

## CONGREGATIONAL SINGING.

Among the many handsome edifices of which Toronto Presbyterians are justly proud, Westminster Church is the most modern. Standing on the main thoroughfare of the northern part of the city, the massive and symmetrical proportions of its brown stone front, surmounted by a handsome tower, produce a very imposing effect. At first sight one would suppose that the seating accommodation would be more than sufficient for the requirements of any ordinary congregation, but the management find their resources severely taxed in providing for the steady increase in the membership. Westminster Church is fortunate in having as pastor one of the ablest ministers of the Presbyterian denomination. On the few occasions on which I have had the opportunity of hearing him, I have been much impressed with the thorough going earnestness of his manner, and geniality of disposition. I was not surprised to find a large number of young people among the worshippers last Sabbath evening. The Rev. John Neil is a pastor well qualified to attract young men and women, and win them for the service of the Master. In his manner there is an entire absence of all affectation of priestly dignity, but on the contrary an expression of frankness and geniality which must invite the confidence and respect of his flock. He presents a fine example of manly, healthy Christianity which cannot fail to attract those who desire to "serve the Lord with gladness, and come into his presence with singing." He takes an active interest in the service of praise and co-operates heartily with the organist and choirmaster. The organ, a magnificent instrument of modern design, occupies an alcove behind the pulpit platform, while the choir seats are arranged in three rows, immediately in front of the organ and behind the pulpit. By judicious extension of the space between pulpit and organ the architect has succeeded in avoiding the thin, cramped effect which is usually associated with this arrangement. Seats are provided for about thirty choirsters, and, on the occasion of my visit, nearly all were occupied. The 24th Psalm was first sung to the tune which was specially composed for it by the Rev. A. M. Thompson, and which bears the name of the church which is so closely associated with his life-work—viz., 'St. George's Edinburgh.' In studying the history of Scottish Psalmody the names of Dr. Thompson, and his equally famous precentor, Mr. R. A. Smith, are found in the foremost ranks of those devoted workers who labored incessantly for the elevation of the public taste in all matters pertaining to the service of praise. Judging from the manner in which the large congregation at Westminster entered into the singing of this excellent, though somewhat elaborate composition, it seems to be a favorite with which they are quite familiar. The first lesson was followed by prayer, after which Hymn 177 was announced. This is thought to be one of the best among the many noble hymns written by Charles Wesley. One writer says 'For its delight in interior spiritual blessedness, and its warm, impassioned expressions of desire after the love of God, it may be compared with the best productions of S. Bernard.' 'It contains an extraordinary depth of feeling and desire, eager, impatient, resolute, combined with an extended view of the love of God, such as only a poet of much heart-experience like Charles Wesley, could write.' This was very well sung by choir and congregation. The tempo was just sufficiently fast to prevent dragging, or breaking of the verbal phrasing, and everybody seemed to enter heartily into the singing. This was followed by the offering, during which the pastor announced that the choir would sing.

Hark, hark, my soul! Angelic songs are swelling  
O'er earth's green fields and ocean's wave-beat thro.

The beautiful setting by Shelley of Faber's beautiful hymn opens with a bass solo which was excellently sung by Mr. George Barron, a member of the choir. His voice is a rich, sombre bass of pure quality which

is judiciously employed. The soprano solo was also sung by a member of the choir, Miss Mary Waldron. This young lady is the fortunate possessor of a pure soprano voice, clear, bright, and penetrating in its quality, which she uses without apparent effort. In the chorus the blending was very good, especially in the piano passages, and the voices were carefully subdued while the solos were being sung. The anthem was followed by the Lord's Prayer, after which Hymn 126 was announced. None of the three tunes with which this well-known hymn is accompanied in our Hymnal seems to have become popular. All three were discarded in favor of Bradbury's tune, to which it is usually set in American collections. When sung sufficiently slowly to meet the requirements of the emotional character of the hymn it is apt to become heavy and dull, while, if sung quickly enough to prevent this it becomes almost flippant in contrast with the deep spirit of humility and trust which pervade the entire hymn. It was sung with a considerable amount of vigor, which would have been quite gratifying to such as are satisfied with mere vigor, but, something higher is required if such a noble hymn as this is to be sung "with the spirit, and with the understanding also." Many composers have attempted to produce a tune in keeping with the character of this hymn, and containing the elements necessary for congregational use, but few have met with unqualified success. The best with which I am acquainted is Sir Henry Smart's "Misericordia" which has been adopted by the Hymnal Committees of both the U. P. and Free Church of Scotland, and the compilers of "Hymns Ancient and Modern."

An excellent sermon on the sin of covetousness was preached from the text contained in Luke xii. 15. It was shown that the sin of covetousness consists, not in the possession of wealth, but in trusting in wealth and making it our god. The covetous man sins against himself, and his covetousness eats out all that is noble, worthy, or Christ-like from the soul of a man. The covetous man sins against his fellow-man, as covetousness is at the root of nearly every crime that is committed. The covetous man sins against God. If he does not give God the highest place in his affections, he is sinning against Him as all we have comes from His hand. Lay up treasure in Heaven, trust in the living God, and as long as His arm has almighty power, and as long as He has infinite wisdom, His arm will protect us, His wisdom will guide us, and no power on earth can harm us.

The concluding hymn was No. 280 commencing  
"When this passing world is done."

"Petra" is essentially a tune for the congregation. Through its association with the ever popular Rock of Ages it is probably the best known among modern hymn tunes. The congregation and choir sang it with much heartiness, and the expression received due attention. With Mr. A. M. Gorrie as choirmaster, and Miss M. G. Fergusson, as organist the service of praise in Westminster Church is in good hands. Miss Fergusson discharges the duties of her office with much skill and the organ accompaniments to the choir and congregational singing are played with musicianly judgment and taste. Mr. Gorrie is evidently a painstaking choirmaster who takes an active interest in his work. He has the hearty support of a large and efficient body of choirsters, well trained in their department of the service of praise. The worshippers in Westminster church seem to be thoroughly in earnest in their praise service, and singing is general throughout the church. Occasionally a slight tendency to waver in the time is noticeable but this may easily be rectified by the cultivation of more clearly marked accentuation and attack, and a less frequent indulgence in *rallentando* and *accelerando* effects. That this is possible even with so large a body of worshippers was clearly demonstrated in the concluding hymn where the accentuation was crisp and definite, and the singing was both hearty and expressive.—TEMPO.