

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, COLLEGE OF ST. NICOLAS, ELMSTEAD LANE, CHISLEHURST, KENT.

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JANUARY, 1930.

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

resolution which the Local Representatives asked might be brought before the Council of the School was then read ; whereupon it was proposed by the Rev. S. M. Morgan of Ferring, and seconded by the Rev. R. M. Tuke of Northampton that the Guild be formally constituted. This motion was carried unanimously.

The Guild Office was then read and the music which had been prepared for use with the Office was circulated. The following constitution was agreed upon :—

1. The Object of the Guild is to form a spiritual and material link between those who are trying to further the work of the School of English Church Music.
2. Membership of the Guild is confined to those who are directly associated with the School as Members ; Regular Subscribers ; Members of affiliated Choirs including Clergy, Choirmasters and Organists, and (where some definite organization exists) ex-Choristers.
3. An Annual Meeting of the Guild is held in London, at which a Representative of the Guild is elected to serve on the Council of the School of English Church Music for the ensuing year.
4. The Guild is organized on a Diocesan or other regional basis, in order that members may have the opportunity of working in conjunction with one another, and of meeting together for special services, gatherings of choirs, hymn festivals, lectures, visits of Commissioners, etc.
5. The Guild Office is available for use on these and similar occasions, and the Badge of the School of English Music should be worn.
6. It is expected of members of the Guild that they should do their utmost to promote the cause of good Church Music by setting before themselves and others a high standard both in choice and rendering, and by furthering the work of the School of English Church Music.

With these objects in view it is expected :—

(a) That in every Church where the Choir belongs to the Guild the thoughts of the congregation should, on at least one Sunday in the year, be directed to the consideration of the place of music in public worship ; and that where possible the day set apart should be the Sunday immediately following St. Nicolas Day (December 6th).

(b) That where possible the collection on such occasions should be devoted to the work of the School of English Church Music.

7. There is no subscription to the Guild.

In accordance with Section No. 3, the Rev. S. M. Morgan proposed that Mr. F. D. L. Penny of Prittlewell be elected to serve on the Council of the School. This was seconded by Mr. S. C. Bragg of Stockton-on-Tees and carried unanimously.

The Meeting closed after Dr. Nicholson had explained something of the School's proposed activities during the coming year.

Since Mr. Penny has been elected as representative of the Guild, he will naturally also be acting as representative of the affiliated Choirs and of ordinary members. If, therefore, any member wishes to bring a proposal before the Council he should do so through Mr. Penny, who may be communicated with at the College of St. Nicolas, Elmstead Lane, Chislehurst, Kent.

Copies of the Guild Office may be obtained from the Secretary, S.E.C.M., price 6d. for 25 (or a smaller number). Music may also be had at 2d. per copy.

SUMMER SCHOOL, JULY 29th, 30th and 31st, 1930.

A course in choir-training will be held at the College of St. Nicolas on the above-mentioned days, and Professor E. C. Bairstow, D.Mus. (of York Minster) has very kindly consented to be the lecturer.

As there is likely to be a keen desire to attend the school and accommodation is definitely limited, it will only be possible to allot places to members of the School of English Church Music, and their applications will be dealt with in rotation. This is only a preliminary announcement and it is hoped that details will be given in the next issue of the *Quarterly News Sheet*. Please do not apply until invited to do so.

FESTIVAL OF ENGLISH CHURCH MUSIC, ALBERT HALL, JUNE 27th, 1930.

Those who do not in the ordinary course read the *Daily Mail*, will doubtless be interested to read the following extract from that paper (Tuesday, December 10th, 1929). Already much keen interest has been displayed in the Festival and it is hoped to have a choir of at least 1,200 voices.

"The *Daily Mail* has the pleasure of announcing a great English choral festival—a festival that will be a demonstration of English music and of English singing at their best—which is to be given under the *Daily Mail's* auspices in London next year.

A vast chorus of picked voices—candidates for which will be chosen from choirs in all parts of the country—will sing a programme of the finest English church music of the past 300 years.

The festival will be at the Albert Hall. The date fixed is June 27.

Our desire is to concentrate the attention of the public on the great heritage of English church music and on the singers—second to none in the world—who devote themselves to it in the cathedrals, collegiate chapels, and parish churches of the country.

Recently the cause of that music has been strengthened by the establishment of the College of St. Nicolas (School of English Church Music) at Chislehurst, Kent. The Warden of the college is Dr. Sydney H. Nicholson, formerly organist of Westminster Abbey. The arrangements for the coming Albert Hall festival are in Dr. Nicholson's charge.

Already many of the principal church choirs in England are affiliated to St. Nicolas College. The festival chorus—of some 1,000 voices—will be drawn exclusively from choirs which are so affiliated.

The profits of the festival will go to St. Nicolas College.

Several of the most eminent English organists and choir conductors will take part.

The festival will be a unique event, impressive and stimulating. Every choir-master who wishes his choir to be represented should write to-day for particulars to:

The Secretary, the School of English Church Music (St. Nicolas College), Chislehurst, Kent.

Choirs not yet affiliated to the college should apply to Dr. Nicholson for affiliation papers."

MUSIC IN VILLAGE CHURCHES.

Although great advances have been made of recent years in our Village Churches, both as regards the choice of music and the manner of performance, it must be admitted that much room for improvement still remains.

It is too true even now, that our village choirs lag far behind our village choral societies, and much that we sing in Church we should be ashamed to sing in the schoolroom.

Economic conditions to-day make it more and more necessary for the incumbent to take entire responsibility for the music of his Church. It is therefore of the first importance that the Clergy should have sufficient musical training to enable them to know such things as they ought to do, and to be able to shew how they ought to be done.

It is very hopeful to know that whereas a few years ago any suggestion of change was met with suspicion, if not with opposition, at the present time reform of any kind is usually met with open arms, when it is suggested in the right way.

There is indeed a certain risk of too eager reform, and it is perhaps well to issue a caution to those impetuous people whose enthusiasm sometimes causes them to alienate the sympathies of those they wish to influence.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty with regard to our Congregations is to create that attitude of mind which realises that the purpose of music in Church is not to give the man in the pew "something he likes"—in other words a concert for a penny—but to intensify and make more real our worship.

It is quite certain that stupid music, badly sung, and if possible worse played, cannot be anything but a hindrance to real devotional feeling.

It follows therefore that, where the resources are limited, the choice of music must be on lines which will not unduly tax those resources, always remembering that simple things done well can fulfil their purpose perfectly, whereas pretentious things done badly can never be worthy.

But let us come to detail. Firstly the Office of the Holy Communion; the singing of this has become so general that it may be well to suggest that in this service especially, the good effect of music will probably be in inverse ratio to the amount used. No attempt should be made to sing such parts as the Commandments, the Comfortable words, the Prayer of Consecration. For the music of the parts which are sung Merbecke remains for many people the ideal setting. But there is much to be said for ringing the changes between

this and two or three of the excellent settings by modern composers, particulars of which may be seen from time to time in the *Quarterly News Sheet*.

The Psalms. There exist to-day so many newly pointed Psalters that the difficulty is to choose between them. It may be said at once that in every case the end aimed at is the same, but that the means employed are many and various.

In most of the new Psalters the signs employed are so complicated and numerous as to make the singing of the Psalms even more difficult. The only practical way of teaching the Psalms in village Churches, is for the teacher to model every half-verse. If, however, the time seems opportune for the introduction of a new Psalter, study them all again carefully and choose that which has the fewest signs and least directions.

Choose chants which lie within an easy range, and move principally by step, avoiding those with wide jumps. It is not by any means necessary to have a different chant for every Psalm. It is in fact a definite drawback, as the learning of the different tunes tends to throw the attention upon the tune rather than upon the words.

It is perhaps the strongest point in favour of Plain-song that the music is simply and solely the vehicle for the expression of the words, which is as it should be. With Anglican chants, the more often a good chant is used the easier it is to approach the Plain-song ideal. In teaching the singing of the Psalms to Anglican chants it is most important that the rhythm of the words should be caught before any attempt is made to learn the tune. There is then no necessity for "taking out" false accents—because they will never be put in.

Hymns. It is perhaps even now not entirely superfluous to suggest that in choosing Hymns the words should be carefully read. Here as elsewhere a liberal use of unison should be made, but the pitch of the Hymns must not be too high. In the newest edition of Hymns A. and M. many tunes are given in lower keys than generally found, and there is also a transposed edition of this Hymn Book which is most valuable. Do not forget that the monotony of unison may be as distressing as the monotony of four-part harmony. Aim therefore at variety of treatment. The following are some of the ways in which unison may be varied:—

- Full Choir with Congregation.
- Full Choir Alone.
- Congregation Alone.
- Men with Congregation.
- Trebles and Women with Congregation.
- Trebles and Women Alone.

With these may also be combined a judicious use of descants. Choose descants which have character, not those which are merely "bad tenor parts, an octave higher."

The Organ Voluntary should serve as the means for creating the right devotional atmosphere. There is no necessity for it, and unless it fulfils its purpose, it should be omitted. There is no justification for the use of the Organ as a means of covering up the noise of footsteps. Often, indeed, the music of footsteps is to be preferred to the noise of the Organ.

The indiscriminate use of the Organ has done more than anything to rob our Services of their dignity.

The ingoing Voluntary may well be a quiet prelude based upon some hymn tune which will be sung during the Service. A similar piece may be used at the end of Service. When Choir and Congregation have finished their private devotions, should Organ and Organist be equal to the task, a Recital of one or more pieces might well follow the outgoing Voluntary.

With Organs having only a few stops it is best to avoid too constant changes of tone-colour. It is more effective to keep one tone-colour for several verses, than to be constantly changing from one stop to another, which produces a restless effect.

Anthems. The same principle applies here as applies to Organ Voluntaries. Both are something in which the Congregation cannot usually take part. It follows then that unless the performance of an Anthem is capable of producing a devotional atmosphere, it should be left unsung. But there is a place for the reverent performance of a simple Anthem, and it may be remarked here that there exist many pieces which are admirably suitable, and which are written entirely, in Unison.

