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Church Music

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE
H.B.C. ASSOCIATION
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The demand now is not so much for more music, as for better music and a better rendering of it.

No parish is considered complete without an attempt, however crude, at a choral service. All this shows a desire in the right direction. I think we are all convinced that the employment of art in religion is a right and good thing. Its message has been "O Worship the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness," and the Church has answered, "we are willing and ready, show us the way." First and foremost among the arts stands music, and to it a great deal of attention has been given. To say that the efforts to introduce and to maintain choral services in so many directions have been attended with unvarying success would be untrue. The obstacles in the way have been and are many and great.

It is not sufficient to decide to introduce a choral service and imagine that it can at once be inaugurated and successfully carried on. Without beginnings we can have no completions, and we must be thankful for beginnings.

But we must face the difficulties, analyse their causes, and tackle the task of removing them.

There was a time when people did not want and would not have choral services. That is now past.

The present trouble is that the standard of rendering is deplorably low, and to raise this is the work of the present day church musicians.

From a musical point of view, Church services may be divided into three distinct types.

- (1) The Cathedral.
- (2) The Town.
- (3) Country Parishes.

The Cathedral service stands out as the highest ideal of musical worship. Upon every part of it all available skill is expended. All treasures new and old of our wealth of Church

music are there to be heard, rendered in a manner worthy of the surroundings, worthy of the object of music. Cathedrals in England have, as a general rule, all the resources requisite for carrying out the idea of musical worship in its completeness.

In this province there is only one Cathedral, viz., Christchurch, which has resources.

In passing it is interesting to note, that the famous authority on Church music, Dr. Nicholson, said that the choir of Christchurch Cathedral compared favourably with the Cathedral Choirs of England.

How far should parish Church choirs strive to imitate the Cathedral choir. How far should the choral service of a parish church differ in kind and degree from that of a Cathedral.

Here considerable variety of opinion exists. Some would maintain that even where possible, it is not right to attempt a reproduction of the complete choral service in a parish church.

The question in reality involves another one, which, we are here obliged to touch upon—congregational singing.

Perfect choral worship implies highly trained voices, artistic balance of parts and careful and constant preparation.

Congregational singing excludes all these. Its theory would include all voices, whether cultivated or not; balance of parts would be out of the question, preparation unnecessary.

Those who seek to raise the artistic level of Church music are told that they are "excluding the people from worship," "defrauding them of their rights," "turning the Church into a concert room," advocating worship by proxy. Assertion is not argument, and abuse is only the sign of a lack of sound reasoning.

If the singing of a trained choir excludes the people from worship, so does the saying of the prayers by the priest alone; if the one is worship by proxy so is the other. In the latter case it would be quite possible for the people to join in with the speaking

voice without committing any obvious breach of good taste, or marring a work of art, for everyone is trained (up to a point) to use the speaking voice by daily practice; but the same does not apply to the singing voice, the proper use of which is confined to a few, and requires special training. For a person with an untrained voice and no knowledge of singing to join in and mar the effect of beautiful music is a thing which, if it be admissible in church, would be tolerated in no other place.

Having said this we must endeavour to set aside prejudices, and try to see clearly what line we should pursue to make our church music truly edifying, and in the real sense of the word congregational.

The reasonable course seems to be to accept the theory that there are three voices properly heard in a musical service, those of the priest, the choir and the people. Throughout the service is the people's, but in some parts the priest represents and speaks for them, in others the choir does so in a manner for which they are themselves unprepared, and, in others, they join in with their own voices.

The worship throughout must be spiritual, and it may fairly be argued that there is often more true worship from the silent heart than from the worshipping lips. "We will go into His tabernacle and fall low on our knees before His footstool," gives a picture of the highest and truest attitude of worship which it is the mind of the church to foster.

We must distinguish between the ideas of congregational worship and congregational singing: the former does not necessarily imply the latter. There are two ways of joining in music, both of which have their place. Music is an art, the very existence of which depends upon its use, and this use is of two kinds, active and passive, that of the performer and that of the listener.

Apart from any question of skill, if we constantly attempted to join in music with our voices, we should actually lose most of it; the sound of our