

# HALIFAX PEARL,

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## CONGREGATIONAL PSALMODY.

The Psalmist: a Collection of Psalm and Hymn Tunes, suited to all the varieties of Metrical Psalmody; consisting principally of Tunes already in general use for Congregational Worship, newly harmonized for four voices with a separate Accompaniment for the Organ or Piano-Forte: the greater part by Vincent Novello. Comprising also many original Compositions and Adaptations contributed expressly to this work, by himself and other eminent Professors: the whole adapted as well for Social and Domestic Devotion as for Public Worship. Part III. London: Jackson and Walford.

Every one may satisfy himself by a moderate attention to his own consciousness that the utterance of any sentiment whatever, gives it a force which it did not previously possess—that the belief of others being the subjects of the same feelings with ourselves deepens our own emotions, (partly perhaps by increasing our conviction of their propriety)—and that their simultaneous expression by a sympathizing multitude carries them to the highest pitch of intensity. Congregational psalmody is the fulfilment of these conditions by means which perfectly harmonize with its end and object—the promotion of the devotional feelings. Religious sentiments are embodied in metrical language, and thus it becomes easy for multitudes to combine in their recitation without clamour and confusion—and at the same time to avail themselves of the potent aid of music, which augments our feelings, by increasing our power of expressing them.

The great truths by which religion makes demands on our various emotions, even when apprehended, can never be felt in a degree commensurate with their importance. If then some proportion between the feeling of the heart and the import of the words on the lip can be produced only now and then, it is a positive good. The impression, which from its nature can only be transitory and occasional, will lend its influence to deepen the tone of our habitual and intermediate state of feeling.

Moreover, this takes place during a professedly religious service, when many things conspire to hinder it from degenerating into a mere gratification of taste, and a barren excitement of the sensibility. There is or ought to be here, the efficient presentation to the mind, not only of the proper occasions of emotion, but of the great reason why it is good to be moved at all—that we may act—and this is more likely to secure an effectual reception when the mind is moved already. There is no just objection to any means of stirring the feelings when at the same time they are made the allies of an enlightened and rectified will.

The annals of the Reformation in France, Germany, and our own country, show that music of the right kind and rightly employed, can be made an engine of vast effect in facilitating the progress of truth, and the sacred volume frequently recognizes its salutary potency. Why is it that in our experience its achievements do not parallel or even approach what has been recorded of it? Man remains the same. His nature is not more rebellious to its influence now, than it was when the minstrel's harp could prepare the prophet for the illapses of inspiration, or soothe the bosom of one under a preter-natural frenzy. It is comparatively ineffective with us only because we have ceased to appeal to its power. Our devotional music has become in a great measure spurious, and our practice of it formal, and we need nothing else to explain the insignificance of the results.

It is impossible in this life to present the perfect idea of the choral worship of God. We may conceive that to be independent of the aid of set compositions and tune-books. But one of its essential elements we may be certain is, the entire sincerity of all the innumerable company. What on earth is a pleasing and charitable fiction—that the heart of the multitude is as the heart of one man, must there be the simple and evident truth. In proportion to our belief in this state of things on earth, the poorest specimen of psalmody yields to a good man delight which no combination of genius and musical talent can afford. There are, however, plenty of ways of counteracting this idea, on which, as a means, nearly the whole effect of psalmody depends. It is destroyed when a whole congregation is called upon to utter sentiments which mark the variations of individual feeling, but could never be expected to exist in a multitude of minds at the same time. Hymns proper enough for the closet become worse than useless when put into the mouths of a congregation. They know that they cannot and ought not to be required to sing them with the heart, and they comply with the announcement from the desk, only as a form in which it is decent for them to join. This mistake is often committed for the sake of some piece of music which the congregation being familiar with therefore approves. 'Vital Spark of Heavenly Flame,' is an instance glaringly in point.

Compositions of a didactic character, conveying instruction in a medium of poetry, are happily abundant, and every variety of appeal and exhortation is to be met with in our collections. But it is usurping the functions of the pulpit to make the people preach to themselves by singing them. They are not hymns—that is, devotional compositions—and therefore, however useful they may be found, they prevent a higher use of the rite by perverting it from its true end, which is, worship. When our hymns express feelings that are proper to the engagement, and therefore ought to be the inmates of all bosoms, we have reason to congratulate ourselves on the power of sympathy.

We have said that music answers a double purpose in psalmody, or should do so. It renders the recitation of multitudes orderly and simultaneous, and contributes to impart and enhance emotion by its power of expressing it. There is room to suspect that the great majority of tunes ordinarily heard in our chapels, fulfil only the first of these ends, or if the latter, in a much less degree than is both possible and desirable. Many of the most popular exert an influence which is worse than negative. As far as they convey any sentiment at all, it is often not of a kind fit for the occasion on which they are used, and therefore instead of being the auxiliaries of devotion, they rather repress it. It may be at once objected to us, 'there is no disputing about tastes—you may think as you do about our old favourites—but if we are in the majority, your predilections, are not to be complied with to our annoyance.' This is the universal argument against proposed reforms in matters of taste, and if it were intended to deny, what is implied in the very terms, that pleasure is the result of gratifying all manner of tastes, it would be conducive as well as trite. We should not contradict the Esquimaux who vaunted seal oil as a nice article of diet, however satisfied that our palates relished higher and purer flavours. But the question is one of degree—and none are qualified to decide it, who are only acquainted with one of the two classes competing for preference. Every body requires the correspondence should be observable between tunes and the words which may be sung to them, and feels that one tune may excel another in this congruity. If not, the words of 'God Save the Queen,' might be set to the jig called 'Drops of Brandy,'—or, to quit the glaringly absurd, the hymn beginning, 'Come, let us join our cheerful songs,' might be sung to 'Burford,' or 'Thee we adore Eternal Name,' to 'Mount Pleasant'—'Lonsdale' would be as often the tune for 'And must this body die,' as 'St. Bride's'; and all without raising the sense of contrast and unfitness. If these are self-evident instances of the justness of the principle, as we are disposed to think them, is it not possible that the faculty of discrimination, if heedfully cultivated, may at last decide that tunes now widely popular are unfit for devotional use at all—and not merely by comparison with the beautiful melodies they have thrust out of notice? We are only inviting to finer appreciations and higher enjoyments.

There is also an argument 'in arrest of judgment' which it may be as well to anticipate. It is alleged, that if many of our tunes are not the best that could be adopted, they serve their purposes, and supply what is lacking, by the associations our congregations attach to them. If time and use are to give qualities to tunes which did not originally belong to them, we may increase our stores on these principles, by proselyting among profane songs to any extent. Our clerks may set long metres and common metres to 'Friend of my Soul,' 'Fly not Yet,' 'Flow on thou Shining River,' just as a notorious composer has done by 'Me Bacchus Fires,' 'Glorious Apollo,' and the popular duet 'Deserted by the Waning Moon.' Circumstances extrinsic to them may invest some of the worst tunes with a charm that belongs to none besides. Nothing is more likely or certain. But the particular recollections which afford this intense delight cannot be common to many people. Perhaps, on such grounds as these, no one tune would secure a majority of votes for its preservation. Moreover, associations equally solemn and affecting, will gather round the best tunes, if they are but sung often enough. And then we predict that the congregation which has permitted the reform will enjoy the recompense.

No tunes can vindicate their claim to be heard in the worship of God, which do not possess that quality of solemnity which summons the mind to devotion, and calls it from the world. Whatever excellence of other kinds they may exhibit, this is a cardinal requisite, and its absence is sufficient reason for banishing them summarily from our religious services. By asserting the absolute necessity of solemnity, we of course do not mean

that religion without which hope and joy are but flattering illusions, affords no scope for the musical expression of cheerful and animating feelings,—but that these when called into exercise by sacred motives have that belonging to them which forbids all light and frivolous modes of expressing them. It is possible to be solemn without gloom and to rejoice with reverence. On this score then, who can defend the tunes called Hampshire, Ebenezer New, Calcutta, Zion Church, Zadok, Church Street, Whitty, etc.

An analysis of tunes which do fulfil this great condition, discovers that they for the most part resemble each other in allotting one bar for the musical expression of two syllables, and if more than one, never more than two notes to each syllable. While the melody is kept within the compass of about eight notes, which is usually that of the human voice. These restrictions, which genius has imposed on itself, also secure the expression of the rhythm or measure of the stanza, and facility of performance by a congregation—points almost equally important with the first. But these three requisites—the expression of a devotional sentiment—identity of accentuation with that of the metre—and facility of execution, are not often separable and independent. The fault which destroys one will often affect the others equally. Vulgar conventional phrases and snatches of secular melody, absurd attempts at the fugue, or short points of imitation which the voices repeat without respect to the sense of the words—the metrical fall of the syllables placed on the wrong parts of the bar—one line taking twice as many bars as it ought, while others are defrauded of their due proportion—all these are allies (in annulling the constituents of a good psalm-tune. Their combined action is very well exemplified in such tunes as Cranbrook, Derby, Oxford, Kentucky, Cambridge New, Calcutta, etc. etc. In Leach (290, Rip.) the symmetry of the tune is spoilt by a senseless repetition of the last line, while a vulgar trolling of notes is expended on one word ('and lives to die no more,') making its duration six times as long as any other of its fellow-syllables. A similar deviation from the regularity of the metre takes place in 'Darkhouse' and 'Clifton.' The absurdity of this becomes evident if we imagine the clerk giving out the stanza in the metrical form it must assume when it comes to be sung to tunes, of which the three we have named are fair specimens. Long passages of short notes on single words are found in the most admired compositions, and we suppose the deformity we are censuring in psalm tunes is owing to a blind spirit of rivalry in their makers. They forget that, in the one case, it is only expressing the word which carries the sentiment in an appropriate strain of music, which can never fall on an insignificant or unsuitable word—that the idea of a cantata admits of this and every other means of making the music closely expressive of the specific sentiments of the words, which that of a psalm tune does not—while the former is not bound like a psalm tune to the observance of any measured accentuation. The attempt at a fugue is totally out of character in a psalm tune—because were the limits of the corale sufficient to develop its progress, it is destructive of the rhythm, and by interrupting the steady syllabic march of the melody, tends to keep the congregation silent, or makes them fall into confusion. In most of the cases where particular tunes seem to enjoy a patent right of being sung to particular hymns, e. g. Cranbrook, Zion Church, Atwaters, to the hymns beginning 'Grace, 'tis a charming sound,' 'How did my heart rejoice to hear,' 'With all my powers of heart and tongue;' it is perhaps this very peculiarity which has been the cause of such special conjunctions. There is some noisy passage to be answered in succession by the different parts, and the congregation execute them with great promptitude and energy. The basses are boldly daring when they have it all to themselves, and the countertenors pleasingly venturous on the verge of the impossible at those junctures of the strain that are contrived to display them. But it may be doubted whether all this fervor results so much from an exaltation of emotion, as from the run of the music admitting and inviting a loud and exhilarating uplifting of the voice. The tune itself, and not any feeling the tune expresses, is the thing thought of.

Many ideas, beautiful in themselves when sung with the expression of a solo singer, varying from the declamatory to that of intense feeling or peaceful repose, become impracticable to a congregation. 'Hotham' may be taken as an example of a good melody, but too delicate in its character for general use. But if a tune so beautiful as 'Hotham' is on this account scarcely transmissible by an assembly, what shall be urged in favor of many in which the same or a greater degree of structural unfit is con-