

To H. and his Choristers,
in memory of many happy hours spent in an
organ-loft, or thereabouts.

I

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

'In Quires and Places where they sing, here followeth the Anthem.' No composer, we believe, has set this theme to music; no preacher descants on it from the pulpit; no conductor of 'retreats' uplifts his baton to weave variations around it for the exercise of pious souls. Yet how rich it is, how steeped in meditation, how full of solemn melody and harmonious peace! To make a defence of those places where they sing, and of those who sing there, might well seem superfluous, were it not for certain ominous facts. Now it is the suppression, or threatened suppression, of a choir-school; now a reduction in the number of singers; now the disappearance of choral Mattins from a cathedral or a college chapel; now, perhaps, only a distant grumbling and muttering about needless luxuries and superfluous expense. While, the immediate urgency of these troubles may be due to transient difficulties arising out of the war, their true origin must be sought in tendencies of older date. Always, and perhaps inevitably, it has been the temptation of the Church to allow its eternal message to assume the form most agreeable to the thoughts and manners of the passing age. Such a policy of accommodation is, indeed, defensible enough when it signifies only that truth can be expressed in various language, or that a life once appropriate to the cloister must be remodelled to suit the marketplace or the camp. What is not defensible is to bow down to popular idols, not even when the ranks of the worshippers are crowded with clergymen justly reputed to be up to date.

Now, the two great idols of the last hundred years or so have been democracy and economics. Democracy we call

an idol, not from any desire to sing the praises of despotism, but because the cult of a certain (or uncertain) form of government has passed into the strange belief that all questions, human or Divine, can be rightly determined by the vote of the majority. Upon economics we bestow the same dishonourable title, because the economic interpretation of life is the one that pretends to tell you most about the meaning of 'value', but actually tells you least. From these two prevailing aberrations of the mind arises, not the whole, indeed, but a great part of the impulse to attack the choral foundations and the type of musical service associated with their existence. And here let us be careful to make no disguise of the facts. The 'cathedral service' is quite indefensible on democratic principles (as many understand them), or on ordinary economic grounds. If you make it congregational, you destroy its meaning; if you make it cheap, you make it bad. Its defence can only be the defence of the alabaster box of ointment, and assuredly it might be sold for many hundreds of pence and given to the poor. Meanwhile, the need of money in the Church of England for many admirable objects is great and urgent. Why not, then, dispense with the luxuries and thus make provision for the necessary goods? Well, it all turns on this question of value. But, first, let us get a little clearer about the preliminary points. The Church of Christ is a catholic, not a democratic, institution. It offers its treasures to all alike, but accepts no popular estimate of their value; and, when they are refused or neglected, it does not woo the market with inferior goods. Many are called, few chosen, is its formidable motto, and even the few are not chosen by the voice of the many. And, again, the Church of Christ, to the narrow eye of the economist, is an open and flagrant scandal. In all ages it has betrayed a passion for unproductive work and expenditure. It has condoned slavery and raised up troops of mendicants; it

has spent untold sums on stained-glass windows and organs, on fretted screens and tessellated pavements, on jewels and cloth of gold. Even now, in some measure, it continues these excesses, and adds to them by squandering wealth on the problematic salvation of negroes, or in forcing improbable dogmas down the throats of innocent children. It traffics always in the spirit of the adventurer, and suffers all the losses belonging to an incalculable risk.

Is it time, then, to reform this inveterate prodigality? Shall we bow to the authority of text-books, and look forward cheerfully to a dividend of 5 per cent.? Once more, it is this question of value. Waste has even less excuse in the affairs of the Church than in secular business. But what is waste? Before we begin to reform our economic policy, let us at least beware of one ancient fallacy which Ruskin strove but failed to dispel. It is idle to suppose that wealth or energy subscribed to one purpose can be lightly diverted to another by the vote of an assembly or the stroke of a pen. Funded and established wealth you can indeed derive into new channels, but only at the risk of choking the water at its source. You can rob Peter, if you please, for the benefit of Paul, but you will not thus persuade a convinced Petrine to subscribe to the upkeep of your favourite apostle. In like manner, you may despoil one set of children, perchance to educate another, but the springs of charity which founded choir-schools, and might yet sustain them, will dry up unaccountably when you go to draw from them with your new and patent can. It is in times of financial straitness that long views are most necessary, and short ones most likely to prevail. No religious society will ever strengthen its spiritual foundations, as distinct from its political position, merely by putting itself on a sound business footing. The only economic policy for a Church is to consider first which of its possessions are most precious, and then to cling to these,

no matter what the cost. If the marvels of architecture and sculpture, of glass and woodwork, of music and liturgy, which have long adorned our churches, are but luxurious corruptions of the spirit, by all means let them perish. If, on the other hand, they are the very symbol and expression of that Christian life which has nothing in common with a business career, let us boldly assert that to sacrifice them to any popular outcry, within or without the Church, would be not merely a blunder but a crime. In writing thus, we do not forget that much of the criticism directed against the choral foundations is neither secular in origin nor distinctively economic. Men are wont, however, to make use of whatever weapons lie readiest to hand, and at the present hour none are readier than the cry for economy and the depreciation of all that seems to lack the popular appeal.

On what general ground, then, must we base the defence of our English ecclesiastical music, and of the foundations that chiefly support it? There is only one possible answer. What we have to defend is a particular form of Divine worship, a form largely fashioned by the peculiar genius of the Church of England, and not precisely to be matched in any other branch of the Catholic Church. To allow the emphasis to fall elsewhere than on the thought of worship would be fatal. Heaven forbid that any silly catchword in the style of 'art for art's sake' should be invoked in favour of our anthems and canticles! If the art of music depends no longer on the patronage of the Church, much less can music alien from the temper of religion claim admission to our services, merely because it commands the applause of musicians. The plea that all good music is religious deserves to be offered to a county council. It will pass as an argument in favour of Sunday concerts, but fundamentally it is nonsense. It is nonsense in the light of religion, and almost worse nonsense in relation to art. You might as well contend that all good prose was religious, and then proceed

to declaim from the lectern the choicest passages of Anatole France. The right and proper demand for good music in our churches is, in fact, no warrant whatever for the totally different proposition that any music is appropriate there, so long as it is 'good'. What has to be shown is, first, that the spirit of religious worship can find expression in music; and secondly, that the secret of that expression belongs to the musical tradition of the English Church. To avoid misunderstanding, we must add that the kind of expression to which we refer is by no means to be confounded with congregational singing. So many are there who allow the value of music as long as all can take part in it, but grow restive whenever the congregation is reduced to silence, that it is necessary to enlarge a little on this question. Singing, as Byrd tells us in his delightful little homily lately reprinted, can boast a variety of uses. 'It is good to preserve the health of man; it doth strengthen all parts of the breast, and doth open the pipes.' On the merits of congregational singing as a form of breathing-exercise and pipe-opening (even when the pipes need re-voicing) it is unnecessary to discourse. Only when Byrd goes on to say that 'the better the voice is, the meeter it is to honour and serve God therewith; and the voice of man is chiefly to be employed to that end', do we begin to tread on more ambiguous ground. That God is honoured, in singing as in other affairs, by sincere intention rather than by perfect achievement is sound theology which we should be sorry to dispute. But does it follow that there is no room for the offering perfect of its kind? If some are apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, are not some also singers? And have they no office of their own to fulfil? Fine and impressive as congregational singing may be, it is not too easy to decide at what point exactly that particular kind of impressiveness becomes distinct from the tumultuous heartiness of a political meeting, or even a football match.

Noise is not in itself religious, nor is a feeling of warm enthusiasm near the pit of the stomach quite the same thing as exaltation of the soul. It is as easy to delude yourself in one type of service as in another, and surely it is a little rash to assume that there is no other way of 'taking part' in a service than by making a lusty noise. Congregations, however, are so diverse in character that no general rule can reasonably be proclaimed. In the next article we hope to make it clearer that we have no hostility to non-musical or unmusical services, and no desire to establish a tyranny of music. At the same time we must frankly declare that the value of music, for which it is the object of these articles to plead, is a value not to be realized in congregational singing. If music is to speak in its proper character, it must speak in the language of art. Its appeal must be to a peculiar sense of beauty, and every such appeal will be limited in range. 'My soul, there is a country far beyond the stars.' Such is the burden of the message conveyed by the great Church musicians; and whoever would pierce to its inner meaning must either sing—if he have the capacity—in the manner demanded by the music, or learn the worth of a silence more golden than speech.

II

THE 'CATHEDRAL SERVICE'

THERE must be something about the art of music (and not merely in its ecclesiastical dress) that instils a peculiar venom into the minds of those who love it not. Towards painting or architecture or poetry men will content themselves with languid indifference, but music excites them to vivid animosity almost rising to the level of moral indignation. The root of the trouble, perhaps, is to be found in the simple fact that

music makes a noise. In all its forms, from that vanishing classic, the barrel-organ, to the full orchestra and chorus, it assails your ears obstreperously, and will not suffer you to be quiet. To many, therefore, it must rank with nocturnal cats and diurnal omnibuses; nay, it lacks even the excuse of those afflictions, since it belongs to the order neither of nature nor of civilization, and might easily be suppressed by the police. Far from despising this not uncommon sentiment, we accept it as a conclusive objection to the imposition of musical services upon all sorts and conditions of men. Nevertheless, we may fairly protest against the fallacious conversion of the average parishioner into an argument against the type of service that belongs primarily to the cathedral. The question before us is, not whether all the faithful shall be compelled to listen to anthems, but whether there is room in each diocese for one cathedral, and perhaps three or four other churches, where fine singing of fine music may daily be heard by those who will. It is one of the essential points in the defence of musical services that no one, or almost no one, should be constrained by pressure of circumstances, or by the obligation of conscience, to attend them. Now this is clearly true of the cathedrals, where none are obliged to be present save the singers themselves (whose case will presently be considered) and possibly the chapter. Even the dean and canons, if they cannot tolerate the *Blest Pair of Sirens*, might be permitted to recite their appointed offices, at dawn and twilight, in the dignified seclusion of the crypt. Their resemblance to the early Christians would then be almost complete.

In addition to cathedrals we have to consider a few college chapels and a few parish churches where the musical tradition is worthy of respect. Now in college chapels of recent years the obligation of attendance has been greatly relaxed. In no case are the men expected or encouraged to be present at choral services on week-days, while even on

Sunday the music has sometimes been cut down with the object (most doubtfully accomplished) of making the services more popular. As to the comparatively few parish churches where the music is of a high order, these, with rare exceptions, will be found in London or other great cities where the inhabitants are not restricted to one particular church. Under the conditions of modern urban life, the rule that every parishioner should attend his own parish church has inevitably become obsolete. Moreover, it would be vain to pretend that music alone affects the parochial system; for those who wander about in search of elegant ritual or edifying sermons are at least as common as those who seek or avoid a particular style of music. On the whole, therefore, the argument against musical services on the ground of their limited appeal is spurious. At the most it amounts to an argument against the folly of parish churches which abandon the charm of simplicity for the slovenly performance of music beyond their powers. It must be remembered, too, that our argument relates chiefly to the daily performance of Matins and Evensong. The use of music at the Holy Eucharist, however general it may presently become, raises a somewhat different question, but certainly does not threaten the liberty of those who dislike music. No one is likely to propose the abolition of plain Celebrations, and on no recognized theory could attendance at the sung service be regarded as essential.

Our sympathy with those who would fain avoid music, especially in church, only strengthens our right to dissent absolutely from another kind of critics, who mistake a personal sentiment for righteousness, and contend that music is alien from the spirit of worship, if not actually a weakness of the flesh. These one can only exhort to stimulate their imagination and enlarge their charity. The Divine light is offered to different men in different ways, and to each according to his disposition and capacity.

Wherever and however the vision is discerned, it clearly and perfectly justifies itself. To maintain, then, that love of music is but a sensuous distraction of the worshipper from his proper business is a piece of arrogant and deplorable folly. If we go so far as to call it an argument, it is one that tells with equal force against every kind of visible and audible expression, and not least against the exquisite language—itself a kind of music—in which our liturgical offices are composed. There is a meaning in the silence of the Quaker; there is often sincerity of intention in the Dissenter's preference of crude improvisation to ordered forms of praise and prayer. Yet in the end this fear of outward seemliness is a confession of infirmity, not an assertion of the true ideal. For the true ideal is to convert into instruments of worship whatever is noble and beautiful in the inventions of man. What we can do *without* is the first test of the spirit; what we can do *with* is the last. The whole attempt to arrive at the reality of worship by renouncing its outward mode of expression is as indefensible from the Christian point of view as the protest of a Manichean or a Platonist against the profanity of degrading the Eternal Logos to the level of human life. How inept, then, how unspeakably futile, is the argument of those who declare that the performance in our churches of Byrd and Gibbons, of Bach and Palestrina, converts a service into nothing more than a concert! The whole intention, the whole atmosphere, the whole effect of ecclesiastical music belongs so entirely to the church, that you have but to transport it—choir and all—to the concert-room, and you will find at once, however excellent the singing, that nothing remains of the living spirit but a pale, uneasy ghost. The difference between a 'cathedral service' and a concert is as wide as the difference between the melodic curves of Farrant in G minor and the shape of the Albert Hall.

But surely, the objector will urge, it is wrong to go to

church 'to hear the music'. And surely, we must reply, it is wrong to go to church to smell the incense, or to hear the sermon, or to impress your neighbours, or to balance your weekly peccadilloes, or to oblige the vicar, or to get up an appetite for lunch. The truth is that, once you start imputing motives to people and questioning their sincerity, you will end by emptying the church of everything but the rats. They at least are untainted with hypocrisy, and stick closely to the business in hand. No, we must take mankind ourselves included, as we find it. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and who shall presume to say how best the *Sursum Corda* can be uttered, or when and where it will provoke response in the soul? A little more imagination, we repeat, and a little more charity is what some of the more strident critics require.

But now we have to face another type of criticism, possibly more formidable, which arises within the circle of those who profess no general hostility to music, but argue from a more or less 'expert' point of view against the tradition embodied especially in the usage of English cathedrals. The most dangerous enemy, in fact, is neither the unmitigated churchman nor the undiluted musician, but that unhappy combination of the two, the man who is determined at all hazards to be 'correct'. As soon as a man begins to assure you that such-and-such is the only 'right' way of doing things, or that only one style of music 'ought' to be used, you may know that he is suffering from the melancholy disease of *docta ignorantia*, for which no physician has yet devised a cure. In another walk of life, he would write a book entitled *The Real Shelley* or *The Truth about Keats*, and no one would be a penny the worse; but, when his mode is ecclesiastical, the case is more serious, and his capacity for mischief must not be ignored. Possessing, as is likely, much curious information about customs prevalent in 'the Middle Ages', or 'before

the Reformation', or 'in Catholic countries', he stands aghast at the obstinate ignorance of all who hesitate to demand the immediate revival of those customs, or who dare to hint that a living Church must continue to develop new forms of expression. Yet could there, on the face of it, be a much worse argument for a particular style of music than the fact that no other was practised some five or six centuries ago? The main reason, after all, for the predominance of a single style in the Middle Ages was that no other had yet been invented. Or, if that be a slight exaggeration, it is certain at least that the problem of ecclesiastical music, as it now confronts us, did not exist for our medieval forefathers, and cannot be solved by medieval examples.

Take, for example, the vexed question of plainsong. Delightful as that ancient idiom may be to educated ears, when adequately rendered, it is sheer affectation to pretend that it can ever again be the easiest or most natural for the modern world, and sheer absurdity to allege that no other is beautiful or religious or 'correct'. Even in the few churches where plainsong is now successful, the success is rather evidently bound up with the peculiar talents of an organist or a priest. For general use we are not likely to get much beyond Merbecke's admirable service, and a few noble melodies for hymns. Nor is it by any means obvious, if we are to talk of propriety, that a style developed in intimate alliance with the Latin language is necessarily the most appropriate to the English. What lovers of plainsong may reasonably demand is opportunity of using and hearing it in a certain number of churches. When they go on to insist that no other kind of music is suitable to Divine worship, they only make themselves ridiculous and discredit their cause. These are the men who so glibly denounce the 'cathedral tradition'; and these, accordingly, we can only expect to horrify when we proceed to assert

that the Catholic spirit of worship owes its survival in this country very largely to the music composed for the English cathedrals, and to the services at which that music has been sung.

The denunciation of cathedral services has had in the past two partial justifications. One was the pompous apathy of deans and chapters, the other the composition of much feeble and tedious music, which enjoyed too long a vogue. Of bygone dignitaries we have no wish to speak evil, and what there is to be said of their successors can be postponed to another place. As to the florid canticles and sentimental anthems which we now find distasteful, it is easy to exaggerate their badness, and easier still to pass an unfair verdict on their composers. The recent example of John Stainer should be enough to serve as a warning against hasty intolerance. Though we no longer admire his compositions, no one in his senses doubts that Stainer was an excellent musician, or that he did more than any other man to raise the standard of musical services, not only at St. Paul's, but throughout the whole country. In the end, however, nothing is gained by citing examples of bad Church music, or by apologizing for the composers. No artist and no art can be rightly judged by failures. The only relevant question is whether there has been enough good work to carry on the authentic tradition and keep alive the sacred flame.

And here, surely, it is impossible, save through ignorance or prejudice, to dispute the pre-eminence of the Church of England in the composition of ecclesiastical music during the last four hundred years. We do not pretend to offer expert judgements on this or that composer; it is not even clear what kind of 'expert' can be taken as an ultimate criterion. What we do assert with confidence is that the secret of profound and mystical expression in music has never been lost in the English Church. Of living com-

posers (though not because we mistrust them) we should prefer to say nothing; but in the long line of notable musicians—from Farrant and Byrd and Gibbons to Sebastian Wesley and Hubert Parry—through many variations of form and idiom, we recognize the same spiritual insight and catch the same high, unfailing note. There is no need to be arrogantly insular. We gladly borrow and use whatever is admirable. We have nothing, perhaps, with the strange ethereal quality of Palestrina; we cannot match the range and profundity of J. S. Bach. Yet, on the whole, we do not fear comparison, in purely ecclesiastical music, with either Germany or Rome. We can point to a constant and vital tradition, which neither Puritanism, nor sentimentalism, nor genteel inefficiency has been able to destroy; and the transmission of this incomparable heritage we chiefly owe to the men and boys who, living in and about cathedrals, took their modest part in those daily choral services at which superior persons find it so easy to sneer. Had the doctrine and practice of the Church of England been as radically sound as its music, we might have realized more definitely the ideal of a Catholicism which neither severs itself from venerable traditions, nor yet is afraid to grow.

III

CHOIRS AND CHOIR-SCHOOLS

THE choral foundations in this country are mainly connected with the cathedrals (including Westminster Abbey), the royal chapels, and certain colleges at Oxford and Cambridge. With some variety in constitutional arrangements, all agree in their primary intention, which is the rendering of daily choral services by a small but sufficient

number of men and boys. No one can be surprised, at the present time, if the expense of maintaining such an establishment is a cause of grave anxiety; but what does strike one as both humorous and pathetic is the bland assumption, all too common in chapters and governing bodies, that the first and most obvious method of retrenchment is to abolish your choir-school, or in some other way to cheapen the business of glorifying God. Would it not be useful to start from the opposite hypothesis, that nothing whatever—unless it be the bare preservation of fabrics—has so strong a claim on the corporate revenues as the maintenance at the highest possible level of the choir and its proper work? Colleges, it is fair to say, do not stand exactly on a level with cathedrals. They are no longer, in the old sense, religious houses, and their finances are much complicated with University politics. The interests of many of the Fellows are frankly secular, and doubtless it is difficult for men absorbed in the study of hieroglyphics or bacteria to see the point of what they regard as a medieval relic. *O fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint* is the ejaculation of many a visitor, after hearing a service at New College or King's.

But to turn more particularly to the cathedrals. Nothing, surely, could be more profoundly incautious, more provocative of allusions to houses made of glass, than for ecclesiastical dignitaries to begin complaining of the expense of the choir. 'And Nathan said unto him, Thou art the man.' We wish no evil to canons; we do not go so far as to declare that they are useless. Some of them, though not too many, are well reputed for learning; others gracefully preside over superfluous committee-meetings; others rush about the diocese, disturbing the country parson's siesta, or tactfully absorbing the vicarage tea. There is, in truth, much to be said for the continuance of clerical positions outside the parochial system, especially

when they are occupied by men capable of devoting their leisure to theology and learning. Nevertheless, we cannot persuade ourselves, when we look at the present state of affairs, that the painless extinction of a few canonries would be half so grave a misfortune as the abolition of choir-schools or the reduction of other parts of the choral foundations. For what reason, when all is said, do cathedrals exist? They exist for worship and praise. Whatever other functions they may have, this is assuredly the chiefest, and the worth of the daily services is not to be gauged by the number of people that attend them. Even arithmetic has its pitfalls for the unwary, and it is sometimes forgotten that a score of people in a college chapel or a provincial cathedral is equivalent, if you go by the rude test of averages, to an assemblage of a thousand under the dome of St. Paul's. We do not believe, however, in the imminence of a dilemma obliging us to choose between the choir and the canons. Much less do we wish to imply that canons in general are indifferent to the fate of choirs and wretched little choristers, so long as the welfare of themselves and their families is secure. More common than that most unworthy sentiment is a kind of indolent conviction that an unpleasant necessity cannot be avoided. But why not seek new remedies for new evils? How would it be, for example, to establish by degrees a chapter of celibate clergy? All could then live together in one of those delightful old houses. Common meals, plain and wholesome, could be served by a discreet housekeeper; and during dinner one of the company could read aloud some edifying passage from a work by one of his colleagues. How quickly then would the gossip and petty malice ascribed by novelists to cathedral society die away! How would charity and unselfishness abound! What unction would flow down to the skirts of clerical garments! But, alas! these are only dreams. In the wideawake world we

can scarcely hope for the restoration of collegiate life in the precincts of cathedrals. Yet at least it might occur to the governing bodies, before they take any calamitous step, to inquire whether there is no way of acquiring fresh resources for the support of old institutions. If more than one London parish has succeeded in paying for the education of its choristers, would it be unreasonable to ask a complete diocese to do as much for its cathedral? Such an appeal would come, however, with much greater force, if more use were made of the cathedrals as centres of Church music; or if, from time to time, the cathedral choir could visit towns and villages in the diocese, to take part in special services, or perhaps to illustrate lectures on Church music by instructed musicians. Anything, surely, is better than the pusillanimous policy of abandoning an ancient trust merely because the original endowments are no longer sufficient. The present enthusiasm for Byrd and other old masters suggests that now is the time. Belief in the value of Church music is far more widespread than some of our dignitaries appear to suspect. If they are themselves unwilling to display a little energy, they might at least give others leave to try.

When we inspect the various personal elements in a choral establishment, there seems to be a rather clear distinction between the men and the boys. The financial difficulties in relation to the men are serious enough. The organist himself is usually underpaid, and often has to augment his income by miscellaneous teaching, not always to the advantage of his work with the choir. Meanwhile, it grows ever more difficult to procure adequate singing men at the old rates of pay, or to provide them with pensions when their singing days are over. While no immediate solution of these problems is obvious, this much may be said without injustice, that the men are old enough to protect their own interests; whereas the boys, even with the help of their

parents, are almost at the mercy of those in authority. The choir-school, therefore, is likely to be a regular target of the clerical economist. So long as a certain number of boys appear in surplices, the letter of ancient statutes can be preserved, and the treble part can be sung. What, then, can be simpler than to drive the boys out of their proper schools and reduce them to the status of wage-earning hacks? The only question is whether this is quite the best and most Christian way of caring for children who belong to the cathedral no less truly than their elders, whose life is bound up for a time with the worship of God—and whose work (if you look into the history of the matter) is the foundation and mainstay of a noble tradition. We must beware, no doubt, of exaggerating the facts. It is by no means true that choristers have always lived in their own schools. All kinds of experiments have been tried on them, and at times they have been shamefully neglected. Nor is it safe to generalize about the musical results of different methods. In some big towns, and in some small ones where the cathedral has a monopoly, it may be possible to find a good supply of day-boys as choristers. In other places (as, for example, at Oxford) it would probably be impossible. Another method is to supplement the local material with a few imported boys professionally trained. This policy, however, is far from desirable. It tends to make a class-distinction among your boys, converts the choir into something like a music-hall troupe, and perpetuates that bad institution, the 'solo-boy' in the *prima donna* style. All things considered, a good choir-school, where the boys live as boarders (and, perhaps, other boys along with them) is by far the best nursery of good singing, and of the *esprit de corps* which counts for so much with boys. Still more certainly is such a school the best home for the boys and the best protection for their life as a whole. The single example of the transformation worked at St. Paul's,

when the boys were rescued (you might almost say) from the streets and lodged in their present home, should be proof enough of what can be done for choristers by proper care.

Those who attack these schools, or perchance depreciate the whole life of a chorister, are not, as a rule, especially interested in the musical question. More often they regard the education provided as inferior, or believe the life to be bad for a boy. Speaking from a rather wide acquaintance with choristers past and present, we should reply with confidence that these criticisms have no serious justification. True, you may get bad teaching, if you engage bad teachers; but is that truth confined to choir-schools?¹ The great fallacy lies, however, in this careless talk of 'education'. The education of a chorister consists primarily in his appointed work, and for boys with the requisite qualifications it is, we believe, about the best education in the world. It is the only life in which a boy of that age is brought into immediate and appreciative contact with works of genius, the only life in which he can readily understand the disgrace of bad work, the only life in which he can himself touch the standard of excellence. Think of the incredible difference between a choir-practice, as conducted by a master of the art, and an ordinary lesson in arithmetic or grammar. How immeasurable is the gulf between the perfect singing of *Tristis est anima* and the painful stumbling through a page of *Caesar*! Without toil and trouble there is, indeed, no genuine education; but to show a boy that there is also such a thing as achievement is a priceless advantage, and this is just what the chorister can learn.

Whether in any way you damage a boy's prospects by claiming rather a large part of his energy for music is

¹ It is true, we fear, that at one or two choir-schools the provision for education is very bad.

exceedingly doubtful. Many experienced choirmasters, who watch the later careers of their boys, would warmly deny it. In the practice-room a boy learns the value of attention, accuracy, order, and rhythm. The effect of these lessons is not confined to his music, but will work out afterwards in many unexpected ways. Professionally, too, he is very far from suffering; for many choristers eventually take up music as a business, and to these the early training is of enormous advantage. The fact is that, in these educational criticisms, no fair comparison with other boys is ever attempted. The critics pick out a chorister here and there who has turned out stupid or unsatisfactory, and forthwith they attribute his faults to his life in a choir. But are there no stupid and unpleasant boys who omitted to be choristers? There is, however, one genuine disadvantage, which could easily be removed. For there are some head masters—in spite, it is said, of a resolution at a Head Masters' Conference in favour of choristers—who insist on all boys entering a public school before they reach the age of fourteen. This is unfair both to the boy and the choir, and head masters who take this line might well spend an hour or two in sober reflection. After all, it is worth while to have a boy in your school who has already learned *something*, even though his age may not square with a pedantic little rule.¹

The more serious allegation, that the life of a chorister is detrimental to religion or morals, we believe to be mischievous nonsense. Constant services, it is said, with frequent repetition of psalms and prayers, make a boy's religion mechanical, or turn him altogether against it. Now this, in the first place, is very bad psychology. It points at the most to a superficial and transient effect, which has

¹ A word might be added on the subject of holidays. At some places the boys are badly treated in this respect. No choir can sing properly when it is stale and tired.

little to do with the deeper experience of the soul. And again, the critics assume, though the evidence is rather painfully against them, that other boys, who have been less often to church, grow up with a lively devotion to religion. Could a fair comparison be made between a large number of ex-choristers and a like number of other boys of the same class, the religious advantage of the chorister's training would be plainly apparent. Beyond question, you can disgust a chorister with religion, if you handle him badly. We have heard of a place where boys were punished for mistakes in singing by being made to write out the Litany. In such cases it is not the boy, but the master who ought to be chastised. Treat them reasonably, make them feel that to sing in time and tune, with due attention to the sense of the words, is itself no bad religion for a boy. Above all, do not weary them with sermons designed for their elders. Let them sleep, if they will, during this painful episode, or let them even depart in peace before the learned doctor gets launched on his profound dissertation. Their solemn exit will be a good example to the congregation, a useful reminder that cathedrals are not meeting-houses, but temples of praise. Remember at least that they are but children, to whom the deeper understanding of things can only come by degrees.

Still less warrantable, and still more malicious, is the suggestion that choristers are beset with exceptional moral dangers. Once more the comparison with other boys is not honestly made, and the smallest breath of scandal in the neighbourhood of a church is magnified beyond measure. Choristers themselves have not the slightest desire to be petted and spoilt. They are just the same as other boys, unless you take pains to make them different. It is bad to let them be undisciplined; it is worse to treat them like hothouse plants. Their musical training is itself an admirable discipline. If their choirmaster is worth his salt,

they will learn no vanity or affectation in the practice-room. A few masters there are, unfortunately, who seem to delight in preciosity, but for the most part the singing of boys, more than anything else in this naughty world, represents the perfect simplicity of nature and the perfect restraint of art. When you do find a boy with feminine airs and graces, the mischief can usually be traced to his home. He is afflicted, perhaps, with an operatic mother or a melodramatic aunt. For the rest, there is no reason whatever why the moral experience of a chorister should differ from that of any other child of his age. He is neither a saint nor a ruffian. A moderately clean collar befits his earthly condition far better than a premature halo, but even the halo would be nearer the truth than the ridiculous suspicions that are sometimes entertained. On the whole, you will find him a very decent kind of child, and those who know him best will not love him least.

The importance of the choral foundations, and especially of the choir-school, in relation to ecclesiastical music is likely to be even greater in the future than it has ever been in the past. While secular music continues to pass through strange and rapid developments, the superior young men at musical colleges, who have barely heard of any one earlier than Stravinsky, are not going to interest themselves much in the services of the Church. A few of them will condescend to play the organ, and some of these, to be sure, may be driven eventually into organ-lofts in search of their daily bread. But these, frankly, are not the men we require. For the proper conduct of music in religious services it is indispensable to find men bred in the old tradition, with their heart in their work. Nor is it principally a question of securing capable organists. The secret belonging to English choirmasters is the training of boys' voices. In this respect, at least, we can claim an immeasurable superiority to all Continental rivals. Moreover, this secret is handed

on by the boys themselves quite as much as by their masters. They learn from one another by half-conscious imitation, and so tenacious is their conservatism that a good tradition will outlive a bad choirmaster, and revive under his more capable successor. To make a good choir sing badly is not so very much harder than to make a bad choir sing well. Thus the business of the organist and choirmaster must be learnt in a church, and can seldom be mastered elsewhere. If every cathedral were a recognized *schola cantorum*, its life and energy would soon marvellously expand, and its value to the Church would no longer be denied. The material lies ready in abundance; nor is there, as yet, any lack of artists to mould it into shape. The future depends, however, not so much upon musicians as upon those to whom authority is committed. If we seem to have spoken harshly of these, we have done it without forgetting that among their number are many who deserve nothing but gratitude and praise. It is not these, however, who will be offended by criticism. Rather, we hope, will they be roused to fresh exertions on behalf of a noble inheritance, which only folly and indolence would lightly cast away.

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