

THE CHURCH MUSIC SOCIETY

Past and Present

OCCASIONAL PAPERS, NO. XV

THE ORIGIN of the Church Music Society may be traced back to the year 1897. It was felt at that time by many leading Church musicians that there was cause for drastic criticism and urgent need for reform in the selection of music then in general use at the daily Services in Cathedrals throughout the country.

Meetings were held at the Royal College of Music to consider what steps might be taken in the matter. The first of these was held on 15 December 1897 when Sir John Stainer took the Chair, supported by Sir Hubert Parry, Sir Charles Stanford, Sir Henry Hadow, Dr. Basil Harwood, Dr. Alan Gray, the Rev. Dr. John Troutbeck, Dr. F. Read, the Hon. Richard Strutt, Sir Percy Buck, and the Rev. Dr. E. H. Fellowes, among others.

The unanimous opinion was expressed that there was real need for action, and the field of criticism was extended to Parish Churches especially as regards the choice of Hymns and Hymn-Tunes.

Several meetings were held, and one of the most important results achieved was the compilation of a repertory of Cathedral Music in actual use in 1898 which, with a similar compilation in 1938, forms the subject of Occasional Paper XIII of the Church Music Society entitled *Forty Years of Cathedral Music 1898-1938*. Both these compilations are now deposited in the library of St. Michael's College, Tenbury. They embody a very valuable record for reference in years to come.

For various reasons this early movement collapsed in 1900. It is, however, worth while to notice that its purpose was almost identical with that of the Church Music Society to-day, in that it aimed at stimulating the revival of much fine music which had been neglected, and at raising the standard of music

selected for Church worship, not only in Cathedrals but also in Parish Churches.

Although the meetings were discontinued, their purpose was not forgotten, and Sir Henry Hadow was especially active in keeping this purpose alive. Largely under his influence a new movement was shortly afterwards set on foot. A meeting was held at the Deanery, St. Paul's Cathedral, in March 1906, at which it was unanimously resolved to form a society which should be called the 'Church Music Society' whose main object should be the improvement of Church Music. The Chairman of the meeting was Archbishop Lord Lang, then Bishop of Stepney and Canon of St. Paul's, who to-day continues to honour the Society with his active support as its President. Two sub-committees were formed, one to compile a list of music suitable for use, and the other to suggest short works to be reprinted in octavo editions in accessible form at a small cost. This new Society attracted influential support. Sir Henry Hadow was Chairman of the Committee. Miss Eleanor Gregory, Lady Mary Trefusis, and Miss Sausmarez were honorary secretaries, the Hon. Spencer Lyttelton was honorary treasurer, and among other prominent members were Dr. T. B. Strong, then Dean of Christ Church, Sir Walter Parratt, the Right Hon. J. G. Talbot, Mr. Fuller-Maitland, and Mr. Barclay Squire.

The main purpose of the present memorandum is to make clear the object of the Church Music Society in reference to that of other organizations which in the meanwhile have come into existence as a result of its activities.

From its inception its aims have been clear and unchanged, namely, to facilitate the selection and performance of the music which is most suitable for different occasions of Divine Worship and for choirs of varying powers.

The chief methods employed in carrying out these aims have been the production of reprints of music not otherwise available in accessible form as stated above, and the issue of Occasional Papers.

Looking back at the list of reprints in the light of present-day conditions, it must be confessed that in this direction the Society has not been entirely successful. A notable exception is the reprint of Bach's *Jesu, Joy of Man's desiring* which enjoys immense popularity, and two or three other items in this list have served their purpose well. But many of the Occasional Papers, which were not at first contemplated in the aims of the Society, have been of great value. One of the earliest was an

admirable paper *Hymns and Hymn-Tunes* by Sir Henry Hadow: others were those of Dr. Harvey Grace on *Music in Parish Churches*, and Robert Bridges on *Hymns*. Among more recent publications were *Music in the New Cathedrals* (1937), and a masterly essay entitled *Song-Schools in the Middle Ages* by Professor A. Hamilton Thompson.

The issue of Papers of this kind at a small cost, and the free distribution of a copy to all members, seems to be the most valuable feature of the Society's activities. It is the present policy of the Council to issue such papers at least twice a year. So much has been done apart from the Society, in producing cheap reprints of music, especially that of the Tudor period, that there seems little need for the Society to continue to pursue that course except very rarely, when some special circumstances may arise.

The coming of Sir Sydney Nicholson to Westminster Abbey enabled him to take an even closer interest than formerly in the work of the Society. He eventually succeeded Sir Walford Davies as Chairman. By this time the principal publications of the Society, which had centred around the subject of choice in Church music, had been issued and were bearing fruit.

In 1915 a Summer School of Church Music was held at Oxford on the initiative of the Rev. A. S. Duncan-Jones and was followed by others: a considerable proportion of the members were also members of the Church Music Society. From this movement there emerged a request to the Archbishop of Canterbury (Dr. Davidson) for the appointment of a Committee on Church Music. A strong commission was set up and as a result the report *Music in Worship* was produced. The wide influence of the Report is testified by the number of reprints that have been made.

Many then began to ask 'What next'? It was clear that a Report which had achieved wide circulation and earned much appreciative comment must not merely be laid aside 'for future reference'. It was then, to implement the Report, to try to bring its main recommendations into practice, that the School of English Church Music was founded.

One practical step had already been taken in the formation of a small Demonstration Choir of boys and men, members of the Westminster Abbey Special Choir who volunteered, under the auspices of the Church Music Society, to visit churches in the neighbourhood of London, and to sing simple services on the lines suggested in the Report. The demand for these visits soon showed how greatly this work was needed and appreciated.

The need of founding a school of Church Music, such as the S.E.C.M. has proved to be, was discussed by many of those interested in the matter, and especially with the Co-Secretaries of the C.M.S., Lady Mary Trefusis and Miss Eleanor Gregory, and with Dr. H. C. Colles, a member of the Committee and later its Chairman and an original member of the Council of the S.E.C.M. All these gave the new project their whole-hearted support; indeed those who were 'behind the scenes' were almost all connected with what the S.E.C.M. has always been proud to acknowledge as its parent Society: and when the resolution was taken to found the S.E.C.M. at the meeting held in the Jerusalem Chamber on St. Nicolas' Day 1927, it was Sir Hugh Allen who proposed and Sir Walford Davies who seconded the motion.

The S.E.C.M., launched as an independent body, and working—as it has always worked—in close co-operation with the C.M.S., soon established a corporate spirit and developed its own activities. It was clear that such matters as Demonstration Choirs, Summer Schools, arrangement of Festivals, and all other direct educational work should be taken over by the new organization which had facilities for dealing with it on a larger scale than had previously been possible, but on the advisory side the S.E.C.M. has always sought the help of the C.M.S. which has a Standing Committee set up for this purpose. So the two bodies have continued to work side by side to the great advantage of Church Music.

A more recent development is the formation of the 'Friends of Church Music', a body designed to embrace all who are interested in the preservation of the English Choral tradition, the maintenance of statutory Choral Services in Cathedrals and of Choir Schools rather than to supply additional opportunities for instruction in either selection or performance. In short, the object of the 'Friends' is to train, enlarge, and consolidate public opinion on matters vital to the future of English Church Music.

It will be seen therefore that each body—the C.M.S., the S.E.C.M., and the 'Friends'—has not only its own particular part to play in future development but has also a main purpose that is common to all, and for these reasons it is clear that they should work not only independently, but also in close communion with each other.

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