

George Frideric
HANDEL

SAMSON

An Oratorio
with English and German Texts

MINIATURE SCORE

K 01319

P R E F A C E.

Immediately after the *Messiah* — which was created in the twenty four days from the 22^d Aug. to the 14th Sept., 1741 — Handel advanced to the composition of SAMSON. The commencement of the work is not dated; but by the 29th September, fourteen days after the completion of *Messiah*, the first act was completed; on the 11th October, the second; and on the 29th Oct. 1741, the last: so that Handel's two greatest oratorios were produced together in ten successive weeks.

According to the first arrangement, the work ended with the chorus "Glorious hero" (p. 262). A year later, Handel added the new conclusion (pp. 268—289), and with this completed the whole work, October 12. 1742. The first performance took place in London, February 18. 1743.

The words are taken from MILTON's dramatic poem "*Samson Agonistes*". NEWBURGH HAMILTON undertook the necessary abridgement and adaptation "to the Stage", and carried it out with as little innovation in arrangement and expression as possible, even borrowing words for the additional lines from Milton's minor poems of similar character. The title of the libretto is as follows:

SAMSON. | AN | ORATORIO. | As it is Perform'd at the | THEATRE-ROYAL | IN |
COVENT-GARDEN. | Alter'd and adapted to the Stage from the SAMSON | AGONISTES of
John Milton. | Set to Musick by GEORGE FREDERICK HANDEL. || London: | Printed for
J. and R. TONSON in the Strand. | MDCCXLIII. | [Price One Shilling.]

The adapter could not fully overcome the difficulty of compressing a long epic poem into a libretto for a dramatic Oratorio. Though Handel abridged a good deal in composing the music, yet much recitative remained, which, however desirable for the continuity of the poem, could not be admitted in the public performances. The libretto gave the passages in question between inverted commas, with the note, that they were to be passèd over. We decided to indicate these in the music itself, by dotted brackets.

Later, however, Handel, taught by the experience gained in the comparatively numerous representations of *Samson*, went further in the accommodation of the score to public performance, and inserted in his conducting score a number of the most valuable alterations and improvements, which this edition presents for the first time in print. One of the chief difficulties encountered in the adoption of these lay in the fact that the movements in question are not simply shortened, but often also transposed into other keys, which entails the omission of some recitatives printed in earlier editions, although never performed.

In order to proceed surely and leave no claim undischarged in so important a work as *Samson*, we will speak separately in turn of every such case and mention every thing remarkable connected with it contained in Handel's score, and every thing instructive suggested by his practice.

Act I.

1. Handel took one, two, or all of the three airs of the Philistines, pp. 19—32, according to circumstances and vocal resources, but never gave the work without at least one of them.
2. In Samson's recitative on p. 36, the first curtailment is noted. The passages before and after the brackets join on in the following way:

An alteration and improvement is found also in the conclusion of the recitative in C minor, instead of F minor, so as to lead naturally to the song in the same key "Torments, alas" (p. 37). — In the 12th — 13th bar of this song the original melody:

was subsequently changed into:

3. A more considerable alteration was undertaken in the air "Oh mirror of our fickle state" (p. 41), one of the pieces added at the revision in 1742. It is evident in the original manuscript, that Handel was in a state of some indecision about the setting of these words. He first set them as a chorus in G minor, which is preserved complete in the original manuscript, only partly crossed out; but this was never performed. Its subject is essentially the same as that subsequently employed for the air. In the air he then, at a later period, cancelled a long passage immediately before the conclusion, just as he had done in other cases at the revision, and would probably have done here also if he had had these words at the beginning. We give below the earlier version, which was published to enable every one to test the justification of Handel's correction; and to withhold nothing from those who may have become attached to the air in its original version; all that is enclosed within brackets is cancelled or altered — :