

## Marvellous Power of Church Music

(Continued.)

The mind of the church was well expressed in a letter of the Congregation of Rites to the Italian Bishops in 1884:

"Figured vocal music which is allowed by the Church is that only whose grave and pious strains are suited to the house of the Lord, to the divine praises, and which, by following the meaning of the sacred words, helps to excite the people to devotion." Thus it is obvious that we are not obliged to exclude all modern music from use at our services. None the less, it cannot be doubted that the attitude of the Church towards modern music is one of toleration, while her generous and unhesitating approbation is reserved for what she considers properly her own—the Gregorian Chant. Judging from the conditions that confront us, especially in our own country, one might well suppose that the facts were reversed; that the church had given her official recommendation to modern music for the churches, and had relegated the Gregorian Chant to monasteries and seminaries.

It is pleasant, however, to be able to say that in other lands conditions are giving some promise of righting themselves. In 1868 the eminent Dr. Witt formed the society of the Coecilian-Verein, to clear the church of what he called "unholy, and, for the most part, blasphemous music," and the efforts of this Favianian priest, as representing a protest against against the prevailing condition of Church music, were blessed by Pius IX. The Rev. Father Haberl, the noted choir-master of Ratisbon, has labored consistently and zealously for a wider diffusion of the true ideals of ecclesiastical music. In France, the Benedictines of Solesmes, who have, indeed, never in their long career compromised with the genius of "godly music," have for some years past been especially occupied with a thorough historical and scientific study of the chant, with the view of making its restoration possible.

In the British Isles, too, the place of the chant is becoming more appreciated. I have already referred to the London Tablet as a prominent organ of the new agitation. Almost weekly it contains forceful articles on the subject, indicating that the importance of good church music is felt throughout the kingdom. At Westminster Cathedral one may hear, on any Sunday, the beautiful strains of the Solesmes Chant sung by a well-trained choir of boys and men. Across the channel, in Dublin, at the pro-cathedral, a chancel choir has been organized, which renders the liturgical music with great effect.

With such achievements—or at least beginnings—before our eyes, why may we not be encouraged to undertake similar works in this country?

Clearly, it cannot be urged in opposition to the longed-for revival, that the plain chant is a thing of the past, for as long as the Mass retains its liturgical construction it has had from venerable antiquity, so long the chant, which was created and perfected for no other purpose than to fit the liturgy, must remain the peculiar and the most worthy companion of the noble religious service of the church.

But, to come to a further consideration, ecclesiastical music demands an ecclesiastical choir. Beyond the demand for a strictly ecclesiastical music, there is a necessity for an appropriate and unique rendering of the chant; a necessity based upon the philosophical fact of the power of association. An opera, dragged from the stage, chopped to pieces, and sung in concert form, without setting or special costuming, loses much of its force. A part then, the ecclesiastical chant can have its full effect only if it be rendered in special, appropriate surroundings; and its only true setting, its native place, is the Sanctuary.

It would seem that there can scarcely be two opinions on this matter. Granted the necessity of a distinctively ecclesiastical music, the necessary complement is a distinctively ecclesiastical rendering, and such a rendition, of course, means a boy-choir placed in the Sanctuary.

But here is the crux of the situation. Here begins the flood of objections, here enters the element of prejudice, here are exposed the not unnatural pride and pique and selfishness that militate so strongly against any radical change in the existing scheme. One cannot advocate a Sanctuary boy-choir without

arguing for the abolition of the mixed choir, and it would be no enviable distinction to be the prominent object of attack of all the individuals whose glory and pride and profit are involved in the permanence of the existing condition. And yet we cannot dissemble; we will not minimize the consequences of an advocacy of a general adoption of boy-choirs. It means, to say it plainly, the abolition of at least the "better half" so to speak, of the mixed choirs. Compromise we can see none. Apart from the impossibility of inviting women into the sanctuary, we are forced to maintain that the feminine voice, even at its glorious best, lacks just the essential timbre that is demanded in true church music. It is an undeniable fact that the boy's voice contains this element and is immeasurably better adapted for the singing of sacred music. This is the frank statement of our idea on the subject, and having discharged our shot, we are glad to retire for a moment, under cover of the defence of an undoubtedly eminent authority—no less a musician than Madame Melba. She had just sung at the Solesmes Mass in a certain church, and the clergy were, naturally enough, spicing the expression of their gratitude with compliments and with wishes that such a glorious voice as hers might contribute often to the dignity and grandeur of the divine service. Imagine their surprise and chagrin when the prima donna gently rebuked them, convicting them of lack of taste in permitting any female voice to be heard during the sacred solemnity of the Mass! She said that the boy's voice was much purer and sweeter, and altogether more suited for religious services; that the surplined choir was more in keeping with the sacred character of the ceremonies, and that a woman's voice, trained to perfection though it be must of necessity remain to this day unfitted for the peculiar function of interpreting the spirit of strictly sacred music.

The point is undeniably well taken; the timbre of the voices of a mixed choir does not differ from that of the voices that we are accustomed to hear at secular amusements, while on the other hand, in the tones of a trained boy-choir, we have something distinct; something which we begin to associate, not from habit alone, but from instinct, with the Sanctuary and its music. A mixed choir is bound to lead our thoughts to the organ loft, while a chancel choir, by its location; its appeal to the eye, its tone quality, by its tout ensemble, holds our attention to the progress of the sacred ritual. Instead of defying the philosophical principle of the association of ideas, we ought to cherish it, use it, summon it to serve the lofty purpose of raising the mind even to the contemplation of the things of God.

But now we are come into contact with the eternal and inevitable objections. "Well enough," says the sceptic, "to talk about the ideal possibilities of the boy's voice, but the plain hard fact is that the chest voice of the ordinary boy can never be so modified and refined as to become fit for public singing." Now we dare maintain that, in spite of longstanding suspicions to the contrary, boys, and ordinary boys, can be trained to sing with superb flexibility and sweetness. And again, we are glad to take refuge behind the authority of a few great names—Barnby, Stainer, Curwen, Whitney, Roney—who have devoted the energy and attention of years to this branch of their profession, and declare it to be their experience that it is possible to train any healthy, every-day boy to sing in the proper register. The almost universal use of the chancel choir in the Anglican Church is in itself a great proof of the possibilities of the boy's voice. Boys can develop voices full of such sweetness as can be found nowhere else—this is a fact not generally known among our people; preconceived notions are against it, and, consequently, many are sceptical and slow to receive it.

A prominent organist of one of our large cities once said to the writer that it was impossible to bring a boy's voice above F on the fifth line. If this were true, the most ordinary music would extend beyond the boys' range, and the question of their employment in the church would be closed; but it is not true; had that same gentleman gone the next Sunday to a certain church not far distant from his own, he would have heard the soprano boys soar to a high A with the utmost ease and

perfect grace. While, when necessity demands, many boys can take B flat with facility; indeed, the writer has heard, at a choir rehearsal, sing a high C sharp without apparent difficulty. It has been well said by a recognized authority, that "there is no top to a boy's voice." No; the possibility of training boys to sing acceptably and with effect presents no difficulty.

"But did you ever hear a boy choir flat?" asks our sceptical friend. Yes; but a skillful choir-master can so train the boys that they will never fall from the given key; while—with regard to the women, the writer has a very vivid recollection of the futile attempts of a great Catholic musician of this country to soften the piercing tone-quality of his sopranos. And not once or twice, but as often as occasion brought him to a certain Cathedral Church, he had heard a Catholic Sanctuary choir sing unaccompanied long psalms, offertories, processional anthems, etc., without departing at all from the original pitch. Another—a non-Catholic choir with which he is familiar—sings every Wednesday evening in Lent a long Litany in procession, without the organ, always maintaining throughout the given pitch. To say that a boy-choir can sing Bach's music without flattening, is to allege a strong argument in favor of the boys; and yet this is no extraordinary feat for many an Anglican choir. And we ought not to be ashamed to take courage from what is done outside. But why defend something which is in no need of defence? It is a fact that boys have been and are daily being trained to sing difficult music with facility and grace. This is enough.

Sometimes pastors urge the difficulty of forming such choirs as a sufficient reason for not making an attempt. This difficulty, in the majority of cases, is purely imaginary, for the average city Church has a Sunday-school and some sodality for the men. Here are the means both to organize the choir and keep it replenished with fresh voices; the Sunday-school will furnish the boys and the sodality the men. Pastors make a mistake in thinking large choirs necessary. There are but few churches in America where a choir of thirty boys and fifteen men would not be ample. In the great Anglican Cathedral of St. Paul, in London, the choir numbers only fifty-four voices—thirty-six boys and eighteen men; and yet the seating capacity is more than six thousand!

But a more serious question is that of the choir-master. "Where shall we get," the pastor asks, "an instructor who has the necessary qualifications?" This is a matter which lies almost entirely in the hands of those in authority. When pastors insist on having the strict ecclesiastical music sung by chancel choirs, then musicians will have to qualify themselves. It is true that at present there are not many organists who are familiar with the chant, but the demand will create the supply. If Catholic musicians realized that their success and livelihood depended upon a thorough knowledge of the chant, and the principles of chancel-choir training, they would not delay long considering the matter. Let our priests once take a firm stand in favor of the Gregorian, and there will be no dearth of competent organists and choir-masters.

Clearly, the objections which are urged against the chancel choir are not of a serious character. Prejudice in favor of the existing scheme naturally blinds many to the advantages of a choir the introduction of which into our churches means such a complete change. But that the chancel choir is the ideal vehicle of ecclesiastical music there can be no doubt. And it is not an air-drawn ideal; it has been practically tested even in our own country.

Since 1871 there has been a distinctive choir singing distinctive music at the Church of St. Paul the Apostle, New York City. For thirty-two years this choir has sung with undisputed success the Gregorian Chant, both for the Proper and Ordinary of the Mass. It was organized by Rev. Alfred Young, C.S.P., with the official approbation of Archbishop McCloskey. At present the choir consists of fifty-one boys and twenty-seven men, who are trained to sing the entire Gregorian service of every Sunday and holiday.

At the Church of the Assumption, Morristown, N.J., there is a very good Sanctuary choir. It was formed in 1832 by the Very Rev. Dean Flynn, and sings the chant, and the common is selected from the works of such eminent ecclesiastical composers as Gounod, Silas, etc.

The archdiocese of Boston possesses some very promising boy-choirs. The choir at the Cathedral, under the direction of Mlle. de la Motte, has

achieved many musical triumphs. The scope of its work is rather limited, however, for it sings only the Proper of the Mass and the Responses. The choir is best known, perhaps, for its magnificent rendering of the sublime offices of Holy Week.

The St. James' chancel choir was organized about fourteen years ago by Rev. William P. McQuaid, with Miss Mary Roche as instructress; it is made up usually of twenty-four boys and eighteen men. It is an auxiliary choir, and sings only the Proper of the Mass and the Anti-phones, and alternate verses of the Psalms at Vespers.

St. Vincent Church, South Boston, boasts of an excellent choir. Unlike the choirs of the Cathedral and St. James' Church, this chorus of boys and men sings to the accompaniment of the organ. It was organized by Father O'Donnell, in 1880, and its success is due in great measure to his untiring zeal. The choir numbers seventy-five voices, and under the direction of the Pastor, Rev. George Patterson, and the prefect of music, Rev. John H. Lyons, it has made remarkable progress.

A large choir of boys and men was organized at the Mission Church, Roxbury, last fall. The choir-master, Mr. Francis O'Brien, formerly of the Gesu, Philadelphia, holds daily rehearsals, and the choir is fast becoming a model. The purity of tone of the soprano boys is quite remarkable. The choir can sing the entire service either in Gregorian or in modern music. Under the auspices of the well-known rector of the Church, Rev. John Frawley, C.S.S.R., its success is assured.

For many years there has been a chancel choir in the Cathedral at Albany, N.Y. It was founded in 1853 by Father Wadhams, afterwards Bishop of Ogdensburg. The chorists together with the altar boys form one society, known as the Cathedral Sanctuary Society. The choir was heard at its best, perhaps, at the consecration of the Cathedral last fall.

At St. Patrick's Church, Albany, there is also a promising choir. Mr. Maher, the organist and director, has been very successful with his boys and men. As at the Cathedral, the chancel choir sings only a part of the service. It is a pity that the scope of the work of such choirs is not wider.

In almost every diocese there are some boy-choirs, which sing parts of the services. In addition to those already mentioned we might add the choirs of the Buffalo, Rochester and the New York Cathedrals. At Trinity Church, Georgetown, D.C., a boy-choir has been recently organized, which is to render the entire service. This choir is trained by Mr. George H. Wells, who is a great enthusiast for the restoration of the chant.

In drawing this article to a close, the writer wishes to call the attention of the reader once more to the spiritual end which church music should achieve, and to point out again that in order to reach the standard set by the church we must have distinctive music sung by distinctive choirs. There has been some enthusiasm for reform shown, but it is insignificant when compared with the almost universally prevailing indifference.

A word to those who are working for the amelioration of conditions in this country: let your watchword be "vigor." Enthusiasm in a right cause is bound to effect some good, and energy expended in endeavoring to restore to the Church of the twentieth century the sublime melodies of the Church of the middle ages, will be energy spent in a work most acceptable to God and sure to merit his blessing. With the young maestro of the Papal choir, let us rejoice that "the cause of sacred music possesses such an enthusiastic patron as His Holiness." The Abbe Perosi declares that next year "a far-reaching movement for the study and execution of plain chant will be inaugurated under the auspices of Pius X." Truly a happy preparation for the centenary of Gregory the Great, which is to be celebrated in 1904!

—William Joseph Finn, in the Catholic World Magazine.

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## OLD PUBLICATIONS.

(By a Regular Contributor.)

Last week I furnished some lengthy extracts from the preface to the quaint and unknown poem of James Sylvius Law, entitled "The Irish Catholic." The preface explained pretty clearly why and under what circumstances and influences the four first cantos, and subsequently the last canto of the poem were written. I will now take a few extracts from the poem itself; just enough to give an idea of the style, form and spirit of the composition. It might be well, however, to first state the principal points of the poem's plan. In other words, a synopsis of the subject-matter of each canto will suffice.

**FIRST CANTO**—The introduction or opening of the poem. Then a retrospect of Ireland in the early ages of Christianity; the character of the Irish Catholic; his name illustrious in various nations. This is followed by a survey of later times; the Penal Laws; their attendant evils; an apostrophe to Erin. Then comes an account of the picturesque distresses of the Irish Royalists, at the time of the Revolution; finally a spirited address to the Muse of Liberty, and a prayer for better days.

**SECOND CANTO**—This canto opens with painful reflections addressed to Erin; and the Muse of Elogy interrogated. Ireland is questioned respecting her misfortunes. The causes attributed to the persecution of Catholics. The poet here refers to the patriotism of the Irish Royalists; then he addresses the Irish Catholics, and the Ministers of Great Britain; cautionary reasoning to the latter; their conduct contrasted with impartiality of Nature to creation: Man was created free, and should neither be tyrannized over nor enslaved.—Man alone guilty of partiality and injustice in regard to his fellow-creatures.

**THIRD CANTO**—Britons are called upon to remember the favors conferred on them by Heaven, and their own unkind behavior to the Irish Catholic; the uselessness of suing for mercy in the hour of calamity, when the claimants are not mercifully inclined; his crime more pardonable who enslaves the sable African, than the conduct of those who make religion a pretext for persecution; what the Irish Catholic has endured since the revolution. Here comes an address to Limerick, with remarks respecting its treaty. Catholicity, seeing the distresses of her votaries, exhorts them to demand Justice and Emancipation of the English legislators. The canto closes with the Muse calling the attention of the reader to a newly risen luminary.

**FOURTH CANTO**—An address to the Prince Regent. (This was written in 1812). The dangers of Monarchy and the evils that surround the King are pictured. Figures of interrogatory and reply—what a King truly is—comparisons of a monarch to various things according to the eccentricity of his character—the good and bad Sovereigns contrasted—the Prince admonished and advised respecting the mode of conduct proper to pursue, in order to secure the affections of his people, and to establish his government should he live to become a King. This is followed by some fine passages concerning the two paths to the Temple of Fame; caution against adulation and flattery; faction to be suppressed, and avoided as a malicious enemy to the welfare of Princes and the good of nations. The canto ends with a detailed account of the expectations of the Irish Catholic.

**FIFTH CANTO**—This last canto is certainly the most interesting, as far as the present is concerned, and especially in regard to the paramount questions with which we are most intimate. The poet begins by congratulating Hibernia on the happy changes which have taken place among her children—the cause attributed to liberality and philanthropy—the dissolution of Disunion and Bigotry—the fallen state of Orangeism—its total abolition predicted—the triumph of Innocence over its fall—Erin's former and present state (in 1812) contrasted—her happy state—the glorious consequences

of patriotism and national love. This all leads up to the grand central idea of the whole poem—Emancipation. The poet describes its rapid progress occasioned by the union of the three principal religions in Ireland, represented under the similes of a Shamrock. Then comes gratulations to the Earl of Fingall, and the other Catholic patriots who espoused the cause of their country—praise bestowed on the Protestant nobleman who advocated Catholic Emancipation—the Marquis of Downshire, Grattan, Ponsonby, Fitzwilliam, Moira. Moira's conduct commented on; division between hope and fear respecting him; the Catholic expectations from him. Finally the Irish Catholic is addressed on his success; and the poem closes with an apostrophe to Erin.

**THE WHOLE SUBJECT**—In the foregoing brief synopsis of the subject matter, the reader has a pretty fair idea of the trend of this peculiar and (strange to say) entirely forgotten, or unknown, poem. No place in all my readings of Irish literature have I ever met with an extract from it, nor even a reference to it. It must have been well known in the early part of the nineteenth century; and still not one of the galaxy of writers on "The Nation" ever seemed to have read it—otherwise, surely some extracts, or quotations, would be found somewhere or other, in all the volumes of Irish literature that have been published, or all the collections of Irish poems that have been edited, or all the lectures on kindred subjects that have been delivered. The only approach to a recognition of this poem that I have come upon is a lecture that Rev. Dr. Cahill delivered in the Mechanics' Institute, Clonmel, in October, 1844. In that lecture I find two lines quoted that are to be found in the fifth canto:

"Erin! Adversity's dark days are o'er;  
Erin! Thy ancient spirit wakes once more;  
Bursting, like sunshine, through a broken sky;  
Its long-imprisoned emanations fly."

Yet, while the lines are there, I find no mention of whence they are taken or by whom they were written. On commencing this week's contribution, it was my intention to quote several passages from this poem; but I find that I have already gone beyond the space which in reasonableness I might ask. I will, therefore, content myself with reproducing the introductory lines—or invocation—and will try, next week, to make such selections from the entire poem as may seem to give the reader a fair idea of its merits.

### THE INVOCATION.

"To strains, whose wild notes, Zephyr never bore,  
Around the Shamrock Island's coast before,  
I court the Muse, who willingly obeys,  
To strike her Harp-strings to the new-born lays."

"The true Hibernian Catholic I sing;  
The faithful subject of Britannia's King;  
His many woes—his tamely-suffered wrongs—  
His faith mistrusted, while stern laws prolong  
The evil tenor of his humble state;  
And adds new terrors to the frowns of Fate."

The task be mine, with Angel Truth my guide,  
My nation's tut'lar guardian, and her pride.  
And while her holy dictates I rehearse,  
Be partial interest foreign to my verse.  
Whatever theme—whatever subject flows  
From Irish pens, should nought but truth disclose:  
So might the Hibernian author's honor'd name,  
Live on the records of his father's fame;  
So might he share the laurels and his bays;  
The tribute honors of his country's praise."

This general introduction gives but faint idea of what is to come; hence I now reproduce it, so as to have done with all preface and introductory matter.

### CHAPTER V.—C

"She can't," said Virginia, has entered the convent, is allowed to come out entered; and only think is to think of our dear shut up there all her life, that horrible dress make her look so hideous, fairly groaned as she saw her eyes filled with tears.

"Come, now," said Robert, his arm around her, "I to see my wife feeling so have heard of young Alexia the convent after having our Alexia may come home."

"Do not be so hasty," said her mother, "If a band says, she came home is no need of your going. I doubt not but what she return to us and will be come Mrs. Hurley."

"Let us hope so," said "but I almost forgot to let any message for me."

"Yes," said Mrs. Sumner, a letter in the top drawer, dresser, Will I get it?"

"No," said Virginia, who to have no eyes upon her read the farewell message, tended to her room, where, seated place, she found a valise addressed to herself delicate handwriting which so well. How her hand as she broke the seal and two papers, one a letter, legal document.

"What can this be?" she as she held the latter, then she saw that it was a made him the owner of Alford home and the furniture Virginia was but human, of pride took possession the thought that the home almost envied her cousin, mented to see closed after of her uncle, was to be her sister as her own home was superior to it. When

remembered that the pleasure might never again be brought to the face she loved, she then the paper saying, "I can't there." The letter in which she had her farewell and ask accept for a wedding gift where she hoped she would her abode as soon as her a long and affectionate in almost every line was of true cousinly love, she so plainly that Alexia's long been premeditated, and so happy in leaving home feared it would be hard to her to return. Nevertheless was resolved to go to her and try to bring her home.

The united efforts of her and parents proved ineffectual preventing our young friend starting on what they insisted be a useless journey, and when leaves were beginning ere she went to Hilton. At first firmly refused to home that had been given but when Robert told her would be much better to go the present than to remain with her parents, as she had been doing for a time, she decided but it was to be on Alexia should come.

### CHAPTER VI.

It was a bright October the carriage which had brought her from the station to the front of the Mercy Convent Alexia," sighed the young glancing at the high box on either side of the convent and the thorn hedge in front she content herself such a gloomy place as to so sorry that I did not go to take her home." As she the grounds and saw that studded with pretty flower shrubbery, her mental comfort "It is not so bad after all, side, but Alexia must go here this is no place for her."

Virginia had never real her cousin had gone how had been to her; but, living they had spent so many hours together, and being much of the time while he was at his office, she had value of the companionship lost, and separation, increasing, had increased her the absent one. But now