

The Competition Festival Movement

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James Turle was the first editor of the Westminster Chant Book, published by Messrs. Novello more than half a century ago. The original preface of this well-known collection stated that 'the object of it is to combine sufficient choice with order, and, by publication of the arrangement, to enable the congregation to join in the Psalms.' Turle was the chant composer *par excellence*, and no better proof thereof could be furnished than by this Westminster collection. In the original edition of the book his splendid double chant in C (there set in D), assigned to the fifth evening of the month, is headed 'Purcell Commemoration Chant,' an interesting fact which does not appear in the modern editions of the collection. His equally



JAMES TURLE.

ORGANIST OF WESTMINSTER ABBEY FROM 1831 TO 1882.
(From a photograph kindly lent by Dr. W. H. Cummings.)

fine hymn-tune 'Westminster'—now so worthily associated with Faber's hymn 'My God, how wonderful Thou art'—first appeared in 'The Psalmist' (Part II., 1836), edited by Vincent Novello, as having been 'composed for this work by J. Turle,' and is named 'Birmingham,' for what reason is not known. It is there set in the key of D, which, of course, includes a high F sharp in the melody: the lowered key (C) in which it is found in most modern hymnals has necessitated a slight re-arrangement of the harmony, also the loss of the low bass notes in the last line of the tune; these, however, can be supplied by the organ.

As already stated, Dr. (now Sir) John Frederick Bridge, from 1869 to 1875 organist of Manchester Cathedral, was appointed permanent deputy-organist of Westminster Abbey in 1875. He succeeded to the full title of the organistship on the death of Mr. Turle in 1882, and has therefore discharged the duties for nearly thirty-two years. An illustrated biography of Sir Frederick Bridge, M.V.O., appeared in THE MUSICAL TIMES of August, 1897—the second in the series of eighty-two similar articles which since have been written for this journal—to which the reader is referred for details concerning the career of the present distinguished holder of the time-honoured office of organist of Westminster Abbey.

DOTTED CROTCHET.

The following slight corrections should be made in the June instalment of this article: p. 370, col. 2, line 2, for Edward, read Edmund; p. 378, col. 2, line 14, for Vanderman read Vandernan; p. 376, col. 1, add that a third performance of Bach's Passion music was given on April 1, 1874, Barnby again conducting.

THE COMPETITION FESTIVAL
MOVEMENT.

BY W. G. McNAUGHT.

The spread and progress of the competition festival movement shows no signs of abatement. A great many festivals of this type are held in the springtime months, because this period is the natural culmination of the winter's work. It is estimated that about 50,000 competitors have been or will be concerned in the festivals held or to be held this year. The following lists show the geographical distribution of the chief centres:

NORTH.

Barrow.	Liverpool.
Blackpool.	Lytham.
Bramley (Yorkshire).	Manchester (2).
Bury (Lancashire).	Morecambe (Lancashire).
*Brigg (N. Lincolnshire).	Morpeth (Northumberland).
Carlisle.	Newcastle.
Dalton-in-Furness.	New Brighton.
Eskdale (Whitby).	Pontefract.
Hexham (Northumberland).	Preston.
Huddersfield (Mrs. Suther-	Southport.
Hull. [land's].	*Spilsby (Lincolnshire).
Ilkley.	Swaledale (Yorkshire).
*Kendal (Westmorland).	Wensleydale (Yorkshire).
Keswick.	Workington (Cumberland).
Leigh (Lancashire).	York (2).

MID-ENGLAND.

Buxton.	Malvern.	Rutland.
Doncaster.	*Northampton.	Shrewsbury.
Keighley.	Nottingham.	Spilsby (S. Lincolnshire).
Leicester.	Retford.	Stourbridge (Worcester).

SOUTH.

Berks, Bucks and Oxon.	London (S. and S.E.).
Bristol.	London, Crystal Palace
East Essex.	(Tonic Sol-fa Association,
Farnham (Surrey).	Church of England
Herts and North Middlesex	Sunday School Institute,
(includes N. London suburbs).	London Sunday School
Hunstanton.	Choirs, Nonconformist
Ipswich.	Choir Union, &c.).
Kent.	Malmesbury.
Leith Hill.	Mid-Somerset.
London (Working Girls'	Petersfield.
Clubs).	Stratford (London E.).
London (Kensington).	Tonbridge.
London (St. Cecilia Clubs).	Weybridge (Surrey).

SCOTLAND, IRELAND, ETC.

Dublin, Feis Ceoil.	Isle of Man (Douglas).	Paisley.
Glasgow.	Londonderry.	Sligo.

* Suspended this year.

The lists given are not exhaustive; there are probably even a greater number of smaller events that escape public record. Welsh Eisteddfodau are excluded because they are in another category. The problems they present press for the grave consideration of all concerned for the future of music in Wales, but they are beyond the scope of this article. It is evident from all this that the application of the competitive principle to musical execution, attracts to the point of fascination a vast number of persons. There is, of course, nothing new in the idea. It is simply that it is now made into a propaganda. The Academies and Colleges of Music are, and always have been, seething in competitions. If any critics are disposed to deprecate the principle as a means of stimulating art progress, they may be invited to consider its application in these high places before they condemn it in more popular and rough and ready quarters. But it will be conceded by the most ardent promoter of the competitive festival movement that the objective and ways and means of the propaganda must always be vigilantly watched. The aims must be high and always educational. If the movement drifts into providing arenas merely for a sordid struggle for a cash-down prize, it will sound its own knell and there will be no mourners. This view is consistent with the belief that money prizes of a reasonable amount are not open to objection, when it is clear that the prize, if won, merely contributes to the unavoidable expenses of competitors. It is absurd to suppose, for instance, that the working men who mainly compose the Habergham Choir (Mr. E. Hitchon)—one of the best-equipped choirs it has ever been my good fortune to hear—gain pecuniarily as individuals by their achievements in the North. To those who, like myself, mix freely with the enthusiastic and obviously altruistic promoters, of at least the schemes born of that founded by Miss Wakefield at Kendal, there would seem to be no danger of the festivals under their benign sway degenerating.

It is worth while to note that the promoters of the majority of the above-named festivals are mostly amateurs of good social position who have been drawn into the vortex—at times a stormy one—because they have been greatly impressed with the utility of the movement from a social point of view. Distinguished professional musicians also have supported the movement in many ways, but they have rarely initiated a festival. The amateurs give their means, and, better still, their time and social influence without stint, and derive their satisfaction and reward when they see that even partial realization of ideals makes for social amelioration. Their motives then are entirely praiseworthy. Can so much be said for the motives of competitors? Perhaps not. There is no doubt a great deal of human nature in the average musical competitor. We meet the conductor who is impervious to the merit of another choir, even when that choir has achieved the amazing feat of beating his own choir; and there is the solo singer who is staggered at the vagaries of the adjudicator. The foregoing,

however, have no mothers as have the junior pianists! Ah! But these are exceptions. As a rule the verdict is accepted cheerfully, and as matter for chaff rather than tears. It is fair to say that the average competitor does not come to win a prize but to gain experience, to have a share, however humble, in the musical feast provided, and to meet and mix with others similarly minded. To such the festival leaves a pleasant memory.

One of the most useful incidental functions of a competitive festival is the education of the audience. Sometimes outsiders are scarce, but in many places the interest of the general public is extraordinarily keen. The festival is found to provide a novel and instructive entertainment. People who have put in an appearance expecting to be bored have been astonished to find themselves absorbingly interested and listening for hours on end, unwilling to lose a single item. Repetitions of a piece are not merely tolerated but eagerly awaited. The first singer or choir performs, it may be, indifferently, but at least the performance (or 'rendition,' as the local reporter generally will have it) makes the audience acquainted with the piece. Other competitors come forward and 'rendite' the piece better or worse, and presently one comes and illuminates much that was dark, and the possibilities of the piece and its dependence upon interpretation are realized. A rough critical standard has been attained, and curiosity is aroused as to how the next comers will meet its demands. By now the music is familiar, and the attitude of the audience has become one of informed expectancy. A competitor appears and obviously eclipses the record. What qualities constitute the merit of the new interpretation? This is debated, and it is felt that certain faults have been avoided, that good points of other performers have been focussed and new and unexpected beauties revealed. The adjudicator then gives his award and the reasons for his decision, and probably many of the audience find their conclusions are different because they have missed points that the more expert listener noticed. The critical standard is now revised and with new zest applied to the next class. The audience now fancies itself and confidently adjudicates the competitors and the official adjudicator.

A contemplation of this widespread and increasing activity excites many hopes. What is quite clear is that there is abundant potential executive ability in the country, and that its development is simply a matter of skilful training. It is not claimed that more than say a tenth of the results achieved in this great musical outpouring can be truly described as first-rate. It is the deliberate aim of the promoters of most of these gatherings to draw the inefficient into the fold. This being so, the need for tolerance is constant, and there must ever be sympathetic study of the evolutionary stage of the organism under observation. Our duty is most faithfully done when we prescribe just the right practical thing.