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SIR J. FREDERICK BRIDGE, C.V.O.,

PRESIDENT,

IN THE CHAIR.

*THE RELATION OF CHURCH MUSIC TO THE
MUSICAL LIFE OF THE NATION.*

BY SYDNEY H. NICHOLSON, M.A., MUS.B.

THE subject of Church Music is one on which a good deal has been written and much has been said in lectures and propaganda of various kinds; and one might well hesitate to tackle it again, for it is a subject that arouses no small amount of controversy among the advocates of different schools, while it yet remains to be shown that the opinions put forward even by the best authorities make very much practical difference in the actual results.

Were my subject "The Reform of Church Music," or even the "History of Church Music," you would have been spared this lecture altogether. These matters are both important and interesting: but the method of approach in this case I want to be something different—for I am convinced that in the relationship of church music to the general musical thought of the day lies the real solution for most of the difficulties which exist.

First then, I want to try and get a plain and unbiassed view of what that relationship is: secondly to try and answer the question as to how far things are satisfactory and what the latent possibilities are: and thirdly to suggest some possible lines of progress. And in dealing with the subject I wish to address myself not primarily to those who are specially concerned with the practice of church music, whether as organists, choirmasters or composers, but rather to those who are musicians in the general sense of the word.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SUBJECT.

I am sure it is not recognised by the general body of musicians who are not definitely connected with this work, what an important feature church music is in our national musical life. Take for instance mere numbers: there are,

I believe, some 13,600 benefices in England alone, many of which embrace more than one church, and it may safely be assumed that practically all of these have some sort of a choir and some sort of an organist. Reckoning the very low average of fifteen members to a choir this gives us a total of choristers in the Church of England alone of something like a quarter of a million. And when one reckons all the churches and chapels of other denominations it is certainly well within the mark to estimate that those who are more or less directly connected with church music in this country must number quite half a million. No other branch of the Art can of course vie with such figures, and probably the organist's is the most numerous branch of the musical profession. But the importance of the matter by no means ends with mere statistics: in a vast number of cases the Church or Chapel Choir is the one form of definitely musical organisation which is to be found in a district: this applies mainly of course to country districts, where the efforts of the church choir are practically the only musical performances that the ordinary people ever hear, simply because it forms the only definite musical organisation within reach. Take again the position of the organist;—and here I would instance particularly the smaller towns: in many of such cases the organist is the most prominent professional musician in the district, and by his energy and capacity or the reverse he has the power of making or marring the musical life of quite a large community.

I purposely refrain here from going into the question of how far choirs and organists achieve, or fall short of what they ought to do. My object is simply to emphasise the enormous potential influence that exists, if rightly used.

THE ATTITUDE OF GENERAL MUSICIANS.

But what is the attitude of the ordinary musician towards this enormous mass of disconnected yet more or less organised groups of executants? How much interest, for example, does the average professional violinist, or orchestral conductor, or solo singer take in church music? or even more important, how many of our rising composers care two straws about it as a serious art form? How is it that scarcely any of our best composers since the time of Wesley, with the honoured exception of Sir Charles Stanford (who in my opinion has exercised a greater and more healthy influence on English church music than any composer, at any rate in modern times), has contributed more than a handful of works for this purpose?

Various answers may be given, and it will be useful to consider a few of them.

"The general standard of performance by church choirs is not good enough": Very true, possibly: but the remedy is to supply them with good music within their powers—for we have yet to learn that good music need necessarily be difficult—and, by encouraging them, to lead them to improve: merely to ignore them is to waste a great opportunity. To put it on its lowest ground, where else can such a public be obtained (except perhaps with the royalty ballad)? and is it not worth while to write even the simplest thing that may be learnt and loved by thousands? I am not sure I would not rather be the composer of a hymn tune that achieved the position occupied say by "Abide with me," or "Rock of Ages," than of a Symphony which obtained two or three hearings at the Queen's Hall, and then lay on a publisher's shelves, dusty and forgotten. I am aware that this is hardly a fair comparison, but still the aspect of the matter is at least a possible one, and to achieve immortality even in a hymn-tune or a chant is no small thing.

Another reason may be that the style considered necessary for church music does not attract the average composer. This is a greater difficulty than the former. The purely liturgical part of church music is no doubt confined within pretty strict limits, and we cannot perhaps expect our budding Stravinskys or Ravels to provide us with very suitable Magnificats: but the Anthem surely provides a wide enough scope. Here we have no prescribed words, a very wide choice of subject is available, and the style may be as free as can be desired. Few composers could be found ready to assert seriously that religion and the highest art are incompatible: were anyone so rash, we need only point to the B minor Mass, and the Brahms' "Requiem," to "Parsifal," or to "Gerontius," for an answer. Now if these larger forms are satisfying to composers, why do they, at any rate in this country, shun the smaller in religious music alone? Why do not some of our excellent song writers or composers of chamber music try their hand at anthems? Is it because they feel that the conventional idioms associated with church music are cramping and thread-bare? Then let them give us something free and original. Do they complain that many anthems are weak in form? Let them write us pieces in a new form. Surely it is just because church music is regarded as a conventional thing in a more or less dead idiom that progressive minds avoid it, and it is by making it real and live and spontaneous, rather than a mere echo of by-gone models, that it can be brought into touch with the thought of the day.

If more interesting music were written for the church by contemporary composers, the standard of performance would certainly be raised, for while all true musicians alike revere the great works of the past, we cannot expect 20th century composers to be bound by the laws of Palestrina, nor can we expect singers who are real live musicians to be contented with nothing but 16th century polyphony on the one hand, or Victorian commonplaces on the other.

Here then is a field that might well be explored by young composers. For it is a fact that though there is far too much so-called modern church music of a sort, there is not nearly enough good modern music for the needs of the day.

I should place first then among the needs of modern church music a greater number of Anthems—especially anthems for special seasons (it would be hard to name a dozen really good modern anthems for Saints Days for instance). Then there is ample scope for short Church Cantatas: beyond a few of the Bach Cantatas, the Mendelssohn Psalms and some of Parry's, and one or two other things, what is there available? Yet the demand is there, only waiting for composers to meet it. It is useless to abuse choirs for performing "The Crucifixion," unless we can suggest something or other in its place. We welcome indeed such a work as Dr. C. Wood's new "Passion Music."

I should say that the following are the essential features of the type of music required:—

It must be genuine and spontaneous—of the day, and no mere imitation of a past idiom.

It must be attractive and easily grasped, as the audience will never be composed primarily of cultured musicians: its appeal must therefore be general and direct.

It must be sufficiently easy to be within the capacity of ordinary church choirs, and as many church choirs can never hope to reach a very high standard of technical attainment, a great deal of it must be very easy indeed.

It must, like all good music, and all good Art, be appropriate for the purpose for which it is to be used.

Surely these are no severe restrictions: the only one that may act as a fetter is the need for simplicity: and this should rather act as an incentive than the reverse, for it is well-known that it is far more difficult to write good music that is simple than that which is difficult, and the truest artistry is often shown not in prodigality of resource, but in economy of material and effective use of limited resources.

In emphasising the need for a re-awakened interest in the composition of church music, however, we must by no means overlook the fact that there is a whole mine of most splendid old music which has been quite insufficiently worked. Many magnificent church compositions still lie buried in musty

tomes, on the shelves of our great national and cathedral libraries ; and though many of them are at last being brought to light by the energies of a few enthusiasts, such as Dr. Terry and Dr. Fellowes, to name only two, the store seems at present to be in no danger of exhaustion. These grand old compositions should indeed form the basis of our national church music, and they sound as fine and fresh to-day as when they were written. Of course they are in an old idiom, and this fact militates against their general popularity—with a few exceptions : also they generally require a technical equipment which can hardly be found outside cathedrals and a few of the best church choirs. Still they do set a standard of what is suitable, and the performance of at least an adequate number of them should be the aim of every self-respecting choir.

I would then appeal in the first instance to composers to reconsider their attitude to church music, and to take it more seriously than seems to be the fashion to-day : to write not only with a view to choral societies or cathedrals or big festival programmes—but for ordinary choirs on ordinary Sundays. There is a tendency to regard all choral writing as more or less subject to the same conditions : the average composer sets to work much in the same way whether he is writing for a choir of 200 or 20. This is obviously wrong : what is needed is that composers should explore the possibilities of choirs as they exist, or as they can be made capable of becoming, and should adapt their music to suit these possibilities. By studying the actual facts of the case, a real style of church composition might be evolved, which would be a worthy addition to the musical literature of the nation. It would be well if our composers were to follow the lead of the Russians in this matter (as many of them are ready enough to do in other respects). It is perhaps not sufficiently known that almost all the great Russian composers such as Tchaikovski, Rimsky-Korsakoff, Rachmaninov, etc., have written quite a large amount of music for their own church : music that is in a distinct style of its own—exceedingly diatonic, often exceedingly simple : yet full of interest and some of it of great beauty.

PRESENT CONDITIONS.

So far I have spoken mainly of the attitude of general musicians to church music. But it is necessary to try and get a view of what the actual state of church music is, not only in relation to musicians, but in relation to the life of the community in general. This involves some sort of a survey of present day conditions, which must of necessity be only

brief, and in which it is impossible to go into details. And it will probably be helpful to consider the musical equipment both as it exists, and also as it might be. In some cases where all is well, the two aspects will coalesce, but in the majority of cases they will be in sharp contrast.

The musical equipment of churches may conveniently be considered under three headings.

- (1) Village Choirs.
- (2) Ordinary Parish Churches in towns.
- (3) Cathedrals or College Chapels, and certain important Churches.

Of course this is only a broad classification, and many choirs will come on the border line : but it substantially represents the case.

THE PURPOSE OF CHOIRS.

Any choir may be said to have two distinct functions (*a*) to lead the praises of the congregation ; (*b*) to minister to the congregation by its interpretation of great thoughts expressed in music, and at the same time to offer worship on behalf of all who are present. The first function, that of leading the congregation is by far the most important in the smaller churches, while the second, that of the ministry of art, is necessarily mainly confined to the larger.

There is a strong and increasing demand for good congregational singing in our churches : it is felt, and rightly, that unless a choir is really good it should not be encouraged to sing much in which the congregation can only play a listener's part. But whether the choir is good or not the congregation can claim with justice a reasonable share in the singing. So much is generally admitted, and all who wish to get a true view of church music, must recognise the claims of the congregation, and that their part in the service is, at least potentially, a musical one. But the matter is not so simple as it appears. What exactly is meant by this congregational singing we all so much desire ? Do we expect to get finished musical performances from our congregations ? If so, there is no need for a choir at all—the whole congregation will form the choir ; or do we wish to provide the kind of music in which any ordinary man or woman can join, who has no special musical knowledge or gifts ? Probably in most cases it would be said that the latter is the right view. Then the question arises, what can such a congregation really sing ? Must it be confined to singing the melody in unison, or can it and should it attempt to sing in parts ? There is some confusion of thought in this matter.

Many will admit, I think rightly, that congregational singing can, to be artistic, only be in unison : no artistic result can

be obtained by promiscuous attempts at harmony by an ordinary congregation, where the voices at best must be ill-balanced, and at worst, are hopelessly incorrect. Owing however, to the preference of choirs for singing in parts, hymns and chants are chosen Sunday after Sunday which are definitely written with a view to four-part harmony, the melody being pitched to suit treble voices. Now the average untrained voice of a man or woman is not of the soprano or tenor compass, but of baritone or mezzo soprano. Consequently a great deal of such music lies too high for comfortable unison singing, with the consequence that the congregation are physically unable to stick to the melody: they therefore have to sing every now and then an octave too low, or else to invent some sort of harmony which seems to them to fit—which they call "singing seconds" (it is more often in fact singing in thirds with the melody). Then again many of these hymns and chants, written with a view to four-part singing, owe whatever interest they possess not to the melody, but to the harmony; and concentration of the whole of the forces on the upper part robs them of their proper effect.

The fact is that if true congregational singing is wanted, music must be chosen which is really adapted to this purpose. The essentials of such music are suitable pitch and melodic interest. The degree in which most collections of hymn tunes and chants fall short of these requirements is quite sufficient to account for the general failure of congregational singing.

THE CONSTITUTION OF CHOIRS.

Choirs in this country, at any rate in churches, generally consist of boys and men, at all events where this combination can be obtained. This may be said to form the normal material which has to be dealt with. And taken on the whole it is material which is well suited to the purpose, and capable of providing excellent results. And whatever may be said for the use of women's voices in church choirs, it must be remembered that all the great church music of the past was written for a combination of men and boys, and with any other combination it cannot produce its proper effect. So without further comment we may take the male choir as the normal, and consider its constitution in the three types of churches already mentioned.

(1) In village choirs. Here the main function of the choir is to lead the congregational singing, and independent work should rarely if ever be attempted save in exceptional cases. In an ordinary village it is seldom possible to insure the regular attendance of a properly balanced four-part choir, and the basis should be unison, and harmony the exception.

There is probably little real justification for harmony singing at all, except the gratification of the village tenor or bass whose perhaps unaided efforts are not very likely to be edifying. It is generally possible in any but the smallest village to collect enough boys (they need not be many) to form a choir of the type required to lead the congregation. Where not enough boys can be collected, girls may of course be introduced. As to men, their presence should be welcomed if they are content to act as leaders of the congregation and to sing in unison. But where men will persist in trying harmony in village choirs, I am convinced that it is better to do without them.

There is no better lead for congregational singing than a clearly defined treble line at a proper pitch. Ordinary boys can easily be taught to sing pleasantly at this pitch. You cannot expect the beautiful high notes of cathedral choristers from village schoolboys, and it is when they are forced to attempt high notes for which they cannot be adequately trained that their efforts are so unmusical. But men who sing in harmony and incorrectly at that, do more harm than good. So that in ordinary villages, I think that the mainstay and important part of the choir should be the boys, and that the men should only be admitted so to speak as auxiliaries to the singing in unison.

But village singing should not be confined to this type of music alone. As has been repeatedly shown at Competition Festivals, all over the country, village choral societies can be formed in the most unlikely places which prove themselves capable of giving really artistic performances of the best music. Now these choral societies are the proper place for men and women who want to sing in harmony, and they should be used in church instead of or in addition to the ordinary choir on special occasions when music of a more ornate character is desired. People who cannot undertake the obligations involved by a weekly attendance in the choir, will often be quite ready to turn up for fixed rallying points, like special music services. In this way it would be possible to perform from time to time music of a character and in a manner quite immeasurably superior to the usual weekly round of hymns, chants, and occasional anthems, too high, ill balanced and out of tune, that so often have to stand as representative of church music.

In small towns or ordinary parish churches, we may reasonably expect to get a choir with the four-parts adequately represented and with some real artistic possibilities. Here again I think that the basis of the music should be congregational; and if adult members of the choir will not accept

this, we are better without them. But the regular choir, or the specially augmented choir embracing all the best talent available will here have an even more important part. There is no reason why anthems, should not be introduced frequently, so long as they can be well sung, and the church cantata also forms a valuable feature in the possibilities. Good material may be found in most places, and the work of such choirs might be immeasurably strengthened throughout the country by judicious handling.

When we come to cathedral and collegiate choirs, and the choirs of churches of cathedral type, we meet with quite different problems. Here the congregational element, though it should never be lost sight of, is not of the main importance. The independent work of the choir is the chief thing, and of course there are no limitations beyond the quality of the material, as to what may be done. These are the choirs that should render the best church music, whether new or old, and these are the choirs that should present the greatest attractions to composers. They often fall short of what they might be, for various causes: but on the whole there are a large number in the country which reach a high degree of efficiency.

It may be well at this point to go a little more closely into the question of the efficiency and possibilities of each of these three types of choirs: and in doing so I cannot avoid making my illustrations from personal experiences.

(1) Village Choirs. For some time past I have made it a habit to take all possible opportunities of hearing choirs of this kind, visiting village churches quite at random wherever I get the opportunity, and trying to note at first hand how things really are. My conclusions lead me to say that taken on the whole, when the music is simple and not pitched too high it is reasonably satisfactory. Organists are generally fairly efficient with things like hymns and chants, but often fail terribly with voluntaries. The boys on the whole are far better than the men, and it is seldom that harmony singing is successful. Women's voices where used generally spoil the effect and boys alone are better. Congregational singing is fair, and evidently greatly dependent upon a good lead from the boys.

I recently had an interesting experience with choirs of this kind. I undertook to visit a small country town, where about eighteen village choirs had been assembled: in the afternoon they were rehearsed carefully, and in the evening they sang service in the church. The points I wish to emphasise are (1) that the music was all in unison (just one or two verses of hymns being sung in harmony for the sake of variety). It

was all melodically interesting and at a low pitch. It was all fairly familiar, and had had little preliminary rehearsal. The district was said to be extremely unmusical, and the choirs to be bad: yet they showed extraordinary interest and intelligence, and the service, simple though the music was, was a joy to listen to. This shows what possibilities there are for these choirs by occasionally uniting in joint services.

As to town choirs. These I find to vary greatly, and their real efficiency is often in inverse ratio to the amount they attempt. But on the whole I do not think the material is bad, and where there is a good organist the boys are nearly always good: but the best available men seldom seem to be attracted. Such choirs in combination can do wonders. In Manchester Cathedral, I once had a choir of over 1,000 boys and men from Parish Churches, singing an eight-part Bach motett without accompaniment. This is admittedly a musical part of the country, and such a result could be looked for in few places. But very fine results are obtained on similar occasions elsewhere.

In Cathedrals, where the conditions as to the choir are favourable, the finest singing can frequently be heard, and probably the technical efficiency is on the whole higher in these choirs than in any other choral bodies. On the rare occasion when two or three good cathedral choirs can be heard massed together, the effect is superb.

Now I think all this goes to prove that anything like elaborate music is infinitely more effective when choirs are augmented, and that with the ordinary small choirs (save perhaps in cathedrals) the best and most artistic results are obtained when their efforts are confined to the simpler things. And I feel so certain that this is the case, that I would go so far as to say that the realization of this principle would do more than anything else to improve the general level of church music. And might it not be that in the case of towns at anyrate, it would be a gain if the musical talent were concentrated in a few churches, while the majority were contented on ordinary occasions with a pure congregational service: this would be better than a large number of choirs all more or less pretentious and few really efficient.

LINE OF PROGRESS.

Having now attempted a necessarily hurried and incomplete survey of the conditions as they actually exist, it remains to try to see in what direction we may look for progress.

I have endeavoured to show how far church music is from occupying the position in the musical life of the day to which

by its importance it should be entitled. I have pointed out some of the defects that I think exist: and now I must try and indicate some of the reforms that seem to be necessary.

In village and country choirs, the greatest need is undoubtedly expert guidance. There should be in each diocese a sort of diocesan inspector of church music, whose whole time should be spent in visiting choirs, training them and helping them on weekdays, and hearing them and playing for them and showing them how to do things on Sundays. In a word what is wanted in country places is educational work. The village organists cannot be expected to be experts—lectures are little good—they must be shown practically what to do, and by a real expert whose word they will not question.

Ordinary parish church choirs suffer I think chiefly from not getting the right sort of music to sing. Here is the great chance for the composer: there is plenty of good and efficient material, but the choice of music is often exceedingly poor, and much good work is wasted on stuff that ought never to be performed. A higher standard ought to be aimed at in these choirs, and if the music they rendered were brought more into line with the musical thought of the day, better singers would be attracted, and the whole level would be immeasurably raised. These choirs suffer more than anything from the fact that we are inclined to accept one standard of criticism for church music and another for secular. This of course is hopelessly wrong. Bad singing or bad music is equally intolerable whether sung on the concert platform or in the choir stalls.

Cathedral choirs demand a little consideration apart from others: reform is doubtless needed in some cases, though I do think that it has set in both in the matter of the music sung and the standard of performance. But I cannot refrain from alluding to the perilous position in which many cathedral choirs find themselves to-day—a position which indeed threatens the stability of the whole of the venerable system which has for so many hundreds of years been a valued part of our national life. This position is brought about chiefly through lack of adequate funds, but partly too through the apathy of Cathedral Chapters. In the memory of most of us the Church Service was chanted twice daily in almost any Cathedral Church—indifferently no doubt at times, but oftener extremely well. Anyhow it was a piece of definite musical organisation of which we had reason to be proud, and the like of which could not be matched in any other country in the world. But what do we find to-day? Cathedrals where several of the week-day services are plain, where certain "dumb days" are the rule, and where at holiday times not

a note of music is to be heard! This is all wrong. The first clearly defined object of all these ancient cathedral foundations is the maintenance of a constant round of dignified worship: the musical staff is every bit as much an integral part of the system as the Dean and Canons themselves: the first duties of these dignitaries, to which they pledge themselves on their appointment, is the observance and guardianship of their statutes. Doubtless a literal observance of all of them has become impossible—many of them are clearly obsolete—but the spirit that underlies them is perfectly plain, and I maintain that Deans and Canons have no more right to acquiesce in the curtailment of the musical services that they have to fail in observing their Residence. How the increased expense is to be met it is difficult to say, but I do not think it is right that necessary economies should all be effected at the expense of the music: it should not be impossible to reduce the staff of clergy for instance, whose specified duties compared with those of the musicians are extraordinary light and extraordinarily well paid in proportion to the requirements. Surely, too, it would not be unreasonable to ask church people to contribute to the maintenance of at least one really efficient choir in each Diocese? It has never, so far as I am aware, been attempted. I feel sure that the real reason for this state of things is not only financial—it is partly because the Chapters don't care sufficiently for music themselves: it makes the services longer and takes them from other things that they think more important. The answer can only be that they should not accept these offices unless they can accept the obligations involved in them. Unless musicians, both professional and still more amateur music-lovers, will take a strong line of protest against these encroachments on the musical rights of the church and the country, we shall in a few years be faced with non-choral services as the general rule on weekdays, and these will very soon be followed by an amateur choir on Sundays.

I have spoken strongly on this subject, for I feel deeply, and I do want all those whom these words may reach to use their best endeavours to save this our most venerable musical heritage before it is too late.

A good deal has been said about particular reforms that are needed to bring church music into line with other branches of the Art: but I feel convinced that there is something deeper than any of these which is really at the root of all the difficulties which are met with. What is chiefly needed is a closer consideration of the whole question of the relationship of Art to Public Worship, and of the inter-relation of all those various factors that contribute to it.

Art in some form has now its recognised place in almost all types of public worship: but its position needs to be regularised and defined. It is rightly regarded as "the hand-maid of religion," but it is often tolerated only on sufferance as if it had little importance except as a means of making religious services attractive—a kind of bribe to get people to come to church! This view is so far from the truth that it is worth while to try and consider briefly the ethics of the whole question.

What then is the true relation of Art to religion and particularly to public worship? Obviously art cannot take the place of religion, and any attempt to make it do so by violating the religious atmosphere or by calling the chief attention to the means rather than the end is predoomed to failure. On the other hand religion as expressed in public worship is at best a somewhat barren thing where Art is entirely ignored. Art certainly has a ministry of its own. Many an artist who perchance may have somewhat vague views on religious dogma or the tenets of a particular church will be repelled by the feeling that his co-operation may for these reasons be regarded as unwelcome or insincere. Indeed in the special matter of Church Music there is a tendency to feel that the Art should only be approached through the gateway of religion, and it is too often forgotten that religion may in many cases be approached through the gateway of Art. Religion in some form is indeed natural to most men. But it is not always expressed in creeds or in church-going. It would seem that the nearest secular analogy to religious Art is to be found in the drama. Here all the arts contribute their share to the general scheme—of the poet, the artist, the designer, the actor, the musician. But for complete success the Art of each must be subordinated to the central idea, and if any department attracts undue attention or is inadequate, the unity is destroyed. Now there is quite a close analogy between the drama and the church service: and in facing this problem squarely, I hope I shall not be accused of anything like irreverence. Corresponding to the stage setting then we have the incomparable architecture of our cathedrals and churches, "scenery" far beyond the wildest dreams of the most imaginative of "producers," for our libretto we have the finest literature in existence: colour, movement, grouping and ornament are all richly provided in the possibilities of dignified ritual: while for music we have our choirs and organs, and there is not the least reason why we should not have our orchestras as well. Now in public worship as in the drama these factors should all be studied as one: architects, artists, ritualists, musicians,

and of course clergy, should all work together for this common end, that Art in the church should show that unity of purpose and design without which the attainment of true beauty is impossible. But too often the exact opposite is the case: the architect detests the musician because he wants good space and position for his organ and choir: the ritualist cannot marshal his forces with the fullest dignity owing to the lack of vision of the architect: the musician is too often interested in no Art but his own, and in so far as attention is diverted from his particular department, votes any other consideration as more or less of a bore: the priest, with his natural and proper desire to keep the purely religious side ever to the front, is apt to disregard the serious claims of Art, and to use it merely as a means of attraction. Were all those engaged on the artistic side of worship to unite in a supreme effort for the central idea of beauty as a whole, rather than to concentrate on their own particular contribution to it, the gain would be incalculable. So often the artistic side of worship is patchy and unbalanced—beautiful architecture ruined by a frightful organ—a grand cathedral with a poverty-stricken ritual—magnificent vestments and ceremonial with tenth-rate music! The instances are too numerous to need further comment.

At this point an objection might be raised which would seem at first sight to shatter the whole theory that has been put forward: the argument might be thought to lead to some such conclusion as this:—supposing you have an ugly church, you should not have good music or fine ritual or they will be out of keeping with the architecture and therefore destroy the unity of the whole. This of course, is a fallacy and is based on the supposition that perfection is attainable in this world. Such not being the case, however, we must do the best we can with the means at our disposal; and the excellencies of one art may perhaps make up for the deficiencies of another: certainly badness in one art is no excuse for badness in another. Nevertheless the main contention is true, and suitability in each contributing art must to some extent be governed by the possibilities in other directions. For instance, we cannot help feeling that ceremonial which would be appropriate in St. Paul's or the Abbey would be rather ridiculous in a hideous mission chapel, nor would very elaborate music be in place in a humble village church service.

The great need is for some unifying force which will place each department in its proper relation to all the others, and to the general religious purpose of the whole. This can best be attained if each service is regarded as in some sense an

organic whole. The study of our various liturgies shows that all are built on a definite structural plan—there was a true sense of proportion and of climax in the minds of those who conceived them.

Take the simplest and most familiar of all—our Morning and Evening Prayer. We commence with exhortation, follow it with an expression of penitence and absolution, then follows the central praise section, "O Lord open thou our lips," with its psalms, canticles and creed, leading up to the collect for the day, embodying the particular thought which should give colour to the whole: then comes the anthem, the climax on the musical side: then follow prayers and thanksgiving for special mercies and the whole ends with the all-embracing grace. No drama could ever have been composed embodying a more complete ideal of structural unity—the preparation gradually leading up to the central thought of the day, and then rounded off with a quiet ending: a sort of *crescendo* to the climax, with a *coda* at the end. Still more does the Communion Service possess this structural unity, culminating of course in the central act of Christian worship. How could anything be better designed, and if one may say so with all reverence, what finer "scenario" has ever been devised? I feel sure that this way of regarding services as a dramatic whole is the first essential for gaining a true view of the unity of art.

I have run the risk in what I have said of being misunderstood: I can quite fancy someone saying, "But surely religion is something quite different from this—you do not mean to advocate the turning of our services into mere stage plays?—we don't want acting in church": or again others might say, "Will not all this concentration on the artistic side tend to draw people away from the main purpose of it all? Are not these things only valuable in so far as they attune our minds to the contemplation of higher things?" Arguments such as these are answered when it is remembered that in all art one inexorable condition for success is that it must be appropriate for its purpose. If then anything in church detracts from the main purpose, which is religious worship, it is proved *ipso facto* to be bad art because it fails in the very first purpose of its existence. So that a jarring note in the music, a vulgar piece of ornamentation, an over prominent scheme of decoration—anything indeed that is inherently ugly or out of the picture must necessarily be bad art because it militates against the central idea. But all that is really good, provided that it is balanced and not brought into undue prominence, is bound to be helpful if once it be admitted that the ministry of art is of any value at all.

One other point of view must not be overlooked: very often that which is simplest and least obtrusive is that which is most artistic. True beauty by no means involves elaboration or excess of ornament. This was discovered long ago in architecture: most of us prefer the simple lines of Early English or Norman to the intricate richness of Decorated or Flamboyant: we are learning the same lesson on the stage, and a good many of us turn with relief from the sumptuous presentations of Shakespeare of a few years ago to the plain back-cloths and simple beauty of the best productions of to-day. Many of us, too, feel that there is more true art in a simple hymn tune or folk song or a bit of plain-chant than in a violently tempestuous Magnificat or a florid and ostentatious Mass. The degree of elaboration has indeed nothing to do with the artistry of the result. So that this "dramatic" conception of the Church Service, far from tending to over-accentuate the artistic side would in fact, by placing all the different elements in a proper perspective, have quite the opposite effect: it would mean that Art instead of being, as it so often is, little more than a hindrance, would take its real place as one of the most valuable adjuncts to religion.

If this view of religious Art be a true one, how is it to be translated into the field of a practical policy? The first step would be that all who are engaged in any form of Art should cultivate a better mutual understanding: each should learn something of the other's point of view. I should like to see a guild of all church artists, where musicians would attend lectures on architecture and theology, where architects would learn something of the requirements of music, where the clergy would hear sound views on art in general, where ritual experts would study conditions that are not necessarily medieval.

As far as general musicians are concerned I feel sure that were such a view of religious art generally accepted, the appeal to them would be far stronger than it is at present: they would feel that they were being asked to contribute their share to a real live art-form, and not merely to engage their talents in an unimportant by-path with which they have no special sympathy. Church music would be raised from a condition of more or less ineffective complacency to take its place alongside the other great art-forms of the world. A society like the British Music Society should do much to unite musicians of different sorts, and to help composers to realise the great field that lies open to them in this matter.

It is on lines like these that real progress may be looked for, far more than in abuse of a few isolated examples of ineptitude, or in the wholesale condemnation of a system.

There is every reason to feel encouragement : the material is all ready to hand : the interest is there, even if it is often dormant : it remains for those who have the power to do so, to kindle the spark into a living flame.

DISCUSSION.

THE CHAIRMAN : The Association is to be congratulated upon the paper just read. To begin with, Mr. Nicholson was cheerful and confident, and suggestive as to what might and could be easily done. And secondly he was not a bit afraid to express his opinions even about Deans and Chapters. The tendency to drop the daily choral service I foresaw years ago. Throughout my long career I have been encouraged often no doubt by appreciative clerics and so on ; but much more often one has had to plead to be allowed to do one's very best. From the age of six (and I am now 76) I have been connected with Cathedral services, and until the last few years I never dreamt that it would be possible that daily choral services in a Cathedral would be dropped. We as boys never had but a fortnight's holiday for the regular cleaning of the Cathedral. One of the most cantankerous men I ever knew was old Provost Hawkins ; we could never get a holiday even out of him though he did not care a brass farthing about music. All the same he regarded the choral service as the *sine qua non* every day. And always at the Abbey we had our fifteen choral services a week—two each day and three on Sunday. Now I am sometimes horrified when I pick up the list to find there are only five services in the week that can be called complete. There may be three or four plain services—yes, very plain ; one day with boys only, and another with men only. That is in the great place to which people come from all parts of the world expecting to hear something good—only five complete services ! I am afraid these choral services are being dropped all over the country. During the war when men were called up they could not be replaced ; but the tendency to set aside the choral service began even before the war. And now when men expect to be paid a little more—as we all do to keep alive—they are told it cannot be done ; and the singing goes by the wall. So I fear we shall lose the daily choral service, unless Deans and Chapters can be wakened by the extremely valuable paper we have just heard. For I am sure this paper should be not only printed but should be sent round from our Association to all the Deans and Canons in England. They cannot take offence. If we

find we cannot afford it perhaps some of you applauding might hand in a little money! I congratulate Mr. Nicholson on his ability, his courage, his cheerfulness and his anticipations for good—all of which I am sure will bear good fruit.

Mr. PERCY SCHOLES: Mr. Nicholson has given us a most splendid paper; and if it is printed as suggested there is hardly a Dean or Chapter in the country who will not be able to understand it. Just two or three points I may perhaps mention in the hope of drawing further comment. There is the question, for instance, of the misappropriation of funds. Funds were left long ago by pious donors for Church music which are now being applied to other purposes. There has been much of that going on throughout the country. To mention one case: St. John's College, Oxford, have a large estate in North Oxford which I believe was left in order that the revenue should be applied to supply incomes for the Vicars Choral. The leases are falling in and the revenue will soon be enormously increased. Probably in anticipation of that the College authorities have, I am told, taken powers to apply that money to ordinary College purposes and are disbanding their choir. That is only one example. Another case that frequently occurs is this. A certain proportion was fixed some centuries ago between the incomes of the Dean and the various Canons including the Minor Canons, and so forth. Then the value of money changes in the course of time and the income of the Dean, which was fixed, say, at £300, was raised gradually, till it is now £3,000 or £4,000 and the salary of a Minor Canon which was, perhaps, £30 a year is raised to perhaps £90 or £120 (I am not giving exact figures). So the whole thing has got out of scale. These facts, it seems to me should be brought to the notice of the public. If Mr. Nicholson would say a word or two about alto voices we should be interested. As to services in village and small town churches—the trouble is that choirs do not seem to enjoy singing in unison. I wish they did! Then what about the recent revival—the system of *faux-bourdon*; cannot we hear something about that? And there may be some here who are scarcely aware of the existence of the Church Music Society of which Mr. Nicholson himself is, I believe, the present Chairman. Perhaps he might tell us a few facts about the Society.

Mr. H. H. STATHAM: As one who has been an amateur church organist for many years, I agree with everything that Mr. Nicholson has said. As to congregational singing—what is wanted is a new system. You will never get an English congregation to sing in parts, not even if the congregation

included much musical ability. What is wanted then is a hymn book with the verses arranged alternately for the choir and congregation. Let the choir sing the hymn tune in harmony, and to follow, let there be a unison verse for the whole congregation, accompanied by a good, powerful, yet not noisy organ, with an efficient bass. As Mr. Nicholson has remarked, architects are jealous in regard to the organ; they think that a small organ is all that is necessary. I have lectured on this subject and have shown that what is wanted is an organ sufficiently large to supply the harmony to congregational unison singing. Then there is the question of chanting the Psalms. I have a great affection for the old Gregorian chant. But the Gregorian melodies are limited. Some good musician then, ought to give his mind to the production of a collection of chants on similar lines to the Gregorian. There would not be for them the tradition of reverence that there is for the old tunes; but they would provide the right sort of chant with greater variety than we can get in the existing Gregorian tunes. The Anglican chant sounds beautiful in a Cathedral; but it is something to listen to, and not for the congregation to join in.

Prof. C. H. KITSON: Mr. Nicholson expressed the wish that many modern composers would write church music. But much modern music is entirely out of keeping with what we feel to be right in church. Just as there is church architecture, just as there is a language of the prayer-book, so we feel there is a language of music that belongs to the church alone. One may carry that principle too far: at the same time a modern composer who sets out to write church music should aim at being as it were in the apostolic succession. There should be in his music idioms and ideas developed from what has been done before, not clean apart from the church. And I do feel that the modern idiom of music has gone further than many of us would think right in church. If modern composers would write pure church music we would welcome it; but it is difficult, and we see but few signs of it being done. Mr. Nicholson remarked that the Morning and Evening Prayer represented to his mind a perfectly artistic form; and its rightness is obvious to us all. But since I have been free from cathedral work I have taken the opportunity of going round to various churches and find that those churches which are alive are the churches where that form is disregarded. You may ask—Why is it? I do not know. But the question will have to be faced.

Mr. SWINBURNE: There was a great deal of discussion as to ecclesiastical appropriation of choir funds about 1850,

and there were many magazine articles, pamphlets and books published. Of these, "The English Cathedral Service: its Glory, its Decline, and its designed Extinction," and Whiston's "Cathedral Trusts and their Fulfilment" created most stir. Our President, I think, remembers Whiston. There is a list of relevant books at the end of Bumpus' "English Cathedral Music." A pamphlet, "Remarks on the causes of the present degraded state of Music in our Churches," by John Bishop is not in this list. I have a few of these books and will gladly lend them to anyone interested.

The Rev. DEWHURST: One has to remember that people who go to a concert are interested in the music whilst in the church there are many who are not so interested at all. Tradition lingers on in the church long after it has been given up by the general public. The influence of Mendelssohn and Gounod continued there long after it had ceased elsewhere. I feel that the future of church music depends upon village and ordinary parish church choirs. It would be interesting to learn how much music was written for these choirs before 1840; what amount of music in the form of anthems was written for church choirs before say 1840. I am not myself convinced that a parish choir of boys and men only is ideal. There is the difficulty about the alto; and it seems contrary to the spirit of our time to set women aside. What is wanted in church music is something simple and direct.

Mr. S. H. NICHOLSON: In my paper I only put forward general theories; and we cannot go into particular instances as, for instance, the constitution of village choirs before 1840; but I shall be pleased to discuss the subject privately after the meeting. As to the question of unison, I think the hymn, say of ten verses, sung to exactly the same harmony in every verse is more dull and uninteresting than it sung in unison with varying accompaniment. In regard to the misappropriation of funds—that is a large subject to embark upon. I have no figures, but I think the matter should be investigated, to insure that in the future at any rate money intended for musical purposes shall not be misappropriated. But on the whole I am not so sanguine as Mr. Scholes.

Mr. SCHOLES: I have the facts in my possession.

Mr. NICHOLSON: Reference has been made to unison. May I put in a word for a possible variety—for *Fauxbourdons*. What charming possibilities, too, there are in Descant. When you have reached say the 52nd verse of a psalm and the congregation have got to know it, why not introduce a little descant? Dr. Alan Gray has brought out

a charming book of descants to well-known hymn tunes which he uses in his college chapel. When the singing by the congregation is well under way the choir sings something else ; and it is easily done. But it is on a unison basis. I did not say in my paper that the whole of the singing should be in unison. But I did say that much of it should be in unison, and that harmony should be the exception. My complaint was that often harmony forms the basis and unison the exception, and that this is the case in most churches.

The Church Music Society is an excellent body which exists to promote much that I have advocated. The best thing then would be to become a member and get the literature it has issued. With regard to the suggestion made by Mr. Statham that chants on the same lines as Gregorian tones should be composed—some effort has been made in that direction, and I think more might be done. I think much that was said about modern music is true. It need scarcely be said that I should not advocate the introduction of anything outrageous into the church service. That might be inferred from my covering statement that everything in the church service must be appropriate to the general purpose. Anything discordant would mar the church service. It is not a question whether it is old or new, but whether it is suitable or unsuitable.

Dr. A. FROGGATT: As to congregational singing—there is no ecclesiastical tradition or authority of which I am aware which entitles the congregation to claim an audible part in the service. Congregational singing presupposes congregational practice ; and if you cannot get that in something like a satisfactory form I do not know what there is much to be said for congregational singing. I have observed that cathedral organists are very much in favour of it, elsewhere than in cathedrals. I have also observed, so far as my limited experience goes, that these organists who had previously held some parish church appointment did not in those places sedulously cultivate congregational singing. Consider the position in a small church. The vicar or someone in the choir notices that someone in the congregation is singing very good tenor or bass. What is the result ? That man is drawn into the choir if possible. That is to say you skim the cream from the congregation and take it into the choir, leaving the skim milk behind. What sort of singing then is to be expected ? There is only one argument in favour of congregational singing, and that is that it is the most inexpensive form of devotion known to the community.

Mr. NICHOLSON : All I say in regard to the remarks of the last speaker is this : that at the Abbey, following Sir Frederick Bridge, I do my level best to encourage congregational singing. Even when there is an organ recital we have a hymn in which all can join. In my opinion there is everything to be said in favour of congregational singing.

THE CHAIRMAN : The misappropriation of funds is one of the things I have heard talked about all my life ; and the help of the legislature has been invoked. But the Dean and Chapter have absolute power in most cases, even to dismiss the organist, I am sorry to say ; though I think that might be obviated. Wesley wrote an admirable paper about this matter. But a greater man in this connection was Mr. Whiston, at Rochester. He was turned out ; he fought the Dean and Chapter ; and won : he refused to be dismissed, for he continued to attend the services and sat beside his successor, till at length he was reinstated. In that case, however, I cannot say that the funds were misappropriated. The clerics we know are paid more than the organist. At the Abbey there are five or six canons at a thousand a year. Many, however, are distinguished men, and we know that a thousand is not now what it was. Then come the organist and the minor canons who are paid much less. But a better spirit prevails now than formerly, and there is little use in agitating about misappropriation of funds for there is not much of it now. But we must concentrate on this other point ; we must insist upon the daily choral service being retained and urge that the members of the choir should be paid sufficiently well. With regard to the selection of music, Wesley, Goss, Sullivan to my mind, wrote music well worthy to be sung in church. Parry also wrote beautiful music for the church. It is too much the fashion to gibe at Stainer. But he did good work ; he pushed up St. Paul's to be a glory and honour to the English church, and he should be honoured for it. Moreover, he wrote many services and anthems which were perfectly good, and some beautiful tunes. The fact is that the musical education of our people is low. In many of the choirs they cannot go further than the tonic sol-fa. However, the paper we have heard will do good. I do not think Mr. Nicholson will get all he has urged, but there is nothing like trying, and in this we want your support. As church musicians we cannot ourselves tackle the authorities alone ; we want the aid of the man in the street in seeing to it that our choirs and the daily choral services are maintained so that we may be sure of having good music.

Mr. NICHOLSON: More than protest is necessary. If protest merely is made to Deans and Chapters about the maintenance of musical services, the answer they will give is this: "When we do have musical services nobody comes." And it is quite true. In many cathedrals there are splendid musical services day after day, yet no one comes to listen. Certain musical services at the Abbey have been dropped but there has not been one letter of protest. If then we wish to persuade Deans and Chapters to retain or restore the choral service musical people must attend, and show their appreciation. We cannot expect to have the choral service merely to maintain an abstract ideal.

With a vote of thanks to Mr. Nicholson the proceedings terminated.