

Review

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*A short Morning, Communion, and Evening Service, in F,*  
set to music by Henry Baker, Mus. Bac.

THIS Service has, to the best of our belief, been some years before the world, and, being frequently performed at the church in Wells Street and elsewhere, it may be supposed to have won public approval, and so to have passed out of the pale of individual criticism—individual because, though a journalist, like a sovereign, styles himself “we,” he is but one, and is accountable to his readers as to his own conscience for all he thinks, or at least for all he divulges of his thoughts. The work is before us for review, however, and therefore, though on the whole we wish not to fly in the face of general opinion, we may not withhold the estimation of good and less good that we form of this composition.

Mr. Henry Baker we understand to be an amateur, or at least to have so been at the time this Service was composed, and as such, the production, although not immaculate, is much to his credit. We protest broadly against the gabbling rapidity of enunciation that prevails generally throughout the series of pieces, which, where it does not entirely obscure the words, gives them so trivial an air as borders strongly on profanity. The fault is not peculiar to the present work, but is unhappily too common in the Church use of our time; its prevalence goes far to divest the Daily Service of solemnity, and even of reverence; and the subject is of such grave importance as to demand the consideration of persons far abler to discuss it than is the individual plurality who offers these remarks. As notable an instance as any of the extreme to which our composer carries this objectionable speed of utterance, is at the words in the *Jubilate* “into His courts with thanksgiving” (this is the musician’s accentuation), where, the tempo being remarkably quick, the words “with thanks” are set to quavers, and are thus all but unpronounceable. There is meaning in the recurrence, at the words “Thou art the King,” &c., of the phrase set to the declaration of the fourfold praise of the Apostles, the Prophets, the Martyrs and the holy Church, representing, as it does, “the King of Glory” to be the subject of the laudation. There is less pertinence in the repetition of the idea, which first appears at the words “When Thou tookest,” &c., for the final sentence of the hymn, “O Lord in Thee;” but even this may be received as implying that we have “trusted” because He took upon Him our deliverance. Thoughtfulness such as this evinces is one of the best distinctions, and there are many good ones, of the Church music of our day from that of the last century, wherein the words are set as vocalising syllables, regardless totally of their sense and expression. Here are two settings of the *Kyrie*, of which each is charming, and there will always be difficulty in choosing between them. Perhaps the author is an amateur of the Italian language as well as of music, else it is hard to account for his using the term “Più rall.” in the *Credo*, where the time has not been getting slow, and so can hardly be more getting slow. It is scarcely judicious to assign the A below the staff to the soprano voices, as is done in this piece to start the phrase “He suffered.” Of greater consequence is the harmonic incident that directly follows; to our perception the diminished third is the harshest combination that can be used, but yet it *can* be used, and its harshness may be applied with more propriety to the description of the Divine Passion than to an indifferent subject; but the progression of the bass from G sharp to B flat for the presentation of the chord in another inversion is as new as it is unsatisfactory, and as unpleasant as both. The *Sanctus* is beautifully conceived, and in no respect fails in its execution. We like far less the *Gloria*. The *Magnificat* is the least meritorious piece in the series; it is a bad instance of the bad system of intermixing the chant form with rhythmical phrases, and the pattering principle of which we have already complained, produces here, we regret to assert, an effect that is nothing short of comical. The *Nunc Dimittis* is wrought in a better spirit, and the Doxology is the same in this as in the other two places where the words occur. We will suppose that the author would not now put forward some portions of this Service, but the best parts of it could not be improved.

*A short, full Cathedral Service in F.* By Samuel Sebastian Wesley.

THE title of this work, in association with the name of the author, raises great expectations, which the work itself does not fulfil. “Short,” it is truly, short to a marvel, for there is not a word repeated throughout the whole series of pieces, and the notes are sometimes iterated chantwise, so as to give the utmost rapidity to the enunciation; and thus the

performance may be effected in as brief time as that of any extant setting of the text, if not in less—alas! that this should be a point of such necessity in our Cathedral service that it should become one for commendation. In other respects the composition is unworthy the great powers of Dr. Wesley.

In the *Te Deum* there is a good reading of the text where the passage “We believe that Thou,” is directed to be sung piano, representing the awe wherewith the great last judgment is expected; and this is the more remarkable, as being the single direction for loudness or softness throughout the entire Service. On the other hand, it is curious to place the last syllable of the word “continually” on the first note of a bar, and so give it the strongest accent, albeit the higher note for the second syllable in some degree qualifies but still does not supersede this. The effect is unsatisfactory of the second inversion of the chord of A minor (the key being C) on the word “fellowship.” At the words “govern them,” it would be pleasanter to have the E flat than natural in the chord which precedes the second inversion of G minor; and between this and the next bar, the ascent of the 7th of the dominant chord is at best a piece of carelessness.

The setting of the *Jubilate* is far more successful. The emphasis on the third word in “We are *His* people,” is appropriate as it is unusual; there is a beautiful phrase set to “It is He,” &c., though we fail to perceive the pertinence of the very pathetic close in D minor to the last words; and there are other incidents which must please the musician.

In the Communion Service the *Sanctus* is highly to be admired as a fine piece of music and a good piece of declamation. We are unable to account for the conclusion of the *Kyrie* in a different key from its commencement, which, if appropriate in the Response that is sung nine times, as showing that the course of prayer is in uncompleted progress, can have no fitness to the tenth Response, since this is certainly conclusive. The setting of the *Credo* is so hurried that saving of time seems to have been the sole purpose in its construction.

In the Evening Service it is impossible to pass by the consecutive sevenths between the extreme parts  $\begin{smallmatrix} C & B \\ & D & C \end{smallmatrix}$  in bar 5 of the *Magnificat*, because their effect stands out with painful prominence. We prefer the music for the *Nunc Dimittis* to that for the other piece, and admire the final treatment of the “Glory,” &c., more than any portion of the whole work. This and other passages to which reference has been made are ample evidence of who is the author, and that he is one of the most gifted and accomplished musicians in the country, wherein we find reason for regret that he has not written the entire composition up to his own high standard.

*Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis*, set to music in the key of C, for voices in unison, by Joseph Barnby.

PREFERENCE falls unhesitatingly on the second of these pieces, in which there is a truly ideal rendering of the sweet sense of the text—the act of devotion is accomplished, the heart of the worshipper is suffused with the blessing of holiness, and, at peace with himself and with mankind, he is about to quit the house of prayer; as the expression of the canticle rises from meekness to exultation the character of the music is accordingly modified, until, in the final glorification it becomes loudly jubilant. This view of the situation is charmingly pictured in the notes, and, liking the whole, we admire particularly the opening phrase. We would that the *Magnificat* were less chromatic, and this apart wholly from the still open question of the more or less fitness of the diatonic or chromatic style to ecclesiastical use, but purely on practical grounds, as being incompatible with the capabilities and the sympathies, too, of congregations for whose performance an unisonous Service must mainly be designed. The composer, always distinguished by care for the declamation of his text, has obviously had this most important purpose in view in the present piece, but we think has missed his aim in the separation of the musical and the literary phraseology; for example, the word “Lord” occurs on the third bar of a rhythmical period that is completed on the second note of the fourth bar, on which second note (the resolution of a discord) begins the sentence “And my spirit;” this view of the rhythmical division is confirmed by the repetition of the passage at the words “All generations,” where the words and the notes close together.

The service is dedicated to the Rev. J. Powell Metcalfe, to whom the world is largely indebted for his staunch