

Review

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The *Nunc Dimittis* opens with a melodious theme which is treated skilfully and at some length, but its character is so smooth and suggestive of calm rest that no feeling of unnecessary elaboration is produced. The music of the "*Gloria Patri*" as given to the *Magnificat*, is repeated at the close of the *Nunc Dimittis*, and brings to a close a setting of the Canticles which will hold a high rank in that comparatively small number which may be called both good and easy. We feel inclined to lay great stress on the simplicity of this work, as there seems to be a growing tendency amongst a certain class of parish choirs to attempt the performance of works far above the strength of their resources. Perhaps the publication by our weekly contemporaries of the music to be performed at various churches tends to foster this evil, by offering the strong temptation to ambitious choirs of appearing very proficient—on paper. How many of those persons who read these weekly music lists take the trouble to make an expedition in order to find out how far such fair promises are fulfilled? Perhaps if more did so, our praise of Mr. Prout's service as being both good and easy would have a special force.

*The Order of Service for the Fourth Annual Festival of the Church Choir Association, held in St. Paul's Cathedral, 26th October 1876.*

THESE few sheets, which we notice immediately after Mr. Smart's Anthem and Mr. Prout's Service, deserve a few lines, because they suggest some important questions as to the composition of Psalm Tunes and Chants. The pamphlet contains, besides the *Preces* and *Responses*, the following pieces, written expressly for the Festival: Two Processional Hymns, by W. S. Hoyte; three Chants for the Psalms, by E. H. Birch, Mus. Bac., Oxon.; a Hymn Tune, by Dr. J. F. Bridge; and two Recessional Hymns, by John Blockley, jun. These various compositions differ in character almost as widely as is possible. Mr. Hoyte's tunes are, we think, models of what psalmody for congregational use should be—broad and dignified in melody, simple yet not bald in harmony. The same praise may be extended to Dr. Bridge's tune, with the slight reservation that he goes rather too far away from his original key at the end of the second line. We congratulate the Church Choir Association on having caused the production of tunes of such sterling merit. On the other hand, we think they have been far less fortunate in the Chants by Mr. Birch, and the Recessional Hymn Tunes by Mr. Blockley, jun. In the first place, they are written in that "pretty" semi-secular style to which, in common with many other musicians, we entertain a rooted antipathy, as being quite incompatible with the dignified character appropriate to Church music; and we therefore regret that compositions of this class should be put forward on a special occasion as representative of our musical art. This, however, is a matter of taste on which opinions will doubtless differ. We have a more serious charge to bring against these pieces. If we may judge from the music itself, neither Mr. Birch nor Mr. Blockley appear to be able to write a correct four-part harmony. Both seem to have a special fondness for consecutive fifths, Mr. Birch's *penchant* being the more pronounced, as he twice gives them between extreme parts, with an effect which, to our ears at least, is simply horrible. Let our readers judge:—



If a "Mus. Bac., Oxon." indulges in such harmonies as these, very grave questions are raised as to the value of musical degrees, and we are reminded of Handel's uncomplimentary remarks on the subject when asked why he did not take his degree. We are curious to know whether these fifths are approved or tolerated by the Oxford examiners.

Mr. Blockley's fifths are less obtrusive than Mr. Birch's, but are even more clumsy. Here they are:—



In both cases it would have been perfectly easy to avoid them; indeed, in the second Mr. Blockley seems absolutely to have gone out of his way to introduce them; for, if not, why did he not leave the C in the tenor for the second minim? We hope these pieces will not fall into the hands of any foreign musical critics; they will certainly form a low estimate of the state of musical education in England.

*Benedicite omnia opera.* Set to chants by F. Walker, W. Winn, and J. Stainer.

*Benedicite omnia opera.* Set to chants by R. de Lacey, F. Champneys, A. Gibbs, and J. Stainer.

THE use of the "*Benedicite*" during the seasons of Advent and Lent is becoming more general as the true beauty of its structure is better understood. When the three great divisions into which it naturally falls are carefully examined, it ceases to be a meaningless catalogue of "things in general," and becomes a poem built on a true philosophical basis. All that belongs to the extra-terrestrial universe is first called upon to bless the Lord—angels, heavens, sun and moon, showers and dew, frost and cold, lightnings and clouds; then the mind is directed to all that is beautiful on the terrestrial universe—the earth, seas and floods, fowls of the air, and lastly the greatest of God's works—Man himself.—"O all ye children of men, bless ye the Lord." But at this point the existence of a *spiritual kingdom* is brought before the poet's vision, and he calls on the true Israel, on priests, servants of the Lord, spirits and souls of the righteous, holy and humble men of heart, and lastly, on the three holy children themselves, to bless the Lord and praise Him for ever.

This division of the poem is admirably pointed out in the settings before us, both of which consist of excellent chants, well arranged, and with the words *printed* and *pointed* immediately under the music to which they are to be sung, thus preventing the possibility of any mistake. We cannot too strongly recommend these settings, not only because of their musical value, but also because their low price (three-halfpence each) renders the "stocking" of a choir a very cheap process.

*Angels singing, Church Bells ringing.* Christmas Carol for Children. Words by C. F. Hernaman. Music by the Rev. Sir F. A. Gore Ouseley, Bart.

We cannot say that there is anything particularly striking in this Carol; but the music expresses the words with appropriate simplicity, and a good effect is gained by the questions and answers between the Decani and Cantoris. In a new edition some omissions in the Alto part (two bars from the end of line 3) should be rectified, and we imagine that the G in the treble at the end of bar 2, line 4, should be A. In the coming season so unpretentious a composition should find a welcome with those whose desire for novelty extends even to Christmas Carols.

*Fourteen Songs;* Set to poems by Robert Burns, by Robert Franz. Edited and adapted by Natalia Macfarren.

Those who know but little of this composer's works will do well to possess themselves of this cheap edition of these charming songs, all of which are melodious and sympathetic with the feeling of Burns's poetry, and some, indeed, veritable gems. No. 2, "*My bonny Mary*," has not only a theme of remarkable beauty, but the character of the accompaniment is so varied as to give importance to a really simple song; No. 4, "*My heart is sair*," commencing in A minor and ending in C major, is an exquisite colouring