

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH PSALMODY.

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It is a matter of great encouragement to all identified with church music, to observe the gradually widening and deepening interest manifested by the entire church in this important department of Christian work. Its claims are being more fully acknowledged on all hands, thorough musical knowledge, the brighter light of musical science, the principles of musical elocution, the development of the rules and laws of the art, the use of new and improved methods of reading music, the increasing liberality of the church in maintaining and promoting the efficiency of this service; the manifest improvement in style and purity of the later edition of our Psalm and hymn tune books; the enlightened interest in the work displayed by the Presbyterian press,—are all pointing to a brighter and clearer day of *Church Psalmody*, when our dim and misty ideas, our old and often erroneous associations, our prejudices and culpable indifference, shall be dispelled by the enlightening influence of a more advanced age.

In order to arrive at some definite and practical plans by which we may be guided in the path of psalmody improvement we propose the three following questions. 1. What is the present condition of our psalmody? 2. What should our psalmody be like? 3. How may we make it what it should be? We will dispose of the first two questions briefly, dwelling more fully on the last.

Although the singing in some of our churches is tolerably good, and although considerable effort has in many instances been put forth to improve matters in this direction, still we are far from the perfection to which we might attain, through the medium of judicious and united effort. It is impossible to raise the status of our Canadian Presbyterian Church music so long as matters remain in their present irregular and disunited condition, and the sooner we can arrive at arrangements whereby we may with method and uniformity engage in our praises, the better for ourselves, the best interests of our Church, and the glory of Him we seek to worship. In matters of doctrine and church discipline our Church has long and successfully maintained an exalted standard, whilst its praises have received but little attention, and have frequently been conducted by individuals whose zeal outran their discretion. It is time that in the matter of conducting our psalmody we should see to it that we have the right men in the right place. Men of musical talent, men of enthusiasm, men of grave and sober spirit, in short, men that need not to be ashamed. In many of our churches we have young men (and maidens too sometimes) entrusted with the entire management and responsibility of the musical portion of the service, who for want of a thorough musical education and experience, are unfitted to conduct the services, however useful they might be in their pews or in the choir seat. In those churches where the services of a good preceptor have been secured, the singing is generally much better than in those churches where they have not a regularly appointed conductor. In churches where the minister boasts of possessing *no ear for music* the singing is not likely to be so successful as in others where the minister sings the part suited to his voice, and seeks to enlist the sympathy and co-operation of the people in the service of song. In some of our churches the people do not in any way exert themselves to sing unitedly, but produce a chilling influence on the minister, and render cold and insipid a service which otherwise would have been beneficial to all. In those churches where the people stand during singing there is likely to be more attention paid to the music, better singing, and a better supply of music books than in those churches where the people sit while the choir stand and lead the music. In those churches where only one music book is used there is certain to be more uniformity in the service of praise than in those where the soprano and alto sing from one book, and the tenor and bass from another. In some of our choir seats is to be found that very dubious, unorthodox book, known as the Manuscript Music book, containing a heterogeneous collection of "real favorites" which have been gathered from various sources. Frequently also we find choirs singing from the front of church galleries, behind the main body of the people, the leader being almost entirely helpless

in case of emergency. The conductor should be located in front of the congregation where he would be able to guide the time and the music with greater power and effect; we would think it strange to have the minister preach from the back gallery, although it is quite common to have the singing led from behind. We cannot leave this division of our lecture without giving due credit to all such as devote their time and talents to the interests of our Church psalmody; we have many bright examples of highly cultivated ladies and gentle men in our midst who with undaunted perseverance and much self-sacrifice, apply themselves with heart and voice to this inspiring service—particularly the ladies, who are ready to every good work; *they* are the Alpha and Omega of our Church psalmody. The Sabbath School lesson of the 10th February, will yet be fresh in the memory of many. You will remember that when "The people stood up to praise the Lord God of Israel with a loud voice on high (yes they "stood up," they did not sit down to praise, "as the manner of some is"), and when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord gave them a signal victory over their enemies," their singing being a manifestation of their "belief in the Lord and in His prophets," and you will remember the burden of their song—"PRAISE THE LORD, for His mercy endureth for ever."

We will now consider our second point, viz.: What should our Psalmody be like? It should be the united voice of the people, given forth with vigor and intelligence. Luther says, "the devil hates good music." "Come," he would say, when he saw his friends or felt himself despondent, "let us defy the devil, and sing the 130th Psalm, our singing distresses the devil, and hurts his feelings exceedingly. I have always loved music; I would not for any price lose my musical power. It drives away the spirit of melancholy, as we see in the case of King Saul. By its aid a man forgets his anger and pride, and expels many temptations and evil thoughts. Music is a great disciplinarian, she makes people tractable and kindly disposed. Music is a lovely gift of God, it awakens and moves me so, that I preach with pleasure. Next to theology, I am not ashamed to confess, there is no art or science to be compared to music." Chrysostom says, "God has joined music with worship that we might with cheerfulness and readiness of mind express His praise in sacred hymns." Bishop Horne says, "The heart may be weaned from everything base and mean, and elevated to every thing excellent and praiseworthy, by sacred music." Baxter says, "When we are singing the praise of God in a great assembly with joyful and fervent spirits, I have the liveliest foretaste of heaven, and I could almost wish that our voice were loud enough to reach through all the world to heaven itself." It should be the desire of every true worshipper to join audibly in the service of song; to realize it to be a pleasant and delightful thing to sing unto the Lord. We all hope to join in the eternal praises of heaven, and do we refuse to join in the praises of the earthly sanctuary?—let us then join in concert with the saints below;

Learning here by faith and love,
Songs of praise to sing above.

The indifference of both parents and children is a source of great annoyance to our church preceptors in their endeavors to improve church and Sabbath School singing. If a congregational practice be announced it is seldom well attended, and if a children's class is formed it very often shares a similar fate, and should they be urged to attend regularly, they are prepared to plead the most trivial excuses for non-attendance. too far to go, too late at night; day school lessons to be committed, evening parties, etc., in fact any engagement is seized upon as an excuse for staying away. We must cast aside our indifference and half-heartedness, and seek to emulate the spirit of the early reformers if our psalmody is to be what it should be; we must "with zeal like their's inspired" render praises unto the Lord. He knew the value of music in a worldly sense who said, "Give me the making of the songs of a country, and I care not who makes its laws," let the Church awake to her duty in this matter, "Let all the people praise the Lord," then, "God shall judge the people righteously, and govern the nations of the earth;" let us do the praising—our part—then "God shall be a lawgiver unto his people," "Oh! let the nations be glad and sing for joy. Then shall the earth yield her increase, and God, even our own God shall bless us, God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him." Let us present our offerings

of praise in our purest language; our finest music; our hearts and voices tuned, nay, consecrated to His service, and He will accept our sacrifice, and make us more and more a blessing at home and abroad. We seem to miss the great truth that our Church psalmody is a living power given us by God for His glory: we fail to realize as fully as we might that praise is not a "sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal," but a powerful emotion of our very inmost soul, whereby we can in all circumstances, express our gratitude and "make all our wants and wishes known."

Our psalmody should not be like the wail of the captive Jews, who hanged their harps on the willows and said, "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" but rather like the exhortation of the Psalmist, "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands, serve the Lord with gladness and come before His presence with singing."

The question proposed as our third and last is, "How may we make our Psalmody what it should be?" We have already anticipated this question somewhat by observing that our singing must proceed from a heartfelt desire to praise the Lord, our singing can never become what it should be unless it is done heartily as unto the Lord. Enlarging more fully under this head we will give attention (however hurriedly and imperfectly) to the educative, scientific, and historic bearing of the art of music in relation to our Church psalmody. Such persons as do not read vocal music from notes, will agree with me in stating that it is a very desirable accomplishment to be able to do so with ease and fluency; while such as do read music from notes or sol-fa syllables, will as readily admit, that it is an inestimable aid to our reading power to be able to grasp the principles of melody and harmony; to judge critically the merits of a musical composition and to understand the rules of the art, and the laws of the science of music. I offer no apology for urging upon all who can, the duty of availing themselves of every opportunity of acquiring the art of reading music, so that they may "sing with the understanding also," whatever is worth doing is worth doing well. Even Scripture comes to the rescue on this point, for in 1 Chron. xxv. 7 read, "So the number of them with their brethren that were instructed in the songs of the Lord, even all that were cunning, was two hundred fourscore and eight. Luther says, "Whoso hath skill in the art is of good temperament, fitted for all things. We must teach music in schools, a schoolmaster ought to have skill in music, or I would not regard him, neither should we ordain young men as preachers unless they have been well exercised and practised in music." Many plans have been adopted for the purpose of simplifying and popularizing musical instruction, the most successful of modern times being the Tonic Sol-fa system of the Rev. John Curwen. He has done more for Church Psalmody than any other living man; indeed, in this respect we might justly designate him the Luther of the nineteenth century. The Tonic Sol-fa system has been before the world for a quarter of a century. It has made infinitely more progress and has done more for the revival of psalmody in modern times than was ever dreamt of by its most enthusiastic admirers. It is adapted to the requirements of any class or state of society, and is especially useful in the training of the young. It presents the theory of music in an easy and pleasing form, and guides the pupil by carefully graded steps from the simpler elements of time and tune to a thorough knowledge of the theory and practice of music. While it saves the learner the worry and mental exertion necessary to overleap the five-barred gate of the ordinary notation, with its clefs, notes, sharps and flats, key-relationships, and other difficulties which frequently discourage and retard the progress of the beginner—it forms a natural stepping-stone to the established notation, and is easily mastered by such as know music in the ordinary way. It has been introduced into several of the Commissioners' Schools, and other schools in this city, and were its advantages more fully known, it would prove a powerful means of making our psalmody what it should be. It would be of untold advantage in our Sabbath Schools, where our present almost uniform system (or rather want of system) is that of playing or singing our new hymns in the ears of the children. By adopting the Sol-fa method of teaching, we could have the work done quite as speedily, more effectively, and thus make our scholars readers of music, preparing them for taking a place in our choirs, and leading them on to a life of usefulness in connection with