

## BOOK REVIEWS

### PLAINSONG GRAMOPHONE RECORDS.

H.M.V. C. 2087.

1. (a) Asperges. (b) Kyrie Eleison, Mass IX.
2. (a) Responses to Preface. (b) Sanctus and Benedictus, Mass IX. (c) Salve Regina, Simple Tone.

C. 2088.

1. (a) Second Alleluia and Sequence for Whit Sunday.
2. (a) Antiphon and Psalm 'Ecce Nunc,' (b) Hymn 'Te Lucis' (for Compline). (c) Ave Regina Coelorum, Simple Tone. (d) O Salutaris Hostia.

The Schola of Ampleforth Abbey, conducted by Rev. J. B. McElligott, O.S.B. (Price, 4/6 each).

There is a long series of Plainsong records made by the French monks of Solesmes and elsewhere. Now we have two records made by the English monks of one of our great Abbeys. It is at last a sign of the awakening of Catholic interest and enthusiasm in this country in Plainsong, of which the Society of St. Gregory is another. We are years behind our continental neighbours in obeying the Holy See and taking it up, but it is just the thing for this country of great choirs and good choir singing. There is not the slightest reason why we should not have Plainsong choirs every bit as good as and better than those of other countries. Here is one of the means to help us to learn it. These Ampleforth records are an excellent beginning. One can say the very best thing about them, they are absolutely *alive*. The singing is vigorous and rhythmical, based upon a good understanding of the Solesmes method, with the added pleasure of hearing every word clearly and distinctly pronounced and correctly emphasised. I would not claim that our English pronunciation of Latin is perfect, far from it, but it is eminently intelligible, and that is essential in Plainsong, where the whole meaning of the music depends upon the words, '*verbum dicatur ut syllaba non sileatur.*' Indeed the vowels in these records leave much to be desired. If these were improved it would also help the tone-quality of the voices greatly, which is inclined in places to be rough.

It is impossible to criticise in detail in a short review, nor is it desirable where there is so much to be praised. The chief musical fault is a slight loss of pitch in most of the pieces sung—this

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can be tested by immediately re-starting the same piece over again when once it has been played. It is not a very considerable loss, but enough to take the 'edge' off the melodic quality. It is a fault easily remedied, it simply needs exact intonation by every singer. In one or two places some of the singers fall victim to that greatest difficulty of the Plainsong singer, to keep the word accent right, especially when, as in hymns, it pulls against the lilt of the melody. How difficult to sing 'Praesta Pater piissime,' and easy to let it sound like 'Praesta Pater.'

A great deal has been got on to these four sides which will be useful to every choir, Asperges, Responses, parts of Compline, etc. While those who are anxious to attempt the Proper for Whit Sunday will find the Alleluia and Sequence invaluable.

Wise choirmasters will invest in these records and play them over many times to their choirs.

F.M.

'BILL.' By C. C. Martindale, S.J., London. (Sheed and Ward; 5/- net.)

Bill, the hero of this book, is yet another of Father Martindale's entertaining young gentlemen. He joins the select company of Jock, Jack, the Corporal, and Albert Alfred, P.C. First encountered on a tram in Poplar, when he cadges a cigarette (so many 'conversions' begin with the offer of a Gold Flake!) he emigrates to New Zealand and 'grows into a knowledge of out-door life and the Catholic Faith simultaneously.' The story is unfolded in a series of letters, though, as the author admits, 'no single "Bill" would have written such long letters and so often.' 'But there are hundreds of thousands of Bills who compose a collective Bill . . . and they have said, I think, pretty well all the things that the book-Bill says.'

Bill is first shocked into serious thought when a mate of his suddenly gives a grunt and falls down in a heap, dead. He tells Father X, in England, all about it, in his Poplar English, and follows up his first letter with various pertinent questions. From 'I never had no religion and never wanted any' he is impelled to ask 'Will you tell me why I should believe in a God?' Given such an opening, his mentor is ready to explain that the 'thing that is at the back of the whole world is what we call God . . . otherwise the world wouldn't have got going at all . . . Because, however many links there are in a chain, you can't hang it up on nothing. See?' Gradually Bill 'sees.' And the end of his 'seeing' is enthusiastic believing, and reception into the Church.