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in a series of declaratory Acts (*i.e.*, measures which did not create new laws, but vindicated and enforced those already in existence) terminated for ever the Pope's jurisdiction in England.

MONTAGUE FOWLER.



ART. IV.—WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD HYMN TUNE?

IF the proud boast of the ancient Roman, "*Homo sum, nihil humanum a me alienum puto,*" may be freely expanded to mean that "nothing appertaining to the Church is outside the purview of *THE CHURCHMAN,*" it will form a perfectly adequate reason for devoting a few pages of that magazine to the consideration of the question above propounded. If we agree with the Bishop of Durham that "the praise of God is the soul and inspiration of worship,"¹ surely the vehicle by which that praise is to be offered, be it the words or the music, cannot but form a subject for serious thought. For more than thirty years it has been the writer's privilege to discharge, so far as that can be done by a layman, the duties of Precentor in one of the leading churches of a large manufacturing town in the North of England, in the midst of a population with whom singing appears to be almost a natural gift, so general is the aptitude shown for taking an intelligent share in the practice of the art of song, and where in consequence part-singing is cultivated to an extent greater than in any other district—some parts of Wales perhaps excepted—with which he is acquainted. And it is in the hope of promoting the careful consideration of what is not the least important portion of their duty by all those—whether of the clergy or the laity—to whom is entrusted the duty of selecting and arranging the music for the church they serve, that he thus ventures to submit to them some reflections suggested by so lengthened an experience, and to formulate the principles by which he has been guided.

It is by no means so easy a thing as at the first one would think it ought to be, to secure a good tune for every hymn. Too often "the tune in the book" is taken as the be-all and end-all of selection; and yet I am very sure that the compilers of those books themselves would be the first to acknowledge how, in the endeavour to provide each hymn

¹ Lenten Letter to his Clergy, 1896.

with its own special and appropriate tune, they had been embarrassed by the copiousness of the material at their disposal, how difficult had been the task of selection, and how often they had been but imperfectly satisfied with the tune on which, in the end, their choice had fallen. In all our collections alike can be traced the outcome of this sort of despairing effort to find as many tunes as there are hymns in the book; and the thought is inevitably suggested whether, after all, it might not be wise to revert to the older custom, and use fewer tunes—at any rate to the more ordinary metres. Hymns in new and peculiar metres may need to be fitted with new tunes; but how seldom do tunes thus written succeed in substantiating a claim to a place in the front rank, or become indissolubly associated with the words for which they were written! But when once a tune has thus taken its place, and become, as it were, part and parcel of the hymn, it ought to become a cherished possession of the whole Church, and not remain merely the private property of its composer, or of the proprietors of that particular compilation in which it first may have chanced to appear. To have contributed to the Church's store of song something that will live is high honour; and such a contribution ought surely to be exempted from the incidence of the ordinary laws of trade, which, if put in force, would narrow rather than widen its sphere of usefulness.

Good tunes are scarce, but when found they well repay the searcher for his trouble, and lighten the weariness of spirit induced by long plodding through the dreary wastes of many hymnals.

The main points for which we should look in a really good hymn tune are:—that it is appropriate to the words with which it is to be joined; that it is adapted to the requirements of those by whom it is to be sung; and that it should be suitable to the place in which, and to the purpose for which, it is to be used.

Little need be said on the first point; it is so evident that hymns should have “apt notes to sing them withal,”¹ or, to put it as broadly as possible, that hymns of penitence and prayer need different treatment from hymns of thanksgiving and praise, that it really needs no discussion or argument.

With the second point it is different. The requirements of those by whom the tune is to be sung vary greatly. It is beside our present purpose to discuss who are to sing in our churches, or argue on the use and influence of choirs; it is

¹ Sternhold and Hopkins' “Metrical Psalter,” title-page to first edition.

taken for granted that the entire congregation, or body of worshippers present, ought, in their measure, to take part in singing the hymns. I say "in their measure" advisedly; and without endorsing every word there said, I would quote the advice given as to congregational singing in the preface to the old "York Hymn-Book," in use at most of the churches in that city, with which I was familiar some thirty-five years ago: "Those whom God hath endowed with a clear voice and good understanding shall sing heartily to the glory of God and the edification of their neighbours: those who have but a poor voice or a dull ear shall sing moderately, so as to please themselves and not annoy others: while those who have no ear or a harsh voice shall maintain a rigorous silence, and thank God who hath better endowed their neighbours."

Were these recommendations to some extent carried out in our churches, it would effect a great improvement in the character of our congregational singing. The rough, untutored voices, now so often prominent, would be more subdued; they would sing with no less edification to themselves, and with decidedly more comfort to their neighbours; and the more cultivated voices, now often subdued, or even reduced to silence by the cacophony, would resume their rightful position. But those unskilled in music must for the most part form the majority of the congregations—at any rate, in our parish churches; and to this majority, unskilled though it be, our first consideration should be given in the choice of hymn-tunes; their understanding must be reached, their imagination must be excited, their sensibilities must be touched, if they are to join "in their measure" in the service of praise. And if they do not so join, not only has the tune missed its aim and object, and so far become a failure, but, by reason of their being thus enforcedly silent, the majority we are considering will begin to carp and criticise, and what should have been a means of edification has become a stumbling-block. To meet the capacity of those who thus sit "in the room of the unlearned," hymn-tunes should be plain, simple, and easy to follow. But they need not on that account be poor or commonplace. Crude harmonies, trivial melodies, ungraceful progressions, wherever they are heard, must jar upon the ears of educated musicians, and they, though the minority in our ordinary congregations, are a skilled minority, and have their rights as well as the unskilled majority, and these should not be ignored or treated as of no account. Musicians cannot divest themselves of their artistic sensibilities along with their hats on entering a church, nor do they lose the perception of what is true and beautiful in music because they happen to be engaged in an act of worship.

It does not follow that a hymn tune is a good one because it is sung with heartiness, and even fervour, by our congregations; to deserve the appellation "a good hymn tune," it must command the approval of musicians, as well as commend itself to the acceptance of the multitude. Happily, our people will not, as a rule, sing bad music: they may sometimes like commonplace, or even frivolous, tunes; but it will be found for the most part, if the experiment be fairly tried, that tunes of a high class, bold in outline and simple in detail, are the most easily learnt, and, once familiar, are sung with the greatest heartiness and pleasure. "Simple yet dignified" should be our motto in selecting hymns and tunes alike, if our choice is to be in any way worthy the majestic simplicity of the language of our Book of Common Prayer.

Our next point carries us a step further, and lifts our thoughts to a higher plane: our music should be suitable to the place in which, no less than to the purpose for which, it is to be used. Bright and joyous that music may well be which is employed to hymn the praise of God; but, again, this joyousness must be secured without any descent to triviality or approach to irreverence. I cannot do better than express this thought in the language of John Hullah, a man whose thoughtful and diligent labours did much to bring about a practical knowledge and appreciation of the true principles of Church music at a time when they were little understood, and even less regarded:—

"Religious music should have a character of its own whether it express strains of joy or sorrow, whether the goodness of God be sung or His mercy supplicated, the singer and the hearer should at once feel that they are not in the theatre, the concert-room, or the private chamber, but in the house of the Most High."

Considerations such as these would lead to the exclusion from our Church hymnals of all tunes poor in thought, weak in expression, and either decorously dull, or trivial or sensuous in their feeling. We all know tunes of this kind, which may be sung through time after time without exciting one look of interested animation in the face of any single singer; and tunes of another description which excite feelings not wanted in church. They would help us also to exclude all the whole tribe of "adaptations," or endeavours to press into the service of the Church music not written for such use. No doubt these endeavours are well intentioned and originate in a desire to utilize whatever is noble and beautiful for the service of the sanctuary; but there is equally little doubt that the ingenuity has been misapplied. Why should we introduce into "the house of the Most High," as fit vehicles for the expression of

His praise, students' or other songs,¹ phrases from operatic choruses,² excerpts from the instrumental or other works of such composers as Beethoven, Schubert, and Mendelssohn,³ or even themes from the oratorios of Handel and Costa,⁴ and the masses of Mozart?⁵

Broadly speaking, it seems unadvisable to admit into our public worship tunes with secular associations; and even those which are associated with sacred themes will inevitably distract the worshipper's attention as he listens for the resemblance to or variation from the original source whence the tune has been derived.

It will not do to press this rule too closely, and cut out every tune which we do not know to have been specially written for its purpose. Such a process might involve the exclusion of the venerable Gregorian tones, by some deemed specially ecclesiastical, and almost inspired in their character. The scales or "modes" in use at the time were certainly taken and set in order by Gregory the Great for Church use; and there is nothing improbable in the suggestion that, as "the people were familiar with the musical system adopted, so they were familiar with the very melodies they were set to sing." Doubt might be cast on the parentage of our glorious "Old Hundredth" itself. In a collection of "Pure Songs of Zion," published at Antwerp in 1540, the melodies set to these "pure songs" are called by the names of the secular ballads with which they had previously been associated; and the first strain of a melody there, entitled "I had chosen a lover whom I heartily loved," is identical with that of the "Old Hundredth." And it would certainly lead to the exclusion of many of the noble German chorales, which are notoriously drawn from secular sources. Not to mention others, the familiar and very beautiful "Passion Chorale" (No. 111 A. and M.; 172 H. C., 2nd ed.) is note for note identical with a love-song to be found harmonized by Leo Hasler in a collection published in 1601, twenty years before the earliest trace of it is found in a chorale-book for Church

¹ "Integer vitæ," Flemming, 10 App. Hym. Com., new edit. "Home, Sweet Home," 35 Leeds Mission Hymn Book.

² "Light as fairy foot can fall," from Weber's "Oberon," 224 App. Hym. Com., 198, 2nd edit.

³ Andante from Pianoforte Sonata, Op. 14, No. 2, Beethoven, 42 Hym. Com., 2nd edit. Song, "Die Forelle," Schubert, 508 Hym. Com., 2nd edit. "Songs Without Words," Mendelssohn, 97 Hym. Com., 2nd edit.; retained in new edit.

⁴ "He shall feed His flock," from "The Messiah," Church Hymns, 351. "March of the Israelites," from Costa's "Eli," 32 Hym. Com., 2nd edit.; retained in new edit.

⁵ "Kyrie," from Twelfth Mass, Mozart, 9 Hym. Com., 2nd edit.; retained in new edit.

use. And it would most certainly disqualify the tune to which most of those who may read this paper sang "Hark! the herald-angels sing" last Christmas Day (No. 60 A. and M.; 78 H. C.). That melody is part of a work written by Mendelssohn to celebrate the tercentenary of the invention of the art of printing, and is a part-song for men's voices in praise of "Gutenberg the able man"! As a rule, tunes of this kind, with living secular associations, should be held disqualified for admission into our public services; while those of which the secular associations are lost or dead *may*—though by no means *must*—be admitted therein: for the fewer secular tunes we introduce, and the more we cultivate tunes specially written for the purposes of public worship, the better shall we preserve the reverent character of our service of praise.

For, after all, the great purpose of our hymn-singing is not to give pleasure to ourselves, but to offer praise to God. "Let us sing to the praise and glory of God" used to be the invariable formula prefacing the giving-out of a psalm or hymn—a formula now fallen into disuse, and one which it might not be either possible or advisable to revive. Nevertheless it had its use: it served as a constant reminder to minister and people alike that they were about to engage in an act of worship when singing a hymn; that they were not going to sing it merely to fill a pause in the service, and allow time for the preacher to ascend the pulpit, or cover the clang of the coins falling into the plates as an offertory is being taken. The practice is very general, but it does seem a little out of place to utilize the singing of a hymn in order to effect either of these objects, for the church officers making the collection in the one case, and the preacher ascending the pulpit in the other, are separated from the general body of the worshippers, and almost seem to intimate that in this portion of the service they have no share. To keep in mind the purpose for which our hymn tune is to be used will prevent our belittling that purpose by permitting any carelessness or triviality either in the music or its performance, and, on the other hand, will prevent our allowing the beauty of outward form and expression to usurp the place of that worship of the heart which alone can make our service of praise "an acceptable service."

S. H. RAMSBOTHAM.

