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978-1-108-00184-7 - A Short Historical Account of the Degrees in Music at Oxford and Cambridge

C. F. Abdy Williams

Excerpt

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DEGREES IN MUSIC.

CHAPTER I.

THE ORIGIN OF ACADEMICAL DEGREES IN GENERAL.

ACADEMICAL Degrees, as we know them, appear to have originated at the University of Bologna, in the first half of the twelfth century, and were probably modelled on those given by Justinian* to the students of his academies at Rome, Constantinople, and Berytus.†

Bayle's account of their origin is as follows: "Irnerius, a German (also called Wernerius, and Guarnerius), Chancellor to the Emperor Lotharius, was the first who renewed the study and profession of Roman Law, after its interruption by the barbarians. He was Professor of Law at the University of Bologna,‡ and is said to have persuaded the Emperor to introduce into that University the creation of *Doctors*, the forms and ceremonies for which degree he arranged; and the first who were promoted to this honour were Bulgarus, Hugolinus, Martin, Pileus, and some others, who began to interpret and teach Roman Law.§ The degree of Doctor having thus been established at Bologna, soon spread to Salerno, where degrees were given in Medicine;|| and

* Bulæus, "Hist. Univ. Pariensis," II., 255.

† Hoefler, "Nouvelle Biog. Générale," Tom. XXVII., p. 327.

‡ Bologna University was founded in A.D. 425, and incorporated A.D. 1119, and in the Middle Ages contained sometimes as many as 12,000 students.—Meyer, "Conversations-Lexicon," Ed. of 1845 and 1886.

§ Bayle, "Dict. Hist." Art. "Irnerius."

|| The doctorate in medicine having been introduced at Salerno, was sometimes given in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries to women as well as men. Constantia Calenda and others received the degree (English Cyclopædia, "Salernitana Schola"). And at Bologna, Beltica Gozadina was made Doctor and Professor of Law (Itterus, "Diatriba de gradibus"). The Catalogue of Dublin Graduates also mentions several female Doctors of Canon and Civil Law and Professors of Medicine and Surgery at Bologna.

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to Paris, where they were given in Theology as well as the other two faculties.

Bulæus gives the following account:—"Gratianus was the first collector and compiler of the Decretal Epistles, which he published, and dedicated to Pope Eugene III. (who reigned from 1145 to 1154). But since students had been applying themselves to civil law, Pope Eugene, fearing that canon law might fall into contempt, at the suggestion of Gratian devised certain academical degrees: the Baccalauriat, the Licentiate, and the Doctorate, that by means of these special titles he might induce students to study canon law and might make them eager to obtain the proposed privileges." Bulæus goes on to say that the greater number of authors acknowledge this to have been the origin of academical degrees, and assert that they were first instituted in the Academy of Bologna; and it is evident that Gratian modelled his degrees on those given by Justinian in civil law.*

Peter Lombard, the "Master of the Sentences," who had studied at Bologna, is said to have instituted, and been the first to receive, the degree of Doctor of Theology at the University of Paris, about 1151, whither he had been attracted by the fame of its professors.†

Another view of the matter, and the one most generally accepted now, is that the fame of the University of Paris having attracted a large number of students, it was found that many pretenders to learning soon appeared amongst them, and easily imposed upon a youthful and enthusiastic audience. Hence it became necessary as a protection, both to the students and their teachers, to grant licences to those who were properly qualified to teach, and to impose some test before doing so, out of which arose the system of examinations. The University Degree was, therefore, anciently simply a licence to teach, and in later times the holder not only had this right, but was held bound to exercise it.‡

The use of the word Master as the title of a degree seems to

* Bulæus, "Hist. Univ. Par.," II., p. 255.

† "Biog. Universelle." Vol. XXIV., p. 641; and Bul., II., 257.

‡ Mullinger, "The Univ. of Cambridge from the Earliest Times," I., 77. Laurie, "Rise and Constitution of English Universities." Hüber, "Die Eng. Universitäten," I., 44. Maxwell Lyte, "Hist. of Oxford," p. 237.

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have arisen later than that of Doctor, although both titles were at one time used indiscriminately for the highest degree in any faculty.* Specht† says, however, that the name Master was applied, before the institution of the ceremony of conferring the Doctorate, to professors of all sciences, languages and arts.

The candidate for the degree of Master of Arts was required to have a thorough knowledge of the seven liberal arts called the Trivium and Quadrivium. Those contending for this degree had as their first "Act" to carry on a solemn disputation, *ad terminorum determinationes*, and, if successful, became Bachelors of Arts. Those who attempted this disputation and were unable to perform it, were called down, confused and ridiculed, as was a certain Trebatius, who had neglected his exercises, at Paris.‡ Besides the disputation, the candidate for the Mastership was obliged to fulfil certain conditions, such as that he should possess the proper books for his profession, should instruct others less learned than himself, and should practise disputing in the schools of the Masters, in order to render himself worthy of promotion.

The degree of Licentiate seems to be older than that of Master or Doctor, and was apparently originally given by the bishop or scholasticus of a diocese. It was a license to teach, and was conferred by the University of Paris on the candidate for the doctorate or mastership as soon as he was fit for it, in order to give him the right of imparting instruction to others. We find the word in 1246, when Matthew of Paris, *Licentiavit familiam*.§ But earlier than this, certain persons were sent out from Rome, licensed by the Pope or his Chancellor to teach, without having undergone the labour of disputing or frequenting the schools,|| a practice which in 1229 gave rise to disturbances at Paris, for the Senate of that University would not accept as members those whose degrees had been thus given by the Pope; nor could the thunders of the Vatican compel them to do so. The custom was established by 1179, for we find the Lateran Council of that year

* In the Middle Ages we constantly meet with "*Magistri in Theologia*" and in Italy there were "*Doctores Artium*." (Information from Rev. H. Rashdall.)

† "De honoribus." Wittenberg, 1631, p. 48.

‡ Bulæus, II., 677.

§ Bulæus, II., 681.

|| Idem.

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enacting that no price is to be demanded by a bishop for the license to teach.*

The derivation of the word Bachelor has been so variously given, that it would take too much space to quote here all the conjectures that have been made as to its origin. Spelman† says that a “Bacularius” is a person who is formally received into the number of those who are commencing the higher studies: hence is a beginner. In military matters, Bacularii or Knights Bachelors were those who, having passed through the stage of recruitship, were beginning their military career.

Other derivations are from “βακηλος,” foolish; “Bas Chevalier,” a knight of the lowest rank; “Baculus,” a staff; “Bucella,” an allowance of provision; “Bacca-Laureus,” the berry of a laurel or bay.‡ The degree of Bachelor of Arts was usually conferred after four years spent in the study of the Trivium, or three lower liberal arts, which consisted of grammar, rhetoric, and logic. It was the first degree conferred upon the candidate for the mastership, and having obtained it he was obliged to spend a further period of three years in the study of the four higher arts of the Quadrivium—namely, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy.

The earliest notice we have of forms and ceremonies being prescribed for the conferring of University degrees, dates from 1231, in which year Gregory IX. seems to have introduced those for the degrees of Bachelor, Licentiate, and Master or Doctor, in the faculties of Arts, Medicine, Law, and Theology; for Renatus Choppinus prefixes to a bull of 1231 the words, “Apostolicum diploma de forma et modo decorandi academicis gradibus scholastici”;§ and after this time frequent mention is made of Bachelors, Licentiates, and Masters of Theology and other faculties.

* Bul., II., 681 and 684. The right which still vests in the Archbishop of Canterbury of giving the degree of Doctor of Music, and demanding a fee of £63 (Grove's Dict., I., 452), is probably a remnant of the ancient custom here referred to. The Archbishop can also grant degrees in other faculties to eminent persons: and in 1671 we find Thomas Baker making a strong protest against the action of the Senate of Cambridge University, in creating a precedent for the admission of Lambeth Graduates to the privileges of the University by incorporation, on precisely the same grounds as those on which the Paris Senate objected to incorporating the Pope's Licentiates in 1229. (Baker MSS., Vol. XLII.) † Gloss, 1687, p. 54.

‡ Hawkins, “Hist. Music,” p. 292.

§ Bulæus, II., 682 and 684.

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THE ORIGIN OF ACADEMICAL DEGREES IN GENERAL. II

In early times, nearly all knowledge and teaching were directed towards the one absorbing study of theology. "The seven liberal arts are the way," says Alcuin to his pupils, "in which you must learn to walk daily in your youth, till you are grown up, and prepared to dedicate yourselves to the highest tasks of Christian study."*

The advantages of these arts have been thus summed up. Grammar was of service for teaching how to read and transcribe the Scriptures, rhetoric and logic for explaining the Fathers and refuting adversaries, music was necessary for the proper performance of divine worship, arithmetic trained the mind to that regularity and order necessary for the study of theology, astronomy taught the contemplation of the heavenly bodies; while geometry, being only concerned with purely earthly things, was considered as the stepson of the liberal arts, and was not so much cultivated as the others.

In the Middle Ages, after a candidate for academical honours had prepared his mind by the studies of the Trivium and Quadrivium, and had received the Mastership in Arts, he was allowed to commence his studies for the Bachelorship and Doctorship of Theology (afterwards called Divinity), Law, or Medicine; and for this a further period of time was prescribed, in addition to the seven years spent in acquiring the Mastership of Arts.

The degree system soon spread over Western Europe, and its influence was naturally felt at the English Universities. Oxford was founded in 1249, and is called by Bulæus the eldest daughter of Paris; † and at Cambridge, which was founded in 1284, the customs were disposed after the manner of those of Paris. The title of Doctor seems to have come into use at Oxford later than that of Master, but after its introduction both titles were used, as on the Continent, for the highest degree in any faculty. Trevetti says, that in the year 1294 Edward I. sent Fre Huges de Malmecestre, *Master* of Divinity, to render his homage to the King of France; and Mathew Paris tells us that in 1267 the *Masters* of Oxford came to the Parliament. ‡

Anthony Wood ("Annals," Vol. II., Book ii., p. 722) says

* Specht, "Geschichte des Unterricht-Wesens in Deutschland," 1885, p. 82.

† Bul., II., 544. See also Laurie, "Rise and Constitution of the Universities,"

p. 242.

‡ Spelman, "Gloss.," *Magister*, and Hüber, "Die Eng. Univ.," II., 192.

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that in early times degrees were given at Oxford in the single liberal arts, such as grammar, rhetoric, poetry, and music; and Mr. Wise, in a letter quoted by Hawkins (p. 292), also takes this view, which he probably derived from Wood. But I have been able to find no direct evidence that such degrees were ever given at our Universities in any subject except grammar; and I shall show that degrees in music were originally so different from those in grammar, that they cannot be placed in the same category. The grammar degrees were of a very inferior nature, and conferred no privileges on the holder, who had, in fact, to pay a yearly sum to the University in return for being allowed to teach. The requirements for these degrees are fully laid down by statute from very early times. No residence was demanded before the conferring of the degree, but there were several rather elaborate examinations or disputations, and the Master in Grammar ranked with the Bachelor of Arts.

The last Oxford Bachelor of Grammar of which we have any mention was Thomas Ashbroke, who graduated on July 10, 1568,* and the last Cambridge Master of Grammar took his degree in 1542. We get an insight into the requirements for these degrees at Oxford in 1511-12, when Edward Watson and Maurice Byrchynshaw were admitted "ad docendum in eadem facultate," the first, on condition of his composing, within a year, 100 poems in praise of the University, and a comedy; the second, on condition of his composing 100 poems on the nobility of the University.† Masters in Grammar, however, seem not always to have been forthcoming when required, for we find in 1455 that Robert Abdy (afterwards Master of Balliol), and Master Joyner, were appointed to act as "Magistri Grammaticales."‡

The Oxford graduates in grammar were originally masters of Grammar schools in the town; but they were bound to dispute at stated times with Masters of Arts,§ probably in order to prevent them from neglecting to keep up their knowledge of grammar, since their duties were only to prepare boys for the Bachelor's degree.

* Boase, "Registrum Univ. Ox.," page 269.

† Boase, "Registrum Univ. Ox.," page 298.

‡ Boase, "Registrum," 24.

§ Anstey, "Munimenta Academica," I., 86, from the Chancellor's and Proctors' Books of 1301.

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CHAPTER II.

THE EARLIEST RECORDS OF DEGREES IN MUSIC.

IT is not known when these degrees were first conferred by Oxford and Cambridge, and they have never been given by foreign Universities.* Some foreign writers have considered that they originated in the practice of giving degrees in the single arts of the seven liberal studies; and there is a certain amount of reason for this view, for they were similar to the grammar degrees, in that no residence was required, and that they did not confer full membership of the University on the recipient.†

My own view is that they were considered more honourable than degrees in grammar, and that the Doctorate in Music was at first conferred only on musicians of eminence, and without examination. It is known that, in the Middle Ages, music took a very high rank in public estimation in England, and English musicians had considerable reputation abroad. MSS. have recently been found at Modena, Bologna, and among the capitular archives of Trent, dating from the latter part of the fifteenth century, which contain compositions by Dunstable, John Benet, Forest, Power, Stowe, and others, showing that the music of English composers was known and appreciated abroad. There is evidence, moreover, that Dunstable preceded Dufay and Binchois by some years, and that the early English School of music, the development of which was crushed by the general disturbance of all the arts of peace caused by

* Some foreign Universities have, however, given the degree of Mus. Doc. *without examination* in modern times, to eminent musicians, as in the case of Andreas Romberg, Spontini, Schneider, and the late Robert Franz, who was a Mus. Doc. of Halle. Mr. Rashdall informs me that there were *Magistri in Musica* in the thirteenth century at some Spanish Universities.

† This view originated with Wood, who says that graduates in grammar, rhetoric, poetry, and music were accounted the most inferior in the University because they had only applied themselves to a single art.—“Annals,” Vol. II., Book ii., p. 723.

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the Wars of the Roses, was flourishing before the rise of the Netherlands School.*

The earliest University statutes, while giving full particulars as to the requirements for the degree of Master of Grammar, are silent with regard to degrees in music. The earliest mention I have found of the latter in any statutes occurs in those given by Elizabeth to Cambridge in 1559, in which the lists of fees to be paid by a Bachelor and Inceptor† in Music are given; and the fees for Bachelors and Inceptors in Medicine are stated to be the same as for those degrees in music.‡

A few years later we meet with a curious decree of the Prefects, dated May 8, 1571, referring to Bachelors of Music amongst other graduates. It is to the effect that any student bathing, or washing, in the river or any pond in the County of Cambridge, shall be punished by public whipping by the Vice-Chancellor; and for the second offence he shall be expelled the University. If the delinquent is a Bachelor of Arts, he is to be put in the stocks for one day; and if he is a Master of Arts or Bachelor of Law, Medicine, or Music, or holds any higher degree, he shall be punished according to the judgment of the head of his college.§

* See Grove's Dict. IV., 619; "Dict. Nat. Biog.," Dunstable; letter to *Times* newspaper, February 21, 1893, from Mr. Barclay Squire. Ambros, Vol. III., p. 453, gives the following additional names of English composers of this school, and shows that they were very much esteemed in Italy: Gervasius de Anglia, Zacarias Anglicanus, Johannes Wylde; and there are two compositions in the Liceo at Bologna inscribed "de Anglia" and "Anglicanum." Hawkins quotes (p. 291) the following remark of Erasmus: "As nature has implanted self-love in the minds of all mortals, so she has disposed to every country and nation a certain tincture of the same affection. Hence it is that the English challenge the prerogative of having the most handsome women, *of being the most accomplished in the skill of music*, and of keeping the best tables."—*Erasmus*, "Moriae encomium," Basle Ed., p. 101.

† The title Inceptor is applied to Doctors and Masters in any faculty immediately after taking their degree. It means a beginner, that is a person who is beginning his work as a Master or Doctor by a year's lecturing (Anstey's "Munimenta Acad.," Introd. p. xcii.). The statutes of Laud speak indiscriminately of the Inceptor and Doctor of Music.

‡ From "Statuta Acad. Cantab.," Ed. of 1785, p. 195, and the Baker MSS. The fees for the Bachelor are as follows: Vicecancellario, 2s.; præsentatori (the graduate who presents the candidate), 2s.; procuratoribus (proctors), 2s.; pro communa (common chest), 20d.; registro (registrar), 4d.; pulsatori (bell ringer), 12d.; bedellis pro collectis (bedells), 4s. 8d.; pro prandiis (feasts), 18d.; pro chirothecis (gloves), 18d.; pro introitu (entrance money), 6s. 8d.; pro visitatione, 6s. 8d. The doctor paid the same items at a higher rate, his total amounting to 51s. 8d. In 1803 the expenses of taking the degree of Mus. Bac. had increased to £70 (*Camb. Univ. Calendar*).

§ "Statuta Acad. Cant.," p. 454.

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It is significant that this notice, which, after the statutes of 1559, is the earliest record of any regulations regarding graduates in music, seems to rank the Bachelor in Music with the Master of Arts, and the Bachelor of Law and Medicine.

The Oxford statutes of 1356 prescribe for four faculties—Arts, Theology, Law, and Medicine. Music is not reckoned among the faculties.* Grammar was called a faculty before music, and it seems as if, in the early graces relating to musical degrees, every effort was made to avoid applying the word faculty to Music.† New regulations appear to have been made for each fresh candidate for a degree in music, and this could probably easily be done, since so few persons applied for these degrees.

The first Doctor of Music of whom there is any mention is Saint Just or Saintwix, who was made Master or Warden of King's Hall,‡ Cambridge, in 1463, by Edward IV., whose chaplain he was. In the document granting him this appointment he is called "Magister," from which we may reasonably infer that he had passed through the ordinary University course, and taken the M.A. degree before becoming a Doctor of Music.§ Although he is the first Doctor of Music of whom there is any record, there is nothing to show that the degree was not conferred before this time. The inference is that it was already well established, at Cambridge, at all events.

The next mention of the Doctorate in Music we meet with is in connection with Henry Habyngton or Abyngdon, who took his Bachelor's degree in 1463, and whose grace was granted that he might proceed to the Doctorate on condition of his residing in Cambridge one year, but whether he did so, does not appear.|| He is said to have been pre-eminent as a singer and organist.¶

Soon afterwards we hear of John Hamboys, or Hanboys, who flourished about 1470, a person who was very eminent not only in

* Cotton MSS., Claud., D. viii.

† See Graces in Appendix—C, E, F, G, H, I, J, &c. It is, however, used in K. Graces referring to grammar almost invariably use the expression "eadem facultate." The word faculty means a body of persons teaching and studying the same subject (Du Cange). Music, except to the extent required for the M.A. degree, was not taught and studied in the Universities; hence it was not one of their faculties, and only came to be considered one when they examined candidates for degrees.

‡ Afterwards absorbed into Trinity College by Henry VIII. Hawkins confuses it with King's College.

§ See Appendix D.

|| See Appendix C.

¶ Grove's Dict., 1, 6.

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music, but in other arts, and especially in Latin and mathematics. Holinshed describes him as “an excellent musician, and for his notable cunning therein made Doctor of Music.”* Pits † does not mention that he was made a Doctor of Music, but is eloquent on his musical attainments, saying that he compared with the best musicians of his time. Bale ‡ says that he was made Doctor “by common suffrage,” being certainly the most celebrated musician of his time in England. It is not known which University thus honoured him, and it is just possible that Bale’s words “Communi suffragio” may mean that he did not graduate at either, but that the title was conferred on him by the *vox populi*.

After Hamboys we find Robert Cooper, or Cowpar, a Mus. Bac. of Cambridge, who proceeds Doctor there in 1502,§ and is mentioned by Morley among famous English musicians. Like Saintwix, he is also styled “Magister.” In the same year, Robert Fairfax, or Fayrfax, or Ferfax, was admitted Mus. Doc. at Cambridge.|| He was a very eminent musician, and was Organist of St. Alban’s Abbey, which then contained the finest organ in England.¶ He is the first Oxford Doctor in Music of whom there is any record, having incorporated there in 1511,** though there is nothing to show that Oxford never made Doctors of Music previously to this.

We now reach the period when conditions began to be imposed upon candidates for the Degree of Mus. Doc. In 1515 we find that Robert Perrot’s request for this degree at Oxford was granted on condition of his composing a mass and one song; †† and in 1531 John Guinneth was required to compose a mass. The latter tried hard to get the degree given him on his reputation as a composer, and the University finally granted it without requiring the mass, but made him pay 20d. for the favour. ‡‡ He is mentioned among famous English musicians by Morley, and both he and Perrot were of reputation as composers. The only other persons upon whom the degree of Mus. Doc. was

* “Chronicles,” III., 710, Ed. of 1587.

† Vol. I., 662, Ed. 1619.

‡ “Scriptorum Catalogus,” 617.

§ App. H.

|| Burney wrongly gives the date as 1511, in which year he incorporated at Oxford.

¶ “Dict. Nat. Biog.” “Fairfax.”

** Foster, “Alumni Ox.”

†† Wood, “Fasti Oxonienses.”

‡‡ See p. 68.