

own notes would prevent our hearing what was being done by others, and we should be always missing the combination of sweet sound which gives to music its value.

When poets allude to the power of music it is the listening attitude to which they invariably refer.

Shakespeare says:

"In sweet music is such art,
Killing care and grief of heart
Fall asleep, or, hearing, die."

and again:

"I am never merry, when I hear
sweet music."

Milton, on hearing church music, says that it can—

"Dissolve me into ecstasies, and
bring all heaven before mine eyes."

Let us bear in mind that it is possible to participate in music by listening, as truly as by performing, and that it is in the first way that the art produces its greatest effects. But, it may be argued that many people in a general congregation have no ear for music; they cannot appreciate its subtleties; for them it has no message. True, there are always some such present, though it may be that their number is often exaggerated. But is it these people who confessedly know nothing of, and care nothing for, the art, and are consequently quite unable themselves to execute it, in whose hands you are to place the singing? There is something wrong here. If people are musical they will be able to appreciate music in the usual way; if they are not, they are obviously the last who should attempt to produce it.

Congregational singing is a comparatively new departure in worship. We do not find it in the Old Testament. There we read of large and highly-trained bodies of musicians, set apart for conducting the worship, and it was clearly in their hands that the rendering of the music was left. The care of the sacred music was confided to the hands of the Levites. David and Solomon not only confined this privilege to the tribe of Levi but considerably increased and extended their musical duties. The Levites had to provide no less than 4000 singers and musicians for the sacred service.

In the early church special choirs were set apart, and untrained persons were actually forbidden to raise their voices, as is shown by the decrees of the Council of Laodicea A.D. 363,

which said that "Only those duly appointed should sing in Christian churches."

The Reformation strove to make public worship a reality for the people, but the point insisted upon was that the people should understand what was being done and said, which is by no means the same thing as saying that they should be compelled to sing.

Congregational singing, as now understood, is a later development since the Reformation, and it originated not with the sixteenth century reformers, but with the Puritans of the seventeenth. If it tends to edification let us use it, but in its proper place, with suitable regulations. The danger to-day seems to be lest it should be allowed to usurp a false position in worship in which case it would stay the development of church music and prevent advance. It requires that all music should be of the simplest description, involving no knowledge, skill, or preparations for its rendering. Should it prevail to the exclusion of other music it would soon bring church music down to the lowest possible level, excluding all lofty artistic aims and ideals.

What parts of a service is it practicable for a congregation to join in?

The responses, metrical hymns, and all parts that are monotoned.

Congregational singing should be in unison. If an attempt is made to introduce part singing the difficulties in the way of making it effective are insuperable. In part singing it is necessary that the parts be correctly taken and properly balanced: the former can very seldom be insured, the latter never.

To improve congregational singing three things are necessary:—

- (1) That those interested should possess books of music.
- (2) That they should meet for an occasional practice.
- (3) That they should be placed all together.

With regard to the chanting of the Psalms, the obstacles in the way of making it congregational, and, at the same time worthy of worship, are insurmountable. Good chanting is an exceedingly difficult thing to acquire. It is the most difficult thing a choir has to do.

The difficulty lies in the fact that no two successive verses are identical in respect of number, grouping, and

accent of syllables, and consequently, the music has to be adapted afresh by the singer to each verse.

As the method of fitting the syllables to the music varies greatly in different Psalters, it is possible to find any given verse "pointed" by different authorities in half a dozen different ways, each of which may be defended. In such cases, it is quite out of the question for an uninitiated person to guess how the Psalms are going to be sung, and hence arises hopeless confusion and discord.

The difficulty is inherent in the nature of the free rhythm of the Hebrew poetry, which, while possessing a unique beauty of its own, makes a faithful musical rendering a matter of extreme difficulty to the skilful, and an impossibility to the multitude.

If the choirs are to be the recognised leaders of worship their attitude must be conformable with their position, and if they are to be the official singers, their singing must be worthy as an offering, and worth hearing as a means of edification.

A choir should realise that they come to church for worship and worship alone. If this conviction is not always before their minds, their work is worthless, and labour spent in vain.

At places with limited means no attempt should be made to imitate the cathedral style. In towns where there are plenty of boys available they may reasonably be employed, provided there is some prospect of having them taught the foundation work of voice production and singing. The object should be to attempt little, but to do that little as well as possible.

In country churches, the difficulties in the way of a musical service are still greater, not only is it often impossible to secure a good teacher, but also the material for the selection of voices is limited.

As a general rule, the music in a country parish church should be purely congregational, for the obvious reason that anything in the way of a full choral service properly rendered is impossible of attainment.

The village choir should lead and support the congregation, and should be content to aim at doing small things well.

[Ed. W.C.G.—We have very much pleasure in printing the above article, and will be glad to receive comments upon it from our readers.]