

On the Rhythmical Form of an Anglican Chant

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THE MUSICAL TIMES,

And Singing Class Circular.

JANUARY 1, 1872.

ON THE RHYTHMICAL FORM OF AN ANGLICAN CHANT.

BY DR. STAINER.

It is not hoped that the following remarks will contain any striking novelty, or broach a theory which has not been hitherto suggested elsewhere. But the important position which Chants, double and single, occupy in the services of our Church ought to render a short consideration of their formal structure useful, if not interesting. A single chant, as we all know, consists of two parts, the first of which contains three bars; the second four; the two parts being separated by a double bar, thus :

1 | 2 | 3 || 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 ||

An addition of the number of bars in each division produces the anomalous total of seven. Anomalous, because, as must be generally observed, phrases of seven bars in length, are of but rare occurrence. They are met with no doubt, but only in such positions as point out the fact that they are subordinate to some more elaborate rhythm dependent upon a proper system of grouping such phrases into an extended rhythmical whole. In these cases an effect is produced quite different to that produced by the frequent repetition of a Chant. To follow out this line of thought further, though it leads to most important results, would be to carry the reader far above the comparatively trifling subject in hand, to unexplored regions of musical analysis.

The following is a specimen of a seven-bar phrase in triple measure from Schubert's Pianoforte Sonata, op. 120 :—

Ex. 1.



&c. As before,

The first bar of the repeated phrase is given in order to show that an eighth bar is not left to be understood in a manner similar to that in which the eighth pulse is understood in a tune called Sevens, thus :

Ex. 2.



from which it is plain that as far as the structure of the tune is concerned, it might as well be classified among "eights," inasmuch as the time of one half-

foot is added to each line of the words at the last note of each line of the music. Whereas, in the phrase quoted from Schubert no imaginary pulse or pulses complete the seven-bar phrase, which can be repeated without a pause, and which when disintegrated consists of twenty-one pulses. It would seem that this completeness is due to some extent to the triple measure, because, if an attempt be made to transfer the theme to duple measure, it falls most naturally into an eight-bar phrase, thus :

Ex. 3.



Nor is it easy to construct a seven-bar phrase which will bear repetition as a Chant does; let us attempt it.

Ex. 4.



If this (Ex. 4) be played over several times, care being taken that not more than two beats be allowed to the seventh bar, it will be noticed that our notions of rhythm are entirely broken up, and that an effect is produced quite unlike that of an often repeated Chant. Something is evidently supplied, by the mind of hearers, to the seven bars of a chant, so as to complete its apparently incomplete form. If further proof of this be required, let us write out Robinson's Chant in half time, and play it through tolerably quickly with a strong emphasis on every down-beat, thus :

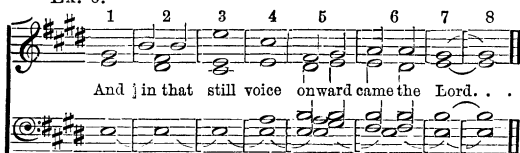
Ex. 5.



The effect of this (Ex. 5) is of the same unsatisfactory kind as that produced in Ex. 4. It may be safely assumed then that *something* is supplied by the mind to a Chant. What is this something? We may discover it in two ways by actual experiment, namely, either by tracing how an ordinary eight-bar phrase can be turned into a Chant; or, how a Chant can, without violence being done to its melodic form and its usefulness, be converted into a single or double eight-bar phrase. A correct result in the former case will of course point out the course to be pursued in the latter, and if it be admitted that the Chant has undergone no change of nature by its transformation, the theory of form which we are seeking will have been found. Let us take the

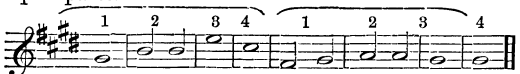
following well-known phrase from Mendelssohn's "Elijah":

Ex. 6.



And in that still voice onward came the Lord. . .

The melody of this divides itself naturally into two equal parts.



This sounds very much like a Chant, and is in its details so similar to one that a comparison between the two will be easy. Let us compare it with a well known chant by Battishill, to which it bears an accidental melodic resemblance.

Ex. 7.



If it be wished to write out this Chant in a form like that of the passage (Ex. 6), which it so closely resembles, it will appear thus:

Ex. 8.



Without any substantial alteration our seven-bar Chant thus becomes an eight-bar phrase, the only changes made, being the addition of a final bar, and the removal of the double bar in the middle.

Let us take a double phrase of eight bars, or of four bars of four pulses, which is the same thing, from Beethoven, and convert it into a Chant.

Ex. 9.



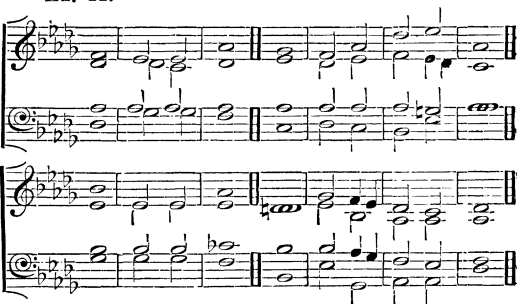
The melody of this may be first thus transferred, omitting grace notes and dots.

Ex. 10.



No injury is done to the salient outlines of his rhythm, although chant-form requires an altered position of the last four semiquavers. According to the theory attempted to be set up, the reciting notes will be Nos. 1 and 4 of each half (compare Ex. 6 and 8). This melody, necessarily transposed for adaptation to voices, but transposed into a key suitable to the gravity of the theme, will appear thus as a Chant.

Ex. 11.

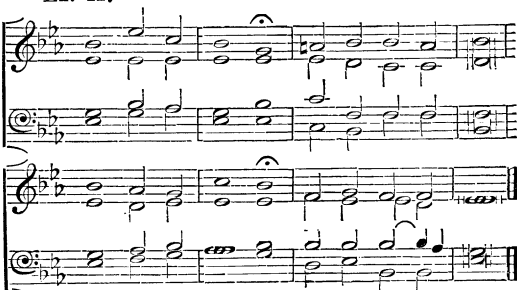


We hope that the fact is, from these examples, tolerably substantiated, that the second and fourth reciting notes belong rhythmically to the previous enclosure in double bars (compare Ex. 10 and 11).

If the reader requires further proof, let him turn "La ci darem" into a Double Chant; and also compare Lupton's excellent chant from Boyce's "By the waters," with its source.

Having turned a Single Chant into a complete musical sentence (see Ex. 8), it is now time to submit a Double Chant to the same process. Robinson's Chant will be presented in this new dress, if unnecessary bars be omitted:

Ex. 12.



If the reader will play this over in strict time, and then compare it with Ex. 5, which preserves intact the rhythm of the Chant as commonly written, he will be sceptical indeed if he does not call this (Ex. 12) a real musical sentence; that (Ex. 5) a sentence from which a something is eliminated.

There remains to be considered this important question, "How do you account for the non-disturbance of the rhythm by the *ad libitum* retention of the reciting notes?"

Enquiries in this direction are partially answered at once, by stating that the second and fourth reciting notes (see the pauses in Ex. 12) are the *end* and *not the beginning* of a limb of the sentence, they can therefore be, by universal assent, extended to any required length without injury to form, whether this extension of their duration is made for purposes of recitation or not; the first and third reciting-notes only remain therefore as requiring some expla-

nation. The explanation thus asked for leads us into what is apparently an entirely new subject, but in reality, one which is connected beyond disavowance with the theory of chant-form, namely, the Theory of Pointing for Chanting.

On examination of a carefully pointed Psalter it will be found that the system is not only of use to keep the voices together *after* they have left the reciting note, but *before* it is finished, and that this is attained by marking a syllable or word with an accent thus :

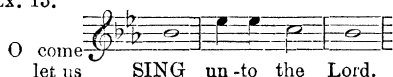
O come let us sing | unto the | Lord || let us heartily re-voice in the | strength of | our sal | vation ||
or, by using a different fount of type, thus :

O come let us SING, &c.,
let us heartily reJOICE in the, &c.

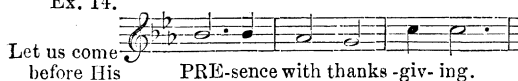
What then is the object of this importantly marked *arsis* before the end of the reciting note? That it is important to mark it, is proved by the fact that if a word is not made prominent in the letter-press, choir singers will of their own accord accent a particular syllable or word, often without the smallest regard to its value in the text, just before leaving the reciting-note.

The answer to this, which is obvious to all experienced choir trainers, and which explains also the reason why a retention of the first and third reciting-notes can be tolerated, is, that this accented word is the point from which the rhythm of the first bar commences, or in other words this accent marks the down-beat of the first bar of the musical phrase, thus :

Ex. 13.



Ex. 14.



Ex. 15.



We can now account for the fact of the non-disturbance of the Rhythm by the long-sustained reciting note, by saying, that sufficient of the recitation is left and then accented, so as to determine definitely that point from which Time commences and the Phrase is measured. Aware of this fact, the late Dr. Stephen Elvey, a thoughtful and painstaking pointer of the Psalms, used in his Psalter distinctive types for words to be sustained during the time of a semibreve, as in Ex. 13, and during a dotted minim as in Ex. 14, and so on. And the Rev. H. Pullen has in his Psalter introduced a bar to point out the accent, thus :

O come, let us | sing | unto the | Lord.

But although the second and fourth Reciting notes do not present the same obstacles to the musical metre as do the first and third, yet it must be remembered that they are treated by choir-singers in just the same manner as those already discussed; thus they give a complete measure at the end of each phrase corresponding to that at the beginning of each phrase.

The objections to the form of a Single or Double Chant as attempted to be drawn out here, which is as follows :



will probably be to this effect; 1st, that in ordinary practice it is not found that choirs retain the last note of a single chant or last note of each half a double chant, for the space of two bars during antiphonal chanting; 2nd, that many chants, if converted into the above shape, would present most absurd forms of melody. With regard to the former of these objections, it may be said that choirs do not limit themselves to the *one semibreve* which closes the seven bars of a chant, but hold it on longer, if not for the full duration of *two semibreves*. An attempt to beat time to ordinary chanting, allowing *exactly* two beats for each final bar, will, prove this, and also, if two beats be strictly enforced the effect is most unpleasant.

In answer to the latter objection, it may be said that it might naturally be expected that those writers of chants who took the seven-bar form with its irregularly placed double bars as their model, without enquiring into its real meaning, would produce forms of melody only adapted to that special form. Also, that the use of bars in Chants at all, has been from the very beginning merely for the sake of assisting singers to cut prose into so many slices, and not for the purpose of pointing out to the theorist the rhythmical outline.

Single Chants were in all probability founded on those Gregorian tones which seemed best adapted to the *English version* of the Psalms. The introduction of bars must have been for many years quite tentative, the many different forms in which old Chants are written helping to prove this to have been the case. The form given in Dr. Boyce's Cathedral Music is well known. The following form, written originally on a six-line staff, occurs in an old book in Magdalen College Library, from which it is transcribed :

Ex. 16.

MR. HEN. PURCELL.



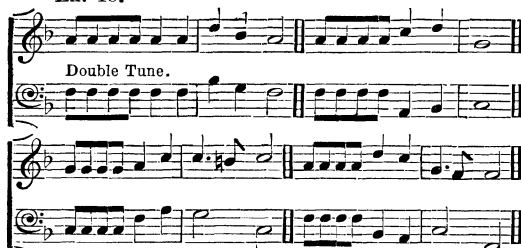
This is the well-known Chant *now* written thus :

Ex. 17.



If the method of writing out this Chant, as shown in Ex. 16, be compared with that in Ex. 17, it will be found that the former is perfectly rhythmical, and the latter, as usual with us, thoroughly unrhythmical. The former strongly confirms, though it has not suggested, the views here expressed, and proves that our musical ancestors wrote out a Chant, if possible, as a correct musical phrase, although the additional notes seem to have been merely for the sake of appearances. The Chant just quoted is immediately followed in the same hand-writing by a "Double Tune," by Mr. J. Gakes, written thus :

Ex. 18.



This, evidently in the earliest *double-Chant* form, is also in itself a strong argument in favour of the theory here laid down.

In conclusion, it may be necessary to say that the transformation of an eight-bar phrase into a chant has been ventured upon here, only for the sake of the conclusions to be drawn from the result, not as signifying approval of such arrangements generally, or as suggesting that the argument can be strengthened by analysing those innumerable arrangements, in which the most trifling similitude seems to have justified the arranger in saying that his handiwork is "from Mr. So-and-so." Lastly, if young composers will try their hands at writing eight-bar phrases on the system here exemplified, and will then transfer them to the common shape, they will find their scope of melody greatly enlarged, and no doubt some really good Chants will result. One of the best chants ever written is here given (though without the permission of its author, E. J. Hopkins), in the form which it is sincerely hoped the reader will feel convinced is a true exponent of Chant-Rhythm.

Ex. 19.



THE ORATORIO CONCERTS.

At the second Concert, on the 6th ult., the Oratorio was Mendelssohn's "Elijah," the principal vocalists being Madame Cora de Wilhorst, Miss Katharine Poyntz, Miss Marion Severn, Miss Julia Elton, Mr. Raynham (who supplied the place of Mr. Sims Reeves, unavoidably absent from an attack of hoarseness), Messrs. Stedman, Pyatt and T. Beale, and Herr Stockhausen. English audiences have been lately so accustomed to hear the part of "Elijah" sung in one unvarying manner that a purely German reading of the music became in the highest degree interesting; and although, therefore, Herr Stockhausen adhered to his own conception of the character, wisely disregarding the models established by his predecessors in this country, so thoroughly did he realise the intention of the composer—so artistically did he colour with the minutest shade of expression every phase of the music—that he completely carried his hearers with him throughout. The whole of his recitatives were given in masterly style; and the duet with the Widow, the impassioned solo, "Is not His word," and more especially the pathetic air, "It is enough," proved that he had studied the part with a reverence inseparable from the nature of a true

artist. In his taunts to the Baal worshippers he was extremely successful, the defiant mocking tone in which he threw out the phrase "Call him louder," being in the highest degree dramatic, and we may also say that in the reiteration of these words it was quite refreshing to hear the notes sung as Mendelssohn has written them, and not as recent *Elijahs* have altered them, to display a high F. Madame Cora de Wilhorst sang the whole of the soprano music with much earnestness and care, creating the greatest effect in the duet with *Elijah*, which is more particularly adapted to her voice and method. Miss Julia Elton would have been compelled to repeat her very excellent interpretation of "O rest in the Lord," had she sung it under a conductor less resolute in his desire to resist encores than Mr. Barnby. She was however most enthusiastically applauded, a compliment with which we trust vocalists will in time learn to rest satisfied. Miss Marion Severn gave the music of the *Queen* with good dramatic feeling, and Miss Katharine Poyntz in the duet (with Miss Severn) "Zion spreadeth her hands," and in the trio "Lift thine eyes," (with Madame De Wilhorst and Miss Severn) was thoroughly satisfactory. Mr. Raynham created a highly favourable impression in the tenor music, the air, "If with all your hearts," being especially well sung, and the recitatives being declaimed with much intelligence and truth of expression. Messrs. Stedman, Pyatt and T. Beale lent efficient aid in the concerted music, the performance of the double quartett, "For He shall give," amply proving that each part was entrusted to a steady and experienced singer. The choruses were uniformly well sung throughout; indeed there can be little question that so fine a rendering of them has never before been heard in the metropolis. Mr. Barnby has now so thoroughly got the whole of his choristers under the control of his *baton* that they move like one machine, the unanimity of their movement however being regulated by a sympathy with the music which, with all due allowance for the power of the conductor, can scarcely come from the conductor alone. The choruses, "Blessed are the men," "He, watching over Israel," and "Be not afraid," were perfectly sublime in depth of expression; and the Baal choruses and "Thanks be to God" were given with such extraordinary precision and brilliancy as to create a positive enthusiasm with the audience. The entire performance of the work was indeed a triumph for the Oratorio Concerts. On the 20th ult., at the third concert, the "Messiah" was given, the solo parts being sustained by Madame Lemmens-Sherrington, Miss Emily Spiller, Madame Laura Baxter, Mr. Sims Reeves, Herr Stockhausen and Mr. T. Beale. Madame Sherrington was in excellent voice, and gave the airs "Rejoice greatly," and "I know that my Redeemer liveth," with true religious fervour, receiving for both the most enthusiastic marks of approbation. Miss Spiller sang "Come unto Him," and "How beautiful are the feet," with so much purity of style and earnestness as to elicit a storm of applause. Madame Laura Baxter, who was at first obviously nervous, gave a very effective rendering of "He was despised," thoroughly enlisting the sympathies of her hearers. Mr. Sims Reeves's singing of the tenor music in this Oratorio has so long been acknowledged as the finest rendering of the part we have ever had that we can add but little to the unqualified admiration which we have so often before expressed upon his singing. We may say, however, that the Recitative and Air, "Thy rebuke hath broken," and "Behold and see," were so exquisitely given as to create an effect upon the audience almost too deeply felt to be expressed in audible applause, although it need scarcely be said that such outward demonstrations of approval were loud and universal. The bass part was sung to perfection by Herr Stockhausen, the air, "But who may abide" (too often given to a contralto), and "Why do the nations," displaying his voice and style to the utmost advantage. A good word must also be said for Mr. T. Beale, who (being called upon at a few minutes notice, in consequence of the hoarseness of Herr Stockhausen) gave the trying air, "The trumpet shall sound" (with Mr. T.