Choral Matters

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THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

APRIL 1, 1871.

CHORAL MATTERS.

I HAVE in three distinct publications, *The Double Choir* (Rivingtons), *Cathedralia* (Masters), and *Sacred Archæology* (Lovell Reeve), discussed many points of choral arrangement. In the following article I wish to draw attention to several points on which there is much popular misapprehension. I proceed to show:

First, that the office of Precentor can be held only by a priest, and exists only in cathedral and collegiate churches, and, before the reformation was also in existence in minsters.

Secondly, the meaning of ruling the choir.

Thirdly, the duty of rectors of choir.

Fourthly, the use of musical instruments in church, and the origin of the office of Organist.

I. The Precentor in cathedral churches, secular or minsters, was a dignitary and Priest by the Statutes and Canon Law. "Those constituted in a dignity office or ministry, as the Dean, Archdeacon, Archpriest, Provost, Præcentor, Treasurer, Chancellor, Master of the Scholars, and Sacrist." (Lyndwood, 327.) The Bishop of Salisbury in the College of Bishops is Præcentor, and when the Archbishop of Canterbury "solemnly celebrates in the presence of the Episcopal College, ought to rule the choir in the divine offices by ancient observance and custom."—Ib. 104. The Statutes of the old foundation state that "the Chanter ought to rule the choir as to singing, and can raise or lower the pitch;" at Exeter he "ruled the choir and boys," and had charge of their morals and instruction, their food and dress. At Hereford, in solemn processions, he commenced the first chant, and the sequence; at Mass and Vespers assigned their duties to the rulers of choir, assisted the Bishop in beginning the anthem and Gloria in Excelsis, and bore the whole charge of the chanting and psalmody; and was consulted in defining the amount of solemnity to be observed, and assigning the person and time for its discharge. At Salisbury he drew up the list of Chanters and Ministers of the Altar, ruled the choir on principal feasts, gave directions to the Rectors, and also the note to the Bishop. At Wells he had charge of the song school and the instruction of the boys, their discipline, admission, and arrangement in choir. At York he ruled the choir in singing and psalms on great festivals, began the "Office" (Introit) in the Mass, and inspected song-schools. At St. Paul's he appointed the Chanters, kept order in the choir, and led the antiphons, sequences and processional chants on great festivals, and examined candidates for admission into the choir. In all cases he superintended and tabled the singers, and in most churches appointed the clerks and boys.

SUCCESSOR.—The Succentorship was an office. (Lyndwood 144.) The Subchanter, also a priest, fulfilled the duties of the Chanter in his absence, and received his instructions from him. At York he pointed out the anthem to the Dean. At Hereford he was to attend perpetually the services and keep the choir books, ruled the choir and the Rectors, had the whole burden of the psalmody and singing, ad-

mitted or expelled the boys, and had power over the clerks. At York, in the name of the Præcentor he arranged the service and ruled the choir. He usually corrected the choristers. It was the duty of the Præcentor or Succentor to see that all in choir sang together, paused together, began anew together, neither outrunning nor lingering behind others, but singing distinctly, audibly, clearly, with care and devotion, dignity in gesture, obedience to command, and reverence in their ministry.

II. RULING (*i. e.* directing or leading) THE CHOIR.

—The parish Priest presides in ruling the choir, in beginning anthems and responses, in reading lessons, in celebrating fixed ministrations of Holy Communion and other Divine offices at set times and seasons. He must see that the Divine office is rightly performed, so that the due order is observed, that the hours are not said after the time, and that there be no clipping in saying or singing of words or syllables. The whole direction of the choir in singing and psalmody resides in his person. (Lyndw., 71.) The choir was ruled on Sundays and great feasts, and during certain octaves. (MS. Harl, 1001, fo. 121 b.)

III. RECTORS OF CHOIR.—At York the Rector of Choir gave the tone or note before the Dean went up to the Sanctuary. At Exeter the Rulers marked "absences," and the Cardinals of the choir and two other Ministers "warded the choir," by noting all irregularities at St. Paul's. At Hereford they began the Introit at Mass and the Kyrie in the Mass, and if negligent and incorrigible were removed at the delation of the Succentor. These Rectors of Choir were Vicars, and at York were bound to know the hymns and all the chants, which they were to begin, and to intone the psalms in their proper mode. They were also called Cantors or Chanters.

There was a principal Rector who was directed as to the Introit by the Præcentor, and then announced it to his fellow. It would seem that in the time of Amalarius they were called Succentors. At Lichfield there were four on great feasts, who took their orders from the Præcentor. At Chichester "two of the Calabre amess" (that is Vicars wearing the amess of dark Calabrian fur) were the "high Rectors in all principal feasts. Two in the priest's stalls were high Rectors in all lesser feasts, and in others two of the second form were Rectors. Every Rector's course of the second form (or row of stalls) continued two weeks alternately."

The Præcentor had a staff when a dignitary, as at St. Paul's. We find a "staff of yverie for the Chauntre of the Queere, with a hedd and a crosse of beriall wrought with gold-smythe worke, with vij joynts, silver & gilt beside the picke and the crosse." (MS. Inv. Publ. Rec. Off.) The Rectors also had their staffs. Thus I find in an MS. inventory at Winchester College:

1582 Four Rectors of the choir's staffs tipped with gold and silver.

Item, three chairs with cushions of silk, and four leathern stools for the same.

And at St. Stephen's, Westminster:

ij Rector's staves of sylver parcell gilt xxiiii. ons. (MS. Inv.)

These Rectors of the choir may still be seen in churches of Normandy, laymen who wear copes and walk up and down the choir on either side during the singing of psalms, etc., and then return to high stools at the west end. These, in the main, respond

to the English director or leader of the choir. In the Minster of Evesham the Præcentor, when ruling, stood in the centre of the choir.

IV. When a Bishop enters the church to celebrate, the organs are played, to enhance the magnificence of the solemn service, and so also at the entrance of the head of the Chapter on a similar occasion. Where there was no Organist a Canon might leave the Choir and fulfil his duties. Rules were laid down for the use of the Organ which was said to "sing" in the hymns, canticles and psalms, and the Organist is forbidden to prolong the service so as to weary the congregation and exhibit his skill by dwelling on the notes, and bound strictly to accompany the chant, and conclude playing when desired by the proper officer. The whole design in the introduction of music and instrumental harmony was to kindle the hearts of the faithful with spiritual joy and stimulate devotion by its varied melody, and yet it was far later than the time of St. Thomas Aquinas, who distinctly says that in his time it was unknown for fear of a misapprehension of judaizing, for only in 1600, the Pope, Clement VIII., by a special constitution permitted its employment. Unhappily great abuses followed, and the style in vogue was, we are told, feeble, petty, leading to wandering thoughts and "chopped up into little bits," and at length designed only to tickle the ear with modulation borrowed from the theatre. Councils therefore required a reform, which should produce grave, devout, distinct music, without unbecoming lightness, fit for the House of God and to sound forth His praise, with words distinctly uttered and altogether conducive to its holy purpose: and a French Synod forbade all but grave, simple music for chant and organ, without repetition of the words in the Creed, and in the hymns Gloria in Excelsis and Sanctus, such as would beseech a ball-room rather than a Choir. In 1657, Alexander VII. prohibited any imitation of a peculiar or dance-like style or "burning," as an old writer says, "unhallowed fire in holy censers." The stately and majestic tones of the organ were gradually lost and buried by the strains of an orchestra; and a great Canonist condemns as unlawful the use of violins, harps, citterns, trumpets, and flutes, which he says were tolerable only so long as they did not distract the thoughts of a congregation.

Such is the history of the musical service in foreign countries. In England the figures in the front of the Minstrel's gallery at Exeter, on the capital of the Minstrel's Pillar at Beverley, in the Angel Choir of Lincoln, and on corbel and carving, show the very instruments which were employed; and in a lately printed inventory of Meaux Abbey, at least two centuries older than the Reformation, we find two organs are at the west end and one in the Choir, and naturally expect some notice of an Organist. The earliest are said to have been the Friars, but certainly the Benedictines followed their example, as we find at Durham, the offices of Organist and Master of the children combined, "he was bound to teach those six children to singe and to plaie on the organs every principall daye when the Monnks did sing their High Masse, and likewise at Evensong." At that time there were three paires, one daily used at ordinary service, one at the north side of the Choir, large organs called the Cryers used only on special days, and the wooden organs over the Choir door used only on principal feasts, and resembling, we

are told, those of York and St. Paul's, the finest in England.

William Thorpe was told, to his discomfiture, by the Archbishop of Canterbury, that "organs and good delectable songs quickened and sharpened more men's wits than should any sermon." (Bale's Works, p. 103.) But Latimer used violent expressions about "piping playing and curious singing" (II. 348) "descant pricksong and organs" irritated ears that loved to hear only the sound of their own voice in the pulpit. (Wordsworth Ecc. Biog., III. 36.) "Organs and curious singing" were considered "proper to Popish dens—cathedral churches," (3 Whitgift, 392,) though Roger Hutchinson had the candour to own that "both song and instruments be laudable and approved ceremonies in God's Church." (Works 285). Those innovating Bishops, Grindal and Horne, disapproved of "measured chanting and the sound of organs," (I. Zur. 178, 358), and in due time, when the Puritans became rebels, they plucked down organs, as at Peterborough and Chichester, and made merry amid their profanity, and outraged common decency.

In 1590, at Wimborne Minster, the "Organist" wore a surplice of Holland, which cost 21s. 3d. In 1517, the "organ player received 3s. 4d., and for a "manuell" 2s. 10d. In 1534 the "bedeman" "blew the organs." In 1676, the Organist of St. Margaret's, Westminster, received £20, and the blower £2 a-year out of the burial fees to the clerks. In the reign of Edward VI. the organs were placed frequently in a loft; and at the dissolution of St. Stephen's Chapel, Westminster, the "iii. payer of organs in the Upper Chapell and j old payer in the Nether Chapell" were valued at £13 13s. 4d.; from this prominence, happily, they are now gradually displaced. "iij long settells for servants to sytt upon the loft that the one pair of organs stode upon." (MS. Inv. St. Mary-at-Bowe, Westchepe.) At Foulsham a pair cost £12. (6 Edw. VI.) Bernard Smith's organ at St. Margaret's, Westminster, cost £200. In 1562 organs were retained by a single vote in convocation. (Card., Conf. 40.) In 1620 Charles and James I. at St. Paul's attended service on Mid-Lent Sunday "performed with organs, cornets, and sagbuts." (Heylin, Cypr. Anglic., 83.) In 1570 Bishop Horne, at Winchester, desired that "the organs be no more used in service time, and the stipend for the organ player turned to some other godly purpose." (MSS. Winchester College.)

At the time of the Reformation, in the Statutes of Cathedrals of the New Foundation, the Organist appears in order to add to the solemnity of the daily service which was to be "celebrated as a daily Laud of God with singing and great joy." Besides the other Clerks, one was to be elected by the Dean and Chapter of honest life and good repute, skilful in singing and playing on the organs, who shall devote himself (studiosè vacabit) to teaching the boys and playing the organ in Divine Service; at one time "he is called Master of the Choristers," and could be removed after three monitions. At Winchester College, in 1692, £2 10s. were paid for a Sackbut for the use of the Choristers. The Caroline Statutes of Canterbury (1636) recognise the Organist as of "custom that hath long subsisted in the Church," "two Sackbutteers" and "two Corneteers," and permit the Dean and Chapter to select the Organist or one of the Minor Canons or Clerks to teach the Choristers to sing, according to their ability. The

Statutes of Wells (1263) and of Exeter (1276), prescribed that every Vicar (Clergy who represented the Dignitaries and the Major Canons, whether priests, Deacons, or Sub-deacons, in their absence) should be able to play on a musical instrument. At Exeter (1540) the Choristers were to be taught by the Clericus Capellæ. At Hereford, proficiency on the viol or harp was indispensable to success on the part of an applicant for admission to the Choir. And at Westminster there is a provision that the Choristers should play on an instrument.

The stipend of an organist in the New Foundations, as at Westminster, was equal to that of a Minor Canon: the former receives for his annual fee £4, for livery 30s., and for commons £6 1s. 8d.; the latter, if also Precentor, had in addition, 40s., or at Rochester, £5 2s. 8d., and as Precentor £2, whilst the Master of Choristers was paid £5 7s. It is much to be wished that as the office of Organist is of such importance in the choral service, his position was more clearly defined, and that by means of an adequate stipend he might be relieved from the drudgery of private tuition, and enabled to devote himself to his high calling exclusively. His skill now must be greater than that of his mediæval, or even more recent, predecessor, when we find such entries as the following:

- 1374 For removing the organs from chapel into hall and preparing them for the play, 5s.
- 1407 For the expenses of 6 scholars carrying the organs from chapel to the Bishop's house at Waltham, 9d.
- 1415 For linen cloth bought to cover the organs of the college to be carried to Clere, 20d.
- For waxing the said cloth, 20d.
- For two ash poles to carry the said organs, 8d.
- 4 Hen. IV. For a pair of organs bought at London, with their carriage, £6 3s. 4d.
- 1421 For a pair of organs bought at London, 100s.
- 1520 An organ cost £13 6s. 7d.
- 1570 A pair of organs cost £6 13s. 4d.
- 1630 For 2 lbs. of tinglass used in constructing the organ, 7s.
- 1666 For a musical instrument called harpsican for the use of the chapel, £4 9s. 6d.
- For its carriage from London, 10s.

The question arises what are the relative duties of the Organist and Precentor in the New Foundations where he is not a permanent dignitary but simply an officer elective by the Dean and Chapter. The Dean has the charge of seeing that "all Divine Services are decently performed." The Precentor is to be one of the Minor Canons, elder in years and superior in learning and manners, whose duty is to guide the singers in church, decently to lead the singing and to have obedience paid him by the Minor Canons and Clerks, and the others of the Choir to sing what he directs, to note absences and keep the Choir books. The Master of the Choristers or Organist, skilful in singing and as a performer on musical instruments, has the instruction of the boys committed to him; at Westminster to teach them in the science and exercise of these requirements and their other duties in choir, whilst the Precentor of the choir, chosen by the Dean as superior to the other Priests in skilfulness of singing, is to preside over them and the other inferior ministers and singers, and his office is to prescribe the mode, order, and persons who are to sing the Common Prayer in church, and note irregularities. At Ely the Master of the Choristers is to

be chosen in addition to the Clerks for his skill as a singer and organist, to teach the boys and assist in singing the Divine Service. No rules can be more distinct and precise as regards the Precentor's right of direction (*regere chorum*), and the Organist's duty of instruction. One of the most learned Canonists decides that the office of the Precentor is to preside in choir, and to direct the Canons, Clerks, and other ministers in things pertaining to the order of singing the Divine office, and to arrange that it be offered to the Most High with gravity and due order. But this observation on his power and authority does not apply if he holds merely an office without administration, as, in that case, the power of ordering in the choir belongs to the first dignitary or President of the choir deputed by the Chapter, according to the custom of each Church.

The appointment of an Organist in the Old Foundations varied in date, but may be generally fixed in the 17th century. At Chichester his duty was to be in the choir until the psalms had been sung, and then, having "done his duty up at the organs, return to the choir to bear his part again."

In parish churches the Organist, under the Incumbent, has the direction of the choir, and there should be no infringement of his authority by the introduction of lay persons bearing fictitious titles,* who would be eminently useful in leading their respective sides of the choir (the parish priest alone being the president), but err against taste, as well as precedent and ordinary sense, in adopting privileged names which are but empty sounds in their case.

MACKENZIE E. C. WALCOTT.

MUSIC AND THE REVISED CODE.

By HENRY C. LUNN.

THE incompetence of committees, acting under official "authority," to examine into musical matters has been so long manifest to all who have really studied the art and its requirements, that no surprise could be felt when it was found that, although music was understood to be included in the new Revised Code, the inspectors selected as examiners knew nothing whatever of the subject. This was thoroughly in consonance with the usual Governmental treatment of the art in this country, and quite in accordance with the manner in which the great question of musical education had been discussed and settled by that formidable body the Society of Arts. But we must confess our astonishment when we first read the astounding fact that this ignorance, which had been so often displayed by pompous and patronising Members of Parliament whenever the subject of music was introduced in the House of Commons, was looked upon as a reason for not examining into and reporting upon the state of the art under the new Revised Code. Here, indeed, is a hopeful sign that at length music shall be admitted to its right place; for this confession of inability on the part of the inspectors shows

* The Precentor is a permanent dignitary collated by the Bishop in Cathedrals of the Old Foundation, Salisbury, Chichester, Exeter, Wells, Hereford, Lincoln, Lichfield, St. Paul's, and York; and in them the Organist is not a statutable officer except as holding a lay clerkship. But in the New Foundations the Organist is a statutable officer under this title, as well as the Precentor, who must be a Minor Canon and likewise appointed by the Dean and Chapter; that is, at Durham, Rochester, Canterbury, Worcester, Carlisle, Peterborough, Chester, Norwich, Oxford, Bristol, Gloucester, and in the collegiate churches of Westminster, Windsor, Ripon, and Manchester. (The two latter being now cathedrals.)