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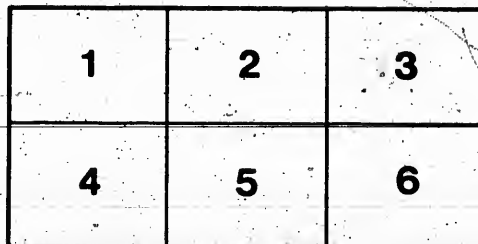
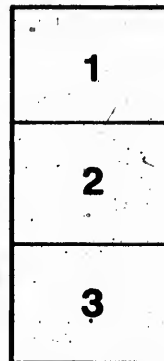
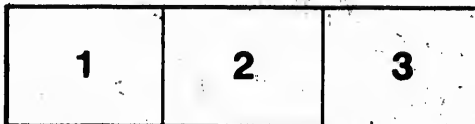
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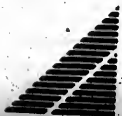
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Congregational Music

—HAND—

Some of its Hindrances.

A Paper,

Read at the Church Conference in Kingston,
October 19th, 1887, and

Printed :-: by :-: Request.

—BY THE—

VEN. T. BEDFORD-JONES, LL. D., D. C. L.,
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ANGLO-CATHOLIC CHURCH OF CANADA
GENERAL SYNOD, ARCHIVES

CONGREGATIONAL MUSIC

—AND—

◁SOME OF ITS HINDRANCES.▷

I.

My subject is wide enough and interesting enough to occupy the entire evening, and I am surrounded by friends who, I suspect, have as many opinions about CONGREGATIONAL Music as they have faces. My limited time therefore, obliges me to speak somewhat dogmatically, and yet I have some claim to offering my few remarks as an "expert." From my earliest childhood I have been employed in all sorts of churches, city and country, promoting congregational music; while during a ministry of thirty-two years I have paid unremitting attention to the subject, and been as regularly at my choir practice on Friday evenings as at my church service on Sunday mornings. Besides this I have been ever impressed with the conviction that the popularity of our religious services in this country (as the popularity of religious services in any country) will in a great degree depend on the facilities afforded to the congregation to give expression to their emotions by vocal music. I refer to the great mass of the people. A few cultured persons, and those too often by no means the most enthusiastic and earnest Christians, may, I know, listen with rapture to an elaborated anthem sung with scientific precision by a select choir of accomplished musicians. Such a performance I can myself enjoy thoroughly in its own place. Indeed I regret that at our own Church entertainments and concerts we have not a great deal more of this delightful and elevating music. But to the great mass of ordinary Christian worshippers an Anthem, or

what is called "a Service," is an unmeaning and often a chilling mode of worship. They understand the fine music as little as they do Greek, and have no taste for the worship of God by deputy. They want to hear their own voices uttering as best they can their own thoughts, hopes, aspirations, convictions. They want to hear too, the concord of the living voices around, and feel the sympathy coming from soul to soul, all finding simultaneous expression in a burst of song that stirs the pulses, excites the awakened fervor of devotion and transports the toiling, sorrowing, weary child of earth, even for a short time to a higher, a heavenly level, where in some partial fashion he and his fellow-worshippers can together hold communion with their common Father, their common Saviour, their common Sanctifier. They may be mistaken in their tastes and ideas. The fact however remains for us to deal with, and I fear the Prayer Book is all on their side. The aim and intention of that Book, which is as much a Book of Praise as of Prayer, is to make the people who use it singing worshippers. Beyond a doubt, let us think what we please, or like what we please, this Directorium of Church of England worship presumes that her service is to be mainly a *musical service*; and for a musical service it is all arranged. Take out the Psalms, which, you know, were meant to be sacred songs, and songs, I presume, are meant to be sung—the Canticles, the Creeds (originally hymnal or rhythmical chants), and the Versicles, all specially pointed and marked by capital letters for the direction of a singing congregation, and you leave little behind. And let us also thankfully keep in mind that the Church of England recognizes the great truth that the worship of God is for the people of God, not the people for the worship, and that it is far easier for an assemblage of persons to sing together in an edifying, orderly manner than to read or speak together. What is called singing in *monotony*, or speaking together on one note, is the simplest and easiest, as it is the most natural, way of securing an orderly and united response from a congregation. If you once heard, as I have, a congregation of 3000 men in St. Paul's cathedral, saying the Lord's Prayer and the Creed in a *monotone*, you would never care to go back to the unintelligible utterance of a variety of voices, masculine and feminine, high and low, fast and slow, all jumbling the words together so that the most attentive listener cannot make out a syllable of what is being said. I leave it to your

own common sense whether the natural, the truly natural monotone of a simple little child is not more decent and devout than the usual congregational manner of speaking together. For speak together, and sing together, they should. The Church of England means a company of her worshipping children, not to be an audience, and her sacred buildings not to be either lecture rooms or music halls. For her they are places consecrated to a worship offered, not by any minister, or a deputy such as a clerk, or any set of deputies such as a choir, but by the entire assembly assenting and enjoying their Christian, priestly privilege of directly and on their own behalf approaching and addressing "with one accord, with one heart and one mouth," that Heavenly Father to whom all equally have access by one Spirit; and this, by reason of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and *His presence with them at the time and all the time.*

Now, then, my good friends, why is not this Church of England worship the rule instead of the exception with us? How comes it that our church-going people do not fall in with their Prayer-and-Praise-Book directions? Go to almost any church, and you will seldom find the people in the nave heartily joining the choir in the singing of the Canticles and Hymns. It matters little what the style of the music is. If it be *Gregorian*,—(I confess I had a long and strong attack of the Gregorian fever, and I know all about it. I need not take up time expatiating on its merits or demerits, for I am quite satisfied that it is out of harmony with the natural taste, and never can become popular; nor is the style of the music worth the alienation of a generation of people from the clergyman and his Catholic teaching).—but even if the music be *Gregorian*, the singing of Canticles and Hymns is unpleasantly *unisonous* in a strict sense, that is, the people do not generally join. If the music be *Anglican*, it is too often a glee-like performance, confined to the choir, light and tripping, utterly undevotional and horribly irreverent, while it murders the sense of the inspired words. If the choir be bad, and are apt to sing flat, the people are silent, unable to help the lame dog over the stile. If the choir sing well, the singing is equally confined to the chancel or the dreadful orchestral gallery. Then the congregation becomes dumb lest they may mar the effect of the fine music, and be scowled at by the musicians; while all shrink from being heard singing by those

lukewarm, lackadaisical folk, or other poor people at their elbow, who do not, cannot, and will not sing also. How, let me ask, are we to account for this? How is it that when we English Church Christians meet solemnly in our own land for the very purpose of uniting our voices in prayer and praise, and with a book in our hands that gives us every assistance and encouragement—we, who can sing well enough at home in our drawing-rooms or our kitchens—we, who have as good musical voices as our Methodist and Presbyterian friends over the way, to say nothing of the shouting Salvationists—we are usually like so many dumb dogs when we meet to sing God's praise in God's presence?

II.

1. There are many hindrances. They begin at an early period of our religious education. *Our children are never taught to sing their Church's service of praise.* It is hard to know really what our children are taught to prepare them for such a service as they have to take part in when they grow up. In the Sunday School, usually, they are made to kneel down or sit on their haunches while *listening* to somebody saying a prayer which they little understand, and in which they never join. Then a hymn is sung by the teachers and a few older pupils, and what is in fact a lecture follows. Then comes another prayer and another hymn, and all is over. Now is not all this a beautiful training for a religious function in places not belonging to the Catholic Church of England? Are we not educating our children admirably for the service of the Meeting house? Why should they not be taught at once to sing a responsive service and do their own praying, according to the model of the Prayer Book? It can be done. *Crede experto*. I have no more time to dwell on this point. But it is the first hindrance—*neglect in training of the young.*

2. Another and serious hindrance (though you may be surprised at my saying it) is this. Our congregations, like our children, as a rule have not been made to recognize as a fundamental requisite for all Catholic worship the fact, the very blessed fact, of *the Lord's Presence* in His Sanctuary. Do you think that were the people, young and old, made to feel that when they entered what we call, what our Lord called "His House" they were on holy ground and as near the Person of the living, listening Lord as was Moses before the burning

bush, or Solomon before the Tabernacle in the Temple, they would be silent - silent in doing the very thing which they come to do, and He comes to hear? Do you think that the choir, aye, and often the clergyman too, would sing or say so flippantly those solemn words, thinking of the effect *not* on the ear of God but the ears of the "*miserable sinners*" around or before them, if they saw with their eyes of faith the living Person of the Christ of God as close to them as His Altar throne—that outward symbol of His presence? I believe that if that awful yet gracious Presence of our King Jesus were recognized by the congregation (who come, remember, expressly to hold communion with Him where He promises to meet them)—I believe that when His Ambassador turns, after Confession and Absolution to the pardoned penitents and cries "*Praise ye the Lord,*" not a voice could refrain from responding with a burst of gratitude, "*The Lord's Name be Praised*" No, we are silent because we are thinking of what we may enjoy or gain for ourselves, forgetting that we are where He is also, and have come to *give* Him the honor due to His Name - an offering of holy worship.

3. Another hindrance is that too frequently *the clergyman leaves this very important part of his duty in the hands of others* as if it were a very secondary affair. I need not remind my reverend brethren that the *Praise of God* is in reality the highest element of our worship. This is recognized in our church by the fact that the Precentor's seat is invariably in cathedrals and correctly arranged churches placed at the north or higher side of the choir, the prayer-desk at the south or lower side. Praise is higher than prayer. Praise will last when Prayer shall cease. In Heaven all is Praise, as all the worship is musical. This being so, the Praise of God is worthy of quite as great pains on the part of the Parish Priest as the Prayers, or the Sermon, or the Lessons. For the music in his church he should consider himself as much responsible as for any other part of his sacred functions. He should take good care that his people have every possible help in this noblest act of the common worship. He should never leave the direction and control of God's praise out of his own hands. He should be always present at the "practices," selecting hymns suitable to and bearing upon the services of the day,—in harmony with Collects, Lessons and Sermons,—checking the irreverence and gossiping chit-chat of thoughtless young people

and now and then to give a word of explanation as to a difficult verse or obsolete word, so that the choir may sing not only with the spirit but with the understanding. It is more to the point that he should insist on the words being sung so that they would be intelligible to his own ears and therefore likely to be intelligible to the ears of his people,—that words of prayer should be sung solemnly and slowly, and words of praise brightly and quickly; that every pains should be taken to have the *words sung as they would be read* with correct grammatical emphasis, not strained or distorted to accommodate the notes, whether long or short. In other words, he should see that the true meaning of the inspired sentiment should not be sacrificed to the music, but rather the music made to enforce and embellish the sacred thought, the holy aspiration, the fervent utterance, as the handmaid of the words and not the words the handmaid of the music. Now you observe that all I have been saying may be done by a clergyman who is not a skilled musician, but who thus makes his people generally, and his choir in particular, feel that the Praise of God is a matter of supreme importance, and not to be relegated to any amateur volunteer, or even a paid professor with too often no more devotional instincts than an organ-grinder, or to that maid-of-all-parish work, the unpaid and unthanked official, the clergyman's own wife! After a choir experience of half a century, I am fully persuaded that the *personal superintendence of the clergyman is essential* in both removing hindrances and helping the congregation to sing. Had I time I could give you many instances of the truth of this, and show the benefits sure to accrue from the clergyman assuming control of the choir, such as the preservation of peace and good will among his musical coadjutors, proverbially touchy and liable to petty squabbles and jealousies, and the securing at all times, at practice as well as at service, a proper behavior and the reverent recognition of that Divine Presence of which I have already spoken.

4. I must conclude with stating one more hindrance. This is the *love of novelty* in music, the incessant changing of tunes and chants. This very effectually interferes with congregational music. People never can learn what they hear only at long intervals. In the streets of London the little Arabs may be heard whistling the beautiful but difficult operatic airs, just because night after night for a month or months

they hear them in the theatre gallery. Of course the airs are usually good airs. My experience and conviction are that people are never tired of really good tunes, just as they are never tired of the good words of our Liturgy. But we all know how our choirs, not our congregations, are ever craving for novelty, some "beautiful new hymn" or "lovely new chant," not for the sake of the words of either hymn or chant, but because they wish to have the gratification of singing the airs. This constant changing has a twofold injurious effect. It perplexes the people, who thus never learn to sing well what they are meant to sing, and the new tune or chant takes their minds off the divine words and spiritual thoughts which should be considered first and before all else. Three or four good simple *Te Deums* suitable to the Church Seasons will give variety enough and soon be sung by everybody. A little S. P. C. K. Chant book, to be bought for five cents (Watkins'), with fifty single and fifty double standard chants by our best English composers for the last 200 years, will supply the ordinary need of almost all our congregations. Do let me implore my revered brethren and my lay brethren also who would make our noble service a service for *all* the worshippers, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, not to consult only the taste of the few cultured musical people in the choir, or the few dillotanti critics in the nave, but those many churchmen and churchwomen who form the great bulk and the real backbone of our congregations,—those to whom the praise of God is the very joy of their hearts if we will only let them give utterance to it,—those whom God Himself teaches to sing for he fills their souls with that heart melody of faith and love and hope, which is eager to find an expression, and however rough and rude the expression may seem to human ears, it is listened to with delight by angels and is acceptable even to the ears of the Lord God Almighty. Thank God our Church of England provides such a service and worship for her christian children and wishes them all to take part in it and learn it on earth that they may share it and enjoy it to perfection throughout eternity. Let us try to help them.

Postscript.

I have hesitated to recommend any of the numerous "pointings" of the Canticles and Psalter, because I shrink from setting my own judgment against that of great and famous musicians. At the same time I must confess that nearly all the modern books seem to aim at *singing mechanically* rather than *singing intelligently*. The music is in the mind of the book-makers rather than the sense of the words. Listen to any choir that is singing the Canticles or Psalms pointed with those abominable little hurdles that bring the voices to a check every moment, and you will soon see that the choir is cantering up to the fence, and then all are waiting for one another, to take the leap together. Not long ago I heard the organist in a very large church deliberately bidding the fashionable choir to pay no attention to the words, but think only of the music and let the words take care of themselves! I believe I have seen and examined every book of any reputation that has been issued during the last thirty years, pointed both for Gregorian and Anglican music. In the former I believe *Spencer Nottingham's* unquestionably the best, and for the latter *Arthur H. Brown's Anglican Canticles and Psalter*. This alone of all seems to aim at helping the choir to *sing as they would read*, and supplies a needful and useful direction for taking breath. For the last six years I have used this book, and find that it really does encourage the congregation to sing, and for that very reason they are made to sing sensibly. It is most painful as well as ludicrous to hear the nonsense usually made by our choir in singing the Canticles. Listen to that solemn and most ancient ascription of praise to the Holy Trinity as usually sung. It is rushed off in a hurry-scurry, with a good many words left out, and sounds as if written, "*As it was beginning now and ever shall be,*" etc. In the great incarnation Hymn, *the Magnificent*, you will usually hear the emphasis laid on the unimportant prepositions and auxiliary verbs, and the whole is sung irreverently fast, e. g., "My spirit *hath* rejoiced," and "*hath* regarded," and "*hath* exalted," as if He did so once, but does so no longer. "He hath filled the hungry with *good things*" is almost invariably sung, "He hath filled the hungry *with good things*," as if the hungry could possibly be filled without them. In the last verse there is a gallop over all the words until you come to "Abraham and his seed for ever," all sung as if the choir

had lost breath and had to pull up; while "*seed for ever*" are joined closely, as if the words "*for ever*" were connected with Abraham's seed, and not with the Divine promise of mercy, to continue for ever.

I have alluded to the *Capital letters* as being helps to the people in keeping together with the clergyman. These are too often forgotten by the latter, who hurries on at any pace he pleases, regardless of all his fellow worshippers. The leader of a common worship should remember that he is speaking or singing, not for himself alone, but as the official guide of the company. The Capital letters in the Confessions, the Lord's Prayer and the Creeds, are designedly placed even where capitals are unnecessary to mark the rhythm of each sentence, as at the beginning of a line in poetry. Look at the Confession in the Communion Office, and you will see how carefully the sentences are all marked for the minister to wait and give to all the opportunity of accompanying him, *exactly as if only one voice was uttering the words*:

"We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness—

Which we, from time to time, most grievously have committed—

By thought, word, and deed—

Against Thy Divine Majesty—

Provoking most justly—etc.

*

*

*

And grant that we may ever hereafter—

Serve and please Thee—

In newness of life—

To the honor and glory of Thy Name."

One word more to avoid misapprehension. There is an admitted difficulty about singing prose. Verses now long, now short, can never be easily adapted to musical notes of unvarying length. This I do believe can best be done, so as to keep all the congregation together, by using the old Gregorian Tones. But beyond any question those Tones, with a few exceptions, do not catch the ear of either the educated or uneducated members of our Canadian congregations. I am sorry for it, but we cannot alter the genius of our people, and the national taste, while in making the attempt, sure to fail, we are losing time and probably estranging friends, prejudicing them against what is of real and vital consequence, for the sake of a tune. This I venture to consider unwise.

Therefore I use the more melodious Gregorians along with the standard Anglicans, and I find that by frequent singing these commend themselves to my people's ears and voices. We should never forget that Apostolic rubric "*Let all things be done to edifying.*" All our music is intended to interest our people in the worship of God and make it a delight, not a drudgery. If by any self-conceit or peculiarity of caprice in matters unessential we repel them from our services we are not serving either them or our Church. Nor can we wonder if they go elsewhere. By no means do I advocate a disregard of that other Apostolic rubric, "*Let all things be done decently and in order.*" (*eusemonos*). We need never degrade our congregational music to the vulgar and profane parodies we hear in the streets. Nor will our people wish it. Our object should be not to drag down God's praise to the level of the ungodly and irreverent, but to raise these unfortunates to a respect for, and a sense of, what is due to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Our music should be elevating and refining in its character. And yet under all circumstances it should never be forgotten that *our music is for the congregation, and not the congregation for the music.* Our great business is to educate and edify the brethren of Christ, on whose behalf we are so often praying, "*O Lord, open Thou our lips, and our mouth shall show forth Thy praise.*"

My Postscript was written at the same time as my paper read at the Conference, but was not delivered. It was all subsequently given as a Lecture to the Divinity Students of Trinity College, Toronto. This I wish to state, for otherwise it might be thought that a good deal of it was suggested by the following extract from the recent primary charge of the Lord Bishop of London. This I did not see until my return from Toronto, (Nov. 12th,) when the *Guardian* of Oct. 26th was received, containing the Bishop's charge delivered the week before. I may introduce his Lordship's words, all of which are well worthy careful perusal with the *Guardian's* editorial comment:

"On another subject the Bishop of London showed that he is conscious of the danger of a certain want of adaptation in our church system. It is natural that those who have the arrangement of services should like to make them elaborate, and that those responsible for the music should make it a prominent element in the service. But as a matter of fact, even among musical people, music, at least all music, is not

always a help to devotion, and when a congregation includes, as congregations ordinarily do, a good many to whom music is almost unintelligible, it is clear that an ornate service disturbs rather than quickens the devotional feelings. As the Bishop points out, the case is analogous to that of speaking with tongues in the Corinthian Church. All these gifts are, or should be, subordinate to the great object of Church Services—the edification of the Church by the worship of God. If they do not edify—that is, if they do not assist men to worship, they are worse than useless.” Here are the Bishop’s words:—

“Let us take in our own worship a somewhat similar gift, the gift of music. It is quite clear that he who possesses this gift may so use it that to himself and the few like himself in the congregation, the singing or the playing may be a spiritual help and edify these few beyond measure, and yet to the body of Christians present it may be utterly out of reach. It is even possible that he who sings or he who plays may be the only one in the congregation who can follow and understand. The man who spoke with the tongue of angels would have been silenced by St. Paul at Corinth because he did not speak ordinary Greek. And so too the most beautiful of all languages that we ever hear, the language of music, is bound to observe the same rule. It is useless to plead that its beauty is for the glory of God if it be out of place. The music now, like the gift of tongues then, must take the congregation with it, or it transgresses St. Paul’s Apostolic directions.”

Perhaps the remainder of the editorial will be read with profit. “Services which it requires highly trained performers to sing and highly trained listeners to appreciate, can only in a few cases be real aids to devotion; the mass of the worshippers will be either repelled or deadened by them. The evil may not be a growing one, but it is a real evil; and the Bishop of London has done well in calling attention to it, and in pointing out the principle by which all these accessories to worship should be judged. In this as in most cases there should be some give and take. Undoubtedly there are persons to whom a hymn is not edifying, while a grand *Credo*, or a pathetic *Agnus Dei* is; and probably as we become a more musical nation this minority will increase. But as yet it is only a minority, and should be content to be treated as what it is.”

These words of sober sense I respectfully commend to all my brethren, whether lay or clerical.

