

CONGREGATIONAL SINGING.

Toronto is justly celebrated as a musical and educational centre and her citizens, with pardonable pride, tell of the rapid advances which have been made in musical culture during the present generation. Occasionally, some of us may be more loud than discreet in sounding the praises of our fair city, and it is not improbable that our neighbors and country cousins may sometimes receive the impression that we are of opinion that Toronto has a monopoly of all that is worth having in musical culture. In order to ascertain to what extent music is cultivated in the churches of one at least of our sister cities, I spent last Sabbath in Hamilton and attended the service in two leading Presbyterian Churches. The first of these to be noticed, in deference to the prerogative of seniority, is Knox Church, which has entered upon the fifty-second year of its existence with a degree of healthy vigor which speaks well for the manner in which its affairs have been conducted. Hamiltonians would smile, were I to describe Knox Church as handsome. It is not, and was never intended to be handsome, but its quaint exterior is suggestive of a kind of dignity and beauty which is dearer to the hearts of old fashioned Presbyterians than any modern structure could possibly become. Built of plain dressed grey stone, free from all appearance of ornamentation, it presents a faithful idea of the staunch character of the hardy Scots who built it, and of the spirit of the times in which it had its birth. The interior presents evidences of having been furnished with the comforts of which our fathers sternly denied themselves but which we of the present generation consider indispensable. Nothing has been added, however, which would be discordant with the character of the building. The pews are arranged in straight lines, those on either side of the pulpit being placed at right angles with those in front. Every available inch of space is utilised for seating accommodation and the aisles are straight and narrow. The architect or his advisers must have been Scotch. On the occasion of my visit every seat seemed to be filled. The congregation is composed of an earnest, sedate, body of worshippers, who seem to assemble with a purpose which cannot be misunderstood. One feature of the service which impressed me most favorably, as it is somewhat exceptional in my Canadian experience, was the fact that I did not observe a single late-comer, or any one leave the Church before the conclusion of the service. This is as it should be if the worship of God is to be conducted "decently, and in order." Much annoyance is caused by thoughtless persons who irreverently, and sometimes ostentatiously enter the House of God while serious-minded people are engaged in His worship, or leave when the service or discourse fails to interest or entertain them. I think the pastor must be entitled to whatever credit is due in connection with this desirable feeling of decorum which prevades the service in Knox Church. Dr. Mungo Fraser is of good old Scottish Highland stock, and thoroughly imbued with the traditions of his ancestors who esteemed the House of God as highly as did the ancient Israelites the House of Holies.

A few minutes before the hour of service the organist Mr. W. J. Cunningham, played a quiet "Andante" from Seatson Clarke and promptly at seven o'clock Mr. J. Johnson, the choir-master, with his followers took their places in the choir-pew in front of the pulpit, where they were at once joined by Dr. Fraser. After the opening prayer, psalm 30 was announced and the well-known tune "Belmont" was played over. I have frequently expressed a decided preference for the psalm or hymn being read, before the tune is played over, and observed that the objections which I have urged against the inverse practice were present, here as in other churches already noticed.

The congregation cannot be expected to catch the tonality, and tempo of the tune after the interval required for the reading of four stanzas has elapsed, and the opening lines of the first stanza are invariably affected. With this slight exception, the singing throughout the psalm was decidedly hearty. Everybody seemed to sing. The volume of tone was broad and harmonious, while the expression was not neglected. The singing of the choir was such as is most desirable where good congregational singing is a desideratum. The attack, and accentuation were clearly marked, there were no sudden changes of force or tempo, and the organist and choir were in thorough sympathy throughout. The first lesson was read from Prov. III, and followed by prayer. Hymn 130, "My faith looks up to Thee," was next announced and sung to Dr. Mason's tune "Olivet." This was excellently sung, the congregation responding readily to the lead of the choir and organ in the expression required by the softer passages in such lines as

"Olivet was written especially for this hymn and is commonly associated with it, still, I cannot refrain from expressing a preference for "Stobel" which is given as an alternative tune in the Hymnal. The last four lines of each verse suggest a gradual increase in intensity of sentiment, culminating in the last line. In "Stobel" this is provided for by a bold melodic phrase, on the fourth line which is repeated in sequence at a higher pitch, on the two succeeding lines, followed by a strongly marked tonic cadence. In "Olivet" the music of the fourth line is repeated without change of pitch, or harmony, the penultimate phrase is a smooth, stepwise, descending progression, followed by a cadence so low in pitch as to be quite inadequate for proper expression of the exalted sentiment of the text. The announcements were then made after which came the offertory and anthem. The latter which consisted of a setting of psalm 23 by Danks was very sweetly sung by the choir. The blending of parts was excellent especially in the *piano* passages. Phrasing and expression were carefully observed, and the duet between contraltos and tenors received careful treatment. The discourse was one of a series which Dr. Fraser is preaching on Paul's epistles, the text being Col. ii. 14-15. I took copious notes of the sermon and could wish to give them in full but the exigencies of space will not permit. Dr. Fraser, in a definite, forceful manner, showed that the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us, consisted of a bond of decrees or dogmas, which made up the law as a whole. The whole law is a standard of life which is everywhere against us. It is too high for us, and there is no man but what doth daily break it in thought, word, or deed. It is against us as an accuser, and as an avenger. The sermon was followed by hymn 189, and prayer after which hymn 342 to Brandenburg was sung. The singing of both hymns was characterized by the same qualities of excellence as have already been mentioned. As an example of good congregational praise Knox Church is among the best which I have been privileged to hear. Such results can only be secured where the choir-master is thoroughly in sympathy with the work of his office and has the hearty co-operation of his organist, and choir and the sympathetic support of the pastor. Of these I had ample evidence during my visit to Knox Church. The choir pew occupies a most desirable position but is much in need of several alterations. The floor of the church being on a level, the choir platform requires to be further elevated in order to make the lead of the singers fully effective. By the adoption of a more modern form of chairs the limited space at the disposal of the choir could be utilised in such a manner as to accommodate a larger number of singers than is at present possible. The accommodation for tenors and basses is insufficient for the requirements of so large a church. The service was one well calculated to make a deep impression on all who delight in seeing our simple, earnest, Presbyterian service rendered with the dignity and reverence which is its due.—TEMP.