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Church and Organ Music.

THE COMPLEAT ORGANIST.

BY HARVEY GRACE.

(Continued from February Number, p. 100.)

V.—OF HOBBIES.

Possibly our Candid Friend exaggerated, after the manner of his kind. Nevertheless, there was some reason behind his rather sweeping statements, and his suggestions in the matter of examinations are less fantastic than they appear to be on the surface. But you shall judge. And to put these papers in tune with their title, let us occasionally adopt the dialogue form used by Old Izaak. Instead of Piscator, Venator, and Auceps—the garrulous trio who stretched their legs up Tottenham Hill on that ‘fine, fresh May morning’ nearly three hundred years ago—shall step out together we two, and the Candid Friend—Auctor, Lector, and Candidus.

Auctor.—Well met, good Lector, on this keen March morning. Whither away thus early?

Lector.—Give you a good day, Master Auctor, I go towards the fields at Charing, to clear my pipes in good air, and to take my morning draught at the ‘Chequers’ where, let me tell you, shall be gotten as noble an ale as any in the shere. But see, here comes friend Candidus. A fair meeting, Candidus, are you for a walk?

Candidus.—With all my heart; and by the way we will hold good discourse, I warrant you.

Auctor.—Agreed, good Candidus, and as Lector and I are players on the organ, and masters of the quiristers, and as you know much of those subjects (though, being withal a man of substance, you do not practise for hire), you shall open your mind about us and our work, more by token that, as hath been well said, lookers-on see most of the game.

Lector.—Do, Candidus. You shall find us good listeners and patient, so go not about the bush with us.

Candidus.—Marry, that will not I. By my fay, an I deal not roundly with you, may I never pour sack again! Have at you then! . . . But if you chaps think I am going to keep up this kind of jargon, you are mistaken. We have had the prologue in the right Walton manner. For the discourse, let it be ‘go as you please.’ And for text, I shall take a subject on which you organists need hortating: your absorption in your own branch of musical work, and neglect of outside interests,—in a word, your ‘grooviness.’

Auctor.—Why, my dear fellow, how can you,—

Lector.—Really, Candidus, I am surprised,—

Auctor.—We may have our faults, but,—

Lector.—Yes, surely, that is not one of them!

Auctor.—Look at the lectures we attend!

Lector.—And the musical journals we read!

Auctor.—And the Organists’ Associations,—

Lector.—Yes, springing up all over the country.

Candidus.—*Piano! Piano!* Let me try to make out my case. To begin with, I admit that the nature of your work tends to narrow your outlook. Year after year you must inevitably travel the same round: responses, chants, hymns, anthems,—altogether hundreds of familiar items must be gone through each year. And to make matters worse the bulk of this music is necessarily of a more or less conventional character, though you must not suppose that I use the term ‘conventional’ in a derogatory sense. The average member of your profession—and bear in mind that throughout I have in my mind only the average organist, who, because he makes up the

majority and is usually the chief musician of his district, has considerable responsibilities in the way of influence—the average organist, I say, has little chance of adding to this repertoire. In the matter of organ music much the same state of things obtains. He does not make his living by playing difficult organ music. His main income is derived from his work as general practitioner. Therefore he goes the round of the organ music he learned in his early days, when he had more time for practising. The more modern school of organ music he rarely has time to study. There is something to be said for his attitude, on utilitarian grounds. Why should he spend time learning difficult music by Reger, Karg-Elert, and Company, which when played is mostly in an idiom not understood of the people? So he sticks to his classics with, for modern work, something that shall make small demands on player and listener. His attendances at concerts are few and far between, for the reason that his evenings are usually filled up with lessons or class work. In smaller provincial towns he has the further disadvantage of rarely hearing any other organ or choir than his own, and if a concert takes place he generally bears a more or less important part in it. Then, unless he is on his guard, the tide of art goes on and leaves him high and dry. Perhaps no other musician runs the risk to such an extent. The orchestral player is constantly in touch with the greatest of music, classical and modern. The professional singer must now be prepared to take part in choral works other than Handel and Mendelssohn, and even in cases where no great variety of work is undertaken, vocal soloists have the bracing experience of constantly singing before fresh audiences, and under different conductors and conditions. Meanwhile, the organist is tied to his church, and goes on his narrow round of service, choir-practice, and lessons. Is it any wonder that his mental and musical outlooks become narrow? What is he to do if he is not to be strangled by his environment?

Lector.—We have quite a lot of organists’ associations.

Candidus.—Good; and what happens when they meet?

Lector.—Somebody reads a paper on some musical subject, and the meeting discusses it.

Candidus.—Not quite so good, that. Organists’ associations, if they take a man from his little corner in the world, even if it be only at monthly or quarterly intervals, and drop him among comparative strangers to rub shoulders with and see that there are other points of view than his own, do a good work. But you say that the subject dealt with at meetings is usually a musical one. There, I venture to think, is where the associations are making a mistake. What the average organist needs is not more music, but more outside interests. The compleatest organist is he who is also in constant touch with at least one of the kindred arts. Your associations would be even more useful if they led to gatherings of organists listening with rapt attention to papers on architecture, painting, or literature. They would be shocked if one suggested a political discussion, but I am sure many cobwebs would be cleared away, and the members would return to their daily round braced, after a well-managed debate on Ulster, Tariff Reform, or some social question. For one thing, they would realise how small a part, after all, their art plays in the scheme of things.

Auctor.—Why, music is a most civilizing,—

Lector.—*Ars longa*,—you know, all that sort of thing.

Candidus.—All that sort of fiddlesticks! Music is just one of the trimmings of life,—a very

pleasant one, perhaps the purest and best of all the trimmings, but at present, so far as popular appeal is concerned, of infinitely less importance than the picture show, variety theatre, or professional football. If you and your music disappeared to-morrow, the world would pitch a wreath after you, and go about its business and pleasure much as usual. However, this by the way. What I want you to realise is the fact that the organist at present is too often an organist only. He forgets that his organistship is a detail. He is, before all else, a man in a world of men and women,—especially women! Reverting for a moment to your organists' associations, when they meet for musical discussion what is the kind of subject usually chosen? Too often it is one with which they already have, or should have, full acquaintance—the training of choirs, organ playing, that standing dish, congregational singing, and so on. If musical subjects be chosen, let them deal with a branch of the art with which the organist is likely to have little to do,—chamber music, opera, modern harmonic tendencies, and the like. But best of all, as I said, drop music altogether on such occasions, and meet for consideration of other subjects, or for social intercourse,—always being careful that the latter does not end in the association becoming a Mutual Admiration Society. A Mutual Recrimination Society would be much more interesting, and really not without its uses.

Lector.—I don't think the change would be popular.

Candidus.—Very likely not, but organists, as well as other folk, have sometimes to be saved from themselves. We laugh at the busman who spent his holiday riding on another 'bus. If you had taken him by the scruff of the neck and made him take a long walk or play a game of bowls instead, he would probably have given you a liberal helping of the vocabulary for which he was famous, but he would have driven his 'bus all the better next day, and in the long run would have thanked you. And the mention of bowls reminds me that organists, because they are debarred from cricket and football on account of the risk to fingers, too often play no games at all. Tennis and its winter brother, badminton, are the very games for the organist who is still on the right side of old age; while bowls, golf, boating, walking, billiards, and (for such as can conquer their repugnance to putting the worm on the hook, which I, for my part, never could) fishing, are available for such as prefer less violent forms of recreation. Holidays, again. There is a pestilent custom springing up of late years of musicians spending their holidays in talking shop, and generally setting the musical world to rights. If you ask me what is the best holiday for a musician, I would say, let him go off with two or three other men who are not musical. An organist who spent a month camping with a lawyer, a doctor, and an inspector of weights and measures, all of whom were in the happy condition of scarcely knowing one tune from another, would come back to work avid, and knowing many more things than he did before he set out. In musical matters, every organist should be proficient in some branch other than that by which he boils the pot. It would do him a world of good to join an orchestral society, or a madrigal choir, and take his place in the rank and file,—he, who is so accustomed to be on his hind legs all the time directing others. His organ playing will gain in the matter of phrasing if he can sing, or play the violin, his perception of rhythm will be developed by even occasional playing of timpani. But above all, he should be a reader of books, and especially poetry and other works from which the imaginative side of him might draw some sustenance. A musician who is not a Browningite is to me a contradiction in

terms. One who has never read 'Abt Vogler'!—Let me quote a few lines from the same poet's 'Shop':

... And so did day wear, wear, till eyes
Brightened apace, for rest was earned:
He locked door long ere candle burned.
And whither went he? Ask himself,
Not me! To change of scene, I think.

Because a man has shop to mind
In time and place, since flesh must live,
Needs spirit lack all life behind,
All stray thoughts, fancies fugitive,
All loves except what trade can give?

I want to know a butcher paints,
A baker rhymes for his pursuit,
Candlestick-maker much acquaints
His soul with song, or, haply mute,
Blows out his brains upon the flute!

We may not be anxious to decorate our walls with the results of the butcher's painting, but he will be the better butcher for his hobby. To the mere butcher a round of beef is just so much fat and lean food, to be disposed of as quickly as possible. To the butcher-painter it is something more, and in the customary slap of his broad knife with which he bids it farewell, there will be a lurking appreciation of its colour-scheme,—a pretty arrangement of red and white that he feels needs a more skilful brush than his to do justice to.

Lector.—Oh! I say! Really, you know! a mere butcher thinking of a bit of beef in that way!

Candidus.—Why not? If it brings into his work an element that helps him to regard his work as something more than a mere money-making operation, is he not likely to be the better man for it? Being a better man, is he not inevitably a better butcher? When I can find such an one, he shall have my custom.

Auctor.—But surely things in our profession are much better than they were twenty years ago. Then an organist was an 'outsider.' Socially, his position is much improved.

Candidus.—Yes, but why? Mainly because his duties are more important and better paid. He is still far from being a complete social success, because he can as a rule talk on no subject but music. I am glad to see that the Royal College of Organists recognises the importance of widening the organist's outlook, by including a literary test. But this hardly goes far enough. Too often the subjects are musical. Occasional excursions have been made in the works of Ruskin, but inasmuch as the examinee knows beforehand what book his two hundred words essay is to deal with, it is merely a test in writing fair English. This is good. But how much better it would be if every candidate went up prepared to answer questions on English literature generally! This is not asking too much. Any man who claims to be even fairly educated should be able to meet such a catechism with no special preparation. I recently amused myself with drawing up some examination questions, which I am sure would brighten the syllabuses of some of our examining bodies.

They are of course not to be taken too seriously, but you will agree with me that the candidate who could answer most of them off-hand would be none the worse musician for the fact, and would certainly be a better companion in non-musical circles:

- (1) Who was Diogenes Teufelsdröck? In what book do we read of him? Translate his second name.
- (2) Say briefly what you think of Mrs. Battle's opinions on her favourite game. What feature in a rival game did she condemn as vulgar?

- (3) What were the palmy days of Surrey Cricket? Critically compare the batting styles of (a) Hobbs, (b) Hayes, and (c) 'Razor' Smith.
- (4) What are your opinions on (a) the l.b.w. rule, and (b) the future of googly bowling?
- (5) Have you read 'John Christopher'? If so, describe his attitude towards the modern French School.
- (6) If not, why not?
- (7) Briefly compare (a) Shaw, Chesterton, and Belloc, (b) Hall Caine and Marie Corelli, and (c) Sam McVea and Bandsman Blake.
- (8) What is your opinion of the transfer fee? Describe its effect on Southern League Clubs.
- (9) Give as briefly as possible your views on (a) Syndicalism, (b) Vegetarianism, (c) Kikuyu, and (d) The future of the London tramway system.
- (10) Who is Melville Gideon? Take the first phrase of what you believe to be his most popular composition; (a) invert it, augment it, put it in the tenor, and add four free counterpoints to it, (b) restore it to its original form, and combine it with 'My mother bids me bind my hair'; (c) add to these two themes three folk-songs, making a *quodlibet*.

There! a man who could make a fair show with that paper, is not likely to get into a groove, and will be able to keep his end up in most circles.

Auctor.—I think you expect too much, though there is a little grain of truth at the bottom of it all.

Candidus.—A grain! There's a solid lump of it that it will do you good to hit your thick head against. But here we are at the 'Chequers,' well breathed, and ready for the noble ale Lector spoke of. We will take a draught to our next merry meeting.

Auctor.) —Merry!
Lector.)

(To be continued.)

THE REFORM OF CHURCH MUSIC: SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE *MORNING* *POST* CORRESPONDENCE.

BY J. LIONEL BENNETT.

Church music has for so long been a favourite field in which the amateur critic may take his cheerful fling, that the professional musician is apt to pass over with quiet contempt any correspondence on that subject. The doctrines enunciated in such controversies have also generally been so various, so contradictory, and so unrelated to any urgently or widely felt need, as most effectually to secure that everything should go on exactly the same as before. The recent correspondence in the *Morning Post* has, however, been noteworthy not merely because there have intervened in the discussion some musicians of commanding authority, but because, whatever contrarieties and extravagancies of opinion have found expression, there has emerged a certain consensus of authoritative judgment that there is a genuine need for some careful reform. Which being interpreted means, for the practical musician, that despite the violence of language and obvious musical insufficiency of some of the more ardent 'reformers,' they yet have hold of a certain something of truth which the professional musician will do well to get a grip upon; and the more so as, if the reforming temper spreads, much music of pure truth and beauty may ere long stand in need of prompt and determined

defence. Church music stands to suffer from the narrow-mindedness of the ill-informed every bit as much as from the debased tastes of the vulgar.

It will not have escaped notice that some of the most eager and uncompromising champions of reform are clergy; which suggests the reflection that the movement is not a purely musical one, however musically important its aims. Nor is it just an excursion of Mediævalists *versus* Moderns. It is in the main the outcome of a conviction which has for a long time been slowly spreading and gathering force amongst earnest and musically sensitive (though perhaps musically ignorant) clergy: That a good deal of the music which the Wesleyan and Tractarian revivals brought into being is not what is most needed to-day. The warmth, fervour, and tenderness which were a beautiful and natural expression in the reaction from the spiritual coldness and deadness of the 18th century, are by no means always morally helpful to a much more emotional, easy-going, and self-indulgent generation in which discipline in the home, in social relations, and in public life, is ever being more and more relaxed. This must not be read as a little bit of a sermon which has somehow worked loose from my pulpit in North Devon, and been carried by some mischievous imp into the columns of the *Musical Times*. It is not intended as a bit of preaching, but simply as defining a position, or a point of view which only needs to be stated clearly to secure the kind consideration of the professional musician. Amongst the music thus referred to there is, of course, much of excellence, high beauty, and permanent value: it only needs using with some discrimination. But there is also much about which no good thing can be said. And to the parish priest there has come, now here, now there, the discovery (through experiences which leave him no room for doubt), that there is a definite and serious risk to ill-balanced and undisciplined characters when they are constantly given a hotch-potch of highly emotional, tenderly sentimental, and even trivial and vulgar music to sing and listen to in their worship.

The 1904 edition of 'Hymns A. & M.' and the 'English Hymnal' represent the impulse of an awakened clerical consciousness, every bit as much as they represent the judgment of the musical experts responsible for them. From dealing with hymns an endeavour will almost certainly be made, and possibly at no distant date, to deal with our Church music generally in the interest of a sterner and loftier muse. Already we have had a plea for a Church Music Board 'for the suppression of the undesirable,' eloquently pressed by Mr. F. E. Barrett. This proposal, if one may judge from the *Morning Post* correspondence and from such letters as that of Prof. Hadow, at once awakened misgivings in the minds of some who were most eager for such reform as presumably Mr. Barrett had in view. And misgivings deepened and multiplied as one faced the question: 'How many of our lay musicians, how many of our clergy, have the profound musical learning, large sympathy, and thorough knowledge of ecclesiastical music and liturgiology requisite for the formation of a board armed with disciplinary powers?' If a merely advisory board were made, there would be need that its first function should be to learn and study rather than venture too soon to give advice. Church music is a big subject; it is particularly so, and correspondingly difficult, in the case of a Church whose formularies, ritual, and practice leave open as wide as possible the way of freedom.

Archdeacon Gardner, in his letter which rounded off the *Morning Post* correspondence, indicated the first fact which has to be faced in any move towards