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III.

THE DOUBLE FUNCTION OF MUSIC IN THE
CHURCH.

THE hereditary ritual of the Presbyterian Church in this country recognized one function of singing in divine service, and only one. This function was that of a vehicle for the utterance of worship by the united voices of the Christian assembly, in literal metrical versions of passages of holy Scripture. The Presbyterian rite excluded all "human composesures" as forms of prayer and praise, excepting extemporaneous composesures. Withal it had no place for the use of musical instruments, and nothing for a choir to do apart from the people.

This ritual was established and defended by no arguments of expediency, or taste, or judgment of what was edifying. It was founded *jure divino* on a theological principle which was thus enunciated: "nothing may be added in the worship of God, as parts of worship, but what is prescribed or appointed by the word of God."* Any departure from this principle was held to be constructive idolatry, forbidden by implication in the Second Commandment. The principle, though really developed by the exigencies of controversy with popery and prelacy, was not on that account laid down with a less confident dogmatism, nor applied with less of arbitrary authority. But having outlasted several generations of strenuous polemic, it came at last (so far as the main body of American Presbyterians was concerned) to a violent death in the struggle that ended in the introduction into public worship of Dr. Watts's "Imitation of the Psalms of David in the language of the New Testament."

We listen sometimes with wonder and sometimes with amusement to traditionary anecdotes of the intense animosities incident to the introduction of that new psalm-book. But the real occasion of wonder is that the animosities were not far more intense; for that change of books involved a theological revolution. The action of the Gen-

* Vincent's Catechism, LI. Q. 9.

eral Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, at the close of the last century, in which the aid of Timothy Dwight of Yale College and the General Association of Connecticut was invoked to provide a suitable "system of public psalmody," with the later vote authorizing the use of Dwight's book of Psalms and Hymns, was the definite abandonment of a dogma which, through the storm and stress of many a controversy, had been counted by no small part of the church among "the fundamentals." This barrier being taken down, free course was made for other innovations. With Watts's Psalms and Dwight's collection of hymns, came choirs, elaborate musical compositions practicable for choirs only, and finally musical instruments. But the traditionary ritual of the church, constructed originally to the purposed exclusion of all these, underwent no deliberate revision. A new factor had entered into the construction of the church services, but no place nor function was assigned to it. It could keep its place only by crowding out what was already in possession. As a matter of fact, in many instances, the choir simply entered into Presbyterian congregations and took the place which had been the people's.

This seems strange and illogical; and it *is* illogical, but not strange. It would have been quite consistent and reasonable for the Presbyterian Church, having squarely repudiated the major premise on which its immemorial controversy with the liturgists had been conducted, to review all its practice as deduced from that premise, and modify it accordingly. But such a course at that time, would have been impossible. There was no distinct, intelligent consciousness on the part of the people generally, of the logical consequences of their action; and if there had been, it would have been felt how much harder it is to change a habit or a prejudice, than to change a dogma.

Accordingly, from that time forward, the state of church music in the Presbyterian Church has been, and still is, that of unstable equilibrium. Much cost of labor and money has been expended from year to year in organizing and perfecting the choir, and in constructing the organ and providing an accomplished organist, and when all is ready, there is nothing distinctly assigned to this expensive organization to do, that cannot be as well or better done without them. The traditionary ritual provides for nothing but two or three psalms; and these are taken possession of by the choir until the craving need of some utterance by the Christian people demands them back again. The difficulty is adjusted by some sort of compromise, parcelling out one hymn to one party and one to another, and adding an "opening

piece" at the beginning; or quite as often by a melancholy effort to fuse both the functions of song in one act, by a vague understanding that choir and people are to sing together, only that the choir shall not sing very effectively, nor the people very unanimously nor heartily.

Now among those who seriously and intelligently study the subject of church music, it is commonly recognized, I think, that there are two wholly distinct functions of music in divine service, corresponding to the two forms of choir singing and congregational singing; that music is good, first, as a means of uniting the voices of the worshippers in uttering praise to God; and good, secondly, as a vehicle for conveying religious truth and sentiment to the minds of the people as listeners; that it is good for *expression*, and also for *impression*. It is generally understood and admitted among such persons, that the two functions which appear in the secular applications of music, are to be recognized also in its religious applications; that it may belong not only to the *worship* of the church, but to the didactic and hortatory parts of its services. And the widely different principles which govern the use of music in these two different applications are not unknown to intelligent critics. An ideal system of church music is that in which the hearty, simple, unanimous song of the whole people in the act of common praise becomes all the more significant and delightful by contrast with the act of the choir using all the resources of musical composition, with the utmost efforts of studious skill, to impress upon the silent and listening people the meaning of sacred words—"teaching and admonishing with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." But this absolutely vital distinction, however clearly apprehended by a few, has never come into general and practical recognition. And until it is recognized and acted on, any large improvement in church music is not to be hoped for. Once clearly acknowledged, it will compel a deliberate revision of the whole subject of the order and methods of public worship in its relations to the use of music.

The results of such revision, when it is made, will not be capable of being summed in a formula of general application. General principles can be enunciated, but the arrangement of details must needs vary with different congregations. The attempt to bring about uniformity of use in a matter on which there is not and cannot be uniformity of conditions, but where there must always be a wide diversity of culture, taste, habits, and resources, can do nothing but mischief.

What a very fine thing it would be, if the Board of Publication

of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., would only issue (by a duly authorized Committee) a series of working drawings for a meeting-house, and then try to have all future Presbyterian churches, large and small, cheap and costly, built after that pattern! It is just so wise exactly for this same Board to prepare a body of church music to be used alike by congregations in all parts of the country, of all grades of taste, culture, and resources. In the nature of the case, the book which will be tolerably good for some of these congregations will be intolerable for others; and neither the compiler nor the Board will be to blame for it, but only the utterly impracticable idea which it is attempted to realize. The only course to be followed, in such a case, is to adapt the book to somebody's conception of the average taste of the Presbyterian congregation, take it by small and large; and nobody will conceive that this average is a high one. Consequently a book of music fitted to be acceptable and useful in the average church, is an incubus under which some other churches groan being burdened. The spiritual edification, the enjoyment in worship, and the material growth and prosperity, of some of the more cultivated Presbyterian congregations are suffering from year to year from their being loaded with a system of psalmody that is levelled down to the general average of the churches, North, South, and West. If the tune-book were adapted, on the other hand, to the congregations of higher musical culture, it would be a burden to the others. In either case, this ambition for a sectarian uniformity of use, in a matter of taste in which there is no uniformity of conditions, is pursued to the serious detriment of individual congregations, and is pursued in vain, after all; for the uniformity is not secured.

Not only the selection of music, but, in general, all the details of the order of worship with reference to the uses of music, ought freely to vary with the varying requirements of the particular congregation; from the simplicity of those congregations in which nothing is used but plain psalmody sung by the whole people, to those in which, with cost, study and labor, the resources of sacred art are largely drawn upon. But in speaking of those congregations in which good choirs sing good music, there are some principles to be suggested that are of general application.

(1.) It is most undesirable to find use for the choir by dividing the psalmody between choir and congregation. The characteristic, historical purpose and use of metrical psalms and hymns, in modern Christendom, is for the folk-song of the church. The feeblest form of choir music extant, is that which is known in America (though hardly known at all elsewhere) as the "Hymn by the Choir." The habit of seques-

trating some hymns in the service for the honors of a more exquisite performance, tends to break the habit of simple, unanimous psalmody by the whole people. It is much better that the announcement of a hymn should be *always* the signal to bring the whole assembly to its feet in an act of common worship. ✓

This understanding ought to relieve the choir of the useless bore of rehearsing six bits of plain psalmody every Saturday night. Good psalmody, with a choir of the least skill, and a congregation of fair musical capacity, needs no rehearsal. It is better without it. Properly led by the organist and choir-master or precentor, it goes of itself. To set the choir practicing a people's hymn is only to tempt it into certain choir "effects" which may, or may not, be good and useful in their place, but are merely distracting in the act of worship.

But the minister and organist cannot be too studious of the hymn and tune book—the minister to guide his selections with reference to tune as well as hymn; and the organist to have his copy well annotated with reference to movement and registration.

Beside metrical psalmody, the congregation may easily have much enjoyment in the chanting of psalms, *if* the selections for this purpose are few in number and return frequently in routine. Ten selections, assigned for morning and evening worship on each of the Sundays of the month, in regular recurrence, give variety enough and not too much; and the utterance of the words together having once been learned, the chant-music may be changed freely.

So much for the exercises of the congregational singing, which ought to be not less frequent, but more frequent, than is now common.

(2.) Coming now to the question what duties, in the order of public worship, shall be assigned to the choir, the first consideration to be had is that these duties shall be prescribed definitely and with some intelligible reason. This excludes, at the outset, that which, in the too prevalent no-particular-order of church worship, is the horror of people of devout taste, and the embarrassment of every serious and conscientious church musician—I mean the "Voluntary by the choir," that is, that at a certain point in the order of service, at the beginning or elsewhere, the choir shall sing "*something*," without any particular reference to the meaning or fitness of it, except that the words, so far as they are understood, shall have a pious sort of sound, and not contain anything unsuitable. O, the frightful rubbish that is sometimes sung in Presbyterian churches, when the choir are thus turned loose upon the people! And who is to blame for it, but the church that sets them up with an organ and with salaries, and with

general orders to sing *something*, and no distinct and rigorous instructions what to sing? How does a public speaker like it, to be asked to say *something* for about five minutes with no particular reference to any particular subject or any particular object, but only to make himself interesting? The chances are, in that case, that he utters a lot of precious nonsense; and that is just what the choir does in the like case.

As to the musical forms best suited to the use of choirs in Presbyterian churches, the most considerable is the Anthem. This word is often used, in a loose sense, to mean almost any vocal composition for the church except a psalm-tune, a chant, or a "spiritual song." The Anthem properly so-called, the large and ample illustration, in successive movements, of a passage of Holy Scripture, is not much known in Presbyterian churches in America. It is a noble musical form, which has employed the best genius of Christian composers, in works some of which may task the best skill of any choir. It is the *sermon* of the service of song, and when the musical superfluities with which our worship is now incumbered are eliminated, it ought to have a worthy place, if not for every Sunday, at least for frequent use in the Lord's house, wherever there are choirs competent to such high work.

But a simpler, more generally useful musical form for choirs, is the Scriptural Sentence. And when the place of this in the service is wisely fixed and the character of it defined, it may be in the highest degree conducive to spiritual edification. The supply of good compositions in this form is not large at present; but there is no other reason why, in a well-ordered system of worship, it should not become at once the best common form of choir-music.

(3.) After a somewhat definite notion has been gained as to what the parts of public worship are to be, in a service in which the two functions of music are both to be employed, the proper ordering of these parts into a whole is not so easy a matter as it seems to those who have never seriously studied it. The average minister, so far as I have made his acquaintance, thinks it only a matter of a few minutes and a half-sheet of sermon-paper to make out an "Order of Service," to be pinned up inside of the pulpit, that will be just as good as the next one—here a prayer, and there a hymn, and there a chapter, and somewhere a chance for the choir to sing "*something*"; these for "the preliminaries" to the Sermon, and a little more for a snapper at the end of it. But in fact the pastor who, within those two canons of the New Testament "Directory of Worship"—"All things to edifying," and "All things decently and in order"—shall

construct and put into becoming language and shape (which is *not* the shape of a concert-programme) a good Order of Worship for his church, will find it as hard and as useful a week's work as the best sermon that he ever wrote.

Among the principles which he will need to keep in mind are these :

(1.) Any change in customary habits and usages of public worship in a particular congregation is, in itself considered, an evil, even when it is a necessary evil. Therefore the existing usage of worship, in any place, should be the basis of the new order, to be departed from only for good reason—a principle which some neglecting, have failed.

(2.) In the successive offices of worship there must be a studied alternation and variety, to engage the attention and sustain the interest of the people, old and young, and to relieve the fatigue of the feeble. This principle is violated, when (for instance) the singing of a psalm is immediately followed by the responsive reading of a psalm ; or when the song of the people comes just before, or just after, the song of the choir.

(3.) But, far more important than this, there needs to be an intelligible consecutiveness and progress in the order of service, that the worship of Christ's house may be, as the word of the Scripture requires, a "logical service"—*rationabile obsequium*. If the act of Confession has place at the beginning of worship, with Invocation of Pardon and Grace ; then let there be no vain repetition of it later on. If Thanksgiving for Mercies is part of the General Prayer, then let it not be anticipated in the Prayer of Invocation. It tends "to edifying" when the "ministered unto," as well as the minister, are conscious of the progress and connection, and customary method of the service. Whether those things which ought to be of constant recurrence in every service may not advantageously find expression in recurrent forms, is a question on which Presbyterians are divided, and which is well worthy of study, but is aside from the special purpose of this paper.

Now, for more distinct illustration of these observations, and to bring them to practical point, let me propose an order of morning worship, not as adapted to all churches, but as suited to some of those in which choir-music is used.

After the organ prelude, the congregation rise and sing a *Doxology* (either the *Gloria Patri* or Bishop Ken's version).

Then a prayer of *Confession and Invocation* is offered, followed by *The Lord's Prayer* said by all the people ; and this by a *Sentence* out of the promises of Holy Scripture to the penitent and believing, sung by a choir.

Then an *Invitation to Praise* is read from the Scriptures, and the people chant a *Psalm*.

Lessons are then read from the Old and New Testaments, and if there is to be an *Anthem*, it is sung between the two *Lessons*.

After the *Lessons* comes a *Hymn*; and then *Prayer*.

Then the *Weekly Offering* is received, during which *Sentences* of Scripture, suitable to this use, may be sung by the choir. And after the necessary *Notices* have been given, a *Hymn* is sung.

Then follow the *Sermon*, *Prayer*, a *Hymn*, and a *Benediction*.

This order is not proposed as an ideal one, but as a good one for some churches. The question is how to provide for the Double Function of Music in a certain church, without needless disturbance of its existing usage. According to this order, the people sing five times, and say together the Lord's Prayer; the choir sing a brief Sentence, an Anthem, and "offertory sentences"; and yet the service is not longer than in other churches.

There is no difficulty in making time for a rich, varied, animated service of worship, by pruning away superfluities that have no use except to take up time, or to give the high-priced organist and choir an opportunity to do something for their money. Such, for example, are the following: 1. The reading of hymns—a survival from the days when books were few; 2, the organ interludes between stanzas; 3, the "giving out" of the tune before singing,—properly obsolete, except in the case of new tunes, since hymn and tune books came into use. By omitting these, "giving out" the tune only by its opening phrase; by disusing the old-fashioned drawling, or florid, or repetitious "choir tunes," in favor of the simple and animated people's tunes; and by the use of wall-tablets (almost universal in Presbyterian churches abroad), for announcing the hymns, so that there may be no hitch nor delay between the parts of service, the order of worship may be greatly varied and enriched, while the course of it will flow freely and unbroken, without weariness or loss of interest on the part of those participating.

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