

## CONGREGATIONAL SINGING.

In the history of Canadian Presbyterianism, the remarkable rise and progress of Bloor street church is probably unequalled. No more than eight years have elapsed since I had the pleasure of attending an evening service in the parlor of a house in Sussex Avenue, which was then sufficiently large to accommodate the small body of worshippers who formed the nucleus of this congregation. In order to provide for the rapidly increasing membership the meeting-place was transferred to Knox College but, the resources of Convocation Hall were soon outgrown, and a new building was found to be indispensable. No more suitable site could have been selected, than that on which the magnificent church building now stands. In providing for the requirements of this rapid growing section of the city, the management evinced much wisdom and judgment, the correctness of which is now beyond question. Although the building is among the most capacious in this City of Churches, I found few vacant pews on the occasion of my visit, last Sabbath evening. I had purposely left Bloor street church near the end of my list, as the present organist and choir-master assumed charge of the service of praise, so recently as the beginning of the present year. As church musicians Mr. and Mrs. H. M. Blight are too well, and favorably known throughout Ontario to require any words of introduction. Mr. Blight performs the duties connected with the direction of the choir, while his better-half presides at the organ. This arrangement nullifies all of the objections usually urged against the division of the offices of choir-master and organist as confliction of interests must surely be an impossibility. During the short time in which they have officiated at Bloor street Mr. and Mrs. Blight have succeeded in collecting an excellent body of singers numbering about thirty voices. The parts are well balanced with the exception of the bass which is not yet sufficiently strong to give effective support to the upper parts.

The prevailing custom of according the first place in the service to the Psalms is observed here, and Psalm 89 to "St Magnus" was first sung. The body of tone was full and powerful and the effect of this bold and triumphant old tune, as sung by the large body of worshippers, was most inspiring. I was pleased to note that the custom of reading the verses before the tune is played over is also observed here. The choir and congregation rise when the final cord is played and commence to sing with the tonality and tempo of the tune clearly defined and present to the ear. After the first lesson had been read from John xiv, hymn 197 was announced. This hymn is now indissolubly wedded to the tune "St. Helen" to which it is set in the Hymnal, and which was composed by Mr. Walter Hately of Edinburg, one of the most distinguished Scottish musicians of this century. It is an excellent tune, and when sung to the first verse of the hymn, presents nothing which can cause the slightest difficulty in singing, but in the second and following verses, great care is necessary in order that serious errors in phrasing may be avoided. An analysis of the first and second verses will make this point more easily understood.

Be still, my soul : the Lord is on thy side :  
Bear patiently thy cross of grief and pain :  
Leave to thy God to order and provide  
In every change His faithful will remain.  
Be still, my soul, thy best thy heavenly Friend  
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

Be still, my soul, thy God doth undertake  
To guide the future as he has the past.  
Thy hope, thy confidence let nothing shake :  
All now mysterious shall be bright at last  
Be still, my soul : the waves and winds shall know  
His voice who ruled them while He dwelt below.

On examining the form of the tune it will be found that the first phrase in each period consists of two quadruple measures containing four notes, while the

second phrase has six notes. The last note in each of the first phrases is prolonged to three beats, followed in all but two cases by a leap of a sixth or fourth. This naturally inclines the singer to take breath at the end of the musical phrase, which is in strict accord with the verbal phrase of the first verse, but sadly at variance with the second. If the musical phrasing only be observed, some results in the second verse will be as follows :—

To guide the fa, taro  
Thy hope, thy con, fidence  
All now myste, rious  
His voice who ruled, them.

The same difficulties are present in the third and fourth verses. No choir or congregation which has neglected the study of phrasing can expect to sing this or similar hymns without mutilating the text or obscuring its meaning. I observed closely while this was being sung and noted that the tempo was sufficiently active to enable anyone to sing any of the verbal phrases without necessitating breath-taking, and that the organist carefully sustained the chords in accordance with the verbal phrasing, still, the errors which I have pointed out were everywhere present. This subject will probably receive increased attention in Bloor street church as the worshippers realize the full import of the excellent phrasing which is, unfortunately, confined almost exclusively to the organ.

During the offertory hymn 210 from Sacred Songs and Solos, "It is well with my soul," was sung by the choir. The first verse was sung as a solo by Miss Agnes Forbes, the chorus singing the refrain. I was much impressed with the amount of feeling which this young lady instilled into her singing. Her voice is an excellent soprano of pure, sympathetic quality which lends itself readily to the emotional expression of the hymn. In the second verse she was joined by Miss Webb, a contralto with a very pleasing quality of voice although somewhat light in volume. The third verse was sung by the full choir, and an impressive effect was made by the repetition of the refrain *pianissimo*, and unaccompanied. The singing of the choir is an excellent tribute to the care which must have been bestowed on it to produce such satisfactory results in the short time which has elapsed since its reorganization. The announcements were followed by hymn 188 which was sung with much heartiness. The sermon was preached by the pastor Rev. W. G. Wallace from the 27th verse of the chapter containing the first lesson, "My peace I give unto you." The peace which springs from confidence in God was described with much earnestness, and all were urged to cultivate the spirit of peace which Christ manifested throughout his earthly life, and prompted Him to meet every opposition with un murmuring patience, and forgiveness of his greatest enemies. The keynote of the entire service, as evinced in the lessons, prayers, sermon and praise was Peace. The concluding hymn was No. 129, "Jesus, lover of my soul" which was evidently enjoyed by every worshipper within the church. Of this inspired hymn of Wesley's volumes might be written. Few hymns have become more closely identified with the last hours of departing believers, or have exercised such an extensive influence for good in the Christian Church. No tune could be more appropriate to it than "Hollingside." Dr. Dykes is recognized as without a peer in the realm of hymn-tune composition and "Hollingside" is among the very best of the many undying compositions which he has dedicated to the service of the Master. It is related of him that when his organist was absent through sickness, he, being himself an able organist, took that gentleman's place at the organ, in addition to reading the lessons and preaching the sermon. The position of organist, with one so well qualified to render assistance and advice in musical matters must have been pleasant indeed. Many preceptors are longing for such help as only a pastor with a broad, sympathetic nature can supply.—  
TEMPO.