

The threat (or the promise) of a permanent orchestra in the next world did the trick. Four hundred of the congregation voted in favour of hardening themselves to the orchestra on earth, while thirty worshippers, who at first refused, withdrew their objection, and thus wisely made the vote unanimous. Personally, I cannot understand why an orchestra (always supposing it to be a competent one) should be deemed less suitable as an accompaniment to divine worship than an organ. Moreover it is an English custom; for before money to purchase an organ has been raised by the vicar or congregation many a country church boasted its performers on the viol, the flute, and the recorder in the days of our ancestors, and its village wind band even in our times.*

Music and Worship.*

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"The Beauty of the Lord our God be upon us."
PSALM XCIV.



HERE was a day in the history of Florence, many centuries ago, when through her famous streets there swept an unpremeditated procession of triumph, with singing, and thanksgiving, and every sign of joy. No victory had been won, no prince was born; it was not an anniversary, or a festival of Church or State. A painter had finished a picture; that was all; and at the sight of its glorious beauty his fellow citizens, transported by an irresistible impulse of admiration and wonder, lifted it from its place, and carried it rejoicing through the streets, to its home above the altar of their great church. And so memorable a day was that, so deep the impression it left upon Florence, that the part of the city through which the picture was carried is called "Borgho Allegri" (The Road of Beauty) even until now.

It is not unlikely, that to the mind of the practical Englishman such a story may sound a little absurd. He does not greatly like sudden outbursts of popular feeling, even when they are called forth by some important event; and that a whole population should be stirred to enthusiasm over a picture seems to him to show a childishness and impulsiveness of character for which he has no admiration, indeed, but scanty tolerance. The value of the picture in the market would interest him much more than the enthusiasm of the Florentines over its beauty.

We have touched assuredly, a weak point in our national character. We have

*A sermon preached at the festival of choirs, in King's College Chapel, Cambridge, on Thursday, May 28th 1891.

not as a people, a keen appreciation of the beautiful; and we are inclined to smile at these old Florentines because they had, and were not ashamed to show, the feeling which we lack ourselves. It would be wiser to recognize that our want of it is a real defect than to try to believe it a virtue. For beauty is a sacrament of God, a fragment of His perfect splendour revealed to our dim sight. And every endeavour on man's part to shape or to set forth a beautiful thing is an attempt to give form and colour to his thought of God. In so far as he succeeds, he has done a thing no less useful to the people than if he had drained a marsh, or bridged a river. We thank God for the success of such works, and we do well. But the beautiful embodying of a beautiful thought is a thing to rejoice in, and to praise God for, no less than these. A great poem is not less of a treasure than a great invention; a noble picture is as priceless a national possession as the sword of a conquered king. Shakespeare, Handel, Michael Angelo, these were prophets of God, and servants of man as true and as illustrious as were ever George Stephenson, or Nelson, or Lord Shaftesbury. The poet, the musician, the painter, are our benefactors no less than the scientist, the warrior, and the statesman. Through them our eyes see something of the King in His beauty; through them the beauty of the Lord our God—though it be but in fragments, as the sunshine falls through stained windows upon this chapel floor—through them that supreme beauty is upon us.

Hence all great art has been inspired by, and has expressed, religious feeling. The greatest masterpieces of painting, of sculpture, of poetry, of music, are one and all attempts to embody religious truth in an external form; to convey some inward spiritual idea through its outward and apparent symbol. Art is sacramental; and the conscience of Christendom has ever recognized and employed it in the service of God.

Even among ourselves the value of art, as an attempt to show further something of the ineffable beauty of God is becoming more fully understood. We are naturally, and rightly considering our history, very sensitive to the dangers of an aesthetic worship. We fear that some peril of idolatry still lurks in a reredo, or that superstition lingers in a vestment. But in spite of this deep-rooted and not altogether groundless prejudice, the change which has taken place during the last half century in our church and chapel services is proof sufficient to show that even among people of Puritan inheritance and tradition, it is found impossible to shut art out of worship. It gradually asserts its right; it slowly but steadily makes its way back to its home in the religious feelings and highest aspirations of men. It is well that we should jealously guard the purity of spiritual worship, and

keep the externals of Church service in their rightful place. But they have a rightful place. They are not opposed to spiritual worship, but are rather its expression and ministry. They are capable of abuse; but they have a high and most sacred usefulness. "What is falsely called a spiritual worship," says Ruskin, "is an attempt to evolve and sustain devotion from isolated powers of the spirit, that were never meant to stand alone. That God is a spirit has not hindered Him from shaping the vault of night, and hanging it with stars, or from clothing the earth with its beauty. They are the works of His creativeness; the appeal of His beauty to our hearts."

There is one branch of art which has always been recognized as foremost among means and helps to devotion. We broke the sculptured figures and painted glories of the saints, that formerly looked down upon the kneeling congregations; but we still sang psalms. We covered over the old frescoes upon the church walls with whitewash and plaster; but we developed a noble English school of anthem and service-music. Even poetry was banished from our Prayer-book, so far as that was possible, when the old hymns were dropped out of it. But music has always remained. The practice of the cathedrals and larger parish churches carrying out as it did the express direction of the rubrics in the Prayer-book, witnessed to the original intention of the Reformers, and to the ineradicable instincts of the people. Our English Church service was meant to be a musical service; and, however imperfectly, the tradition has always been preserved among us. We rejected painting; we destroyed sculpture; we would have none of the divers colours of needlework; we preferred the prosaic and halting measure of Tate and Brady, to the wealth of poetry enshrined in the ancient Latin hymns. But we kept our music. English psalm tunes are the noblest Church medodies in the world; English cathedral music is a development purely national, of the highest artistic value and the deepest religious interest. Through this department of religious art, if scarcely through any other, the beauty of the Lord our God has been upon us.

1. Music is, in the first place, the voice of God to the soul. There are other ways, of preaching the Gospel than by speaking from the pulpit. A singer, filled with the power and the pathos of some great spiritual song, can touch the hearts of men who would listen unmoved to the most eloquent of sermons. The voice of the organ or of the orchestra, interpreting the consecrated thought of a great composer, has carried home, often and again, the message of the Cross of Christ. The strange, uplifting power of a mighty chorus is familiar to us all; not one of us but has felt it; most of us have known it in this place. And in the passion of the singer