

CONGREGATIONAL SINGING.

The visitor to Oak street Presbyterian church cannot fail to be impressed with the earnestness which characterises every department of the service. The congregation is not one in which fashionable idlers, who prefer to have their worship done by proxy, would find a congenial church-home. The worshippers as a class bear unmistakable evidence of having borne the burden and heat of the battle of life; they are of the people who form the bone and sinew of the country. Accustomed as they are to taking an intelligent part in the everyday affairs of life, they, naturally take an active part in the service of the sanctuary. Everyone seems to realize a personal responsibility which makes an active participation in the service of praise a duty which cannot be shirked, or delegated to another. In Oak street church no one need refrain from joining in the singing lest he should attract attention. If he should refrain, he is not likely to remain unnoticed. During the singing of the first hymn at last Sabbath evening's service I remained silent in order to form an estimate of the manner in which the praise is conducted. Before the first verse was completed, I had been offered the use of a hymn-book by the usher, and shown the number of the hymn by an intelligent looking young lady, with an excellent soprano voice, who evidently considered inability to find the hymn, the only probable explanation of my silence. Service was commenced by the singing of Hymn 135,

"Approach, my soul, the mercy-seat
Where Jesus answers prayer."

As the opening note of a service in which the dominant idea was God's love for His people nothing could be more appropriate than this beautiful hymn, by John Newton. It is felicitously set to "St Paul" which is among the most devotional of the sacred melodies which have come to us from the past century. In our Hymnal, "St Paul" is erroneously ascribed to William Fate. The authorship of the tune is unknown, but it has recently been proven to be of Scottish origin, and its first appearance has been traced by Mr. Jas. Love of Falkirk—a leading authority on the Scottish Psalmody—to a collection of church tunes published in 1748. Among superficially minded people it is fashionable to affect contempt for old tunes such as "St. Paul," but we can only pity those who lack discernment sufficient to enable them to appreciate its beauties. Had it been possible to arrange (or derange) the old tunes with a flippant accompaniment, suggestive of a waltz, they might have been admitted to the favor of those who dislike Presbyterian tunes because "they are so antiquated and slow." Many generations of such tunes have come and gone, have lived, died and been buried since "St. Paul" and its fellows had had their birth, but the melodies which cheered our ancestors in their times of sorrow and trouble, are with us still. It has been wisely said that "the old tunes are old because they are good." Had they not possessed the essential elements of enduring success they would have been lost and forgotten ages ago. I enjoyed hearing this grand old melody as sung by the congregation of Oak street church, and noted with satisfaction the evident delight of the worshippers themselves. The singing was very hearty and the choir and congregation were of one accord throughout. After the invocatory prayer, Hymn 140 was announced. The custom observed at Oak street is to have the tune played over before the hymn is read. I have discussed the weak points of this arrangement in previous articles and need not refer to them again. I noticed that in every case, there was a marked lack of promptness of attack, and breadth of tone in the first as compared with the succeeding verses. This hymn with its prayerful refrain of "Even me" is so familiar to all church-goers that it is invariably well sung. The melody is by Bradbury who was, perhaps, the most solid composer of church tunes among American writers

who are not, as a class, celebrated for solidity of style. The evening lesson was read from John xvii after which the announcements were made by the pastor, Rev. J. A. Morison B.A. Among them I was gratified to hear a chorus practice announced, to which all the young people were cordially invited. In this we have the most substantial foundation on which good congregational singing can be built. I learned on enquiry, that a class for the study of music is held throughout the greater part of the year. In addition to the hymns, sacred Cantatas are studied and one at least is given publicly every year. This ensures the active interest of the young folks who, in turn carry their enthusiasm to the home-circle, and interest in musical matters is thus maintained all round. An anthem is usually sung during the collection but on this occasion a hymn bearing especially on the subject of the discourse was sung by Mr. J. D. Keachie a member of the choir. The hymn selected was "My ain countrie" (Sacred Songs and Solos), which was sung with much expression, the singer being evidently in thorough sympathy with the devotional sentiment of the piece, and the homely Doric in which it is expressed. The sermon was preceded by the Lord's Prayer. The subject of discourse was the parable of the lost sheep as told in Luke xv. 1-10. As a preacher Mr. Morison is deeply impressive. His manner is entirely free from the pulpit style of oratory which is unfortunately affected by many young ministers who imitate the dignity and impressiveness of their seniors, but which frequently fails to reach the hearts of their hearers. His meaning is never obscured by grandiloquent terms, but is expressed in plain language, in an earnest conversational tone of voice which somehow, gives one the impression that an appeal is being made directly to himself. He is evidently master of the resources of elocution which he employs in an easy, natural manner, without allowing them to become apparent. The great love of the shepherd for his poor, lost sheep, and the compassion which he manifested towards it in its helpless condition were portrayed with much earnestness, and treated as an illustration of Christ's love for poor, lost sinners. All were urged to help in the work of seeking those who are lost and bringing them to the great shepherd. The various points in the discourse were driven home by the judicious employment of apt illustrations wisely chosen and clearly depicted. The concluding hymn was 163,

Jesus, Shepherd of the sheep,
Who Thy Father's flock dost keep,
Safe we wake and safe we sleep,
Guarded still by Thee.

This was sung to the quaint old Church tune "St. Ambrose." The singing was quiet and devotional in manner, in keeping with the character of the hymn.

The conduct of the service of praise is entrusted to Mr. J. Stoddart who has occupied the office of choir-master during the past fifteen years. Since the introduction of the vocation which temporarily occupies the recess provided for the organ, he has had the assistance of Mr. S. Lovatt who discharges the duties of the organist's office with much acceptance to the congregation and choir. Mr. Stoddart is the happy possessor of an excellent tenor voice which he uses with much effect in leading the praise service, and in addition he has those qualities of heart and mind which attract the young people of the congregation and secure their interest in the study of music which are indispensable in those who would seek to develop congregational singing on a permanent basis. The choir numbers about twenty singers, who occupy the platform in front of the pulpit. Although this is the most desirable location for the choir pew it is, at present attended with some disadvantage as the organist is seated close to his instrument and consequently separated from the choir. This will ultimately be remedied by the introduction of an organ in keeping with the size and importance of the church, when the keyboard can be placed in front of the pulpit.—TEMPO.