

School of English Church Music

QUARTERLY NEWS SHEET

Edited by a Committee appointed by the CHURCH MUSIC SOCIETY and issued from the office of the SCHOOL OF ENGLISH CHURCH MUSIC, 105, GOWER STREET, W.C.1

No. 3.

OCTOBER, 1928.

LET IT BE GRANTED.

Since the last issue of the "NEWS SHEET" in July much has happened, and though we are still very far from realizing the means necessary for the complete foundation of the School of English Church Music it is possible that even while this issue is in the press the Provisional Council will have taken decisions which will give the School a home and enable it to test in practical work the schemes which have been so carefully prepared. These schemes have been outlined in two issues of the "NEWS SHEET." They have met with widespread approval, and Dr. Nicholson, moving from diocese to diocese and from rural deanery to rural deanery, has listened to every question and to every criticism which had a "But" in it, in order that the scheme might be framed to practical ends. Now that its realisation is at hand comes the moment when we may turn away in thought from the problems, the difficulties to be surmounted, the short-comings to be guarded against, and take an imaginary glance at the School in being.

It has been generally granted that the thing is worth doing; enough support has come to show that it can be done; let it be granted that it will be done. Suppose it to be established in a large house in a suburb from which there is direct communication by tube to the centre of London. Some sixteen to twenty students live in the house with the Warden. Some of them are, or have been, organ students at one or other of the great music schools of London; others are theological students or are already ordained.

They are there to fit themselves for the special province of the art which is called Church Musicianship. Ten or a dozen chorister boys live in an annex under their own master. There is a simple but well-furnished Chapel in which services are sung daily by the students and choristers forming a choir. The services are not of one fixed type; they employ a very wide range of music, unison melodies and harmonised chants, great church compositions and simple ones. The students are taught to draw up service lists with a knowledge of varied resources, ancient and modern. They take their turns in organ accompaniment on a small two-manual instrument. Apart from the services themselves they take choir practices, attend lectures on all aspects of church music, its history and that of the liturgy and kindred matters. They also have hours for their own instrumental work as organists and as pianists, and have lessons in speaking, intoning, singing. It is a wide curriculum, and it is further widened by a troop of Boy Scouts who have just come in off the neighbouring common and are making their tea in the garden. Presently it will be some students' business to give them a singing lesson for there must be raw material to work with as well as trained choristers. Perchance the student will learn something from the Scouts of the necessary art of managing boys, managing, that is, without compulsion.

In the evening another set of students arrive at the School. They are young men and women engaged in business or as teachers, and who want to take up work in their spare time as amateurs or as "semi-professional" organists and choirmasters. Some of them are already doing such work and have begun to discover the difficulties. One can play the organ pretty well but knows nothing about the training of boys' voices. Another, an elementary school teacher, who knows all there is to be known about taking singing classes of boys or girls, wants to know what music to choose or what to play for a "Voluntary." Another, again, has been recently faced with the necessity for accompanying plain-song for the first time and is non-plussed. Others with no special problem or consciousness of defect in themselves just want to widen their experience, feeling that their best is not quite good enough. At the School they can discuss things; they can learn from each other's experience and widen their own. Those who are already actively engaged can here make experiments without having to run the gauntlet of criticism from the entire parish. They escape from the routine of accepted limitations into a stimulating atmosphere of keenness for the best things.

It is not only Londoners who profit. Visitors come and go. Perhaps a country Vicar whose choir is affiliated calls. His organist would like to come up for a short course but there is no one to take his place. What can be done? There is a resident student just finishing his course at the School. It would be excellent practice for him to take the country organist's place for a fortnight or three weeks. It is all fixed up in a few minutes' talk. Or another, parish priest or choirmaster, has a very promising boy; his voice may be broken; he ought to have a musical career before him but he is not yet ready to go up to the R.A.M. or R.C.M. Could not a course at the School form a bridge between the choir-boy stage and the Music School? Of course it could; nothing better.

Meantime the country affiliated choirs profit not only by their visits to the School but by the School's visits to them. Its choir is not tied to its own Chapel as a Cathedral Choir is tied. From time to time it goes out on short demonstration tours; or its individual members go out to help in the Choir Festivals which are doing such excellent work in many parts of the country.

So the work both in the School itself and outside it expands from day to day. The School of English Church Music is not a patent remedy offering immediate cure for every ill. If we were given the money tomorrow to start it on the largest scale and in the most ideal conditions its influence would still be slow, and only a minute fraction of the Church Musicians of the country could be immediately benefitted by it. But with even the most modest establishment it can begin both its direct and its indirect processes of education. It can draw musically-minded Churchmen together, stimulate co-operation and give to music a more vital place in Church life.

The main postulate of those who have supported the project has been: Let it be granted that there is work for such a School to do. To that they now add: Let the necessary support be granted that the work may be begun.

THE SCHOOL'S FIRST COMMISSIONER.

It is with great pleasure that we announce the appointment of Mr. Harvey Grace as Commissioner for the School of English Church Music. His authority as a practical church musician stands high, and those who know his singularly penetrating book *The Complete Organist* will realize that he adds the qualities of sympathy and understanding to his attainments as a musician. At the invitation of a group of Affiliated choirs the School's Commissioner will arrange

