

Pastor and People.

STEADFAST TRUST.

'Twixt gleams of joy and clouds o' doubt
Our feelings come and go;
Our best estate is toss'd about
In ceaseless ebb and flow.

No mood of feeling, form of thought,
Is constant for a day;
But Thou, O Lord! Thou changest not;
The same Thou art alway.

I grasp Thy strength, make it my own;
My heart with peace is blest;
I lose my hold and then comes down
Darkness and cold unrest.

Let me no more my comfort draw
From my frail hold of Thee.
In this alone rejoice with awe;
Thy mighty grasp of me

Out of that weak, unquiet drift
That comes but to depart,
To that pure heaven my spirit lift,
Where Thou unchanging art.

Lay hold of me with Thy strong grasp,
Let Thy almighty arm
In its embrace my weakness clasp,
And I shall fear no harm.

Thy purpose of eternal good
Let me but surely know;
On this I'll lean, let changing mood
And feeling come and go.

Glad when Thy sunshine fills my soul;
Not lorn when clouds o'ercast;
Since Thou within Thy sure control
Of love doth hold me fast.

— John Campbell Shairp.

GOLDEN GRAIN BIBLE READING

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The meaning of Christ's Resurrection to the Believer
Key text. Luke xxiv. 6.

Foretold by Christ. Matt. xvi. 21, xxii. 23.

1. Declared to be God's Son. Romans x. 4.

Emphasized in Apostolic preaching. Acts xiii. 13. xvii. 18, iv. 33.

2. Our justification. Romans iv. 25, 1 Cor. xv. 16-20

3. A living hope begotten. 1 Peter i. iii. 21.

4. Lifts us into a new life. Ephes. ii. 6-7, Col. ii. 12-15.

5. Inspires us with desires after heavenly things. Col. iii. 1-3.

6. Transforms death into translation. Heb. ix. 15, 1 Peter i. 4, John xiv. 3

7. Secured our inheritance for us. Heb. vi. 20.

8. Keeps us for the inheritance. 1 Peter i. 5, Heb. vii. 25

9. Immortality. John xiv. 9

10. Crowns all with comfort. 1 Thes. iv. 13-18.

A CAUSERIE ABOUT CHOIRS.

They get hard measures dealt out to them at times. Many curious and vexatious mis-conceptions prevail as to their function. Occasionally they appear to be regarded as an asylum for incurables, where all are entitled to find a home who, whether they are fit to sing or not, are, at all events, fit for little else. There is a fatuous delusion that anyone will do for the choir, even though there be no more music in the soul or voice than in the rusty hinge of a farmyard gate; and though the most artistic achievement may be the emission of a monotone that, like a misplaced pedal-note, pursues the "even tenor of its way," regardless of the agonies it inflicts upon those that have ears to hear.

It is not an uncommon thing either for the choir to be turned to account as a cheap theatre for self-display. Here is your vocalist that unquestionably has a voice. He—perhaps we should say she—will be to the front, and will outshine all the meeker stars. The gift may be nothing better than a throat of iron or lungs of leather, by virtue of which the possessor could out-roar Bottom the weaver, or out-shriek an American devil. But the complacent artist is not troubled by such minor matters, and shouts or screeches as to the manner born. Happy the conductor who has not to battle with any such self-assertive member, and is not maddened by the incessant obtrusiveness that engenders chaos.

What, then, is the function of a Church choir? It is no exaggeration to reply, that its function is to promote, in its own special way, the spiritual welfare of the congregation. It is meant to minister to edification—to feed the divine life within the hearts of the people. Its service of song should be a means of grace, quite as really as is the preacher's sermon. In the exercise of its gift the choir should do much to dispel the clouds of care that gather about the souls of men, to bear us above the shadow-laden atmosphere we habitually breathe, and to stand us on such holy heights as pierce the skies, and render faith as easy as sight. "Ambassadors for Christ," that is what the members of the choir should feel themselves to be.

That conception of the matter is by no means universal either inside or outside Church choirs. There is in many quarters a tendency to disparage their services and make very light of the work they do. Often the choir's interests are sacrificed without hesitancy in favour of some other organization

not one jot more spiritual or helpful to the Church. The blunder is a serious one, and there should be no scruple in asserting the choir's right to be esteemed one of the most important institutions in a congregation. Conductors do well, in a wise way, to magnify their office; and choristers should make it plain that the golden motto, "for Christ's sake," is stamped upon their service, and renders it sacred and divine.

Of course, the choir is charged specially with the care of all such parts of worship as are fairly capable of musical expression, and, particularly, of that form of musical expression which,

born of human breath,
Comes straighter from the soul than any strain
The hand alone can make.

It must aid the Church, then, in the melodious utterance of religious emotion, and must identify itself with the congregation,—entering into and appropriating the spirit of psalm or hymn in which the emotion is embodied. The words ought to be intelligently studied, and the significance of them thoroughly mastered.

It is not well to assume that, because everybody knows such time-honoured strains as those of St. Paul's, Martyrdom, or Old Hundred, therefore the right rendering of these tunes and the words wedded to them may be confidently counted on, apart from all preparation. That is a perilous mistake. Comparatively few of our ordinary choirs can be trusted to such an extent. It is just these common tunes that are most frequently murdered. The choristers know them as well as they know A B C. They have hummed them, and shouted them, and whistled them every day of their lives. What can there be to attend to? And the result is an indescribable slovenliness. One half of the members, probably, read from the notes, and adhere rigidly to the musical text as it stands before them; but the other half trust to their treacherous memories, their bad ears or good ones; and hence "confusion dire." Some hold firmly on their syllabic course, and march with sure step over the authorized intervals; but others go slurring and sliding, creeping up or crawling down, in a way fitted to make a musician's hair stand on end, or Johann Sebastian Bach turn in his grave. All the notes and all the words should be studied, if the choir is to do its work perfectly.

Should a choir sing *with expression*? The question sounds absurd; but the opinion is held by some that that is not part of the choir's duty. Rather, it is argued, should it deliver its whole burden with unvarying force, and thus obviate the possibility of the congregation flattening. But surely that is as unreasonable as it is inartistic. The tendency to fall is not to be counteracted by any such mechanical device. The result of its adoption must be to turn the whole service of song into a perfunctory caricature, if not to set a premium on that wild bawling, which many regard as the only sure sign of heartiness and fervour. Better that the choir set the example of true expressiveness, avoiding equally, on the one hand, the monotonousness that makes no distinction between penitence and praise; and, on the other, the exaggerated mannerism that lays pitfalls for the congregation.

True expression involves distinct articulation. The choir should give no uncertain sound, as it too often does. Who has not listened to choirs professedly using our familiar mother-tongue, but torturing its homely syllables into noises as barbaric and unintelligible as the talk of Timbuctoo? The vowel sounds are marvellously metamorphosed; and our everyday acquaintances, the full open "o" or "u," disappear in strange, irritating disguises. The exigencies of breathing tear syllable from syllable, and rend words to fragments, with the cruel ingenuity of a Spanish inquisitor. Or, perhaps, vowels and consonants are all jumbled together in one unvarying sound, that resembles nothing so much as the inarticulate *baaing* of sheep or goats on their way to market or slaughter-house. To talk about expressive singing under such conditions is to utter arrant nonsense.

Then, the choir should quicken religious emotion as well as express it. It should sometimes sing *to*, if generally *with*, the congregation. There is a stock objection to this, which all resolves itself into the one ominous word "performance"; but there is no validity in the objection, surely, where our Church choirs are composed, as certainly as our Churches, of Christian men and women. The principle, indeed, has been conceded by nearly all who support our modern evangelistic methods; and is there any greater inconsistency than theirs who allow that it may be good for a worshipping assembly to have Mr. Sankey sing to it, but it must be evil, only evil, for a congregation to be sung to by those of its own members who have the necessary qualification?

The principle may be defended on apostolic authority. There are clear indications that song was a recognized means of edification in the earliest ages. Paul makes special provision for him who has a psalm or a hymn with which to speak to the assembled Christians; and the broad rule is laid down that believers are "to teach and admonish one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs"; and the stores of sacred music are now so vast that there can be no difficulty in finding abundance of material exquisitely fitted for use in this form. This is a type of service capable of yielding far richer results than it has yet produced, and our choirs might, much more frequently than is the case, act as preachers of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the love and glory of our heavenly Father.

A Church choir, too, is a fine illustration of principles bearing very directly upon congregational prosperity. It is a standing witness to the fact that there are diversities of gifts,

each of which, soprano, alto, tenor, bass, has its own rights and its own duties. It enforces the truth that all powers, however various, are capable of consecration to highest and holiest uses, and that the fullest service is that which is distinguished, not by uniformity, but by such unity as harmonizes manifold qualities and capacities. It demonstrates that the secret of perfection is the glad co-operation and loyal subordination of one and all to a common aim and purpose. It is pre-eminently the function of the choir to keep the Church continually mindful of the truth, that in its corporate capacity its life should be one prolonged Hallelujah Chorus in praise of its Messiah-Lord.—*United Presbyterian Magazine.*

CONGREGATIONAL SINGING.

A Roman Catholic organist from Dublin, speaking to me on this point the other day, said that in teaching the elements of singing he found Presbyterians much more promising musical material than Roman Catholics. He considered that it was the congregational singing that made the difference. I was surprised, because congregational singing in many Presbyterian Churches is of the rudest kind, while we all know how much the Roman Catholic Church does in the way of gorgeous music. "That," said my friend, "does not count. Our people listen to the music, but do not take part in it. You may set a fine breakfast before yourself, but until you eat it you do not begin to gain nourishment or strength." And he considered that the simple and imperfect attempt to join in Presbyterian Church song, week by week, did more to train the voice and ear than all the listening to good music in Roman Catholic Churches. Other writers have borne the same testimony.—*S. Spencer Curwen, in the Contemporary Review.*

THE FEET OF JESUS.

One evening when a mother was putting her little babe to bed, she took the little feet in her hand and tenderly kissed them. A friend standing near, who was also a loving mother, said gently: "I wonder if there was ever a mother who did not kiss her baby's feet?"

And my thoughts went back to that dear mother of Nazareth, whose babe lay not in a crib, but a manger, with the stars for night lamps guarding the Baby Jesus asleep on the hay.

I wonder if Mary's tender hands did not lovingly fondle those little feet?

I think that her kisses fell softly upon them as she wondered as all mothers do where those little untried feet might be led. Did any thought in her prophetic mother-heart foretell the rough paths those feet must tread?

Not many years she had to guide them, for soon the child Jesus slips from her side, and going home with happy heart, "supposing Him to be in the company," she suddenly misses Him from her side, and, anxiously retracing her steps, she finds Him in the temple in Jerusalem teaching the elders. Not a disobedient child, but doing first His "Father's business." Then He returns, and is "subject to His parents." His willing feet doing their bidding day by day.

But the time comes when He must leave this safe home, and He goes forth homeless to prepare an eternal home for us, followed by a few loving hearts from door to door, from seashore to hill and valley. Saying unto all men, "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out," is Himself cast out of homes and temples.

His faithful feet tread the boisterous waves at night that Peter may be rescued from a sea of doubt. He rests in the pharisee's home, and a woman, a sinner, in her need of pity, fell at His feet and washed them with her tears and wiped them with the hairs of her head, kissing them and anointing them with ointment. Her weary soul found rest in tender ministrations to His earth-weary feet. Again we see Mary taking her box of ointment, so "very costly," and anointing the feet of Jesus, and wiping them with her beautiful hair. Nothing could be too precious for Him who had restored Lazarus to that lonely home.

Then two days later those patient feet are led from court to street, from street to judgment hall, at last to Golgotha, stumbling with weariness and faltering under the weight of the cross. All mother-hearts share with Mary in that bitter hour. Our Saviour is still her child, and by the dear bond of motherhood we suffer with her in her suffering Christ-Child.

His dear feet are pierced for us, who, homeless and lost in life's forest, need His lifted cross to show us the way to the eternal city.

Look on Me. All-Forgiving!
Low at Thy feet I bow.
O all divine Thou seemest
As I behold Thee now!
I clasp with tender passion
Thy feet so pierced for us,
The cruel wounds deep graven
O'erwhelmed to see Thee thus!

—Emma L. Savage.

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Your blood
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