Review

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The Organ Voluntary. By Sydney H. Nicholson.
Two Chorales for use at the conclusion of Evening Service.
Harmonized by Bach.

[Humphrey Milford, London.]

In No. 6 of the Occasional Papers issued by the Church Music Society, Mr. Sydney H. Nicholson deals with the organ voluntary in all its branches. He also touches on many other departments of the organist's work, and his suggestions generally deserve to be read and pondered by those concerned. The Church Music Society has also issued on a card two evening hymns, set to chorales harmonized by Bach. It is much to be hoped that these or similarly dignified strains will gradually oust the mawkish so-called 'Vespers' which too often bring the Sunday devotions to such a melancholy conclusion.

BOOKS RECEIVED.

Catalogue of Music in the Library of Christ Church, Oxford. By G. E. P. Arkwright. With a preface by T. B. Strong. Part I: Works of ascertained authorship. Pp. viii. + 128. Price, 7s. 6d. net. (Oxford University Press—Humphrey Milford.)

The Consort of Music. A study of Interpretation and Ensemble. By J. A. Fuller-Maitland. Pp. 244. Price 6s. net. (Oxford University Press.)

An Illustrated History of Music. By Thomas Tapper and Percy Goetschius. Pp. xviii + 365. Price 7s. 6d. net. (London: John Murray.) See Review, p. 282.

Concerning Hymn Tunes and Sequences. By Athelstan Riley. Pp. 107. Price 2s. 6d. (London: Mowbray & Co., Ltd.)

Bush Songs and Oversea Voices. By A. Safroni-Middleton. Pp. 159. Price 3s. 6d. net. (London: John Long, Ltd.)

Carillons of Belgium and Holland. By William Gorham Rice. Pp. 232. Price, 6s. net. (London: John Lane.)

Nature in Music. By Lawrence Gilman. Pp. 220. Price 4s. 6d. net. (London: John Lane.)

Correspondence.

COUNTERPOINT AND HARMONY.

TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE MUSICAL TIMES.'

SIR,—Mr. Newman, I think, misses my meaning in his remarks upon the following examples from my 'Evolution of Harmony':

(a) is strict counterpoint, (b) is not. But the objection to (b) as strict counterpoint is not one of effect at all.

The material of musical composition, as everyone knows, has gradually evolved according to certain fundamental principles, and the student who has carefully read the literature of music could probably say to what period a composition belonged without seeing the name of the composer. One of the tests applied, for arriving at the conclusion, would be that of the use of harmony. For example, if we saw:

we should know that it did not belong to the polyphonic period. And if a pupil wrote (c) in a passage purporting to be in the style of Palestrina, one would cross it out, not because it sounded wrong, but because it did not come within the scheme of harmony at that period of its evolution. This is precisely the objection to (b). Strict counterpoint is the grammar of the polyphonic period, and many procedures which we now know to be good are forbidden simply because they are not a part of the technique of the period. Surely this is the only logical basis for restrictions of this sort. If it is said, 'Strict counterpoint should be abolished,' I have no more to add. Perhaps it should. But if we teach the technique of a definite period that is past, it is obvious that many of the restrictions must not be to us questions of effect, but restrictions in accordance with the stage of evolution at which the art had arrived. For instance, where is the sense of saying quavers must not be approached or quitted by leap, unless it is a restriction of a period?

My point was that the view of the material of composition as consisting of chords and their decoration made (b) a possibility, whereas under the régime of the polyphonic period it would never have occurred to men to use it, though we do see its precursor in (a). The fact that moderns would never argue out their music in such a way does not surely mean that we should not study the methods of the past, and so see the gradual steps by which modern points of view have been reached. No one should gainsay that what sounds right is right, and what sounds wrong is wrong. But in studying strict counterpoint, even if we cannot hear with 16th-century ears, we have to argue from 16th-century points of view. Such a study may be regarded by some as being as useless as Latin or Greek prose. But that is not the point at issue.

Mr. Newman criticises my remarks in reference to 'effect.' My point was in reference to the technique of a period, and not in reference to effect at all. But some one will say, 'Are not all rules of this nature based on effect?' That is true. But again, new effects are generally obtained by breaking through what have been the conventions of a period. The fact that Palestrina never used (b) does not mean that he disliked it, but that it did not come within the scope of his technique.

I tried to show in my chapter on the chord of the six-four that all its best original uses were to be found in the system under which the fourth from the bass was treated as a discord.

O. course I might have put down the results of my research as dogma in half a page, and said 'These are the rules for the use of a six-four.' Someone would immediately say, 'Your authority, please,' and rightly so. My aim has been to trace the origin of rules, not as being the laws of the Medes and Persians, but as being precepts based on fundamental principles which are capable of expansion.

I do not say, of course, that a composer requires to be able to write in the style of every master of the past before he can write in the idiom of his own age. The composer is born, not made, and he will come out on top, no matter upon what method he is brought up. But most of us who teach harmony are not teaching it to born composers, nor even to those born with special musical instincts. If such people are taught to see, for example, the process by which the rules for the use of the chord of the six-four are deduced, they will be much more likely to use it properly than if they are given a few dogmatic assertions.

The genius requires no rules; or at least very few. And our aim in teaching harmony is not to produce composers: that cannot be done. It is rather to give the general practitioner an insight into the gradual evolution of the material of musical composition, and to prevent him, if he will rush into print, from making a complete fool of himself. Composition is the gift of the few—the very few; but the rest of us will be better musicians if we study the methods not only of our own age but of the past. We do not aspire to be composers, but we can improve our musicianship by studying and imitating the styles of the great masters of the past. And by so doing we can perhaps be of some service to the genius who just wants the restraining influence of such scholarship.

C. H. KITSON.