

## Portfolio of Select Literature.

### CONGREGATIONAL SINGING.

We have good reason for supposing that the psalmody of the Jewish church was very elaborate and impressive, and that the nation at large were proficient in musical science; but we must not press these facts too closely in our consideration of the present subject. The age was, pre-eminently, one of type and symbol; and a splendid and costly ritual seems to have been required by the circumstances of the people. It is sufficiently obvious, that the precedents of Judaism will not in this case apply without qualification to Christianity, which is far less dependent than its predecessor on the externals of worship.

And yet those who allege that such matters as time and correctness are of no moment in the performance of modern sacred music,—that in fact, spirituality is the sole essential,—are hardly aware of the distracting effect often produced on the mind of a musician, or even of a person of good general taste and education, by rude and noisy singing, even though it be redeemed, in some measure by earnestness and feeling. It is neither possible nor desirable that church-music should, as a general rule, compete scientifically with that of the oratorio or opera. Neither the psalmody, the poetry, nor the architecture of the sanctuary should be excessively elaborate. The highest art admits on the contrary, of extreme simplicity. Complex chants, whatever their musical merits or demerits, are certainly more or less inimical to what most of us rightly deem a far grander thing,—the singing of an entire congregation. Yet, if this be sufficiently chaste and simple there is no necessity for its being, in any sense of the term, coarse or slovenly in execution.

It would seem sufficiently obvious, that, if the upper classes of society refuse to take their part in this or in any other public duty, the result must be the infusion of a large amount of vulgarity and tastelessness into its performance. On these individuals, therefore, devolves, in a great measure, the task of reforming the style of congregational singing. The educated classes are a part of the general congregation; and it is extremely unjust for them to complain of the musical blunders of the rest, while they themselves do their best to perpetuate these, simply by refusing to take their own proper part in the service of song. Yet, we should be sorry to encourage, in any, a disposition to undertake this duty from merely musical motives; and good taste alone should be sufficient to discourage anything approaching to display. If the subject be regarded simply from a scientific point of view, the musical variations to which we are constantly compelled to listen are, as a rule, anything but improvements on the original melodies. We confess to have been at times heretical enough to think that some even of these latter might be advantageously rendered lighter, and more easy of execution. At all events, in whatever else it may be lacking, congregational singing should unquestionably