Oratorio Choir at Westminster Abbey

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descent to banality. It is well written, with a pianoforte part easy, but not deficient in interest. Perhaps the rhythmic scheme is built too much on the pattern set by the opening phrase, and the closing of lines three and four of verse one suffers from the vocal fall to the same note. Why not end line three as in the second verse?

With the passing of the sailing ship the jolly old chanteys lost their main use, but thanks to enthusiastic collectors, they have not been allowed to disappear. Mr. Sharp has given us two sets that may be relied upon to stimulate any audience. The interest is mainly in the music, the words being often doggerel. Some of the doggerel, however, is distinctly funny, having all the inconsequential excellence of the best type of nonsense. Only the stodgiest of hearers could fail to be tickled by 'The Drunken Sailor,' 'Knock a man down,' 'Poor old Reuben Ranzo,' or 'In 'Frisco Bay.' The rhythm in many cases is fascinating. Probably some of the eccentricities are due to the irregular action of the labour with which the chantey was connected. Be that as it may, the result makes one marvel more than ever at the complacency with which so many musicians are content with works in which the pattern is as regular as clockwork. Mr. Sharp has arranged the chanteys for solo voice (generally of medium compass) with a simple but telling pianoforte part.

The Ballads are of the primitive type that deal with rather gruesome doings in many verses. It seems a pity that such fine tunes as 'Lord Bateman,' and 'The Cruel Mother,' for example, could not have been provided with words that would have made them more practicable for school use. The first runs to twenty-one verses, and the second deals with a mother who kills her two children with a penknife, and is afterwards told by the juvenile spooks that they go to heaven and she to hell. Not very suitable fare for schools, surely. The set is notable, however, for a splendid ballad in 'The Low Low Lands of Holland,' and a very striking variant of Barbara Allen, here given as 'Barbara Ellen,' with most of the tune in 5-4 time.

Vol. 2 of the 'Motherland Song-Book' consists of familiar sea songs compiled and arranged chiefly with a view to outdoor use. The harmony is bold and simple, and a good send-off and confident performance are ensured by the occasional unison and the frequent doubling of the melody by the tenor.

Dr. Vaughan Williams's collections of sea chanties are specially suitable for choral use. Many are laid out for solo voice, with vocal accompaniment. The quaint harmonic possibilities are made the most of, as may be expected. The settings are not difficult; any average small choir could make a great effect with them.

The volumes contain also three fine modern songs in Stanford's 'Sailing at Dawn' and 'Farewell,' and Martin Shaw's 'Called Up.'

Of the two songs by Frank Bridge the more convincing is 'Mantle of Blue.' The setting of 'Daffodils' seems too sophisticated for old Herrick's simple lines. In 'Mantle of Blue' the touching appeal of the words is heightened by the music, a striking feature being the throbbing bass. This is one of the composer's best songs.

ORGAN MUSIC.

Twenty Short and Easy Pieces by various composers.
Set III.

[Novello & Co., Ltd.]

Like its predecessors, this volume is well calculated to supply the needs of several types of players. The pupil who has just 'found his feet,' and is anxious for interesting work of not too exacting a nature, is catered for; the organist (deputy or regular) with limited technique and little opportunity for improving it will find here pieces well within his powers; and to the fully qualified player who wishes for a handy collection containing a number of short good works by standard writers, the book will be welcome. The composers drawn upon include A. Herbert Brewer (Melody in A), Chipp ('Ave Maria'), Percy E. Fletcher (Interlude), Alan Gray (Intermezzo), Guilmant (Postlude in F), Ireland ('Sursum Corda'), Raff (Cavatina), Rheinberger (Monologue in G), Rubinstein (Melody in F), Schumann ('Dreaming'), Selby, Tours, W. G. Wood, and John E. West ('Aspiration,' and Sketch in C minor).

Suite for Pianoforte Duet. By York Bowen.

[Stainer & Bell.]

Mr. York Bowen's Suite was the prizewinner in a competition held in May, 1918, in connection with *Musical Opinion*. It contains three movements, Prelude, Dance, and Nocturne. All are excellent, and it is safe to predict wide popularity for the Dance, a brilliant piece of work with the flavour of the English country dance, heightened by modern harmonic seasoning. After this rousing section, the Nocturne is somewhat of an anticlimax. Players will probably adopt the composer's suggestion, and transpose the order of the second and third movements. The Suite is only moderately difficult.

Letters to the Editor.

ORATORIO CHOIR AT WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

SIR,—It is proposed to form a special choir of boys and men, with the object of giving renderings in Westminster Abbey of extended sacred choral works. The choir will number about two hundred picked voices, no one receiving payment for his services, and will be accompanied (as a rule) by a full professional orchestra. It is intended that the works performed should be of all styles and periods, preference being given to those which are not very frequently to be heard, and a feature being made of unaccompanied music. The works selected for the coming season are:—before Christmas, Handel's 'Israel in Egypt'; before Easter, Bach's 'St. Matthew' Passion Music; after Easter, a selection of unaccompanied motets.

The help of the boys of several of the best London choirs has already been secured, through the co-operation of their choirmasters; it now remains to enlist the services of basses, tenors, and a few male altos. It is felt that there must be many who, though they are unable to undertake the responsibilities of membership of a regular Church choir, are nevertheless keenly interested in Church music, and would welcome the opportunity for taking part in renderings such as those proposed: regular members of Church choirs, too, whether professional or amateur, will, it is hoped, come forward. The essentials for membership are a good voice, accuracy in reading at sight, and an enthusiasm which will assure regularity in attendance.

The rendering of great works in the unique surroundings of the Abbey should prove extraordinarily impressive, and it is hoped that those to whom religious music makes a strong appeal will respond with offers to help as performers, or, what is no less important, will take a share in the financial support which is essential to the initial success and permanence of the effort.

Those who are willing to help in either way are invited to communicate with me at the Abbey, when full particulars will be forwarded.—Yours, &c.,

SYDNEY H. NICHOLSON

(Organist of Westminster Abbey).

PURCELL'S ANTHEMS.

SIR,—I have just read the August number of the *Musical Times*. I should like first to thank the writer of the article on Purcell's music for his able and timely summary of that great composer's achievements: then, if I may, to add one or two comments.

I was sorry to see the old tag of the text-books and history-books once more repeated, that 'too many of Purcell's anthems suffer from concessions to the taste of the period,' and that *ritornelli* 'of decidedly secular flavour' intrude. Give a dog a bad name, and the unthinking reader will do the rest. Has the writer of these remarks heard the anthems to which he alludes sung and played sympathetically, after careful rehearsal? I have rehearsed and performed in my College Chapel a good many Purcell anthems, including several of the so-called 'secular' examples, with the orchestral *ritornelli* in their entirety. I told my singers and players of the 'secularity' legend; they agreed with me that it was nonsense. Those who listened on each occasion, as far as I could gather by inquiry, confirmed the opinion of the performers. In further support of my contention, let me cite some information which may be new to many. A few