

singing, particularly at the back or in the aisles, where the best voices usually seem to be.

Thanks to the kindly co-operation of Incumbents, and the most ready help of choirmasters, organists, and choirs, the writer has had the opportunity of conducting upwards of a hundred such hymn practices on these lines in village churches, and can therefore testify at first hand to the keen interest aroused both in chancel and nave, the resultant improvement in many ways, and the evidence of the value of team spirit underlying all the work, on which so very much depends.

'Clergy and organists alike', once said a distinguished cathedral organist—he might well have added 'and congregations'—'need the gift of imagination, the spirit of adventure, and the will to overcome obstacles and prejudices, if dullness and apathy are to give place to warmth and vitality in public worship.' Possibly these strong words may not apply with such force in these days when many leaders in our church are paying special attention to the matter of its music, but one thing seems quite certain. Much more can, and should be, expected from church congregations in general. We must recognize this fact, and do all in our power to play our part, while those responsible for the choice and performance of music in our churches should look to us to co-operate, and realize that the stronger the stimulus, the greater the response is likely to be.

'As you call into the wood, so will the wood answer you.'

C. E. D.

*First printed as 'Hymn Festivals and Hymn Practices', 1919
New Edition, 1945*

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, OXFORD
BY CHARLES BATEY, PRINTER TO THE UNIVERSITY

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CHURCH MUSIC SOCIETY

CONGREGATIONAL HYMN PRACTICES

No. 5

FILE COPY

NEW EDITION

Price ~~threepence~~

Published for the Church Music Society by

GEOFFREY CUMBERLEGE

AMEN HOUSE, LONDON, E.C. 4

1945

CONGREGATIONAL HYMN PRACTICES

THE appended notes are the outcome of considerable experience from a member of the Society in conducting hymn practices in village churches. It will be recalled that in the Archbishops' Committee Report 'Music in Worship' great stress is laid on the importance—indeed the necessity—of such Practices if any real progress in that line were to be expected. It is urged that such should take the place of the evening sermon when there is a 5th Sunday in the month. Experience has shown that practices taken before the beginning of a Service rarely succeed; the time is awkward for choristers and congregation alike because of the risk of continual interruption. At the end of Evensong worshippers have lost some of their initial keenness and are anxious to return home. Incumbents sometimes demur at the idea of a hymn practice taking the place of the usual address from the pulpit, but at the same time it should be remembered that a hymn really well and intelligently sung by choir and congregation can often preach an extremely good sermon.

Much depends on the preliminary steps before the first practice is held. There must be really good Parish team-work, and a thorough understanding between Incumbent, choirmaster, organist, choir, and congregation. Doubters must be tactfully won over in advance, and persuaded to give the experiment and its conductor a fair trial: members of the Parochial Church Council must be freely consulted, and so on. An article in the Parish Magazine (preferably written by the choirmaster), a special sermon on the subject of congregational worship, all these help to prepare the ground.

On the evening itself it is advisable slightly to curtail the Service up to the Third Collect by lessening the number of psalms to be sung, introducing a special Lesson, and the like, to allow of as much time as possible for the practice: it is

important that Evensong should not exceed its normal length of time.

Time will usually allow of six hymns to be practised: the first should be one thoroughly familiar to the congregation, which they can sing with full confidence, before passing to others less well known to them. An unfamiliar hymn-tune would be played over by the organist, a verse sung by the choir, the same verse sung by choir and congregation, and finally by the latter by themselves, by which time it should be well known and attention can then be given to the words of the hymn. The congregation should be permitted to learn a new tune sitting down: once learnt they should rise *with* the choir to sing selected verses. Anything from the conductor tending to interest the worshippers in the hymn and tune they are to learn, its composer and so on, is to be welcomed. Criticism, both favourable and the reverse, must be open and frank: pleasantly and tactfully worded, no offence will be given.

The scattering of members of a congregation all over the church precludes any chance of good concerted singing, for enthusiasm must be contagious, and empty rows of seats are fatal to success. This must be remedied before the practice begins. It may be added that an ex-choristers' pew, adopted now in many churches, will be even more than usually advantageous on such an occasion as this.

There must be plenty of variety in the singing: a verse for the choir, another for the congregation, a verse in unison, another without organ accompaniment, and so on. (If a descant be used, the number of voices singing it should be strictly limited.)

Half-way through the practice a short change is advisable, and this gives opportunity to practise the responses, or a canticle in speech rhythm.

It has proved unsound to have any conducting as such: with a friend or pupil assisting at the organ the organist-choirmaster is free to move about the church at will and encourage the