

Choir and Chorus Singing

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that none but a Mozart could have written them; and the same success everywhere attended his compositions, whether he wrote dramatic choruses in his Salzburg Masses to please himself and his friends, or went out of his way to adopt some peculiar and favorite style to flatter the ears of an elector who liked Italian music and thought Jomelli the model of perfection.

The Gloria has the same points of resemblance and dissimilarity to Mozart; but this subject must be held in reserve.

*To be continued.*

NOTICE.—Our next publication will appear on the 15th of March, and fortnightly afterwards, on the 1st and 15th of every month, until August. Early orders should be given to the country booksellers, to insure equal punctuality in the *middle of the month*, for which the bookselling arrangements are hardly so well organized. Mr. Leigh Hunt's articles will be continued in our next, and Mr. Macfarren has promised to resume those on *St. Paul* in April.

#### CATCHES.

We have been asked to furnish a few specimens of that truly English species of music, *The Catch*; and in accordance, the present number includes five favorite examples. It may not be out of place to state the manner of singing them. The highest part is first sung through alone; the singer of this goes then to the second part, when another singer takes up the highest part, and so on for as many singers as there are parts, and thus each performer sings through all the parts in succession, and generally, three times over. The *Catch* depends on the distribution of the words among the performers. This is so contrived that a meaning is given to the lines wholly different from that which appears when they are read in a straightforward manner. Those who would execute *catches* with good effect, should learn them thoroughly off by memory, and, if possible, the parties should be well accustomed to sing them together. If sparingly introduced on festive occasions, they seldom fail to add to the good humour of the company.

It is to be regretted that the coarseness of manner at the time when some of the best catches (considered as music) were written, allowed of such obscene and disgusting words, as must prevent their revival until new words can be invented for them.

It is believed that Dr. Callcott's somewhat complicated catch, "Ah how Sophia," (a house on fire) is now printed for the first time in the precise manner in which it should be sung.

#### SACRED HARMONIC SOCIETY'S LIBRETTOS.

This society is giving a fresh interest to the works they perform, by having had compiled for them, historical, biographical, and critical notices in the form of introduction and notes to the oratorios they perform. At Christmas they issued Handel's *Messiah*, so prepared by Mr. G. A. Macfarren, for the nominal cost of sixpence, and Haydn's *Creation* is now ready, by the same author. The large number of copies (at least 5,000) which it requires to make such a libretto pay at so small a price, would have confined the advantage of such books to their own powerful society, had it not been that with their usual liberality, they have intimated their willingness to accommodate any society with a few copies upon very easy terms.

The historical part embraces matter of much interest, and is well worth a perusal; but one proposition, namely, that Handel's *Messiah* was not published during the author's lifetime, is so startling as to require further examination before we can consent to admit its exactitude. From the examination we have already given the point, it appears to be involved in much obscurity.

## CHOIR AND CHORUS SINGING.\*

### TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

By the kindness of the Librarian of the *Sacred Harmonic Society*, the original work, of which this is a translation, first came under my notice a few months ago. I had long sought in vain for anything of a similar kind in English. As soon as I had read M. Fétis's *Chant en Chœur*, I felt that an English version would be a useful addition to our stores of elementary works, and would stop a gap which had too long been left open. It is true that many excellent manuals of vocal music have from time to time appeared, and many systems of class instruction in music have been worked of late with more or less success, and some one or other of these is presupposed as a preparation for the profitable use of this treatise,—but so far as I am aware, there is no book of instructions specifically addressed to Choirs, as such; and although, doubtless, there are in England many Choral bodies who have attained excellence without such systematic instruction, yet few will be unwilling to acknowledge that M. Fétis's complaints of the inefficiency of Choirs and Choruses are, in very many cases, as applicable in this country as in his own. Much as has been done here by Choral Societies, by Singing Classes, and by the Clergy of many Parishes up and down the land, much,—very much remains to be done, before our people generally will become practically musical, in any high degree.

After the power of singing in tune and time, and of reading musical notation has been acquired, there is an almost immeasurable gulph to be passed before a body of singers, even thus qualified, can attain to any high artistic excellence as a Choir or Chorus. I am the more anxious to express this as my settled conviction, because I have been earnest in the encouragement of Congregational Singing in the worship of God, and on that account have been, I fear, sometimes misunderstood, as undervaluing, and wishing to exclude from the Church, music not adapted for that specific purpose. But I would venture to remark, that while the style of singing of the masses must necessarily be inferior, under all circumstances, to that of well-educated Choirs, nevertheless there will be some limit or proportion, to this inferiority; and that as you improve the one upon any grand scale, so will the other rise towards higher musical excellence. I would popularize music, especially vocal music, not only on the highest religious, moral, and social grounds, but also on others of an artistic nature: for if good teaching, and good performances of music were more in demand throughout the country, the numbers and the skill of musical artists would be proportionally increased. In the reciprocation of musical influences, all classes of people would be led to a higher appreciation of the art itself,—they would acquire greater skill in singing those parts of the Divine Offices which they are required to offer with their own lips,—and they would be anxious (according to their ability) to provide the more costly offering of efficient Choirs for the due celebration of the higher parts of the Service. If I desire "that all the people" should praise God, I do not desire that their vocal praises should shock the ear by their want of skill;—and to make them skilful, even in the simplest strains, their ear and their tastes must be cultivated by often listening to something better than they can do themselves; therefore it is that I am doubly anxious that Choirs should be really good, and sing good music. In this wish, I venture to present the following translation to English Choirs, in the confident expectation of great benefit being derived from M. Fétis's instructions by all who will diligently use them. Nothing in the original has been omitted, nothing altered; in the translation no attempt has been made to disguise its being primarily written in French, and for French use; the same figures of speech, and the same style of expression have been retained, as far as possible, in the English version.

None of our author's facts are stated otherwise than he states them, and they must be therefore taken on his authority; not that I have the least doubt of their accuracy, although on p. 2 he might have used the present tense, and omitted the word "formerly" in what is there stated concerning the Contraltos of the Sistine Chapel: and on some points I had no means at hand of confirming his statements from other authentic sources.

In conclusion, I have gratefully to acknowledge the Author's kindness in at once giving his own personal sanction to the present Translation; and also to return thanks to the *Sacred Harmonic Society* for first allowing me the sight of the original work.

THOMAS HELMORE.

February, 1854.

### AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

It is my design, in this little work, to teach a branch of the musical art which has been much neglected, I might even say ignored. There exist, doubtless, in Germany, some schools where the principles explained in this book are put in practice; but I do not know that any one has hitherto pointed out the principles of a rational method for

\* *A Treatise on Choir and Chorus Singing.* By F. J. Fétis, Chapel Master to H. M. the King of the Belgians; Director of the Conservatory of Music, Brussels; Knight of the Legion of Honor; etc. Translated (with the kind permission of the Author) into English by the Rev. Thomas Helmore, M.A., Priest in Ordinary, and Master of the Children of H. M. Chapels Royal; Precentor of S. Mark's College, Chelsea; Hon. Secretary, in musical matters, to the Ecclesiological, late Cambridge Camden Society; etc., etc. Novello's London and New York. Price 4s. 6d., sewed.

*Continued from page 376.*

teaching Choirs and Choruses. The work of M. Hæser,\* and all that have been written on this subject, are almost exclusively on practice, and include many notions of matters which do not belong to the special nature of Choir and Chorus Singing. Other important matters, which belong essentially to this subject, are not even mentioned. Upon the whole, these excellent works are only applicable to the schools for which they were intended.

That which I propose is to call the attention of Heads of Schools, Directors of Music, and Chapel Masters, to the necessity of perfecting the execution of music in vocal masses, and to point out to them the progressive steps by which that aim may be attained. It was necessary for this purpose to arrange these steps according to numerous delicate investigations, suggested by musical perception sufficiently active, by long experience, and by much thought. I am far from thinking this work as good as it ought to be, for the subject is new, and imperfection is inseparable from a first attempt; but such as it is, I hope it will be useful, and that it will in time effect some progress in the art of duly executing the inspirations of Composers of genius.

As for the exercises, which may lead vocal masses to a good execution of music, they are scarcely more than indicated in this work, because I did not wish to make it too voluminous. To complete its usefulness, I shall publish a collection of these exercises arranged for different kinds of voices.

## PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

### ON THE NATURE OF SINGING IN CHORUS.

1. THE colouring of the expression, and the shading, which add so much power to the effects of music, have been perfected with much care, for more than thirty years, in Orchestras; and we have in our days arrived at results which formerly were not thought possible. Why is it not the same in our Choirs and Choruses? Why in our Churches and Theatres are we scarcely able to mark in an imperfect manner some difference between the loud and the soft of the voices? Why are accuracy of tone, pronunciation, true rhythm, and accent, so much neglected by the directors of choral masses, especially in France and Belgium? Formerly all these branches of the art, united to the beauty of the voices, added an inestimable value to the beautiful compositions heard in the choir of the Pontifical Chapel at Rome. The true tradition still exists in this Chapel, but the soprano and contralto voices have lost their power. The effect of these perfect traditions was so beautiful, that the compositions of Palestrina and other great Masters do not seem to be the same when they are executed otherwise than in the Pontifical Chapel. At Berlin, the Academy of Choral-singing, formerly directed by Zelter, merited praise for some points of choral execution. In France there is nothing like it. The art of solo singing is there cultivated with more success than in Germany; but the art of impressing artistic life on vocal masses is absolutely unknown.

2. It is this new art which it is here proposed to teach; an art which it is no longer possible to ignore or to neglect in the state of advancement at which the general execution of music has arrived, and which is worthy of all the attention of the heads of musical institutions, chapel-masters, directors of the music of theatres and concerts, of great popular singing-schools, and even of elementary schools; for there is no doubt that vocal music will soon be an inseparable part of every system of general education in civilized countries. The elements of chorus singing are—I. The choice and classification of voices. II. The concord and exercise of voices in the unison or octave. III. The concord and exercise of voices in the harmony of several sounds. IV. The modification of sound in its different shadings, or degrees of loudness. V. The different accents, or

tonal quality of voices. VI. Rhythmical accent. VII. Pronunciation and articulation. VIII. The simultaneous striking of the time of the measure. IX. The striking of syncopations. X. The melodic phrasing. XI. Harmonic phrasing. XII. Rhythmical phrasing. XIII. The collective sentiment. XIV. Animation.

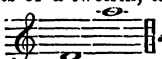
3. I do not place among the elements of Choir and Chorus singing the reading of music, because this kind of knowledge belongs to another system of teaching. Every chorister, choirman, lay-clerk, and chorus singer, is supposed to know music, and to read it with facility.

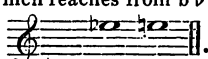
## CHAPTER I.

### OF THE CHOICE AND CLASSIFICATION OF VOICES.

4. Voices are divided into two principal kinds, viz., 1st, the voices of women or children,—2nd, the voices of men.

5. The voices of women, of children, and of men, are more or less acute, more or less grave.

6. The most acute species of the voices of women and children is called First Treble or Soprano. The extent of this kind of voice is not determined in an absolute manner. In general, this extent is more limited in children than in women, particularly in the lower part, where the sounds have less tone [timbre], at least if they have not contracted the vicious habit of producing guttural sounds, a fault which is frequently met with in choir-children. There are many treble and soprano voices of chorus singers which are confined to the limits of a twelfth, taken from  $d$  to  $a$ , as in this example, . There are those which descend to  $c$ , others which rise with ease to  $b$ ,  $b$ , and even to  $c$ , but the emission of these last notes is not often possible, except in loud passages and with painful efforts.

7. The intermediate range of voices of women and children is called Second Treble or Mezzo Soprano. Their extent is more circumscribed than those of the first Treble; they are often confined to a tenth, or at most an eleventh, which reaches from  $b$  to  $e$  or  $e$ , as in this example, . There are

few varieties in this kind of voice. We occasionally meet with defective first trebles, of which we make second trebles, and which appear to ascend with more ease, but the bad quality of these voices ought to exclude them from a chorus, unless the singers are very numerous. The second treble voices of boys are often more penetrating than those of women. Modern composers sometimes make the second treble ascend to  $f$  or  $g$ ; these notes can only be reached in the Forte, and are almost always harsh and screaming. Observe that in all which goes before, as in that which follows, chorus voices are spoken of, and not solo voices, which may be considered as exceptions.

8. The low voices of women and children are those that are called in Italy Contralto, and in France Bas dessus, *i. e.* low treble. In the latter country they are very rare, and the difficulty experienced in representing them caused them formerly to be replaced by the high voices of men, called Counter-Tenor. But if the end was attained by this substitution as far as concerned the similarity of the sounds for the har-

\* *Chorgesangschule Von August: Ferd: Hæser für Schul und Theaterchöre und Anguchende Singvereine. Mayence et Anvers, chez les fils de B: Schott.*

mony, it was not the same for the quality of tone, for this quality is low in the voices of women and children, and if not *acute* at least *clear*, and high in the voices of men. For this reason, in the chapels of Italy, and particularly in the Pontifical Chapel at Rome, they formerly employed "Castrati" for the contralto. Their shrill voices were more penetrating than the voices of women and children, and had more weight than the counter tenors. Some of these singers were sent to France for the service of the Chapels of Louis XIV. and Louis XV., but at the theatres they have never had any but counter-tenors for the contralto, and the effect of the choruses has always been harsh and noisy on that account.

In some churches in France they have thought to avoid the disadvantages of counter-tenors by means of chorister boys with powerful voices,\* but in avoiding this defect, they have fallen into another not less injurious, that is the guttural quality of this artificial voice. The extent of the true contralto is this,

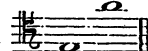


It will be seen that it differs little

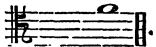
from the mezzo-soprano in height. The difference of these voices in this part of their compass consist less, in fact, in their power of ascending, than in their tone and volume. Much less strong in the mezzo-soprano than in the contralto, the sound assumes in the latter the character of a bass to the upper system of voices, which it does not possess in the other.

9. The voices of men are divided in Choir and Chorus singing into three principal species, which are—the High Tenor, Low Tenor, and Bass. The latter was also divided into two varieties in the compositions of the Masters of the 16th century, and of the first part of the 17th; the first called *Basse-taille* (i. e. tenor-bass) in France, and *Basso* in Italy, was the high bass, the first bass, which was usually written in the Fa clef on the third line; the other was the lower bass, which the French called *Basse Contre*, and the Italians *Baritono*.† By a remarkable antilogy, we now call the lightest and highest bass voices, *Baritones*. However, we do not now distinguish the different kinds of basses in our Choirs and Choruses, it is only in the parts of the Opera that different classifications are made.

10. There are delicate varieties of height and depth in the tenors as in the trebles. Some countries furnish high tenors in abundance, others only produce lower voices. High tenors are those which extend over the

interval of an eleventh, from e to a, 

and which make these notes with the chest voice. Low tenor, or second tenor, extends from b to f,



In these two varieties of the same kind of voice, we meet with certain modifications in the quality of the sounds, if not in their compass. It is the duty of the Director of music to examine the voices of Choir and Chorus singers, and to classify them according to his observations.

(To be continued.)

\* It is this kind of voice which Ferrein believed was produced by a particular organ, —but he was mistaken.

† This word comes from the Greek *βαρυ*, heavy, ponderous,—and *φωνος* (Latin *tonus*), tone. *Baritone* signifies, then, an unwieldy, heavy, ponderous voice, which cannot execute anything light. It is in the same sense that the cry of the elephant is called *Barritus*.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS.

*This Journal will be published fortnightly until August next, on the 1st and 15th of the month.*

*The late hour at which Advertisements reach us interferes much with their proper classification.*

*Colored Envelopes are sent to all Subscribers whose payment in advance is exhausted. The paper will be discontinued where the Subscriber neglects to renew. We again remind those who are disappointed in getting back numbers, that only the music pages are stereotyped, and of the rest of the paper, only sufficient are printed to supply the current sale.*

J. N., Kingston.—*The Author of "Ben Bolt" is said to be an American, J. W. Christy.*

A. C. S. is referred to our *Professional Notices* on the page preceding the leading article. *We have already declined, editorially, to recommend.*

## Brief Chronicle of the last Fortnight.

MR. E. W. THOMAS, so undeservedly neglected by the Manchester public twelve months ago, has brought his second series of shilling concerts at the Philharmonic, Liverpool, to a conclusion on Saturday week. Notwithstanding the slack attendance the first fortnight, the receipts have left him a handsome surplus after the payment of all expenses.—*Manchester Examiner*.

ROCHDALE.—The subscription concerts of the Harmonic Choral Society were brought to a successful close on the 16th Feb. A numerous audience expressed their approbation by continued applause.

CHESTER.—Mr. Baxter, late alto of the cathedral, gave a farewell concert on the 16th of February, on his removal to Manchester Cathedral. Mr. Bickley, late of Lichfield, fills his post at Chester. Musical matters are reviving in Chester.—A committee has recently been formed, of which the Very Rev. the Dean (Dr. Anson), the Mayor, the Rev. Canon Blomfield, several magistrates and influential gentlemen are members, who have obtained from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners a lease of the Theatre Royal in this city. This building is situated near the cathedral. The committee have obtained the estimate of an eminent architect, who guarantees the conversion of the present building into a music hall for about £2,500. Within £100 of this sum has been already subscribed in £5 shares. The building to be erected will be a gothic hall, in unison with the original edifice on the same site. The hall when completed according to the plans will be 110 feet long, 40 feet wide, and 50 feet high; it will be capable of seating 1,400 persons, and also for affording room for an organ and orchestra of 300 performers; there will be cloak and refreshment rooms, with other convenient apartments. The work will be commenced immediately, and it is confidently expected that the Hall will be opened by a Festival about Christmas next.

CHELTHENHAM.—Musical recitals take place weekly at the residence of Mr. Evans. Lent performances will include selections from *Messiah*, *Creation*, *St. Paul*, &c. St. David's Day is to be commemorated by a performance of Welsh music.

THE MANCHESTER SACRED HARMONIC UNION's third concert, on the 15th of February, consisted of Handel's *Judas Maccabæus*, and a selection.

LEEDS.—We are glad to hear of the continued success of the People's Concerts here. The *Messiah*, on Christmas-Eve, is to be followed by the *Creation* on March the 6th; with intervening miscellaneous concerts. We would suggest to the direction, that the laudatory (query?) descriptions of the singers engaged, are hardly in good taste.