

School of English Church Music

QUARTERLY NEWS SHEET

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Address by

HIS GRACE THE LORD ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY,

at the Festival Service at St. Sepulchre's Church, Dec. 10th, 1929.

Music makes all its lovers, "high and low, rich and poor, one with another," friends and companions. We who are here assembled are united as lovers of music. We are grateful beyond words for the delight, the solace, the inspiration, with which it has enriched our lives. We are united most of all in our desire to make music a worthy aid to, and offering of, the worship which rises from the human spirit to God,—most High, most Beautiful, most Holy. In this love and desire I would place myself among you. I long with all my heart that music should hold its rightful place in the life and worship of the Church of England.

Certainly we have the encouragement and inspiration of a great tradition. I doubt whether there is any Church in Christendom which has a tradition of music so rich and so sustained. The genius of Byrd gathered up the music of the Middle Ages:—

"Through mazes running,
Untwisting all the chains that tie
The hidden soul of harmony."

From him the stream has flowed on—sometimes full and joyous, sometimes quiet, sometimes perhaps shallow, and yet always moving—a stream which for centuries in England has made glad the City of God. It is chiefly in our cathedrals that the current has been kept fresh and strong. Let us remember with gratitude the goodly fellowship of composers, organists, choirmasters, clergy and choristers who patiently and lovingly have sustained the great tradition.

I have heard with deep interest of the proposal next summer to present a Festival of English Church Music, under the auspices of the College of St. Nicolas. Some of you will be privileged to take part in it. I hope that many people, not only in London, but from all parts of the country, will then realize the wealth of the treasure which has been committed to us.

But remember, if it is a great possession, it is also a great trust. We have to prove ourselves worthy of it. It belongs to the honour of each generation to see that the music which it offers in worship maintains, continues, if it may be, enriches, what we have received.

Perhaps in our day our special duty is to revive the tradition, for, in the nineteenth century, or at least the latter half of it, there was a decline. The stream passed into the shallows of sentimentality. It was a weakness which infected all branches of art. It marked the fading of the romantic epoch with which the century began. Architecture tended to become a corrupt following of the Gothic revival; lifeless copy-book designs were varied by petty ornament. Windows were filled with figures painted in garish colours of our Lord, the Apostles, the Saints, which by their sentimentality vulgarised, and indeed perverted, the religious imagination of two generations. Church walls were covered by stencilling which was a feeble copy of the rich colouring of Mediaeval churches, or by pictures which had lost all trace of the mingled austerity and delightful symbolism which marked the mediaeval frescoes. In short, is it an exaggeration to say that Church art often fell to the level of the Christmas card? It must be confessed that the music of the Church suffered a like enfeeblement. There were indeed men who were not unworthy of a nobler tradition, such as (to mention two only) Charles Stanford and Hubert Parry; but very commonly Church music tended to become shallow and sentimental. Perhaps this degeneration was most noticeable in hymn tunes. It is sad that at the very time when congregational singing became more than ever before a great feature of worship, it should have lost the tradition of noble and simple tunes. We may thankfully believe that other branches of art have now reached a higher level in the service of the Church. Architecture, painting, sculpture, are tending to greater

simplicity and sincerity, and by many composers, organists, and choirmasters, music is being given to us filled with a high ideal, yet still, sometimes even in Cathedrals, and very often in Parish Churches, our music is still under the influence of this shallow sentimentality. We must not rest until we shall be ashamed to use in the worship of God music of a standard which we would no longer tolerate in the designs, the walls, the windows, and the furnishings of our Churches.

The trouble of course is that familiar music, particularly of hymn tunes, gathers around it one of the most powerful and enduring influences which move the heart of man—the influence of association. It cannot be ignored. It links certain tunes in the hearts of multitudes of people with their most hallowed memories. It must be treated with considerateness, with patience, and with sympathy. It would be mere pedantry to insist on at once abolishing music which still makes this powerful appeal to the common heart; but I believe that men “must needs admire the highest when they see it,” and that they will come to admire a purer and nobler sort of music when they know it. It is only the knowledge of better music which can draw people out of their love of the weaker and more sentimental. Our task must be not to impose our ideal arbitrarily and inconsiderately, but to educate people up to it. We must introduce more worthy, strong and dignified melodies, and the force of contrast will soon make its appeal. Already in all parts of the country I notice a healthful and hopeful change.

There is another tendency in the Church music of the nineteenth century which must be overcome. It is due to a wrong following of the tradition of the Cathedrals. It has been the attempt to introduce types of music suitable to cathedrals into parochial choirs. It cannot be too often remembered that fine music is not elaborate music; on the contrary, the notes of nobility are rather simplicity and strength.

Our task, then, is to revive, restore and vitalize the great tradition, and in the fulfilment of this task we can all see the value of some centre of education and inspiration, some school where organists and choirmasters may assimilate the tradition and spread it over the land. This, as you know, is the aim of the College of St. Nicolas; and its highest ideal is that those who attend it, or are associated with it, may study the art of music in close connection with the worship of the Church, so that from the first they may realize that Liturgy, voice, and organ, must be fused together in one whole of adoring praise.

This must always be our chief and highest ambition—the form of music, however admirable, will be dull and lifeless apart from the spirit which fills it. It is for you both to lay worthy music upon the Altar, and to bring to it the fire of the spirit which will kindle it and carry it upwards as a true sacrifice to God.

Unlike most discourses, let this one end, instead of beginning, with a text, and let its text be taken, not from the Written Word, but from the lips and life of a great artist. “The utmost for the Highest”—the utmost of your best thought, study, practice, and prayer; and this always for the Highest—the highest standard which you can reach in your reverence for God in His beauty and holiness. Let the music of the Church rise, not on the gossamer wings of mere sweetness and sentimentality, but on the pinions, strong, swift, sure, of noble art, up to the height where angels and archangels cry “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts, Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory.”

ST. NICOLAS DAY.

St. Nicolas Day was celebrated at the College with great happiness to all who were able to be present.

There was a plain Celebration at 8 a.m., with remembrance of Benefactors. At 11 a.m. there was Sung Eucharist, in which the Chaplain was assisted by the Precentor and the Sacrist of Westminster Abbey. The music was chosen to represent all periods, ranging from Plain-song to modern examples.

In the afternoon there was short Evensong, and then the Choristers performed an opera, “The Boy Bishop,” composed by the Warden. Afterwards the Company, which included many friends of the College, were entertained at a feast (presided over by the Boy Bishop and his Clerks).

GUILD OF ST. NICOLAS.

Meeting at St. Sepulchre's Church, Holborn Viaduct, London, December 10th, 1929.

In taking the chair, Dr. Nicholson explained that the formation of the Guild had been carried through at the direct request of the Local Representatives of the School when they met at the College of St. Nicolas in April last (see *Quarterly News Sheet* No. 6). The

