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ABOUT CHURCH MUSIC.

THE important debate which, history says, separated into factions some of the hair-splitting casuists of one period of the early Church—namely, how many angels could dance on the point of a needle—did not wage more furiously than have various questions relating to the proper and improper in church music. Some would have organs; some would not. One would have an anthem—another speaks of the anthem as a “performance.” One brother likes an organ voluntary during the collection, “to cover up the ringing of the coppers;” the occupant of the adjoining pew is quite sure the voluntary is a subtle invention of the enemy. One denomination will sing no hymn; but only “the Psalms of David,” done up sometimes in stove-pipe metrical lengths fearfully and wonderfully put together. Deacon B. prefers his tunes “slow and stately,” after the style of an undertaker’s procession; Deacon D. likes them “lively.” Such are some of the diversities of opinion on the subject of church music.

We propose to make a few remarks on this important subject. We hardly hope for universal assent to our opinions. Nor is that necessary. Our aim is to call forth expressions of opinion on the subject, in the hope that yet more may be done to improve the service of song in our churches.

And first, *the object and spirit* of the musical portion of the service should ever be kept in mind. The object is to make and deepen religious impressions. The spirit in which all concerned should take their parts is the spirit of devotion, of reverence, of desire to be instrumental in doing some good.

Then, *the mutual relations of Church and choir* are not unimportant. The choir should have the sympathy, the good-will, the charitable criticism, of the members of the church and congregation. Only those who have had experience of the matter know how much time and patience are consumed in the task of blending together into harmonious cadences the voices of ill-trained amateur singers.

Further, *the pastor and the choir leader should work together*. The pastor can often be of essential service in paving the way for some needed reform; in persuading the people to sing with “the understanding also;” or, like Spurgeon, in discouraging the congregation from the too-frequent method of singing joyous sentiments plaintively and plaintive sentiments boisterously.

Then again, as to *hymn-tunes*. There is no other division of the church music question comparable in importance with this. On the

whole, we know of no collection of tunes of equal merit, and so calculated to be of solid service, as the Rev. Henry Allon’s “HYMN AND TUNE BOOK,” particularly the later and fuller English edition. In it will be found hymns adapted to all tastes and needs. Here are the old standard tunes like “FRENCH,” “ARNOLD,” “BALLERMA,” “OLD HUNDRED,” “MARINERS,” “BOYLSTON,” and many others, strong either in themselves, or by association.

Here, also, are tunes of a more modern type—including such excellent compositions as “AJALON,” wonderfully suited to the words to which it is set:

“Bread of Heaven, on thee I feed,
For thy flesh is meat, indeed;”

“CAPERNAUM,” in somewhat the same style; and “MELITA,” a delightful study. Here, also, are tunes like “MULHAUSEN,” calm, stately, and satisfying; “MUNICH,” in the German chorale style; and “UPSAL,” which we defy anyone to sing cheerfully to appropriate words without being both soothed and strengthened. In the choice of hymn-tunes there is abundant room for the display of talent, tact, and wise consideration. The lover of the modern tunes must not too violently trample on the feelings of the good brother who naturally asserts that the familiar tunes he has long known are the best. They may be endeared to him by a thousand memories of the living and the dead. But, on the other hand, for the conservative in these matters to wish to shut out the more modern tunes, is something like our friends of a sister denomination in refusing the help and solace of our magnificent modern hymnology altogether. If the English Congregationalists have nobly solved the question of hymn-tunes in the collection quoted, not less nobly have they met the still more important question of the hymns themselves, in the supplemented collection now universally in use in England, and which should be in use in every one of our Canadian churches.

Again, in three out of four of our churches *the hymns are sung too slow*. Professional singers are trained to accuracy of time, and to a sustained pitch. This it is all but impossible to find in the amateurs who ordinarily fill our choirs. The following is a statement that observation will amply confirm:—“*Choirs that sing slowest are generally faultiest both in time and tune*.” It is bad enough to have people fall asleep under a sermon that is too long or too prosy. But, it is worse when what ought to be the most joyous part of the service is also soporific in its tendency.

We should add a few words on the use of anthems and voluntaries but for the present we forbear. We hope, however, to take up this subject again in a future issue. Meanwhile, we await the frank expression of our friends’ opinions on this subject, and hope that the thorough ventilation of the question will secure a much needed improvement in our church services.

OUR PRISONS AND COMMON
GAOLS.

OUR prisons and county gaols have been very much improved within the last few years. There are some people—obstructionists we are forced to call them—who think that this work of improvement would better have been left undone. They say that, in so far as these institutions are concerned, “the worse the better;” and their reasons for coming to this conclusion are that bad gaol accommodation has a tendency to keep people from committing crime, and that any improvement in this respect is only offering a premium on wrong-doing. We beg to differ with these over-wise people. We admit that a hardened criminal has sometimes been known to break a pane of glass or commit some other minor offence with the avowed object of being “sent down” for a short time to avoid starvation; but we deny that the hope of getting into gaol ever tempted anybody to a criminal course; and we also deny that the improvements made have any tendency in that direction. As a matter of fact it is well known that the commission of crime for the sake of getting into gaol was more common in by-gone days than it is now; and to those who understand the nature and objects of the improvements made, the reason is obvious. Under the new arrangements there is more seclusion than there was under the old; cleanliness and correct habits of living are enforced; and hard labour is duly recognized as the normal state of existence for fallen man. To a low, gross, sensual nature, such as most criminals have, these changes are anything but inviting. The more closely we examine the details of these improvements as set forth in Mr. Langmuir’s report, the more we are convinced, not only that they have not been the means of increasing crime, but that they are well calculated to diminish crime, to protect society, and to reform the criminal. One of the chief objects in view in the rebuilding and altering of gaol structures was the proper classification of the inmates. Now, the attainment of this object alone is enough to justify all the expenditure that has been incurred. As it was, all classes—both sexes, the expert and the tyro in crime, the sane and the insane, the convicted and the suspected, the guilty and the innocent—were huddled together, so that the young and comparatively innocent were corrupted by the more hardened, till in the course of time the wickedness of the worst became the common character of all. It was in the old gaols that criminals were trained; it was there that the science and art of crime were cultivated and brought to perfection; and it was there that many, who had stumbled and fallen once in their path, and under better influences would perhaps have done so no more, were hardened and bound over to a course of crime, a life of misery, and an eternity of woe. Surely the consequences would have been very serious