

the practical details on the organist's part. The suggestions are the result of seven years practical experience as organist of a village choir composed of twelve small boys and girls and four older girls: and also of a somewhat varied experience as occasional accompanist at soldiers' parade services, naval parade services in one of H.M.'s ships, and services for passengers in various liners in different parts of the world.

*Scalsbury*

## Church Music Society

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# MUSIC IN VILLAGE CHURCHES

No. 1

BY  
A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH MUSIC  
SOCIETY

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*Price Twopence*

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## MUSIC IN VILLAGE CHURCHES

TWO things are to be avoided in planning the music for a simple village service—dullness and elaborateness. Let us at once divest ourselves of the deep-rooted idea that all village services must be modelled upon those in cathedrals: it is the pit into which many fall, and it is the main cause of the failure to inspire the worshippers, or add to the dignity of the worship. Let us frankly admit our limitations in the number and balance, as well as in the quality and compass of the voices; in the lack, as a whole, of musical education in either choir or congregation; and having admitted our limitations, let us consider our advantages. The chief advantage is the stability of the congregation as opposed to the fluctuations and constant changes in many towns. A personal acquaintance with the family and family history and circumstances of each member of the choir, and probably of the congregation too, should encourage a feeling of friendliness and clanship which is not to be found in a more heterogeneous town parish. There is also, usually, the advantage of a small organ, instead of the huge instrument, with rows of solo stops, which has



lured many a young organist into an entirely wrong conception of his position and duties.

The effacement of the organist as an individual performer is essential. He or she is 'servus servorum,' and the accompaniment should be so integral a part of the music as to pass almost unnoticed by the ordinary worshipper.

The reverent rendering of the service can best be obtained by perfect understanding and co-operation between organist, choir, and congregation.

Let us now consider what are the chief things to aim at.

Firstly, simplicity of the music; and simple music, be it noted, does not mean the commonplace or easy anthems and services, with neither inspiration nor dignity in aim or construction, which are generally considered suitable for village choirs. The perfection of simplicity is to be found in the melodies of the old chorales and hymn-tunes; but we hear, far more often, the florid tunes of such writers as Dykes and Sullivan.

Secondly, none of the music should be pitched too high, as it is important to remember always that the object of the choir is to lead, and not supersede, the voices of the congregation. Most of the chants, and many of the hymns in ordinary use, were written for trained voices in four parts: for unison and congregational singing they should be transposed one or even two tones. For those who cannot do this at sight, it is quite easy to write the transpositions on paper; it is only necessary to get the key into which the tune is to be transposed firmly in the mind. Such a tune

as 'Pentecost' for 'Fight the good fight' will be sung lustily in F or G; but the average voice finds the usual key of A a great strain after the first two verses. 'O God, our help in ages past,' to 'St. Anne,' is greatly improved for unison singing by being transposed into B flat, and the same can be said of many other hymns and chants.

Thirdly, but really first in importance, is the time, which must not be so slow as to lose all feeling of movement, nor so fast as to be undignified or irreverent and obscure the meaning of the words. In the large majority of churches, both in towns and villages, the hymns are taken far too slowly, and the sense of rhythm is entirely lacking.

Fourthly, it is necessary to concentrate upon the really important parts of the service, and decide what ought to be said, or monotoned, and what should be sung. A careful study of the Prayer Book is essential for this. For instance, it is wrong to sing the Responses and the Confession to the usual festal or ferial setting, and then to say the Canticles and Psalms. Music should accentuate the parts of the service connected with praise, rather than those connected with humble prayer and supplication.

Fifthly, the music should be all, or nearly all, in unison; but variety may be obtained by the introduction of simple faux-bourbons in two parts (see pp. 14 and 15).

It is impossible to lay too much stress on the superiority of unison instead of part singing for all small choirs and village churches.

One of the great advantages is that far more artistic



effect is given by the singing of the congregation than when a large number are attempting to sing one of the inner parts of a four-part harmony an octave higher or lower than it is written, or when a Celtic congregation whose instinct for music is more marked than its knowledge sings its own harmonies—which are usually a third or a sixth below the tune, without any reference to the harmonies of the composer. Another advantage is the ease with which music can be learnt—only very few practices being necessary—and the possibility of concentrating the minds of the choir upon the sense of the words, instead of upon the intricacies of the music. Of course additional care is needed in choosing only really good tunes for unison singing. A feeble hymn-melody which passes muster when clothed with a few sugary harmonies stands revealed in naked feebleness when sung in unison; whereas a fine tune gains in nobility.

It will probably be more helpful to give here a few concrete suggestions for the different parts of the service, as well as the above general principles.

*Holy Communion.*—This is becoming the chief service in an increasing number of churches; and a list of the simplest and best settings may be of use. Foremost among them is John Merbecke's (1550), and this should be the first learnt, and used frequently. There are many editions of Merbecke's service, and as some editors have failed entirely to grasp his rhythm, three good settings are recommended.

1. *The Office for the Holy Communion* set to music by John Merbecke, edited by Basil Harwood

(Novello, 6d.). This is in the new and old notations; and the accompaniment is suitable for a harmonium as well as for an organ. The melody only, in both notations, is published at 2d.

2. Merbecke's *Holy Communion Service*, edited by Royle Shore (Novello, 1s.). This has useful preliminary directions and notes throughout; the people's edition (by E. G. P. Wyatt) is 1½d.
3. *The Office of Holy Communion*, musically noted by John Merbecke, edited by Martin Shaw (Curwen, 6d.).

For simplicity as well as dignity and reverence the following can be strongly recommended:

4. *Modal Setting of the Communion Service*, by Martin Shaw (Curwen, 4d.). This can also be sung in four parts by more elaborate choirs.

Four unison settings, in plainsong, are the following:

5. *Missa de Angelis*, arranged by Basil Harwood (Novello, 6d.).
6. *Missa Regia*, arranged by Francis Burgess (Novello, 6d.).
7. *Missa Simplex*, arranged by Francis Burgess (Novello, 6d.).
8. *Communion Service in Old English Plain-chant from the Sarum Gradual* (Setting A.), edited by Royle Shore (Novello, 1s.; people's edition, 2d.).

For those who cannot accustom themselves to plainsong, two reverent and straightforward settings are:



9. *Communion Service*, A. Somervell in F (Novello, 4d.).

10. A simple *Communion Service* in G, composed by Sydney H. Nicholson (The Faith Press, 6d.).<sup>1</sup>

It is better if the parts of the Service which are not sung, are *said*, not monotoned; but if the latter, it should be on a very low note. A copy of the music should be given to every musical member of the congregation, and two or three congregational practices held to make it familiar.

#### MORNING AND EVENING PRAYER

*Responses*.—It is best if these are said, or monotoned not higher than F. When sung, a simple, *not* festal setting should be used. Those in the choir-book published by the Church Music Society are quite suitable for a village church; and there is also a simple setting published by the Plainsong and Mediæval Music Society (44, Russell Square, W.C.1) at 3d.

*Psalms*.—If plainsong be used, the best Psalter is *A Manual of Plainsong* by H. B. Briggs and W. H. Frere (Novello, 4s. 6d., words only 1s. 6d.), which is a revised edition of Helmore's Manual.

For Anglican chants the *Barless Psalter* (edited by the Rev. W. Marshall and Mr. Seymour Pile, and published by Novello) is far the best. It helps to get rid of the artificial accents which a barred Psalter is bound to foster in any but a highly trained choir. *The Cathedral Psalter*, used in nine out of ten parish churches, is entirely unsuitable.

<sup>1</sup> N.B.—A simple unison hymn-service is in preparation, suitable for churches where there is no choir at all.

The chants<sup>1</sup> for the Psalms should be nearly all single chants, not double ones. Novello's 6d. book of single village chants can be used with any Psalter, and so can the Church Music Society's chant-book, in which numbers should be written over each chant for reference. Care must be taken to vary the keys for the different Psalms, so as to rest the ear and voice, and prevent flatness. Besides the usual sequence of dominant or sub-dominant after the tonic (*i.e.* the key of G, dominant, or sub-dominant, F, following the key of C), a beautiful and restful change is from F to D flat.

If a change is necessary in the middle of a long Psalm, the choir-books should all be clearly marked, and the congregation warned by the priest, or some indication, such as a slight *rallentando*, given to them. Special care should be taken only to change when the words make it suitable to do so. Though occasional changes are helpful, a constant change of chant, *e.g.* six different ones for the six different Psalms in the 27th morning or evening, is very much to be deprecated; one change is enough. If the Psalms are sung, it is essential that the verses should be sung alternately, however small the choir. Otherwise it is impossible to avoid tired voices, and the gradual collapse of clear enunciation which is bound to occur when the little choir sings every verse together. To sing alternate verses also encourages independence in a choir, and prevents the fatal waiting for one strong voice to lead which is so demoralizing. The best alternative is children's and.

<sup>1</sup> N.B.—Chants in minor keys are not suitable for village services.



men's voices, as that is also the most restful to the ear but alternate sides can also be used with good results, or in a mixed children's choir, boys alternately with girls. If the Psalms are sung in unison, in this way, it is possible for the organist to vary the accompaniments; but this must be done with discretion, as the employment of strange chords, when the way of modulation back to the original key is not clear to the executant, is much to be deprecated. Sufficient variety can then be given by the stops, and by playing the parts inverted, *i.e.* the tenor or alto in the top part, as a faux-bourdon. This also encourages independence in the choir, without making them lose confidence in the accompaniment.

*Te Deum.*—The best arrangement for this is to sing the first thirteen verses to a single or double chant; verses 14 to 21 to a single chant in the dominant or sub-dominant key; and verses 22 to end to the same chant as the first part. If a double chant be used, verse 13, *not* verse 9, should repeat the second half.

*Benedicite.*—This is the most difficult of all the Canticles, the usual chants in three-four time being abominable. A plainsong chant is the best; or three very simple single ones, if possible with crotchets on the third and sixth beats, such as Wesley's in B flat. An excellent and easy setting by Martin Shaw in F is published by Curwen at 2d.

*Responses after Creed.*—When sung, these should be accompanied quite softly. If the choir is inclined to sing flat (though no choir should do this), it will be found helpful to double the fifth of the tonic chord or play it prominently as the top note; also to play the

first note alone, a second before the whole chord. The Responses and Amens should never be dragged, but sung as if said, including the final 'And take not Thy Holy Spirit from us.'

*Evening Service.*—A simplified form of Evening Prayer, which is sanctioned in many dioceses, has lately been brought out by the Rev. F. Iremonger (Mowbray). This contains full directions for the music, and the selected Psalms are carefully pointed. If a Psalter for the evening Psalms only is wanted, the best is *The Plain-chant Evening Psalter* by Mr. Francis Burgess, and published by the Faith Press at 1s. 6d.

*Anthems.*—These should be used very seldom; and then only good and very simple ones chosen, if possible with a refrain, which can be easily sung by the congregation after one congregational practice (see p. 13).

*Hymns.*—It is most important to play these over quite clearly and firmly, on an 8-foot stop, in the exact time at which you intend them to be sung. If you add a rallentando in the last line, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the congregation to start right, and you lose control from the beginning, which is fatal. The priest should announce the hymn fully, with its text or first line before, and never repeat it after the tune has been played through. The choir should stand up while the tune is played, and be ready to begin without a pause. When an entirely new hymn is to be learnt, it is wise to enlist the co-operation of the head teacher at the village elementary school, and ask him to let all the children learn it during the half-hour devoted to music. This familiarizes it to a



large proportion of the congregation, especially as the children probably sing or hum it at home.

*Kyries.*—Strictly, these should only be sung when the rest of the service of Holy Communion is choral. It is better to have five or six good and simple (*not* florid) ones, and use them in turn, rather than a large variety of elaborate ones in which the congregation cannot join.

*Choir Practices.*—These are very important, but they must be made interesting as well as instructive. Some should be held in the church, so that the choir may be familiar with the organ and adapt their voices to the building. But some should be held in a school or parish room, where exercises for developing the voice may be more freely used. An excellent manual is Dr. A. Somervell's little text-book *Class Singing in Schools* (Stainer & Bell, 6d.). The exercises are necessary to develop the whole voice and to keep the tone clear and sweet. The children should sing them singly, beginning with the smallest child, as well as together. In practising hymns, great stress should be laid on the necessity of every member of the choir beginning together on the opening word, and not straggling in anywhere during the first line. The first verse should be repeated continually until this is secured. Other parts of the services (Psalms, Canticles, Responses, and the Creed, Gloria, etc., when the Holy Communion Service is sung) should sometimes be read through all together, so that the accents of the words should be rightly placed, and then repeated directly afterwards, with the same accents, to the tune. This ensures a smooth and intelligent rendering of the words. It must be impressed upon the choir

that the words are the important part, and the music an addition.

*Congregational Practices.*—These are very valuable if the congregation are to take an intelligent interest and part in the service. A good time is half an hour before Evensong. New hymn-tunes, or carols at festivals, or the refrain to an anthem, or a new setting for the service of Holy Communion, can all be practised in this way; as well as old and well-known tunes which are apt to drag. Copies of the music should be provided, and a good start for hymns and chants insisted upon.

The aim should be to encourage the congregation to sing the whole service, even without the lead of a choir. It would be far better in all our parish churches to have simple music sung by the congregation than more elaborate music sung by a choir in which the congregation can take little or no vocal part.

*Organ Voluntaries.*—The services should never be prefaced nor concluded with a long and elaborate voluntary; the usual choice is of a kind unsuited to prepare and uplift the minds of choir and congregation. It is possible for any impression made by the service or sermon to be almost effaced by a blatant or unsuitable burst from the organ at the close of the service. Some simple hymn-tune, such as those in the Cowley Carol book or in *The Songs of Syon*, is very appropriate at the beginning, and a selection from one of the best-known oratorios at the conclusion, or, if the powers of the organist warrant it, a fugue of Bach. To play such a piece as 'The Rosary' (a most popular voluntary during the past few years) on the vox-humana or a tremulant stop is to preface the service



with an atmosphere of emotional sentimentalism which is not the best preparation for the spirit of reverence and detachment which should accompany our offering of corporate worship. It is difficult to give directions for the use of different stops, as organs differ so much from each other. But it is safe to say that for ordinary accompaniment 8-foot stops are the best; 4-foot ones can be added occasionally to brighten the accompaniment, but only with a sufficient body of 8-foot stops with them. Two-foot stops should only be used very sparingly. A 16-foot stop on the pedals is valuable, but if kept on the whole time becomes very wearisome to the ear.

Melody by E. Miller  
(1731-1807).

"ROCKINGHAM."

Descant by  
Geoffrey Shaw.

CHOIR AND CONGREGATION.

A FEW PICKED VOICES.

CHOIR AND CONGREGATION.

A FEW PICKED VOICES.

The musical score for 'Rockingham' is presented in two systems. Each system consists of two staves. The top staff of each system is labeled 'CHOIR AND CONGREGATION.' and contains a simple melody in G major (one sharp). The bottom staff is labeled 'A FEW PICKED VOICES.' and contains a more complex descant in the same key. The first system is the original melody by E. Miller, and the second system is a descant by Geoffrey Shaw.

*Faux-bourbons.*—An occasional use of these to one or two verses of the best-known hymns and for a few verses of Te Deum and Magnificat gives variety; and also interests the choir and allows scope for any voices that show promise. In two-part descants the congregation and part of the choir sing the melody, whilst a few trebles sing a simple "embroidering" part. In four-part descants a few picked voices sing the three-part harmonies.

The example on the opposite page is taken (by permission) from *The Tenor Tune Book*, recently published by the Faith Press (22, Buckingham Street, Strand), price 1s. 6d.

An even simpler example is the following to Farrant's well-known chant: it is merely an inversion of the tenor part.

A FEW PICKED VOICES.

CHOIR AND CONGREGATION.

The musical score for the chant is presented in two staves. The top staff is labeled 'A FEW PICKED VOICES.' and contains a simple melody in G major. The bottom staff is labeled 'CHOIR AND CONGREGATION.' and contains a descant in the same key. The melody is a simple, single-note line, and the descant is a more complex, multi-note line.

The foregoing suggestions will seem so obvious that I feel an apology is needed for making them. But the many little faults in choirs which are easily avoided by simple means are met with in such scores of churches, that it is possible the musical ideal often obscures