

## CONGREGATIONAL SINGING.

When Dr. Parsons entered the pulpit of Knox Church last Sabbath evening his first words were, "let us praise God." Without further announcement than the sounding of the opening chord of the grand "Old Hundredth" the entire congregation rose with one accord and sang the accepted *Te Deum* of all Protestant denominations,

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,  
Praise Him, all creatures here below;  
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

The English language contains no more comprehensive, or condensed expression of praise to the Triune God than this magnificent doxology of good old Bishop Ken. As the opening hymn of a congregation, assembled ostensibly to praise God, it seems especially appropriate. I have heard of congregations who object to its use in this part of the service, as savoring of ritualism, but in Knox Church, though in some respects the most conservative congregation in the city, this narrow prejudice finds no place. Every worshipper within the church seemed to feel the inspiring influence of this noble combination of sacred poetry and music, which is almost irresistible in its appeal to the devotional impulse implanted in every human heart. The invocation was followed by Ps. xxiv sung to that good old Scottish tune "Kilmarnock." The congregation entered heartily into the singing which was marked by clearly defined rhythm and accentuation which obviated all tendency to heaviness or dragging. "Kilmarnock" is among the most deservedly popular of Scottish Psalm tunes of the present century. Its composer was Neil Dougall, a native of Greenock. When only eighteen years of age he lost his eyesight, and had his right arm blown off by the accidental discharge of a cannon on board the Clarence Yacht, while engaged in firing a salute in connection with the rejoicings occasioned by Lord Howe's great victory over the French fleet in 1794. He applied himself to the study of music under Mr. Robert Duncan precentor of East Parish Church, Greenock. His progress was so rapid that he was soon enabled to engage in teaching music classes on his own account. The origin of Kilmarnock is interesting and may be briefly told. "Dougall's attention having been drawn to the peculiarity of the tune "Marven" (built on what is commonly termed the Caledonian scale—viz., without the fourth or seventh in the melody) he resolved to compose one on the same principle, "Kilmarnock" being the result. It shared the fate of his other tunes—a place among his scraps. One day R. A. Smith of "St George's" Edinburgh paid him a visit. After conversation, Smith enquired, anything doing Mr. Dougall? any scraps to divert us? Mr Dougall produced from his drawer the first few scraps of paper he could lay his hands on. Smith took up one and having hummed it over observed—A very pretty melody, and what do you call it? "It's no christend yet," was the answer; but do you observe anything peculiar about it? I do, said Smith; it is on the Caledonian scale, the same as "Marven"; will you oblige me with a copy of your nameless tune? "With pleasure," said the composer, and we'll christen't "Kilmarnock." It was first published in Brown's Robertson's Selections of the Best Psalm and Hymn tunes which appeared about 1834.

The first Scripture lesson was followed by Hymn 63 sung to "Miles Lane" which has already been mentioned in my notes on St. Andrew's Church. Dr. Parsons's method of conducting the offertory is unique and decidedly impressive. He first announces that "Our usual offering will now be rendered unto God." While the plates are being passed he reads selected passages of Scripture having a direct bearing on the sacredness, and duty of this distinct act of worship. These are alternated with short organ voluntaries

which are played very softly and occupy less than one minute each. I have heard of a Scottish minister who rated his hearers soundly on the meagreness of their offerings and expressed the conviction that "while they were professing to give freely to the Lord, they were feeling the nicks in their sma siller, for fear they should gie a three-penny instead o a fower-penny bit." Such tirades might pass without producing any effect other than a smile, or perhaps a slight feeling of resentment, but the impressive commands of Scripture as read by Dr. Parsons cannot fail to make the offering a matter of serious consideration on the part of every conscientious worshipper.

Dr. Parsons is giving a series of discourses on Old Testament subjects in connection with the evening services, in which a complete chapter is taken as the text. On the occasion of my visit the subject was 2nd Samuel 6th chap. which was read and expounded in successive paragraphs. It was shown that "David violated the law of Moses by putting the ark of God on a cart instead of having it carried by the priests and Levites who were appointed to this sacred office. God was jealous to make an example of Uzzah so that all, even the king should be warned. No secular act can be committed in God's house. Some think the giving of the offering a mere secular act saying, it is to pay expenses or send missionaries to the heathen. How few realise that it is a sacred offering unto God. When we recognize the presence of God in His house as we do at the family altar then will He bless us and our children as He did Obed-edom and all his household. It is because the family altar has been thrown down and neglected that we find so few who are willing to consecrate themselves to God's service. We are educating a set of sceptics and infidels simply because of the indecent, flippant familiarity with God's word which is tolerated by even professing Christians. Let every one study how he should come into the sanctuary, how he should give his offering, and how he should recognize the presence of God in everything.

The discourse was followed by the well known hymn 223, "Onward Christian Soldiers" to Sir Arthur Sullivan's equally well known tune "St. Gertrude" with which it is now indissolubly associated. In this the congregational singing was spirited and rousing, as it was throughout the service. The central object of the musical authorities of Knox Church is the attainment of good, healthy congregational singing. Of their success there can be no question. Everybody sings. The organ is a magnificent instrument presided over by an efficient organist in the person of Mr. T. Galbraith. Mr. John Alexander has been precentor for several years. Until recently the singing was led by precentor and organ without the aid which a well trained choir alone can give. Dr. Parsons' experiences of the vagaries of American quartette choirs may have had something to do with the reluctance to risk any similar experiences in Knox. Mr. Alexander has associated with him a body of young people numbering about twenty-four voices which render excellent assistance in leading the congregational praise. Anthems and organ voluntaries are viewed with disfavor by the session, an exception being made in favor of the short voluntaries mentioned in connection with the offertory. The introduction of the choir must have proved a source of much gratification to those worshippers gifted with a musical ear, as the efforts of a single voice to make itself heard above the tones of the organ, and the vigorous congregational singing which prevails at Knox Church must have been somewhat trying. Congregational singing has not been developed without effort. Mr. Alexander has conducted Psalmody classes for several winters with much success. The arrangement of the choir seats is that which I have previously described as most desirable—viz: in front of the pulpit with the organ console extended, in such a manner as to allow organist and choir to receive the full benefit of the organ tone, and concentrate their forces in leading the congregational praise.—TEMPO.