

The Waiapu Church Gazette

CHURCH MUSIC

(A Paper read before the H.B.C. Association, by C. B. Spinney.)

(The interest evoked by the Paper on Church Music by Rev. W. T. Drake has been widespread. The Church News of Tasmania has published his article in full, and the following Paper by Mr. C. B. Spinney, organist of St. Matthews Church, Hastings, is another excellent contribution to this important subject.—Ed.)

Gentlemen,—I would like first of all to thank you for the honour you have conferred upon me by asking me to address you. The Vicar asked me to read Mr. Drake's Paper, and either carry it a step further or advance other views. I can only congratulate Mr. Drake on the very excellent way in which he has touched in a simple and straightforward manner the difficult question of Church music and our attitude towards it.

In the 15 minutes at my disposal, it will be only possible for me to touch on the bare outline of Church Music in its several branches, so I have divided the talk into three parts: (1) A standard to aim at in our choice of Church music. (2) Congregational music and our attitude towards it. (3) The S.E.C.M. (School of English Church Music) and what it stands for.

Church Music is distinctly an offering dedicated to God. It therefore requires to be purer and deeper than music offered by man for the entertainment of his fellow-men. So it must be suitable; befitting the resources, the occasion and the purpose. Good music ranges over many degrees of difficulty, it should be chosen with due regard to the capacities of the singers—one kind for the Cathedral, another for the Parish Church, and another for the Village congregation. A great deal of harm is done by ambitious choirmasters who set untrained voices to tasks which they are unable to perform; it is far better to recognise their limitations and hold them to the finest work which is within their reach.

Again, the service should be an act of worship and praise by the whole

congregation, therefore the music will fall of its effect if it baffles and bewilders the congregation by excess of variety. Almost all our collections of anthems and hymns are too large, and I think it would be all for the good if we selected a small number of enduring merit and allowed them to become familiar. And because the service is corporate its music should express in the main those broad common emotions which the worshippers can truly and sincerely share. Then again the music must be dignified. Whatever the emotion that it expresses—of jubilation or prayer, or penitence—it must always purify and ennoble. There is often a danger lest we allow our religious emotions to be over-humanised, and in this danger music, with its vivid appeal to sense and feeling may bear no inconsiderable part.

Many popular hymn tunes of the present day are full of softness and luxury—more like sentimental part songs than illustrations of a sacred theme. The music of the Church should be marked by a stateliness of rhythm, not tripping or gesticulating, but hearing itself as befits a ceremonial.

But it is not enough that the music should be dignified, it must be reverent. A great deal of Church music is merely negative, and while not actually offensive, is yet devoid of all devotion or reverence, and should be discarded, not because it does ill, but because it does nothing. Far different is the reverence which is animated by love and inspired by genius, which is the true sense of the term "devout." Its music is not gloomy or monotonous, it can glow with colour like an East window or sing aloud like one of the Psalms of praise, and whether in gladness or in sorrow is always conscious of the Divine presence.

Now, the tune that offends one hearer may be acceptable to another, and there must be many such tunes at the frontier-line, but I venture to say that a little way back will be found plenty left for all our needs if we only use a little careful thought. Mission tunes, or rather I should say some Mission tunes, to me, are especially distressing with their tum-te-tum rhythms and catch sequences, and, in

my opinion, would be much better left unused in our Church, as they only seem to attract a class of people who like these jingling tum-te-tum catch tunes, together with our Church buildings and organs, but who will have none of us, and are no more seen once we revert back to our more usual ritual.

CONGREGATIONAL SINGING.

Broadly speaking, congregational singing is of two kinds: Active and silent (not passive).

By active I mean singing by all whether musically minded or trained, in tune or not, pleasant to listen to, or otherwise.

By silent I mean following the service with the mind, and joining in the singing mentally. Of those who go to make up these groups the unmusical by far predominate in the former class, while the musical and musicians form the latter class. The home or cradle of active singing is the Village Church, where usually there is no choir, and the singing, although untrained, is yet hearty and full.

The home of silent singing, or singing in the heart, is the Cathedral, and, here, we have the artistic and meditative type of music.

In between these two extremes comes the Parish Church with its mixed service. What is a reasonable attitude to adopt towards the Parish Church congregational singing? The hymn should be congregational, and should be chosen with this end in view. We cannot blame the congregation for weak singing or indifference if they arrive in Church Sunday after Sunday only to find that the hymns are either new, or in reality hymn anthems, or that they do not even possess a copy of the words.

The canticles when sung to chants or well-known settings can and should also be regarded as congregational, but I venture to suggest that the psalms and anthems should be followed by the congregation mentally, and, in this way, the special points of beauty and teaching will be more readily seen and appreciated. Another point bearing on this question, to my mind, is: Are we right in presuming that the people who are not audibly singing are passive? A point in the favour of these folk is that when we have an old