

IT WAS HE WHO WROTE THE POPULAR
"FARMER'S MASS IN B FLAT."

Henry Farmer, who made a considerable mark in the musical world, at least in England, died in Nottingham June 25 last, in his seventy-third year. He was the composer of the popular Farmer's mass in B flat, a work which is frequently but erroneously attributed to his nephew, John Farmer, composer of the cantata, "Christ and His Soldiers." Henry Farmer was born in Nottingham, England, May 13, 1819. As a musician he was essentially self-taught, although he was for a short time when a youth a pupil of Thirlwell, a local teacher of some repute, and afterward studied harmony with Sir Henry (then plain Mr.) Bishop. His genius made him the master of many instruments, but his reputation was principally achieved as a violinist. His "Violin Tutor" was accepted throughout England as a standard publication, while his instruction books were very largely used. For the copyright of the "Violin Tutor" he originally received £10, but a few months before his death, the work having reverted to him, according to the English law, at the expiration of forty-two years, he was paid £400 by the publishers for the renewal and £1,752 in addition for the purchase of the copyright.

By means of his pen, aided by judicious investments, Henry Farmer amassed a fortune. He was not only the Magnús Apollo of the Midland Counties, but one of the largest property owners in Nottingham, and his Flora Cottage, as he called his country seat in the suburbs, was one of the commanding features of the city.

His first published composition was a song entitled "Mary," distinguished for its graceful and flowing melody, purity of sentiment, and delicacy of treatment, characteristics which marked his subsequent works. He was a prolific writer of popular music, and, though frequently importuned to devote himself to the classical, he resolutely declined on the ground that classical music did not pay.

His Mass in B flat was sketched by him in 1843, and in all probability would never have been given to the world had it not been for Mr. Thomas S. Nedham of 23 West Eighty-second Street, this city, who four years later prevailed upon Mr. Farmer to score and publish the work. The following year Mr. Nedham brought the mass to America, and it was sung in St. Peter's Church, Barclay Street, for the first time in this country, Easter Sunday, 1848, Mr. Nedham copying the voice parts for the use of the quartet from the original score inscribed to him by the composer, and which he still has in his possession. Since then "Farmer in B flat" has been sung in church and concert until it has achieved a familiarity second only to the famous "Mozart's Twelfth."

For the last ten years of his life Mr. Farmer lived as a retired gentleman, devoting himself to horticulture, of which he was passionately fond, and only occasionally engaged in composition. His last works were "Six Short and Easy Trios for Violin" and an elaborate anthem, "I Will Sing of the Mercies of the Lord." The last year of his life he was an invalid.



Henry Farmer: organist, violinist, composer of the Anthem, "Great and Marvelous," (from his "Mass in B-flat"), often sung by South Norfolk Baptist Church Choir on special occasions.

Henry Farmer lived at “Flora Cottage,” Sherwin Road, and carried on a music business at High Street, Nottingham, was the conductor of the Nottingham Sacred Harmonic Society from 1866 to 1880, the composer of numerous musical pieces, and excelled as a violinist and conductor of oratorios. He simplified the musical compositions so as to come within the capabilities of the average performer. His instruction books on the various orchestral instruments were very practical and helpful.

Henry Farmer composed a Mass setting in 1843 for choir and organ; it became very popular, not only in England, but in America, and he was known in church circles as “Farmer in B-flat.” (“Great and Marvelous,” is one of the sections of music within the “Mass in B-flat.”)

Like Gwen Whitehurst, who’s family were all musicians, and her brother Marvin, who owned a music store, Henry Farmer was from a musical family, for his father, John Farmer, was a celebrated glee singer; his nephew, also named John Farmer, was the author of “Christ and His Soldiers”; and his niece, Mrs. Bowman-Hart, was a well-known teacher of music.

He was civic minded, and was a Captain in the “Robin Hoods,” the local defense Territorial Home Guards.

He was Organist at High Pavement Chapel (Presbyterian), Nottingham, for over 40 years. The organ was installed by the firm of J. C. Bishop and Son, from a specification by Henry Farmer, and included a free reed Euphone 8' in the Choir division. His father, John Farmer, was present, at age 83, to see his son honored on his 35th anniversary as organist. The minister presented Henry with a mantel clock and silver cup.



