

THE CHORAL SOCIETY.

The Dunedin Choral Society gave their fourth and last concert of the season in the University Hall on Tuesday evening. The audience was an exceedingly large one, and, with good reason, was appreciative. We have seldom heard amateurs so highly efficient as those who took part in that concert. Great credit is due to the new and evidently able conductor, Mr A. J. Towsey, for the excellent manner in which he has produced selections from Sir Michael Costa's oratoria of 'Eli,' and which we consider has placed beyond a doubt his qualifications as an accomplished conductor. Mr Sykes accompanied the choruses throughout the evening; M. Fleury rendered great assistance to the leading violinist, Mr Little; and Mr Martin, who played the clarinet, was heard to great advantage on several occasions as the oratorio progressed. The band, which has been materially strengthened, opened with the overture, which was rendered satisfactorily and pleasingly. A recitative and solo by Mr Campbell held the attention of the large audience strongly; in fact, we have never heard him to such advantage before. His effort was just such a one as we would almost unconsciously take for many a day to come as a standard wherewith to judge others. Mr Lewis we have heard to better advantage; he had a slight cold, nevertheless he was very good. In the chorus, "Let us go to pray before the Lord," a slight timidity was observable at first but confidence was soon gained, and the good training made itself apparent. A thorough mastery of the music was shown, the voices blending together finely. The tenor on the left of the conductor had nine clear-tored voices, which blended excellently with the soprano and bass; but when their turn came with the others, it was noticeable that the latter were not strong. It would be better also if the number of the contraltos were increased. The choruses were remarkable for their steadiness and the harmony of the voices.

There was an absence of the want of precision observable on former occasions, and great attention was paid to the conductor's baton. It may be here mentioned that the prayer "Turn thee," by Miss Thompson, was remarkable for the correct manner in which it was rendered. We have not heard anything sung equal to this overture here, with the exception of Mozart's 12th Mass—which the Society might attempt to produce some of these days—by Miss Julia Matthews and Mrs Mitchell in the old Theatre Royal. In the "March of the Levites" the want of an organ was very prominent, and if the Society could secure itself a permanent habitation they could remedy that want—in fact, considering the good that a Society for the promotion of high class music does in the way of cultivating a proper taste, we think it might not only be allowed, but assisted, in the erection of an organ in the hall. Many might demur on the score of expense, but where there's a will there's a way, and, if once permission were given to put up an organ, it would soon be paid for. The effect of the duetto "Hannah and Elkanah" was much impaired by the tenor, than whom a better was obtainable. Hayden's No. 2 Symphony was artistically executed—a point deserving of special mention was the blending of the violin in the A minor passage of the largo movement. The short space allowed compels us to curtail our notice of the second part; sufficed it to say that the brilliant rendering of the violin and piano duett "Guillaume Tell" was such as was listened to with pleasure, which, if anything, was heightened in the performance of the encore demanded and given, Beethoven's Sonata Op. 12 No. 2, the minor mode in which was particularly good. Noticeable also, was the song "To the woods," by Miss Grant, who has an excellent and well cultivated contralto voice, and the fascinating singing of Miss Sinclair.

HISTORY OF OUR SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST.

BY THE ABBE J. E. DARRAS.

(Translated from the original French for the New Zealand TABLET.) [It is our intention to publish a translation of the 'History of Christ,' by the Abbé J. E. Darras, and the first part of the introduction appears to-day. This history, written in an eloquent style, addresses itself to the tone of thought prevailing in many minds at the present day, and whilst instructing and interesting all, will be found to prove, amongst many other important points, the need the world had of a Saviour, the impossibility of its being saved by philosophy, or any other human means, and that Christ is the Saviour expected of all nations, foreshadowed in the Law of Moses, and foretold by all the Prophets. We consider it will be at once more interesting to our readers and more useful to publish such a translation than burden our pages with some story of fiction. Even the little of the introduction given to-day will enable our readers to catch a glimpse of what is in store for them, and to form an estimate of the elevation of style and ability of the Abbé Darras. Care will be taken that this translation shall be accurate, and as faithful to the original—that is, as literal—as the differences of the idioms of the two languages will permit.

The following is the first part of the introduction:—

THE WORLD BEFORE JESUS CHRIST.

The whole impulse of thought and civilisation in Pagan Greece may be summed up in two names—Athens and Rome. Viewing them from a geographical point, the first of these great intellectual capitals realised the idea of universal empire under Alexander—the second under Augustus. Athens, vanquished as a ruling power, became absorbed in the vast Roman unity. But the Greek element still triumphed over her conquerors; in so much, that while two different tongues prevailed, there was but one theology, worship, philosophy, and doctrine reigning on the shores of the Tiber and the banks of the Eurotas. The age of Augustus was but a pale reflection of that of Pericles. Theocritus and Euripides inspired the Latin of Virgil and the tragic muse of Seneca. Horace fell immeasurably short of Pindar, and Cicero, in his efforts to transport

to the Forum the eloquence of Demosthenes, could not sustain the manly vigor of his model. Notwithstanding its many shortcomings, however, the literary splendour of the Augustan age has long dazzled, even to blindness, the strongest gaze, by hiding the shallowness of its foundations under the richness of its mouldings. Even in our own day it is a common-place idea to magnify the moral greatness, powerful civilisation, institutions, customs, laws, of what in classical style is emphatically called—Antiquity. But, if the Pagan world realised the ideal of human perfection, what need was there here below of Christ, the Redeemer, the Word, "whose light enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world?" Where then were "the nations seated in darkness, in the shadow of death," whom the splendour of the Divine Incarnation, according to the prophecy of Isaiah, were to illuminate? If Pagan antiquity merits the eulogiums too liberally awarded to it, the Prophets must be impostors; the expectation of nations, a hallucination; the Messiah, a superfluity; the Gospel, a barbarity! This is a question worthy our investigation. Let us search out the truth, then, as well beneath the flowers of poetry and the rhythm of prose as under the garlands and gildings of the pagan temples. Let us raise the mask to come to the reality, and draw aside the veils which conceal these mysteries as far as Christian modesty will allow. What can concern us more closely than to probe the wounds the Saviour came to heal?—bleeding wounds, that the oil of human wisdom had failed to close, the balm of pagan literature to soothe, and which the united mythologies of Polytheism had only tended to aggravate.

The Greco-Roman theology is a direct descendant from Sodom, having for beginning, the absence of God; and for end, the most fearful corruption that ever existed. The absence of God from pagan societies may possibly astonish some superficial minds, who have adopted, without rightly understanding its meaning, a well-known phrase of Bossuet's, intended to stamp the character of Polytheism. "All was God but God Himself," said the great Bishop of Meaux.

After giving an eloquent and powerful *resumé* of the mythological doctrine and of the philosophy reigning on the shores of the Tiber and the banks of the Eurotas, which, however, we cannot insert in this paper, and also of the immoral practices of the leading nations of antiquity, our author proceeds thus:—

The entire world sought to shape itself on the model of the pagan heaven, and the earth was one vast theatre of infamy. Vain is it for the poets to conceal under their flowing numbers the horrors of Polytheistic theology! They cannot disguise the truth. What do I say? Far from seeking to dissimulate, the Greek and Roman literatures teach these horrors, *ex professo*. The lyre of Virgil has attuned itself to other praises as well as those of sylvan woods and smiling meadows. It has lent its inspiration to themes which might be tolerated in Gomorrah! Homer pours nectar into the wine cup of the Master of the Gods by other hands than Hebe's. Cornelius Nepos undertakes the task of initiating our youthful students into secrets discreditable to Alcibiades, Socrates, and Plato.

The absence of God simply meant in that degenerate world—absence of soul. What had become of the dignity of mankind during this reign of unutterable depravity. After drawing so sad and revolting a picture of its horrors, I have no heart to unveil its ludicrous side, and expose to ridicule a religion which set up for adoration and imitation monsters of iniquity in the persons of its Gods. The solemn Romans, in their warlike enterprises, carried sacred fowls along with the army. These birds were to furnish omens at all times to the soothsayers. It might happen that at the moment for consulting the oracle no birds could be found, and the military operations should have to be suspended. A certain quantity of grains, forming the ritual paste, were placed outside the cage, within reach of the birds—*offa pullis*. If the winged animals set on the food with avidity, especially if, in their eagerness, they let some grains fall to the earth, this was the Tripudium, the happiest of auspices. On the contrary, if they obstinately remained in their cage and refused to eat, the omen was an unhappy one, and the enterprise was condemned. Who is it that has left us an official account of these details? Cicero, himself an augur. Possibly he did not believe in them; he says somewhere that two augurs could not look each other in the face without laughing. But it was important that the plebeians should be the dupes of their faithless priests, whose trade it was to speculate in the credulity of the vulgar.

Will not the philosophers at least make amends to us for those shameful and absurd superstitions? Alas! philosophy, separated from religious belief, what is it but the perpetual restlessness of human ignorance, heaving amidst the angry billows of self-debate, and ever falling back into the abyss of its own impotence.

The Greek philosophy took its starting point from materialism. Thales, of Miletus (600), founder of the Ionic School, maintained that water is the source out of which everything arises, and into which everything resolves itself. In physics, this doctrine was an absurdity, in religion, a blasphemy. Pythagoras (608-500), the father of the Italian school, after having visited Egypt and many countries in the East, and being initiated in the mysteries of Bacchus and Orpheus, repudiated the physics of Thales as incomplete, and substituted for them a mathematical system, according to which God is nothing more than a complete monad; the soul, a living member; the world a harmonious assemblage of numbers. The Eleatic School (500), with its leaders, Xenophanes, Parmenides, and Zeno, developed the pantheistic germ of the two preceding philosophers. The entire world, a collective being, all-powerful, immutable, eternal, was proclaimed the Deity. Leucippides, the founder of the atomic theory, resolved this vast divinity into an infinite number of atoms, floating eternally in infinite space. Each of these atoms was a fractional part of their Deity. The school of Sophists (V. century B.C.), soon came to draw from these wild theories a practical inference. Georgias of Leontini, Protagoras of Abdera, Prodicus of Geos, Hippias of Elis, Thrasymachus, Euthedemus, taught that truth and error were two terms equally devoid of meaning and reality. Scepticism thus became the final sentence of human reason. This glorious conquest achieved, the labors of the first philosophical period draw to a close.