

School of English Church Music

QUARTERLY NEWS SHEET

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THE SCHOOL AND AFFILIATED CHOIRS.

It is too early as yet to estimate the result of the Appeal or to issue a list of subscribers, but it is most gratifying to be able to record that Her Majesty The Queen has sent a handsome donation as an indication of her personal interest. The list of contributors is already large and includes such distinguished names as that of the Prime Minister.

The Affiliation of Choirs is proceeding most satisfactorily; many Choirs have already enrolled themselves, and everywhere there is a ready response to the suggestion that they should do so. It is increasingly evident that affiliation will afford a main source of income to the School, but its value to the individual Choirs lies in the fact that it will bring them into direct touch with the central organization, and so is likely to prove the surest means of making the work of the School practically effective.

Every Choir in the country is urged to become affiliated. This implies that the members definitely stand for the cause of worthy Church Music, and that they are prepared to enter into a corporate effort to promote the cause.

Those Choirs that are not enrolled are earnestly invited to apply to the Office of the School (105, Gower Street, W.C.1) for full particulars of Affiliation. Such an application in no way commits them; but the details of the scheme, which have now been fully worked out, cannot be explained in a mere summary, and at least demand the careful consideration of every Choir in the country.

This number of the "QUARTERLY NEWS SHEET" is being sent to all who have expressed any interest, but future numbers, for obvious reasons, can only be sent to affiliated Choirs, to Subscribers, or to Members of the Church Music Society.—SYDNEY H. NICHOLSON (*Warden-Elect*).

THE NATURE OF THE APPEAL.

In April a general appeal was issued for funds to establish the School of English Church Music. It was announced that:—

1. The Provisional Council has found premises which are ideal.
2. These premises are now used as a Boys' School, and could be adapted for the proposed purpose without difficulty or undue expense. The provision of a permanent Chapel could be deferred, as a building suitable for temporary use is in existence.
3. The property is splendidly situated adjoining Wimbledon Common; it comprises 3½ acres with good main road frontage, and is freehold.
4. £50,000 is the immediate need in order to acquire the property and found the School.

The property is not yet bought but is still available. Subscriptions both large and small are needed, first to acquire the premises, then to complete the Foundation Fund of £50,000.

THE USE OF PLAINSONG.

BY A PARISH CHURCH ORGANIST.

Those who are anxious to bring about a general reform in our Church Music are agreed that the music for the Sanctuary, while being of the very best, should have a special character of its own. It should be devotional and uplifting in style, and usually so simple that all the worshippers can follow it and most of them join in the singing of at least the more important parts of the Service.

In many places one way—though of course not the only way—of bringing about these ideals might be to turn for help to the Plainsong system and to a gradual introduction of some amount of this kind of music into the Services, especially the Choral Celebrations of the Holy Communion. The writer therefore ventures to address a few words to those who may care to consider this possibility. He feels himself to be on difficult ground, as so many people frankly dislike this form of music. Like or dislike of Plainsong is probably to some extent a matter of temperament. There are some to whom after taking due trouble to understand it, it still makes little appeal. On the other hand there are many who cannot endure it—and the writer in his younger days was of their number—simply because they have never experienced it properly presented, and so do not in the least know what it really is. There must surely be something of prejudice in the matter, as in most Churches in the ordinary routine of their Services *some* Plainsong—harmonized, perhaps, but still fundamentally Plainsong—is sung in the usual Ferial Responses without complaint under the sanction of custom, and in the writer's own experience it has been found possible to introduce a Plainsong Service in which the Choir became quite interested simply because he refrained from telling them that it was Plainsong!

Most of those who have had the privilege of hearing simple Plainsong properly sung find it a new experience in uplifting and religious music. They feel that it really gives true expression to religious feeling; it stands apart from much of the music which they so often hear in Church, which is merely a repetition of outside secular music, in that it seems to be really fitted for the Sanctuary. It is hallowed by antiquity, but yet lives to-day as fresh as ever in its beauty of vocal phrasing and expression.

Many modern composers are tending to use the scales of the old Modal system in order to express themselves. They find that there is greater scope for melodic variation in the eight scales of the Gregorian system than in the two of the modern one. In the light of this fact the time has surely gone by when Plainsong can be sneered at as archaic and obsolete. It is a fact that to-day Choirs who have come under the influence of Plainsong properly taught are able to sing other music—especially unaccompanied Tudor music—with greater intelligence in the matters of phrasing and accentuation than those who have not had this training. There is a wonderful insistence about these old melodies when one has been at pains to master them. A modern Service will often be very attractive at first, but after a time interest in it will pall. With the Plainsong melodies this is not so. They may seem strange at first, but after they have once been learnt they seem more fresh and vigorous each time they are sung. Plainsong melodies as a rule lie in an easy range of voice for all singers, and so a very real objection often urged

