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Church Music.

BY THE REV. E. VINE HALL, M.A.

IT will be almost universally admitted that sacred music has a strange and wondrous power over the hearts of men. It touches our emotions, it stimulates our reverence, it lifts us up, it helps us to pray, it is one of God's best and brightest gifts to man. Sacred music, whether it be the majestic strains of a Handel or a Mozart, or whether it be some of the dear old English hymn-tunes, such as *Hanover*, or *Melcombe*, or *Rockingham*—sacred music has a strange power over us ; it is the very handmaid of religion ; it is, or it ought to be, a great assistance to our devotions.

The object of the present article is to offer a few simple and practical suggestions as to Church music and its due performance ; and to give some assistance to those who are actively concerned in its promotion.

It will be agreed, on all hands, that the musical portions of our Church services stand in need, in many cases, of considerable improvement ; and that especially there is a great lack amongst us of hearty congregational singing. We often meet with large choirs, and expensive organs with clever organists, and pains-taking choirmasters, but the result of all this is not necessarily congregational singing. Is it not often the case that the people merely look on and listen while the choir sing ? Is it not the case that while, as a rule, Nonconformist worshippers are famous for hearty singing, the singing in our churches is often cold and languid and poor ? We all of us desire that the laity should take their due and rightful share in offering praise to the Almighty. The practical question is this, how is it to be done ? What course can we take to make our services congregational ?

First of all, too much care cannot be bestowed on the choice of appropriate chants and hymn-tunes. There are certain chants, and still more certain hymn-tunes, in which congre-

gations almost invariably decline to take part. Those chants and hymn-tunes should be left severely alone. Choose those which the people cannot help singing. Such tunes as *Aurelia*, *St. Ann's*, *Bedford*, and *Rockingham*, are always popular ; they have a certain fascination, a certain "swing" about them which carries the congregation along, and which calls forth a good solid body of sound.

Again, neither chants nor hymn-tunes should be chosen which contain very high or very low notes ; they should be well within the compass of an ordinary singer ; and they should be simple and dignified, too elaborate chants and too secular hymn-tunes should both be carefully excluded.

Secondly, it is a mistake to introduce too many new chants and tunes. One new tune and one new chant each month are quite enough, perhaps more than enough. Nothing discourages a congregation more than constant introduction of new tunes—tunes which they never heard before, and which perhaps they never wish to hear again.

Thirdly, it is a wise plan to continue the same chants for the Canticles for four or five Sundays. The people grow accustomed to a chant after a Sunday or two, and will often sing it far more lustily at the end of the month than at the beginning.

Fourthly, the present system of rapid chanting and rapid hymn-singing is fatal to good congregational singing. The people cannot, and will not, be hurried. They must take their time over the chants and hymns. Not only do the fine old hymn-tunes lose much of their dignity and grandeur when unduly hurried, but the people are left far behind by the rapidity which in the present day seems so popular. There should be no hurry when we are singing praise to Almighty God. We should never forget that we should use the utmost reverence and deliberation when we join angels and archangels and all the hosts of heaven in offering praise and adoration to our Saviour and our Lord.

Lastly, congregational practices have been found to work well in some parishes. These practices might be held on a

week-day evening, and one of the clergy should always be present. A Collect and the Lord's Prayer might be said at the commencement, and a Collect and the Blessing might be said at the end. Then the chants and hymns for the whole month might be practised, and any new chants or hymns might be played over by the organist and studied by the congregation. The result would be that when Sunday came round a good proportion of the congregation would know exactly what was to be sung, and would be able to sing with increased confidence, and thus lead the more timid or unmusical of their brethren.

Passing on to the subject of hymns and hymn-tunes, one is almost bewildered by the number of hymn-books which are in use in the various churches. It is not our intention to advertise any special hymn-book, but we may say this without hesitation, that the three most popular hymn-books have, each of them, their own peculiar features and excellencies. They are the "Hymnal Companion," by Bishop Bickersteth; "Church Hymns," published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; and "Hymns Ancient and Modern." The musical portions of these books have all been carefully edited, and will be found more or less satisfactory.

Leaving the question of hymn-tunes, a few words about the hymns themselves may not be out of place. It is needless to say that hymns vary immensely, both as to their spirituality and also as to their fitness for being sung in public worship. There are many hymns, most beautiful, most edifying, and most helpful, which nevertheless appear to be more suitable for private devotion than for public worship. There are also hymns which, on account of the intense fervour of their language, can hardly be sung with sincerity and truth by a congregation at large. Again, there are hymns which are not hymns, but simply excellent specimens of grand sacred poetry; these so-called hymns are not really suited for worship, they give no praise to the Almighty, they offer Him no homage, they give Him no worship. They are often very beautiful and very touching poetical effusions, but they lack "the one thing

needful," personal homage to the Most High, the offering of praises to the Incarnate Saviour.

Hymns, again, should be simple in their diction, devout in their addresses to God, and free from all taint of false doctrine or of exaggerated sentiment. In a certain popular hymn-book there are to be found certain hymns which distinctly offend in these two respects.

There are hymns which are sung in certain churches which "sail very near the wind" (to use a popular expression), and which must be distasteful to all who love the simple evangelical teaching of the Book of Common Prayer. A very great and terrible responsibility lies on those persons who, especially in country parishes where the bulk of the congregation is simple and unlearned, and therefore uncritical, introduce hymns of this character and accustom their people to doctrines and expressions which are not warranted by Holy Scripture.

There is one other remark about hymns which it is necessary to make. It is this—that hymns should not be sung at one invariable speed. Each hymn has its own special characteristics, one is jubilant, another is sad ; one is full of hope, another is full of something like despair ; one is full of praise, another is full of confession and sorrow for sin. Therefore to sing all hymns which vary so much one from the other at one uniform pace is absolutely absurd. Once again, it is only too true that many persons, not only members of our choir, but also members of our congregations, are apt to think more of the music of the hymns than of their meaning. A favourite tune is sung ; we join in it heartily and gladly ; we enjoy our old favourite tune ; and too often we sing the hymn with not the slightest thought of the words to which the music is wedded. It was Bishop Mackenzie who once told Harvey Goodwin, afterwards Bishop of Carlisle, that it was he who first "taught him to think of the words of the hymns."

It is to be feared that a good many people, musical and otherwise, need to be taught that same lesson. Too often hymns are sung in a cold and perfunctory spirit ; too often the

music, which should assist our devotion, prevents us from offering real homage and praise to the Almighty. Especially should those who are members of church choirs, be earnestly and affectionately exhorted to sing "with the spirit," as well as with the voice. Especially should those, whose great privilege it is to *lead* the praises of the people, be exhorted not to allow their love of music to blind their eyes to the deep spirituality and reality of the hymns they sing.

In some churches good results have followed from allowing one or perhaps two verses in each hymn to be sung by the people alone, the choir remaining silent. This practice is not only a relief to the choir, but it gives confidence to the congregation. They know that they are responsible for these verses ; they feel that they must sing, or the result will be disastrous ; and so they learn to sing out manfully, and "with a good courage," and those foolish feelings of shyness and false modesty, which are sometimes to be met with in our congregations, are put to flight. Another excellent custom is to silence the organ for one or two verses. The effect is often, from a musical point of view, very pleasing and satisfactory, and both choir and congregation are emboldened to sing with courage and decision, although for a time deprived of the support which is given them by the organ. It is also a great assistance to congregational singing if the first and the last verses of each hymn be sung by the choir in *unison*, that is, without harmony. Unison singing is wonderfully effective, and it gives confidence and help to the congregation.

And now perhaps a few words may be said about anthems. There is a considerable difference of opinion as to whether anthems should ever displace hymns in any churches short of cathedrals. As in most other questions, so in this, there is a good deal to be said on both sides. Anthems are not congregational. While they are being sung, the congregation is necessarily silent ; but there is no reason why the people should not join in spirit, nor, while the choir is offering praise to God, why the people should not offer praise in their hearts. When

we listen to some tender and beautiful composition of Handel or of Mendelssohn, such compositions as "O rest in the Lord," or "He shall feed His flock," it is quite possible to lift up our hearts to God, and to drink in the messages which He sends, even though our voices are silent. So it should be with anthems. If occasionally, at Christmas, and Easter, and at other festivals, anthems are sung, it by no means follows that such anthems are unedifying and unspiritual as far as the congregation is concerned. It is quite possible for the devout soul to join in spirit with the sacred words which are being sung "to the honour and glory" of the Most High. But in the performance of anthems great care should be exercised, and stringent rules should be observed. The words of the anthem should be in the hands of the congregation. Those words should be simple and devotional. Great care should be taken that no anthems be attempted which are beyond the powers of the choir. Nothing is more painful than to hear the too ambitious efforts of too ambitious choirs. Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" and Haydn's "The Heavens are telling," have too often been ruthlessly murdered by choirs, who were perfectly incompetent to render such elaborate and difficult compositions.

There can be no question that the members of our church choirs are fond of having an occasional anthem. The perpetual repetition of the same old chants and hymn-tunes becomes unspeakably irksome to our choirs, and it is very difficult to insure their punctual attendance at the necessary practices unless they have, from time to time, an anthem to learn. It must also be admitted that it does give a little variety to the service, if at the greater festivals a short and devotional anthem be sung, with words appropriate to the occasion. There are many short and easy anthems, by English composers, which are both effective, in a musical sense, and which are also devotional and edifying. There is one portion of our services which is sometimes sung, and which is not always wedded to devotional and appropriate music, and that is the responses to the Commandments. A moment's thought will show us that these

responses are a very solemn and pathetic prayer to the Most High. They contain a two-fold petition. They ask for mercy for the past and help for the future. They should certainly be set to music which is both pathetic and devotional. How often is it just the reverse! The music of these responses is sometimes simply frivolous and jaunty. We ask God for "mercy" in accents which are almost secular. No music to the responses should be permitted, unless it is in strict accordance with the spirit of the words. Better let the responses be simply "said" than sung to inappropriate and unedifying strains.

To conclude : it is impossible to take too much care that the music which is used in public worship should be helpful to the worshippers, and not altogether unworthy of the Divine Being to Whom it is offered. Much care should be taken in the selection of the music and the hymns ; much care also in the selection of those who lead the praises of the congregation ; much care also that their behaviour in church should be reverent. It is so easy for members of our church choirs to grow careless and indifferent, and to sing the music in a listless and a perfunctory manner. Let the clergy help the choir, let the choir help, not stifle, the congregation, and the result will be, with God's blessing, a bright, a hearty, a devotional service. That is what every devout Churchman should aim at and pray for. Without God's blessing vain are all our attempts at effective rendering of sacred music, without prayer for His help our music will be as "sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal."



Literary Notes.

TIMES are changing for all, and one must adapt one's self to them as much as one's dignity will permit. Probably one of the most striking features of recent years in the world of books is in reference to what are known as "seasons." There used to be two and a half. I use the term advisedly. The two consisted of spring and autumn, while the half was the summer. The first lasted from about the middle of February until the end of June, starting mildly at the beginning, reaching its highest phase in March