Mozart's 12th Mass. One part of the audience, who had only been accustomed to listen to simple melody, on hearing these scientific compositions, looked at each other with interesting wry faces, such as sucking babes make on the first taste of an olive. Another part of the assembly whispered aloud, in the seeming agony of those convulsed with certain symptoms of cholera. 'There, do you hear, they are all behind—they can't keep together; how they are scampering after each other—they are no musicians—they know nothing of time. Can he be Nathan, the composer of the Hebrew Melodies, Lord Byron's protege and friend ? No ! He is no more that man than he is Nathan the Prophet.' They 'looked unutterable things,' and judging from their looks, seemed to say, 'Why are you wandering here, I pray.' Since the epoch of doubt and suspicion, my orchestral arrangement, extemporaneous performances on the organ—

the thirst for good music inspired by the constant introduction of works from classical authors—the variety of music composed in this Colony—together with the number of musicians made—and voices cultivated—and a few other striking coincidences of incontrovertible stubbornness concomitant with these efforts, all combine to identify me, as being no other person than myself, the acknowledged author of 'Dicky Dolus,' 'Billy Lackaday,' 'Skippity whippity nippity hop,' and a few other trifling productions." As illustrating the low ebb of musical tide in Australia, when Mr. Nathan arrived, he relates that Mr. Leggatt, a first rate oboe and clarionet performer and the only musician in Sydney who was sufficiently versed in the theory of music to arrange orchestral parts correctly, and who had been military bandmaster for forty years, had received so little encouragement in his profession that he had been compelled to turn publican.

Mr. Nathan lost no time in continuing the musical education of Sydney, and in teaching the citizens to appreciate the taste of the musical olive. He formed two musical societies, known as St. Mary's and St. James' Choral Societies, and on May 27th, 1842, he gave a madrigal concert in the hall of the present Grammar School. At this concert, Nathan's composition of "Koorinda Braia" was first performed. This was the first of the aboriginal melodies which Nathan has preserved for us. A number of these airs were harmonised by him and thereby preserved from oblivion. Speaking from an antiquarian point of view, this was a most useful service. "Nations write their autobiographies," it has been said, "in three manuscripts—the book of their deeds, the book of their words, and the book of their art." Some philologist of to morrow might even murmur, as he chanced upon some illuminating aboriginal word in these airs—

All the charm of all the Muses
Often flowering in a lonely word.

In describing the "Koorinda Braia," Nathan writes that it is a song of rejoicing, sung at the corrobories, "their mode of singing this and all their native strains," he says, "whether the subject be plaintive or cheerful, is somewhat singular. . . . . Before they commence 'Koorinda Braia,' which is in 2/4 time, they first (by striking two pieces of stick against each other) beat two or three bars in perfect measure to triple time, seemingly as if trying to excite inspiration; they then continue beating and marking the time and rhythm, with accuracy not to be surpassed by the best musicians at the Italian Opera, of the melody which is sung with equal correctness, repeating the song several times; each repetition with increased energy and animated gestures—until the singers become completely exhausted by their enthusiasm. It is perfectly ludicrous to see, as we have seen, one of these wild aboriginal music directors or time keepers, with all the grimace, gestures, and consequence of a connoisseur, stop his sable faced singers and compel them to recommence their song—at the slightest innovation or defect of time, rhythm or accent."

Mr. Nathan had a pleasant custom of prefixing a disquisition to his published pieces. Speaking as a historian, this is a most commendable practice and, I think, as musicians, you would not be unmindful if Beethoven or Mozart or Bach had prefaced their works in the same manner. An unusually long preface accompanied "The Aboriginal Father, a Native Song of the Maneroo Tribe," and I propose to quote this in full, illustrating as it does what I have just said as to the importance of preserving these lays, and I think

you will find enough humour in it and a connection with Handel, which will prevent the quotation from becoming tedious :—

THE ABORIGINAL FATHER.

A Native Song of the Maneroo Tribe.
Versified from the original words by Mrs. E. K. Dunlop.
The Melody, as sung by the Aborigines, put into rhythm, and harmonized with appropriate symphonies and accompaniments and respectfully inscribed to
THE LADY MAYORESS
by
Isaac Nathan.

On my arrival in Australia, I felt anxious for the honour, pride and glory of musical tradition to make myself acquainted with the characteristic peculiarities of the native Aboriginal airs. I was favoured with a lithographic copy of this beautifully pathetic melody, so deformed and mutilated by false rhythm, so disguised in complete masquerade, by false basses and false harmony, that I cast it from me with no small share of regret the poor chance thus afforded me of adding anything in favour of the claim of the Aborigines to the pages of musical history. My astonishment, however, a short time afterwards was only equalled by the delight I experienced at hearing the same melody sung in all its genuine purity and simplicity, by one of the Maneroo tribe. I at once discovered the key to its latent rhythm and excellent scope for good basses and rich transitions and progressions of harmony.

There is in the first bars of this melody, so striking an affinity to one of Handel's compositions, that those who are acquainted with the works of that great master might find difficulty in divesting themselves of the belief, that the Aborigines had been guilty of piracy. Sceptics, on that point may, however, remove all doubt from their minds, when they reflect on the little probability of any of these sable-faced gentlemen ever having graced Drury Lane or Covent Garden, by the sunshine of their polished countenances, to witness the performance of Handel's Oratorios. I have in early life read of a Gruntling (in company with its accomplished mamma) who, like Selwyn in search of a daughter, or Japhet in search of a father, flew with all the

epicurean taste of a gourmand, across the Atlantic, after the more fascinating allurements of the Calipash and Calipee —and we have all been made acquainted with the full particulars of Mahomet's very interesting journey to Heaven on his ass (Ali Borak), but as we have no authenticated record of either the Loobras or Gins of the aborigines taking flight to England for the purpose of engaging composers, and selecting sacred music from the works of Handel for their Antipodal words, we must give them credit for originality and prevent hostile proceedings in the Court of Chancery, against them—by way of an injunction for their seeming infringement of the Laws of Copyright. As to the affinity of the four bars alluded to, to Handel's song, we must exclaim with Bowdich—that there can be no stronger proof of the musical powers of these beings—nor of the nature of Handel's compositions. For the satisfaction of the curious I take leave to subjoin the following quotation from Bowdich's Mission to Ashanti—(page 451) :

After giving an account of the musical powers of a white negro from the interior country of Imbekee—describing his person—his harp, &c.—he says : " The Negro sat on a stool, supporting his harp on his knee and shoulder when he proceeded to tune it with great nicety : his hands appeared to wander among the strings, until he performed a running accompaniment to extraordinary vociferations. At times one deep and hollow note burst forth and became broken ; presently he looked up, pursuing all the actions of a maniac ; and whilst the one hand continued playing, he rung forth a peal which vibrated on the ear long after it was produced. He became silent, the running accompaniment revived again as a prelude to loud recitative uttered with the greatest volubility, and ending on one word, on which he ascended and descended far beyond the extent (in pitch) of his harp, with the most beautiful precision. Sometimes he became more collected and a mournful air succeeded the recitative without the least connection and he would again burst out with the whole force of his powerful voice in the notes of the Hallelujah Chorus of Handel. To meet with this chorus in the wilds of Africa, and from such a being, had an effect I can scarcely describe. I was lost in astonishment at the coincidence ; there could be no stronger proof of the nature of Handel, nor of the powers of the Negro. I naturally inquired if this man was in his sane senses and the reply was, he was always rational but when he played, at

which time he invariably used the same gestures and evinced the same incoherency."

Loobra—A girl.

Gin—A wife.

I. Nathan.

Mr. Nathan's activities as a composer did not end with his aboriginal airs. During the rest of his life in Sydney, a constant stream of music poured from him. The fifty-eighth Anniversary of the Colony, in 1846, provided him with inspiration for "Currency Lasses—a song inscribed with the utmost devotion and respect to the Fair Sex of Australia," while the inauguration of the City Council, in 1842, called forth "Australia—the wide and free—as sung at the great Civic Dinner, December 21st, 1842."

In 1845, the fate of Leichhardt, the explorer, then on an expedition to Port Essington, was unknown, but it was believed that he had perished. Lieut. Robert Lynd, the barrack master at Sydney, composed an ode on "Leichhardt's Grave," which Nathan set to music, but the explorer confounded his mourners by arriving in Sydney soon after the ode was sung, and I have little doubt relished the opportunity of listening to his own funeral elegy. Nothing daunted, Mr. Nathan promptly produced "The Greeting Home Again—a pæan on Leichhardt's Return."

Historically speaking, the most interesting portion of Mr. Nathan's work in Sydney was the production of the opera "Don John of Austria," which has the honour of being the first opera, written, composed and performed in Australia. This interesting event took place at the Victoria Theatre, Pitt Street, on Monday, May 3rd, 1847, "to an elegantly crowded and delighted audience" as the composer modestly records. The production was under the direction of the composer "who (I again quote Mr. Nathan) through the liberality of the spirited proprietors, Messrs. Wyatt and Knight, was not suffered to die of hunger in the lobby of the

Theatre, like the great Athenian author during the representation of his labours." The "Sydney Morning Herald" waited until the following Saturday to deliver itself of a criticism of the work. "We refrained," the critic writes, "from giving an earlier notice of this production, as we were unwilling to form an opinion amidst the mistakes and confusion inseparable from first performances." The play was received with "decided approbation." The plot, according to the critic, "is somewhat tame and gloomy and wants relief; there is no counterplot, nor are there any striking dramatic effects" and sums the opera up by declaring that there are several pretty songs in the opera which are certain to become favourites, but, on the whole, the music is "much more adapted to the drawing room than the stage."

Another operatic drama composed in Sydney was "Merry Freaks in Troublous Times—an historical operatic drama in two acts." The libretto was written by Charles Nagel, Esquire. It deals with the time of Charles II., and according to the preface to the published work exhibits that merry monarch as "not so 'basefully ungrateful' as he has been represented." The opera was written about 1845, but the complete score was not published until 1851. So far as I can discover, the work was not presented on the stage.

There are other aspects of Mr. Nathan which I could present to you, as for instance, his facetiousness, a sample of which is found in his little song called "Humbug," which he directed should be "Executed by amateurs," and that it was "composed and inscribed to all Professors of the Art," but I must pass on to the end of his career. Like Mr. Nathan's life generally, his ending was out of the ordinary. Sydney in 1864 possessed a horse tramway, which ran from Circular Quay to the Railway, along Pitt Street. On the afternoon of January 15th, 1864, Mr. Nathan alighted from the tram at the corner of Goulburn Street, with the

intention of reaching his home at 442 Pitt Street, but before he could get clear of the rails, the tram started and Mr. Nathan was crushed to death beneath the wheels.

Mr. Nathan was married twice. His first wife was Eliza Worthington, whom he married in 1812. Miss Worthington was an Irish authoress and had written several books. His second wife was Henrietta Buckley, whom he married in 1826, in Bristol, England. Two daughters of Mr. Nathan are still alive—Miss Zillah Nathan and Mrs. Walter Fell. His descendants, including the late Dr. Charles Nathan, the well known surgeon, the late Alfred Nathan, and Henry Lynd Nathan, and Lady MacLaurin, have by virtue of their reputation as good citizens, added lustre to the name of Nathan. To two of his grandsons, Messrs. E. A. and V. V. Nathan, I am greatly indebted for assistance in gathering material for this paper.

It is difficult with this space of time to assess the influence of Isaac Nathan upon the musical life of Australia. What we do know is that he came to this country when the tide of music was at a low ebb ; that he brought with him a mind well stored in literature and music, and with a reputation as a composer ; that in Sydney he gave classical concerts, lectured and organised musical societies, wrote and composed. As he writes himself, he induced " the thirst for good music inspired by the constant introduction of works from classical authors " and having drunk of the Pierian spring, the people of Sydney would not be content with the things which pleased them aforetime. The stream of musical thought has widened since Isaac Nathan's day, but we must remember that there would have been no stream without a source, and the man who dug and moulded the source in Australia is worthy to be classed amongst those whom we should honour.

I cannot do better, nor confer more honour on Isaac Nathan, than by naming him as the " Verbrugghen of the 'Forties."