MAYR'S SAMUELE

By JOHN ALLITT.

Since writing my article on La Passione, the Society has had the good fortune to discover the full-score of Mayr's Oratorio Samuele and is losing no time in preparing performing material of this important work. Samuele was composed by Mayr for his school in 1821 and in honour of the visit by Bishop Pietro Mola. On the first page we read in his own handwriting;'poesia di Bartolomeo Merelli secondo il piano di Mayr, tutta appoggiata all Sacra Scrittura'. (Words by Bartolomeo Merelli based on an outline drawn up by Mayr and based throughout on Holy Scripture). Therefore the text alone is important in our re-assessment of Mayr and Donizetti, fot it will reveal new insights into Mayr's wisdom as a teacher, and furthermore, it will help to provide a clearer understanding of the principles upon which Donizetti's education was based. The work is scored for full orchestra, soloists, and chorus. The story is concerned with Samuel's vocation as may be read in I Samuel, chapters 1 - 3. The libretto contains a beautiful aria for Hannah, Samuel's mother, which is a paraphrase of I Samuel 2 1-10. This is one of the great songs of thanksgiving for having conceived a child in the Old Testament. The Magnificat (St Mary's song of thanksgiving) is consciously modelled on such examples in the Old Testament and Mayr has quite rightly taken the birth of Samuel as a pre-figuring of Christ's birth.

The Oratorio recalls to mind those beautiful works which Benjamin Britten has composed for boy's voices. The characters will provide a good idea of the way Mayr has approached his subject:

Eli, The High Priest....Bass

Hannah, the Mother.....Soprano

Elkanah, the Father of..Tenor

Samuel.....Treble

His brothers.....Trebles

The Chorus, which as in La Passione represents the Church Militant.

Samuele is typical of Mayr's self-effacement, the successful composer who turned from the operatic stage

to dedicate his life to his school and the composition of religious music. It is interesting to note that Donizetti must have been involved in some capacity with the work (did he cnduct it?), for as Mayr's notebooks tell us he was still in this year 'perfecting' his studies after his break from Bergamo at the Bologna Academy 'sotto Mattei'. In 1821 Donizetti composed at least five strings quartets and a number of religious pieces as part of his 'post graduate' training with Mayr.

Hannah's Prayer

My heart rejoices in the Lord,
in the Lord I now hold my head high;
my mouth is full of derision of my foes,
exultant because thou hast saved me.
    There is none except thee,
    none so holy as the Lord,
    no rock like our God.
Cease your proud boasting,
let no word of arrogance pass your lips;
for the Lord is a god of all knowledge:
he governs all that men do.

Strong men stand in mute dismay
but those who faltered put on new strength.
Those who had plenty sell themselves for a crust,
and the hungry grow strong again.
The barren woman has seven children,
and the mother of many sons is left to languish.

The Lord kills and he gives life,
he sends down to Sheol, he can bring the dead up again.
The Lord makes a man poor, he makes him rich,
he brings down and he raises up.
He lifts the weak out of the dust
and raises the poor from the dunghill;
to give them a place among the great,
to set them in seats of honour.

For the foundations of the earth are the Lord's,
he has built the world upon them.
He will guard the footsteps of his saints,
while the wicked sink into silence and gloom;
not by mere strength shall a man prevail.

Those that stand against the Lord will be terrified
when the High God thunders out of heaven.
The Lord is judge even to the ends of the earth,
he will give strength to his king
and raise high the head of his anointed prince.