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C. F. Abdy Williams

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A Short Historical Account of the Degrees in Music at Oxford and Cambridge

C. F. Abdy Williams (1855-1923), a noted music scholar, traced the history of the discipline at Oxford and Cambridge from the fifteenth century to the late Victorian period in this 1894 book. He discusses the earliest records of degrees in the subject, the establishment of professorships, the requirements for degrees and the ceremonies associated with their conferral. He provides biographical information for graduates from as early as 1463, noting that English music of this early period was in a very advanced stage compared to that of the rest of Europe. He also includes in an appendix the names of those persons who are mentioned as graduates but whose names do not appear in the university records. His book reveals the importance attached to the cultivation of music at the ancient British universities and the prestige attached to their scholars over several centuries.

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*With a Chronological List of Graduates in that
Faculty from the Year 1463*

C. F. ABDY WILLIAMS



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PREFACE.



THE attention which has of late years been given by our Universities to the cultivation of music, and the endeavour to again make the degrees of Doctor and Bachelor in that faculty of substantial value, as marks of real musical erudition and culture on the part of the holder, as was formerly the case, have induced me to try and investigate the early history of these degrees, which are peculiar to the English Universities, and are practically unknown abroad. My researches have led me to the conclusion that they arose at a time when English music was in a very advanced stage of development, in comparison with that of the Continent, and English musicians in consequence took a high rank, not only among contemporary musicians, but among the learned men of the day; and that our Universities gave degrees of an honorary nature, without requiring any examination or exercise, to eminent English musicians as marks of honour and esteem, rather than as mere "licences to teach." But in course of time, when less eminent musicians began to supplicate for these degrees, the Universities required some testimony as to the fitness of the applicant, and hence arose the necessity for the candidate to show that he had studied for a certain number of years; and in return for the favour of granting the degree a composition was demanded, to be performed before the University, as an addition to the ceremonies at "Act time"; and this became the exercise. How far I have succeeded in establishing this theory must be left to the reader to judge; in no other way can I account for the origin of degrees in music.

This is not the first "History of Musical Degrees," for in 1752 Johann Oelrichs, a Doctor of Law, published at Berlin a short "Historische Nachricht von den Academischen Würden in der Musik," chiefly dealing with English musical degrees and graduates. He says in Chapter iii.: "Nowhere has music received greater honour than in England, where, in London, Cambridge, and Oxford, not only has there been for a long time a special public teacher of music, . . . but from ancient times

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England has given academical dignities in this art. It must not be thought, however, that a Doctor of Music is of little account, and the degree an empty title, or that it is easy to become such a Doctor. This degree is, on the contrary, far more difficult to attain than the highest honours in the chief faculties in German and other Universities. A Doctor in Music in England is a person of great importance, and takes rank, with the Doctors in other faculties, above the ordinary esquire, or gentleman entitled to bear arms, and both he and the Bachelor of Music wear special robes of honour." Oelrichs' little book goes on to describe the statutory requirements for graduating in music, and he is evidently much struck with their searching and arduous nature. He afterwards discusses the question of Allibond's degree—*i.e.*, whether it was that of "Master in Music"—but comes to the conclusion that it was "Master in Arts." After this there is an alphabetical list of some of the more important English Doctors, and lists of the Gresham, Heather, and Cambridge Professors of Music; and the book concludes with a short account of what each foreign University does in the way of teaching music. The book is interesting as showing something of the view that obtained abroad in the last century on English musical degrees; but its material is mostly gathered from Wood, and the author had evidently not visited the English Universities.

I have traced the course of the degrees from the earliest time they are mentioned, to the present day, when the tendency becomes more and more marked to place music on a level in every respect with the other faculties. I have in all cases given references to the authorities for my statements, and wish here to offer my best thanks for assistance and information given me by Professor S. S. Laurie, of Edinburgh University; the Rev. H. Rashdall, of Hertford College, Oxford; Dr. C. Harford Lloyd; Mr. H. B. Briggs, the Hon. Secretary of the Plainsong and Mediæval Music Society; Mr. Charles Sayle; Mr. A. Hughes-Hughes; the Rev. J. Mee, Mus. Doc.; Mr. George Parker, the Clerk of the Schools, Oxford; and especially to Mr. J. W. Clark, the Registry of Cambridge University, to whom I am indebted for most valuable assistance with regard to the early Cambridge Grades.

The edition of Hawkins' History referred to is that published by Novello, in three volumes, in 1853, the pagination of which is continuous.

C. F. A. W.

December, 1893.

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