

Correspondence.

CONGREGATIONAL SINGING.

(To the Editor, "Church Gazette").

Sir,—Most of your readers will agree that congregational singing is desirable. I think the cause for the lack of it you give is not borne out by the facts. You say that the choirs being placed in the chancel away from the congregation is one of the causes and suggest that the choir and organ should be at the west end of the church. I am credibly informed that the singing of the congregation is no better in those churches that have no chancel. (1). I remember as a boy that with the organ and choir in a gallery at the west end of the church it was the custom to turn round and face the choir when singing. It seems natural to be led rather than driven. The objection to the high pitch of many of the tunes in the Ancient and Modern Hymn book has been met by the publication of a book for organ use with all the tunes in a lower setting. This has been in use at Waipukurau for some time and is of great benefit. (2). I do not think anything would be gained by scrapping A. and M. People are used to it, and surely there is sufficient variety to suit all tastes. The fact that the tunes are beautifully harmonised has no bearing on congregational singing since the people only sing the air. There should be one universal hymn book, for nothing is more annoying than to go to church and find a different hymnal in use to that you are accustomed to. (3). It is ridiculous to say that the lack of congregational singing is owing to the parish churches aping the Cathedrals. The trouble was in existence over fifty years ago to my knowledge and there was not much of the Cathedral then in the parish churches. (4). The most hearty congregational singing I have ever heard was in a country church in Buckinghamshire, the ritual was very elaborate, but the people had learnt to value the service, the choir sang one verse of the psalms and the people the next. It was Gregorian music. Singing the responses on G is a mistake so far as the congregation is concerned. I know there is a difficulty as regards the harmony but surely that could be overcome. (5). The psalms are the real difficulty, even those used to choir singing come to grief if they have not a pointed psalter so it is no wonder the congregation do not join. I hope that in the revised prayer book the psalms will be much abridged and would like to see them set to alternative chants, anglican and plain song. The value of the latter is not that they are more

melodious but are within the reach of all voices. (6). I suggest the way to get congregational singing is (a) to have a strong choir to lead the singing; (b) to have tunes of such pitch that they can be sung without effort; (c) to have a short practice immediately before the service commences especially if a new tune is to be used. It is no use trying to get them to come specially nor to ask them to wait after the service. Of course it would not do to have practice before every service or many would come late; (d) let the congregation have a verse or two by themselves; (e) explain the use of the expression marks. The Vicar should stress the point that our voices are given to be used to the honor and glory of God. In conclusion let me put in a word for the choirs. It may be that some in the congregation do not like anthems because they cannot join in them. Remember the choir members give a lot of time and trouble to their work, and do not grudge them getting a little pleasure from singing anthems, but do your part by standing and entering into the spirit of the words although you cannot join in singing.—I am, etc.,

C. SAUNDERS.

We hope the above letter will provoke others to write to us on this important question. The reproach is constantly hurled at the Church that our congregations are too starchy. To save space we have inserted numbers in the letter after Mr Saunders' comments. These numbers refer to the following notes:—

1. Our experience differs from that of our correspondent's friends. It is the separation of the choir from the congregation that is at fault. A choir in a high gallery does not help the congregation any more than one in a chancel. A choir in the front seats facing eastwards is not much better; a choir in the front of the nave, facing north and south is an improvement, but a choir at the back of the nave (only slightly raised), or a choir in the centre of the congregation would help greatly, though the latter position would be very inconvenient.

2. The "Transposed Tune Book" partially solves one difficulty.

3. Our objection to Hymns A. and M. is not merely a matter of taste. A congregational hymn must have a good melody which is worth singing, suits the sentiment and rhythm of the hymn and does not need harmonies to embellish it. There are some such in Hymns A. and M., e.g., 546. But Hymns A. and M. contains many hymns that have a weak melody and depend entirely on their harmonies for the beauty they have.

Again: A good hymn should not consist of sentimental individual musings, pious, maudlin, morbid, or

otherwise—(Hymns A. and M. 260), nor of relations of one's singular individual experience (A. and M. 258 and 530), nor of unnatural yearnings for angel harps and wings (A. and M. 234), which do not express the real feelings of a healthy Christian. If the congregation sing them, they don't mean them. If they don't mean them, they shouldn't sing them. Hymns A. and M. contains many of them; they satisfy the popular "taste" for hypocrisy but destroy the whole rationale of public worship.

4. Fifty years ago congregations didn't sing because they didn't want to. To-day congregations can't sing because the Cathedral-style musicians won't let them.

5. Mr Saunders is by no means singular in condemning the "sacred G." has killed tens of thousands of worshippers.

6. In the Revised Psalter some senseless verses have been rendered in the vulgar tongue, but many remain unintelligible. Pointing is a fine art; the Cathedral method is about the worst at present existing. Plainsong is ideal, but no one can sing it until he has banished from his mind the false rhythms, bars and atrocities of the Cathedral chant. We agree that it is the only natural method of reciting (not singing) the psalms. We thank Mr Saunders for his letter.

Synod Services.

The Synod services were on the whole very inspiring, especially the sung celebrations on Friday and Sunday. Merbecke was fairly well sung but, in spite of Mr P. Tombs' able and careful tuition, Anglican stiffness was evident and there was too little spontaneity and lack of volume. The Archbishop on Sunday was splendid in his rendering of the celebrant's part. In spite of the notices placed at the doors, a number of the congregation made an ignominious retreat during the most solemn part of the service (John 13, verse 30).

The Archbishops' sermon on Sunday evening was characteristically human. He preached on the parable of the prodigal son and particularly dealt with the character of the elder brother, faithful, constant and diligent but self-satisfied, comparing the complacency of modern Christians, and their attitude of superiority towards notorious sinners to the conduct of the elder brother towards the younger. The sermon was a powerful appeal, well timed and incisive. The most eloquent testimony to its appropriateness was heard in Napier during the week, when knots of older brothers whom it had smitten but had not convinced discussed it with warm criticism at the street corners;