Review

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REVIEWS.

Novello's Music Primers. Edited by Dr. Stainer.

Composition. By John Stainer, M.A., Mus. Doc., Oxon. [Novello, Ewer and Co.]

THE Editor of this most handy, cheap, and useful series of Music Primers has lost no time in following his capital little work on "Harmony" with one no less excellent on "Composition." The second, we need hardly say, is a legitimate and necessary sequel to the first, and, like it, is "only intended for beginners." Dr. Stainer modestly styles it a "collection of hints both to masters and pupils as to the course which should be pursued in the first steps towards the art of Composition." We can only say as to this that the pupil who accepts the book, not as a "collection of hints," but as a complete manual within the limits laid down, and who, helped by a master, performs all the exercises given, will require to know very little more on the same subject. Dr. Stainer is eminently qualified for the work here achieved, not alone by the way in which he arranges and presents his matter, but also because he declines to move in the track of pedantic predecessors along the same route. Musty rules and regulations, the "red tape" by which art is hampered when not strangled, has no attraction for Dr. Stainer; and the common sense that so remarkably distinguishes his "Theory of Harmony," published some years ago, now serves him as well as ever. Thus we read, in the preface to "Composition," that the author has "purposely omitted any concise or definite rules on modulation, because he conceives that it is better that it should be learned in the process of harmonising melodies than by 'short cuts' committed to memory. Pupils who have been made familiar with such 'short cuts' usually jump into a new key by their means, and fail to master that gentle and interesting leaning towards the new tonality which is so characteristic a portion of the best type of modulation." With these words away go, as far as Dr. Stainer is concerned, the "cut and dried" formulæ over which so many generations of music students have painfully pondered. "A good riddance," say we. No doubt modulation must always remain a subject of careful study, but every one knows the difference between a rule and an example. Give the pupil set rules of modulation, and the chances are that, as Dr. Stainer says, he will "jump into a new key by their means." On the other hand, give him the work of a great master, pointing out where it exemplifies the most charming of artistic devices, and his fancy will be excited while his knowledge is increased. This is the sort of common sense with which we credit Dr. Stainer.

The contents of "Composition" are set forth with our author's usual skill, and made interesting even to those who have passed beyond elementary studies, by copious examples taken from classical works. Beginning with a chapter of instructions on the writing down of music from dictation, Dr. Stainer devotes three chapters to the harmonisation, first, of separate notes, then groups of notes, and then the degrees of the minor and major scales when used as a melody. Passing from this, we have melodic structure succinctly explained, helped by plentiful illustrations. But the greater interest and value of the book appears in the chapters devoted to rhythm, which subject, so fascinating in its infinite application to music, Dr. Stainer treats with rare acuteness. Thus the student is referred for the peculiar effects of syncopation to the unwillingness of the mind to resign the rhythmic pulsation it has once received—a phenomenon answering to the inertia of matter. Such points as dotted notes, rests, and sub-divisions upon strong and weak pulses are also considered in their relation to rhythm, with due regard to the magnitude of the results achieved by these apparently trifling agencies. Finally, Dr. Stainer gives no less than seven pages of rhythms which the student is required to "clothe" with melody and harmony. Musical sentences are next considered, the remarks on phrasing are worth careful attention, and the book ends with observations upon accompaniment and the Sonata "form."

Some points in the work call for extended notice and present a tempting theme. But enough if we indicate

generally its perfect fitness for the modest purpose intended by the accomplished author.

Novello's Music Primers. Edited by Dr. Stainer.

A Dictionary of Musical Terms. By J. Stainer, M.A., Mus. Doc., and W. A. Barrett, Mus. Bac. (Compressed from the Imperial Octavo Edition by K. M. Ross.) [Novello, Ewer and Co.]

THE issue of this abridgment of Messrs. Stainer and Barrett's Dictionary was a decidedly "happy thought." Many amateurs cannot well afford the price of the complete work, while many others find its varied contents, if not superfluous in themselves, an *embarras des richesses* as part of a book of reference for words in common use. The present issue exactly meets the wants of the many. Its ninety-six pages are crowded with succinct definitions of musical terminology, hardly a word being omitted. Connoisseurs may, of course, differ as to the value, and, sometimes, as to the correctness of this and that definition. In the very nature of the case this must be so; but a somewhat extensive acquaintance with musical dictionaries enables us to say that no other work of the kind conveys so much accurate information within the same compass. The little book is the best shilling's worth in all musical literature.

Henry Smart: his Life and Works. By William Spark Organist of the Town Hall, Leeds. [William Reeves.]

DR. SPARK very truly asks in his Preface to the book before us, "Why should the biography of our composers be so scanty, and the facts of their personal histories so rarely alluded to, as compared with the great masters of other arts?" We can only reply that in this country so many of our composers and performers live by the daily routine of teaching that a record of their lives would most probably degenerate into a catalogue of their works. To an artist of course the life of an artist is of the highest interest; but the English public has not yet learned to estimate our great musicians at their right value, and would infinitely rather read the translated biography of a German than one originally written in English, of their own countryman. Thus much in answer to Dr. Spark's question; but we heartily sympathise with his attempt to break the ice, and believe that he has reason to pride himself on the assertion that this book "will be the first of its kind ever published of an English musician." Unfortunately, however, his work proves the truth of our assertion; for after a very few facts connected with the early life of Henry Smart, we get a criticism upon the best of his works, with illustrations in music-type—interesting of course in the highest degree, but disappointing to those who anticipate reading an account of the composer's career sketched by one of his most intimate friends. All who knew Henry Smart must have felt that, apart from his musical talents, he had many natural gifts; and, above all, was innately a gentleman. In this book we find that on his mother's side he belonged to one of the oldest and noblest families in England, Mrs. Smart being a descendant of Robin Hood, the outlawed Earl of Huntingdon. In very early life he displayed an exceptional musical faculty. At ten years of age "pianoforte-playing and the rudiments of harmony began to form part of his daily study. But he soon declined to have anything to do with the music then considered *good enough for children*; and when sent to practise, would do nothing but extemporise, much to his mother's chagrin." His acquaintance with the Robsons, the well-known organ-builders of St. Martin's Lane, enabled him to try his skill upon several of their instruments, for he was constantly rambling through the workshops, where he was no doubt considered a privileged boy, and permitted to do pretty much as he liked. During his boarding-school days of course music was but little cultivated by him; but although started in life under a lawyer, he managed to escape from the work with which he had so little sympathy—having just learned enough of law to discover a flaw in his articles—and very soon we find him obtaining the post of organist at the Parish Church of Blackburn, in Lancashire. Here his talents appeared thoroughly appreciated. For a missionary meeting amongst the Nonconformists he wrote the hymn-tune now known as "Lancashire"; and his biographer tells us that on one occasion his extraordinary memory enabled him to conduct "a Mass of Beethoven's"

when the score was wanting, which we think may safely be presumed to be the Mass in C, considering that Beethoven's works of this class were limited to two. In 1835 he produced his first work of importance—an Anthem for the Tercentenary Commemoration of the Reformation. The performance took place in the Parish Church of Blackburn, and produced a striking effect; although, being written, as Dr. Spark says, whilst under the influence of Spohr, it has been almost eclipsed by his later works, all of which breathe a feeling of earnest devotion, more indeed in consonance with his real character. When appointed organist of St. Philip's, Regent Street, he became a pianoforte teacher, and also accepted the office of musical critic to the *Atlas* newspaper. His career after this has been sketched not only in THE MUSICAL TIMES, but in most of the journals which commented upon his services to musical art at the time of his decease; and we are sorry to say that Dr. Spark's book adds nothing to what we have been already told, save a few anecdotes, and some letters which, although highly valuable as records of a dear friend to those who possess the originals, contain but little to interest the general musical public. The list of the composer's works at the conclusion of the volume shows not only how earnestly he laboured in the creative portion of his profession, but how thoroughly he regarded it as a sacred duty; for not a composition, however light or small in construction, ever proceeded from his pen which could possibly be said to lower the art of which he formed so bright an ornament. The many admirers of Henry Smart will cordially welcome his friend's tribute to his memory; but Dr. Spark tells us in the Preface when he found the materials he could collect for the purpose of a biography "to be of the most meagre description," he desired to retire from the task. If, therefore, the book should not obtain that wide acceptance which its author could desire, those who "combated his misgivings," and not Dr. Spark himself, must be blamed.

Form or Design in Music. By Oliveria Prescott.
[Duncan Davison and Co.]

THE authoress of this little pamphlet has already made a name as a composer; and, no doubt, thinking with many others, that the subject upon which she writes is becoming more and more disregarded, gives us the result of her own examination of the standard works in a series of papers which were from time to time contributed to our contemporary the *Musical World*. That she has well thought out the matter may be seen by her definition of what may be termed a *heard form*, as distinct from that which may be seen or handled. "The one," she says, "may be compared to a road laid out on a map, the form of which becomes evident at a glance; the other to the same road when we travel on it, and trace it out by slow degrees, turning a corner here, going a hundred yards in a direct line, and another fifty in a curve, and so working its form into our minds minute by minute, and having it in our memories to refer to afterwards." The balance of keys, the periodical recurrence of ideas, and the due observance of rhythm, the three important elements of *form*, are well described; and on the varieties of design which may be built up with these materials our authoress makes some remarks which show that she has not studied in a school which would tend to cramp the ideas of young composers by confining them to the models even of their own day. "Some forms," she tells us, "have been developed by successive generations of composers, each adding a new feature, or cutting off one while increasing another, and at length certain forms have grown up which are recognised as classical—being those in which the classical, *i.e.*, the best, composers have cast their music, as the minuet and the rondo, the canon and the fugue, and the sonata with its many varieties of application, whether for solo instrument, for combinations of chamber instruments, or for full orchestra, as in overture and symphony." We cannot but think that were the fact of form in music—however much it may have gradually settled into certain recognised shapes—universally acknowledged to be progressive, there would be less antagonism between modern composers and their critics. The examples given in the book are most judiciously selected, the varieties of the sonata form being

shown to have been used by the best writers in overtures and other compositions. Mozart and Beethoven are very naturally constantly referred to, the former, indeed, being perhaps the truest adherent to the models of his time, and the latter—although considered "eccentric" by the pedants of the day—shadowing forth new forms which are now accepted as "classical." Although not very elaborate, students will find this little book extremely useful.

The Gleaners. Cantata for Female Voices. Words by Edward Oxenford. Music by Otto Peiniger.
[Stanley Lucas, Weber and Co.]

THE demand for concerted music of any kind is a healthy sign of the time, for too much solo-singing or solo-playing not only administers to the vanity of executants, but tends to keep them in ignorance of their defects. If a single performer, for instance, be out of time, or even out of tune, the listeners only are made painfully conscious of the error; but association with others at once brings the slightest failing into prominence, and there is little doubt that these failings will be, either tacitly or openly, very speedily made apparent to the too ambitious musical aspirant. Cantatas for female voices, therefore, may be strongly recommended for teaching in schools; for, apart from the reason already given, although comparatively small in construction, they lead gradually to a desire for choral works of a higher class; and even after school-days are over, will always be received with pleasure in the drawing-room. "The Gleaners" is a very fair sample of the conventional Pastoral Cantata; and, though not appealing so much to the musician as the amateur, is melodious and refined enough for the home-circle. The "Argument" is not very elaborate, for in it we are merely told that "it is the custom in southern countries to celebrate the day upon which gleanings commence by a formal procession to the fields. Songs, accompanied by music, are sung during the progress, at intervals throughout the day, and on the return home at nightfall." Now, as we have often heard in many parts of England gleaners going to and returning from their work singing songs by no means "accompanied with music," the author was quite right to lay the scene of his work in "southern countries," where we may hope some such pleasing little strains as the composer has given us enlivened their toilsome way. The great defect in the work is the constant repetition of verses to precisely the same music; this, especially in the choral pieces, becoming sometimes extremely wearisome. The opening chorus is simple and tuneful, and the duet (which, by the way, the composer tells us "may be sung as a chorus") contains some exceedingly effective points. The contralto song, "I hear them speak of riches rare," although somewhat eccentric in rhythm, expresses the words well; and a good effect is gained by a change of *tempo*, with a triplet, and afterwards an arpeggio, accompaniment. Some choral recitatives are interwoven with the solos and choruses; and the Finale, finishing with a reminiscence of the figure in the accompaniment of the opening chorus, forms an appropriate farewell to the day's work, although the repetition, already mentioned, materially weakens the effect of this, as well as many other pieces in the work. The naming of the principal singers—Gabiella (soprano) and Bianca (contralto)—seems to imply that the composer was desirous of creating some dramatic effect in the work, but we cannot say that this intention is realised. The music flows on pleasantly and smoothly; and, being thoroughly within the reach of the majority of amateurs, it may be cordially commended to their notice.

A Brief History of Mr. Henry Leslie's Choir from its Formation to its Dissolution. By F. A. Bridge.
[F. A. Bridge.]

AS the rise of artistic and refined part-singing in this country is unquestionably to be dated from the formation of Mr. Henry Leslie's Choir, there can be little doubt that when future histories of English musical progress come to be written, the little book now before us will be most valuable for reference. The germ of what afterwards became a recognised institution of the country originated, as Mr. Bridge tells us, in the autumn of 1855, when "about thirty-five voices, carefully selected by Mr. Joseph Heming, met, under Mr. Leslie's direction, in one of the