

CATHOLIC CHOIRS
AND
Choir Music in Philadelphia.

[Prepared by MICHAEL H. CROSS, and read before the SOCIETY by FRANCIS X. REUSS, October 26th, 1887.]

A SKETCH of the music in some of the older Catholic churches in this diocese, while not of interest to many of the present generation, cannot fail to be so to some yet living of that which has passed away.

In this paper it is proposed to speak of the choirs, and musical administration thereof, of St. Augustine's, St. Mary's, St. Joseph's, and St. John's. While the writer is fully aware of the many interesting performances which other choirs have given, he does not think that the limits of a paper such as this is intended to be, would admit of their being recorded.

The music sung in the choirs at the beginning of this century was of the most primitive, simple and uninteresting kind. If it were to be sung again in these times, it would not fail to attract the attention and receive the censure of five-sixths of almost any congregation obliged to listen to it. We all know that Catholics do not go to church to hear the music—indeed Catholic congregations are remarkably insensible to it—but I cannot believe that the early Catholic music of the century would be endured now.

The first selection of music in use was that published by John Aiken in 1791. It was composed of Masses, Hymns, Litanies, the Vesper psalms, &c. There are among them

many English hymns, the words of which are to-day sung in all Protestant churches; I might mention "Children of the Heavenly King," "Jesus, Saviour of my Soul," "Come, Holy Spirit"—not a translation of the "Veni Creator"—"Soldiers of Christ, arise," "Vital spark of heavenly flame," &c. The organ accompaniment, as arranged in the book, is simply beneath criticism, and many of the selections are open to the same remark. It does not appear to the writer, from any data that he has been able to obtain, that even the Gregorian notes received any attention. Most of the music was evidently sung in two parts, and even the solo parts were sung by the choir in unison. This was the rule. The exceptions were, of course, that when anyone was present who could sing, he or she did sing the solos.

This was the condition of Catholic choir music when Mr. B. Carr took charge at St. Augustine's church, when it was opened in June, 1801. He was an accomplished musician and a gentleman. He had had the advantage of a solid musical education in England prior to making this country his home, and was in every way fitted for the position in which he was placed. His influence on musical matters was of the most valuable kind, and indeed it might not be inappropriate to say that he was the father of music in Philadelphia. He at once directed his efforts towards forming a good choir, and he did so with immediate success. He wrote much music for the church, to supersede that which he found in use, and in 1806 published a collection of church music which at that time must have been invaluable. The compositions in it were largely from a book published some years before by Samuel Webbe, Sr., in London.* This Samuel Webbe was one of England's greatest glee composers, cotemporary with, and the peer of Callcott, Mornington, Danby, J. S. Smith, and others. Mr. Carr's book contains a beautiful Mass and "Te Deum" of his own. The writer distinctly remembers hearing them sung in the old church of St. Augustine.

The organ was built by Charles Taws. He was probably

* There are copies of all these works in our Society's library.—ED.

the first organ builder in the city. The instruments of that day were certainly very mediocre.

Mr. Carr at this time, 1807, had of course some musical confreres. I might mention Mr. Raynor Taylor, organist of St Peter's; Mr. George Schetkey, violoncellist; Mr. John Hommann, father of Mr. Charles Hommann, and others. Some of these men were professionally engaged at the Chestnut Street Theatre.

In 1810, June 10th, a grand sacred concert was given at St Augustine's.* It consisted of selections from oratorios, solos, &c. It was under Mr. Carr's direction. He had the assistance of all the orchestra players at that time in the city. The trombones were supplied from Bethlehem. Miss Eliza Taws, who had been a member of the choir from an early date, was the soprano. Mr. Benjamin Cross, a pupil of Mr. Carr, made his first public appearance as a singer at this performance. He sang an aria for the bass voice, by Hasse, a German composer who wrote a vast amount of music, such as operas, oratorios, cantatas, &c., nearly all of which are now forgotten. In all his endeavors at St Augustine's Mr. Carr appears to have had the judicious aid of the pastor, Rev. Dr. Matthew Carr, who evidently understood how to assist without interfering. These performances at the church were from time to time repeated, Mr. Carr introducing such music as proved interesting, and meeting with Dr. Carr's approval. Mr. Carr had collected quite an extensive musical library, which contained a great deal of choice sacred music, among the rest a selection in six volumes, now very rare, published in London by C. J. Latrobe. Much of the music which was in this library has come into the writer's possession. From the choir associations many private musical coteries were formed, at which it was the aim to improve musical taste and introduce new music.

It does not appear, however, that any four part Masses were introduced by Mr. Carr. Those sung were either for soprano, tenor and bass, or two sopranos and bass. At the death of the Rev. Dr. Carr, in 1820, the Rev. Dr. Michael Hurley suc-

* A copy of the programme is in the Library A. C. H. S.—ED.

ceeded to the pastorate. He was also an ardent admirer of music, a fine singer, and always took the greatest interest in abetting Mr. Carr in every way.

Catholic music was greatly enriched at this time by the publications of Vincent Novello in London, where he was the organist of the Portuguese Chapel. He was the founder of the house of Novello, Ewer & Co. of the present day. He introduced to the public all the great Masses of Hadyn, Mozart, Beethoven, Hummel, Schubert and others. His two collections, of twelve books each, for the morning and evening services, were a mine of wealth of good music. We all know how extensively his work has been republished in this country.

Mr. Carr held the position of organist until his death on the 24th of May, 1831. He was buried on May 26th at St. Peter's. The choir erected a tablet to his memory. He was quite a voluminous composer, having written a great amount of sacred music, ballads, piano-forte music, etc. The writer has a very interesting volume of his manuscripts.

At the death of Mr. Carr, Mr. Benjamin Cross succeeded to the position of organist. He retained the position until 1838, when he went to St. Mary's. During the time he was at St. Augustine's he followed as nearly as possible in Mr. Carr's footsteps. He introduced a beautiful Mass by Mazzinghi, written in 1823 for the consecration of an Augustinian abbey in England. It was constantly sung for many years. Zimmer's Mass was also introduced, as well as one or two others.

There was published in Baltimore about this time, by Jacob Walter, a valuable collection of sacred music. It contained a Mass by De Monti which became very popular.

Mr. Cross was succeeded by Mr. Dos Santos, who was the organist until the church was burned in 1844. In the same year, immediately after the destruction of the church, a chapel was built on Crown street. It was opened October 27th, 1844. Mrs. John R. Welsh, a daughter of Benjamin Cross, played the organ and took charge of the choir. She was assisted by her husband and one or two other singers. Mrs. Welsh was succeeded by Henry Corrie, a son of the Henry Corrie who built the first organ in St. John's church. He remained

until the new church, which was being rebuilt, was finished. It was opened on Christmas Day, 1847. Mr. Benjamin Cross was appointed organist. The choir was in the second gallery of the church, at the Fourth street end. The organ, built in Baltimore, which was placed in the church in 1850, was located in the tower. Its effect was thereby ruined, and in the course of a few years it was rebuilt, moved down to the first gallery and placed in its present case, which was expressly designed for it by the builder. The service on the opening day was merely with organ accompaniment. The choir which was at that time organized consisted of: sopranos, Mrs. John Brown, Mrs. Welsh, Miss Mary Downs, Miss Durang; altos, Miss McManus, Miss J. Meyers, Miss Keller; tenors, Mr. Charles Ryan, Mr. Moore, Mr. Brown; basses, Mr. H. Fleming (afterwards an Augustinian father), Mr. Fox and Mr. Smythe. On January 1st, 1848, the choir sang Zimmer's Mass, with "Venite Adoremus" by Cross, at the morning service; and in the afternoon the Gregorian Vespers, "Venite Adoremus" by Webbe, as well as his "Magnificat" in A, and his "Alma." A great feature of the service on Christmas Day was the rendition of Handel's "Let the Bright Seraphim" by Mrs. Eliza Brown. Four part Masses were sung during this administration of the choir. On November 5th, 1848, the new church was consecrated. The music was under the direction of Mr. B. Cross and led by him. A four part Mass by C. Mienieke, of Baltimore, was sung with orchestral accompaniment. The choir was assisted by Mr. and Mrs. J. R. Welsh, Mrs. Stephens and others. Mr. Welsh sang, at the close of the service, "Sound the Trumpet in Zion."

Mr. B. Cross was succeeded in 1849 by his son, Mr. B. Carr Cross, who again was succeeded very shortly afterwards by Mr. Henry Thunder, an accomplished musician and organist. He was brought from Baltimore, where he had until then been playing, through the influence of Very Rev. Dr. Moriarty. Mr. Thunder had charge of the music until 1875, when he went to New York to become the organist of St. Stephen's. He returned in 1879 and remained until his death. During all the time that he was organist he filled the position ably, and

always in a spirit in accordance with its dignity. He introduced Kalliwoda's beautiful Mass, as well as Gounod's "St. Cecilia," together with much new and interesting music. It affords the writer the greatest pleasure to bear witness to his skill and erudite taste as an organist. Certainly as an *ex tempore* player he had no superior in the city. He was succeeded by his son, who is the present incumbent,* and on whose shoulders the mantle of the father appears to have fallen.

During Mr. Thunder's absence in New York, his place was filled by Mr. William A. Newland, who is the oldest Catholic organist living in Philadelphia, and whose faithful, conscientious services, in the many churches in which he has been organist, bear ample witness to his unswerving discharge of duty and to his love for the cause. The writer is indebted to him for data which his ripe experience and recollections so eminently enable him to give.

In closing this sketch of St. Augustine's, a few remarks as to the kind of music and selections sung at the present day in Catholic choirs generally may not be out of place. Until the time of the Rt. Rev. Bishop Kenrick, a great many English hymns, etc., were sung; it did not matter at what service, it was a universal custom. A return to Latin hymns, etc., was the means of correcting many of the abuses and *absurd*, not to say irreverent, selections which were used. But a new abuse crept in. All kinds of adaptations of Latin words to unsuitable, undevotional, trashy music, operatic and other, were made. In fact, the writer has heard "Tantum Ergo," "O Salutaris," and other most sacred hymns sung to music only fit for the theatre. Sometimes selections have been sung without any adaptation of Latin words at all, but with the original words, French, Italian, or whatever they might have been. The good Masses of former years have been superseded by trashy Italian or still worse home-made ones. Strange selections in English, to say the least, have been made at funerals. The idea of singing "Love's Last Greet-

* Mr. Henry G. Thunder, Jr., left St. Augustine's late in the Autumn of 1887, to become organist of the new St. James' church, in West Philadelphia.—Ed.

ing," or "We Miss Thee Every Hour," and more of that stripe, certainly calls for some censorship in regard to such things.

At St. Peter's church the music of the St. Cecilia Society is sung.* This is an organization which has for its object the restoration of the music of the Church to its original purity and dignity. It was founded in one of the western cities, has Pontifical approval, and is doing noble work. Its influence and authority are sadly needed in Philadelphia. The only objection which can in any way be made against it is, that it excludes all the great Masses on account of the repetition of the words they contain. In their place it uses the old Masses of Palestrina and others. I have nothing to say against these Masses, they are great, but by excluding the others which are equally great, this noble society retards its own usefulness, for many organists are not willing to abandon the noblest music ever written. Yet if some check to such abuses could be instituted, it would be of untold value. The endless wealth of beautiful music written for the Catholic Church is unknown to all who pervert her liturgy in this dreadful way. Let us hope that the time will come when such things will cease to be.

At the beginning of the present century the organist at St. Mary's was John Rudolph, a German. We have no data of interest regarding the choir at this time. We presume that John Aiken's book, published in 1791, formed the staple of Catholic music, and poor it was indeed. In 1806 Mr. John Huneker, father of our townsman of the same name, was elected. He appears to have had difficulty with one John Azam, who had evidently been, and still aspired to be, leader. In this connection we may exclaim, or remark, how often the wrong people want to be leaders. This is the case to-day in some choirs, and one-half of the trouble in them arises from this cause. If the organist should happen to be competent, he finds it a little difficult to tolerate the leader's mistakes. It appears to us that with many leaders, confidence, not know-

* A modification has taken place here since this paper was written.—ED.

ledge, is the one thing necessary. Mr. Huneker, however, would not submit to interference under the name of leading, and was given entire charge of the choir. He held the post for many years, when, being stricken with sickness, he was obliged to resign. Mr. John Janke, Sr., officiated during his illness, and finally succeeded him, remaining until 1835. Mr. Newland, whose name is so prominently identified with so many choirs, followed him and remained until 1837, when Mr. Benjamin Cross took charge. The organ was the old one built by Taws in 1806 or 1807.

The appearance of the church at this time is vividly remembered. The ceiling was arched, painted a dark blue, and had gilt stars on it. The organ stood in a gallery built for it. It was, of course, like all the organs of that day. The church was at this time remodeled and painted. The frescoing and picture on the ceiling were done by Monachesi.

A large new organ was built by Henry Erben, of New York, and placed in the gallery. It was considered at that time the finest in the city.

The choir, during Mr. Cross's term, was composed of a paid quartette, consisting of Miss Strahan, afterwards Mrs. Stephens, soprano; Miss Margaret A. Cross, alto; Dr. F. Crowley, tenor; and Mr. Garrett Ruth, bass. There were other voices which formed a chorus. Mr. Cross introduced two Masses of Mozart, the first and seventh, Zimmer's second Mass in B flat, Novello's two part Mass in E major, Mr. Charles Hommann's beautiful Mass in E flat for two sopranos and bass; Zingarelli's "Laudate Pueri Dominum," which was sung first in Philadelphia by Plumber, an operatic tenor of long ago, and Gardini's "Tibi Omnes Angeli." All of this music, except Mozart's First Mass, and, indeed, in many choirs that also, has been given the go-by.

Mr. Cross remained until about 1845. Mr. Dos Santos succeeded him. It was at this time that Haydn's third Mass was first done in Philadelphia, and in this church, under the direction of L. Meignen, Esq., a musician well known in Philadelphia at that time. He was the leader of the Musical Fund Society, teacher of singing and harmony, etc. He died

a few years since, leaving in manuscript a Mass for organ, orchestra, solo voices and chorus, and a lengthy and comprehensive work on composition. The latter is in possession of the Misses Drexel. Haydn's Mass was done with orchestra. The solo singers were the Misses Lejambre, Miss Pintard, Mr. Armstrong and others. It was a glorious performance, and marked an epoch in church music in Philadelphia. Mr. Dos Santos, I believe, remained at St. Mary's until his death, which took place a few years ago.

Dr. Meignen's Mass was sung with great effect at St. Mary's and St. Augustine's. It has never, we believe, been published.

Since the death of Mr. Dos Santos, St. Mary's choir has had several organists, and, we believe, leaders, but with the death of Mr. Dos Santos all that had become historic connected with its choir ceased. The changes of the last few years are, without doubt, recorded, and will be written at some future date.

The earliest account we have regarding the choir of St. Joseph's church dates from the opening of the new church in 1839, when Mr. Dos Santos was organist.*

Before this date the music at St. Joseph's must have been very primitive in its character and performance, no doubt much in the same style as that at St. Mary's and Holy Trinity.

Mr. Dos Santos had also been organist at the old church.† When the new church was built it was desired that the choir should attend during the Month of May services, that is, every evening. Mr. Dos Santos found this impracticable, and resigned his position. He was followed by Mr. Le Brun,

*Almost continuously from the time the old church was enlarged in 1821, by Bishop Conwell, until it was demolished in 1838, Tobias M. Durney was the organist, and his two brothers, John and Paul, sang in the choir. During a brief interruption, about 1835, a Miss Lebreton was organist.—ED.

† It must have been for a very short time indeed. See preceding note.—ED.

who was an amateur. He was the well-known architect of Philadelphia. He remained until 1842.

Mr. W. A. Newland followed, and remained until 1844. He was succeeded by Pedro A. Dannas, a Spaniard, who was at that time engaged in Philadelphia, in music publishing, teaching, etc. Dannas and Ashe in 1846 published a fine quarto edition of Haydn's Third Mass, which about this time was first sung in the city. While he was at St. Joseph's its choir became quite well known.

In 1852 Mr. Newland was again organist, and remained in the position until 1868, when Mrs. Aledo, the present incumbent, was selected.

St. Joseph's choir has had as members many excellent singers, both male and female. The organ has never been very good, although we believe it has lately been remodeled and is now quite effective. The choir duties at this church have always demanded a great deal of attention from its members. It has had much gratuitous service rendered by many singers.

St. Joseph's church is dear to Philadelphia Catholics. It has had a succession of saintly and illustrious men as pastors, and the choir has always been faithful in carrying out their wishes in regard to the music.

Of St. John's church Mr. B. Carr Cross was the first organist. He was appointed in 1832, and held the position until 1844, when he was succeeded by Mr. William A. Newland. We would like to be able to give the names of the members of the first choir of St. John's, and we have tried in every way to obtain data, but regret to say that we have only had partial success. From what we can learn, however, we may mention a few names, such as Miss Mary Warren, afterwards Mrs. B. C. Cross; Miss Williams, Mr. Beyer, Mr. and Mrs. Gubert, Mrs. Dr. Roper, Mr. F. M. Drexel, Mr. Lankenau, Mr. C. Janke, Mr. F. X. Kelly, Mr. and Mrs. J. R. Welsh, Miss De Becquer. Of course these ladies and gentlemen were not all members of the first choir. As years rolled by and changes took place, they were connected with the choir,

and gave their services to the church. In the early years the singers were to a great extent volunteers.

During Mr. B. Carr Cross's term, Mozart's Twelfth Mass was first sung in Philadelphia. It was an important musical event. The choir was largely augmented for the occasion by all the available local talent in the city. The orchestra score of the Mass does not call for what is termed a "full orchestra." There are no flute or clarinet parts in the original. They have been added, of course, in late years, and the Twelfth Mass has been made to sound just as Mozart intended it should *not* sound. There is an organ part by Mozart designed to be used with the orchestral parts. This has been superseded by Novello's accompaniment. The first organ in St. John's was built by Mr. George Corrie, father of another Mr. George Corrie, later known as an organist and professor of music. This organ was replaced after many years by one of J. C. B. Stanbridge's instruments.

Mr. T. E. Gubert was well known as a leading amateur vocalist. He was a tenor singer, and an active member of all the leading musical organizations. His daughter, Miss Louisa Gubert,—many remember her,—made, it might be said, her *debut* in St. John's choir. This was during Mr. Newland's term.

Haydn's Mass No. 1, Eykens' Mass, and other interesting compositions were introduced by Mr. Newland.

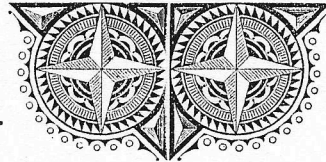
At this time the Rev. F. X. Gartland, pastor of the church, made an effort to have the Vesper service done as it is in the Gradual, i. e., with the proper psalms, antiphons and hymns of the day. This was a feature, and made the service a very beautiful one. After the Rev. Mr. Gartland was made Bishop of Savannah this reform fell into disuse, and the Vesper service became again what it is in every Catholic choir in the diocese to-day, a sort of miscellaneous afternoon concert—so far as the music is concerned, I mean, of course.

Mr. Newland was succeeded in 1852 by Mr. Michael Cross, who was organist until 1856. During his term Haydn's Masses Nos. 2, 6 and 16 were first sung in the city, together with much other music new to choirs.

In 1856 Mr. John Janke succeeded Mr. Cross. He in turn was followed by Mrs. Harron, who held the position until 1869, when Mr. Newland again was organist. In 1872 Mr. Guhlmann occupied the position, and Mr. Barili about this time became the leader of the choir.

Mr. Barili was in every way capable for the position, and he formed a choir of solo voices, mainly his own pupils, and a chorus. He was a zealous worker, and made the music at St. John's very effective and satisfactory. Miss McCartney will be remembered with pleasure as one of his very best singers. At Mr. Barili's death Mr. Carl Wittig, the present incumbent, assumed charge of the choir. He had become organist during the early years of Barili's leadership. Mr. Wittig has lately produced a Mass of his own, which has, we believe, been accorded much praise.

This brings our sketch of the choirs to a close. Of course we could have made it much more lengthy, but have thought it best not to do so. It is mainly the early data of the choirs under notice which we try to give with some little detail, events of the last few years being too fresh to have as yet any historic value.



ADDENDUM.

CHARLES TAWS.

THE same evening on which Mr. Cross's paper was read, Mr. Reuss announced the presentation to the Society, by Miss Henrietta M. Bradshaw, of a piano made in Philadelphia in 1794 by Charles Taws. The instrument had been shown in the industrial parade in connection with the celebration of the centenary of the United States Constitution. In a note enclosed with the history of the manufacturer, Miss Bradshaw says the article may have passed through many hands before her family obtained possession of it; she knows nothing more about it. But she gives the following account of the manufacturer and his family:

"Charles Taws, the first manufacturer of pianos in Philadelphia, settled here in the year 1785, his place of business being on Walnut street below Third. He built many of the organs in the Catholic and Episcopalian churches. St. Peter's congregation, Third and Pine streets, had one which was in their possession quite recently. Mr. Taws had the honor of visiting at the house of George Washington, and selected pianos for his family. He was a Scotchman by birth. Most of his life, however, was spent in Philadelphia. He was a staunch Catholic, and from the beginning of his residence here was a member of St. Mary's congregation, holding a pew there from 1785 until his death in 1836, when he had reached the advanced age of 95 years. His son, Joseph, was one of the earliest organists at Holy Trinity church, at Sixth and Spruce streets, and several other children were quite prominent as singers in the other Catholic churches."