

Review

Source: *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, Vol. 16, No. 382 (Dec. 1, 1874), p. 714

Published by: [Musical Times Publications Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3352492>

Accessed: 09-01-2016 07:16 UTC

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



*Musical Times Publications Ltd.* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

might be expected, this meeting between the youthful artists soon led to a warm attachment; and, some years after, Dr. Hiller relates one of the many proofs which he witnessed of his extraordinary abilities. At one of the practice-meetings of the "Cæcilia" Society, at Frankfort, Mendelssohn being present, was asked to play: "We had been singing choruses from *Judas Maccabæus*," he says, "He took some of the principal melodies—especially 'See the Conquering Hero'—and began to extemporise on them. I hardly know which was the most wonderful—the skilful counterpoint, the flow and continuity of the thoughts, or the fire, expression and extraordinary execution which characterized his playing." That music was the language in which Mendelssohn gave utterance to his best thoughts may be gathered not only from his letters, but from many incidents related by those who were most intimate with him. In this book, for example, we are told that a letter to his family describing the passage to Staffa, and the inside of the cave—which is dated "Auf einer Hebride, d. 7te August 1829," as if actually written on the island—contains the words "to show how extraordinarily moved I was, the following occurred to me,"—and then come the first ten or twelve bars of the overture in score. Another instance may be cited: "One evening," says Dr. Hiller, "I found Felix deep in the Bible. 'Listen,' he said; and then he read to me, in a gentle and agitated voice, the passage from the First Book of Kings, beginning with the words, 'And behold, the Lord passed by,' 'Would not that be splendid for an Oratorio?' he exclaimed"—and with what sublime effect he afterwards set these words those acquainted with *Elijah* need scarcely be reminded. It would be impossible with the few quotations we could give from the letters in this volume, to convey the faintest idea of the rich contents of the book. Dr. Hiller is an accomplished literary man, as well as a distinguished musical artist; and the style with which he relates his experiences is exceedingly attractive, apart from the interesting matter upon which he treats. His veneration for his deceased friend is so thoroughly shared in by the world at large that even the minute points of character which he occasionally enlarges upon, will be interesting to the majority of his readers. "How gloriously," he says, "the Greeks would have honoured and praised him, as a chosen favourite of Apollo and the Muses." Let us hope that certain of Mendelssohn's countrymen will take this truth to heart.

J. B. CRAMER AND CO.

*Treatise on Counterpoint.* Translated and adapted from the German of Ernst Friedrich Richter, by Franklin Taylor.

THIS work, by the Professor at the Conservatorium of Music at Leipzig, will, we hope, cause us to think seriously of the manner in which for so many years Counterpoint has been taught in this country. Bound by the fetters constructed in a past age, we have moved only within the narrow confines of a system which was too carefully guarded to permit of our escaping with impunity; and if we would gain that healthy freedom, therefore, positively essential for those who desire to develop the modern resources of the art, we must not only listen to the earnest teachings of so fearless a reformer as Herr Richter, but do our utmost to spread his doctrines amongst the musical students of our seminaries. "Fux," says our author in his Introduction, "founded his system on the so-called *Church Tones* (*Gregorian Modes*) the treatment of which required special rules. That which was suitable and appropriate to his time is so no longer for us." This is true enough; but the worst of it is, that not only did this author in his *Gradus ad Parnassum*, lay down contrapuntal laws for the guidance of students, who of course had not the slightest idea of our modern tonal system, but he did so with a manner so authoritative, that his principles have remained in force long after many of them became practically useless. The plan, for instance, of commencing with two parts, and advancing gradually to a greater number, was of course a portion of the system which recognised only a progression of intervals, without relation to any harmonic foundation;

but, as Richter says, the ascendancy of Harmony over Counterpoint, which received a decisive impulse from Beethoven, made theorists begin to think a little on their own account; and insensibly almost, contrapuntal writing became coloured with modern feeling, whilst the ancient rules were as rigidly taught as if the Gregorian Modes were still in the ascendant. It has been so long the custom too to class Counterpoint in five orders, that it appears almost strange to imagine that any eminent theorist should dare to violate this time-honoured rule; but it is difficult indeed to give any solid reason for the pursuance of this method, especially when we find that Johann Anton André, in his *Lehrbuch der Tonsetzkunst*, treats of many others of use at one time in Italy. In the treatise before us, the author clears away at once all obstructions, and considering solely how Counterpoint should be taught in the present day, obeys only those rules of the older writers which seem to embody an eternal truth. The reasons for his first innovation shall be told in his own words: "One important point in which our present plan differs from the older methods is in the choice of the *four-part* contrapuntal phrase as a starting point, while the earlier exercises on the old system were always in two parts; the justification of this course lies in the fact that the harmonic progression is of much greater importance in modern music than formerly, as giving the foundation for all the melodic progressions, instead of being rather the accidental result of the to a certain extent very mechanical movement of parts." In proof of this ruling influence of the harmony upon the contrapuntal writing, the commencement of the first chorus in Bach's St. Matthew "Passion Music" is quoted, and afterwards the harmonic sequence upon which it is undoubtedly founded is given, the contrast between this beautiful progression and the dry Counterpoint of the older writers being too obvious to be questioned. Acting upon this fact, the exercises in the treatise commence with counterpoint in *four* parts; and, in accordance, as the author says, with the requirements of modern music, common chords and sevenths, with their inversions, are available, not however, of course, without a strict observance of all rules relating to the preparation and resolution of discords. The next important difference between this book and those which have preceded it is that, instead of *five* orders of counterpoint, only *three* are treated of—the first, note against note, the second composed of the original second and fourth orders in combination, and the third with four notes against one. We are not quite sure that we like the plan of merging the second and fourth species into one "order," as we consider it very essential to teach the student to observe an almost unbroken series of syncopations; and, according to Richter's method, he will, by writing in the second order whenever he pleases, use with the utmost freedom a counterpoint which, in the old "fourth species" was merely allowed as a "licence," in order to escape a difficulty. We are also inclined to dissent from the rule that no passing notes be admitted in this species except the seventh; for certainly a good effect is, we think, obtained by passing to a concord through what is known as a "discord of regular transition," both in ancient and modern counterpoint. Slight differences of opinion, however, should not prevent the teachers of the day from seeing what a valuable book is before them; and much may be done by drawing the attention of students to the main principles contained in this treatise, even if all the laws there laid down be not rigidly enforced. We are still in our teachings haunted by traditions which are totally inapplicable to modern art; even our term "Relative minor"—with all the absurdities surrounding it—is but a remnant of a past age; and if we are to continue to use this name because it meant something once, we might as well commence our study of the theory of music by counterpoint in two parts, and proceed gradually to harmony, because this was the method pursued by those who have gone before us. In concluding our notice of Herr Richter's Treatise, we must award much praise to Mr. Franklin Taylor, not only for his excellent translation, but for his description of the "Gregorian Modes," which will be found highly useful to students unacquainted with the subject.