

Church Music Society

OCCASIONAL PAPERS, NO. 6

THE ORGAN VOLUNTARY

BY

SYDNEY H. NICHOLSON

ORGANIST OF MANCHESTER CATHEDRAL

PUBLISHED FOR THE CHURCH MUSIC SOCIETY

BY

HUMPHREY MILFORD

AMEN CORNER, LONDON, E.C.

Price Twopence

THE ORGAN VOLUNTARY

THE Voluntary is one of those adjuncts to a Church Service which has come into such general use that it is almost regarded as a necessary part of it. Indeed, the average congregation expect it, whether they like it or not, and a Sunday Service at which voluntaries were not played would be considered by many people as quite eccentric. Yet it is questionable whether the continual use of voluntaries is either desirable or edifying, while it is quite certain that the effusions that are frequently to be heard are neither the one nor the other. It will be well, then, to consider the *raison d'être* of the voluntary.

The only valid reasons why voluntaries should be played are either to add to the beauty of the Service on the artistic side, or to serve a definitely religious or utilitarian purpose. Viewed from the former standpoint it should be clear that there is no place except for good music adequately performed. But the religious or utilitarian aspect may dictate a need for instrumental music which is not primarily an ornament to the Service, but which is required for some other specific purpose. If voluntaries are introduced with either one or other of these objects consciously in view, even though they may fall woefully short of the ideal, there is at any rate an honesty of purpose which is commendable: the desire is to help, whether the desire is realized or no.

But it is to be feared that voluntaries are often played not for any such purpose, nor indeed for any reasonable purpose at all. There is one outstanding feature in the Services of the English Church, and that is the extraordinary

degree in which we are the slaves of convention. We all long to do the 'correct thing', with little thought of its appropriateness; and though it is in many ways excellent to take the noblest examples as our models, we are too apt to forget that what is suitable for a certain church or cathedral may be quite unsuitable for another church where the conditions are different. Few can remain insensible to the effect of the prelude played on a noble cathedral organ, as it whispers down the long-drawn aisles, or to the majestic fugue pealing along the nave and echoing among the arches; but what shall be said of the 'introductory voluntary' incorrectly played by the village schoolmistress on a wheezy harmonium, or to the utter ineptitude of the boisterous finale on a £100 organ? Do such things serve any useful purpose at all? Are they not merely introduced for the same reason that we follow so many other customs in our churches—'because it is generally done'?

Such conventions, though often based on good models, are the very bane of our Church Services, for they introduce an element of unreality which is not only not helpful, but at times a positive hindrance. It is a great mistake to adopt a practice in one church because it is the custom elsewhere—the reference of course is merely to external matters; practices involving a doctrinal significance are beyond the purview of such a paper as this. Yet we find an almost stereotyped manner of rendering the Service, at any rate in musical respects, at which most churches aim with more or less success:—the conventional monotoning, sung Amens, responses, chanted Psalms, occasional anthem, and so on. Yet none of these things has of itself more than an ornamental importance: they go to make up what is generally called a 'nice Service'. The point is not that any of them is bad, but that none of them are necessary. If they do not add to the beauty of the Service or the

edification of the worshippers, there is no reason for their continuance. How often, for instance, do we suffer from that peculiar clerical drawl which is called 'intoning', or more euphemistically 'monotoning' (for the last thing that can truly be said of it is that it remains on one note)! Sometimes there are strong reasons for good intoning (never for bad): yet it is often employed, whether bad or good, for no reason whatever, except that it is 'the correct thing'.

Again, the 'Amens': why has it become almost impossible for a congregation or choir to *say* 'Amen'? We are so accustomed to the practice that we hardly feel a prayer is properly concluded unless two common chords are sung at the end. This may often be beautiful: but is it always?

So with the Psalms: is it always better to have them sung, even though the intonation may be imperfect, and the pointing shaky? Does a musical setting really make up for distortion of the sense and indistinctness of the words? Any good choirmaster knows that it is far more difficult to get the Psalms well sung than an ordinary anthem: yet almost any choir, however ill equipped, will launch off into them quite calmly and often with little or no practice. We admit that such things should not be, but then 'it is the custom'.

Instances might be multiplied: indeed, we get into the habit of doing the same thing every Sunday to such an extent, that we come to regard as inevitable quite trifling details which a moment's thoughtful consideration would often lead us to reject.

Not the least remarkable of these products of convention is the introductory or concluding voluntary: if any portion of the Service is an ornament pure and simple, surely it is this; and it can only justify its existence by being in itself a 'thing of beauty': for music can never have a negative effect; it must be either better or worse than silence. And the question to settle is—which!

So that it would be well if every clergyman and every organist were from time to time to go soberly and dispassionately through every point of detail in his Service, and consider afresh whether it serves any useful purpose or whether it is merely a matter of custom.

Another reason why the voluntary, or its younger brother the interlude, is employed is our supposed extraordinary dislike of silence in church. There is a tendency apparent in most churches to fill up every single corner of the Service with some sort of sound: not only must we have a voluntary while the choir come in—it must last precisely until they have risen from their knees; a few bars must be added at the end of the Psalms if the priest has not yet reached the lectern—he could not possibly walk there without an instrumental accompaniment; if the collection lasts longer than its accompanying hymn (why always sing a hymn while the faithful are fumbling for their threepenny-pieces?), it would be outrageous not to go on playing until the churchwardens have returned to their seats; even the final words of peace do not seem to enjoin as much as ten seconds of silence, and if we have not to endure the sentimental trivialities of a vesper hymn, we must be thankful to escape with a few more or less innocuous chords on the *Voix Célestes*, even though the harmonies may be incorrect and the progressions inconsequent.

If only those in authority would realize the value of occasional silences in our Services, how great the gain would be! The continual use of music to fill up all the vacant spaces in the Service gives a sense of restlessness and a lack of deliberation which is sometimes almost painful. It produces the same sort of effect as a hurried rendering of the Service: as if the congregation could not be kept waiting for a few seconds, but everything must be timed to fit in like clockwork. It tends to make the whole thing seem artificial, and a performance rather than an act of

worship. Needless pauses are of course not advocated, but they are almost better than needless sounds. The statement may seem paradoxical, but the greatest gain to the average musical Service would be to have less music.

Voluntaries are employed for yet another reason, and this a purely utilitarian one—to cover up extraneous noises; to cloak the shuffling of people's feet as they leave the church; and, it is to be feared, sometimes to cover up their whisperings while they are waiting for the Service to begin. Such an employment of the voluntary is not in itself very dignified, but it at least serves a useful purpose and is so far justifiable as it tends towards a more orderly rendering of the Service as a whole.

For whatever purpose voluntaries are introduced, they have, rightly or wrongly, come to be recognized as a regular institution, and it is well, therefore, to devote some attention to their style and character. Musically they have their importance as furnishing the only opportunity for purely instrumental music in our Services: yet they too often receive scant attention either from the listeners or the performer. Nowadays, at any rate, the regular place for voluntaries proper is before and after the Service; but the subject cannot be dealt with completely unless we include the consideration of those minor fragments, preludes, interludes, and so on, which occur at different places during the Service. So that it is convenient to consider under the one heading all the purely instrumental music that is used in the ordinary church, and this it is proposed to do in the order in which it occurs. But beforehand it will be well to try and arrive at one or two broad principles.

1. *The choice of voluntaries in general.* Much here must depend upon the capacity of the player and the possibilities of the instrument. It is all very well to counsel a frequent choice of such pieces as the Chorale Preludes of Bach, or his Fugues, and the similar works of

writers like Reger or César Franck, or the sonatas of Mendelssohn and Rheinberger: but many of these are exceedingly difficult to play, while others are quite ineffective except on a first-rate instrument. So that our choice must be guided by circumstances. But whatever pieces are chosen, it is essential that they should be well within the capacity of the player and of the instrument: it is far better to play an easy piece well than a difficult piece badly. It is quite right for the organist who wishes to make progress to *practise* music which is beyond him; but he should never be tempted to play in church what he cannot play really well: it is not edifying to hear the would-be A.R.C.O. firing off his examination piece in church, especially if he is not certain of winning the coveted distinction. When big pieces have been properly mastered, they can be used appropriately. But few organists can play a big piece properly every Sunday, even if such a course were desirable: and the great need is for attention to the selection and playing of the smaller pieces. These are often left almost to chance—to the selection of the moment (not infrequently the moment of the sermon!); they are often quite unpractised, and not infrequently 'read at sight'. Some organists of experience and attainment are no doubt capable of giving an adequate rendering of at any rate the simpler pieces, without an intimate previous acquaintance with them, or at any rate without special practice. But for the average man to make his voluntaries little better than an exhibition of sight-reading, is surely unworthy of their purpose, if not rather insulting to the intelligence of the congregation. So, then, the first requisite is that the voluntaries should be planned beforehand like the rest of the music, and should be properly prepared before performance. A very good plan adopted in some churches is to print a list of voluntaries for the month in the Parish Magazine.

As to the actual choice of pieces available it should be pointed out that the supply of easy short and appropriate voluntaries is not great; and it is much to be desired that some of our leading composers would give more attention to supplying this need—remembering that the persons whom most require their help are those whose technical attainments are the smallest. There are plenty of good and difficult pieces, but not nearly enough good and easy ones: and yet there is no instrument which lends itself so readily as the organ to the production of good effects by simple means.

2. *Voluntaries should be appropriate* not only to their surroundings, but as far as may be to the particular Service of which they form part. They should also, if possible, be of such a character as to appeal to the average worshipper: they should not on the one hand bore the unmusical, nor should they repel the musical. It is a great gain if they can be made in any way to reflect the teaching of the particular Service. This is often very difficult to manage, but at any rate the object can be kept in view. Few would be so thoughtless as to play a boisterous march on Good Friday, or a doleful piece on Easter Day; but the principle can be carried further: different pieces do undoubtedly suggest different moods: compare, for instance, the gloom of the small E minor Prelude and Fugue of Bach with the exuberant spirit of the D major, or the virile energy of the G minor: and it should be the aim of the organist to make the 'mood' of his voluntaries fit the 'mood' of the Service. And here we are brought face to face with a difficult question.

3. *The use of arrangements.* It can of course be argued with some degree of reason that the whole system of arrangements is inartistic: and that no music should be performed on the organ except that which was written for it. This is the view of purists on the one side, while extremists on the other side would admit into the category of music suitable

for the organ almost any composition which can be played upon it. The true view probably lies somewhere between the two. The technical side of organ arrangements has been most cleverly dealt with in two lectures to the Royal College of Organists by Professor P. C. Buck, published in the *R.C.O. Calendar* for 1915. Advice is given as to the transfer of all kinds of instrumental music to the organ. One or two short extracts will indicate the general line of thought:

'The surest way to achieve failure in any transcription is to take what was written for one instrument and play it, as it stands, on another. A musical phrase on paper is not only an idea brought to birth, but an idea stated in terms of a definite instrument or combination of instruments. No composer will admit, save in rare and accidental cases, that his idea can be transplanted to another medium without modification. And the problem before us is to discuss the conditions of such modification, to see whether it is possible to evolve any general principles as to how we may recast, in terms of the organ, music written for other instruments.'

'... in transcribing a passage in any particular idiom the problem before the transcriber lies in the question, "If the composer had understood the organ, and this idea had come to him in organ idiom, how would he have written it?"'

As to the principle of the transference of suitable music from other instruments to the organ, there is not likely to be very much difference of opinion except between extremists. But when we come to the question of the similar transference of vocal music, the decision is much more difficult. And yet few arguments can be adduced against the transference of vocal music that will not also apply to instrumental: the chief difference lies in the close association of words with their setting.

Any musical thought consists of two parts, the outward expression and the inward idea: and however closely an idea may be connected with its medium of expression, yet the idea itself is something separate and elemental. A phrase, for instance, comes into a composer's mind: he has not played

it, or sung it, or written it down; but the act of invention has taken place. The thing that has come into being is absolute music; the writing down, or singing, or playing, is merely giving it an outward expression communicable to others. In some cases the form of expression is so much a part of the thing expressed that the two are practically inseparable; but in other cases the absolute musical idea is of paramount importance, the medium of expression being more or less accidental. A reasonable conclusion would seem to be that the nearer a piece is to 'absolute music' and the less dependent it is upon the medium of its expression, the more suitable it is for transcription. Many instances might be quoted in support of this theory from orchestral and other instrumental examples; but perhaps it can better be illustrated by reference to vocal works. First we may compare a Bach recitative with an air, say from one of the 'Passions'. In the recitative every single note is directly connected with the words; the notes, as it were, grow out of the words; the musical phrases without the words would be almost meaningless. Therefore the transference of such phrases to an instrument, of necessity leaving out the words which are essential to it, would be fatal. But in the case of the set 'aria' it is different. The music of course expresses the general idea of the words, but the words themselves, except in so far as they furnish a clue to the music, are not of the same importance: for example, they are frequently repeated to phrases of different character: so that, however well the song as a whole may interpret the words as a whole, it cannot be said that each note is indissolubly connected with each word as in the case of the recitative. In such a case, where the musical idea of the whole is the paramount feature and the particular medium of expression is less important, the transference to the organ or some other instrument would seem much more justifiable. Compare again two types of chorus: the

short exclamatory chorus in the 'Passion', which is absolutely dependent for its dramatic significance on the words, would utterly fail of its effect if played on the organ without voices: but many of the contrapuntal choruses, as in the B minor Mass or the Church Cantatas, where though the words are truly expressed in the music they are not united in the same intimate connexion, would furnish quite satisfactory transcriptions. In further corroboration of this point the numerous cases may be noted in works of the great composers where identical music has been used for two completely different sets of words.

If we can once admit the principle of transcriptions of music associated with words, a large field is at once opened to the organist for selections of music appropriate to special occasions. There is no doubt that music exercises its most potent influence, at any rate on the musically unlearned, by association with words. Would the airs and choruses of the *Messiah*, for instance, ever have produced the impression they have made on the hearts of countless thousands, had they not been associated with perhaps the most magnificent words of the Bible? And there is no question but that the minds of ordinary people are attuned to special thoughts far more readily by means of music which they are accustomed to associate with special words, than by music which has no such association for them. So when a worshipper hears during the Service a theme which he can associate with certain words, his current of thought is turned directly to the thoughts those words suggest. Other music might possibly suggest the same thoughts, but the association with words makes the suggestion certain. What theme could be more appropriate for a voluntary on Good Friday than 'He was despised'; or on Ascension Day than 'Lift up your heads'; or on Advent Sunday than the Chorale, 'Sleepers wake'? Instances might be multiplied indefinitely. Indeed, it is not too much to say that if the organist is to be

debarred from playing anything of this kind, a great proportion of his power to help the Service by emphasizing its message is taken from him.

Of course it is not argued for one moment that it is not better that such pieces should, if possible, be sung as intended: nor, indeed, that all or the majority of voluntaries should consist of such adaptations in preference to real organ music. The only claim is that the use of such pieces, when the teaching of the Service seems to demand it, should not be deprecated or condemned on purely artistic grounds. And, after all, the criticism that may justly be passed on the choice of music for a recital in a concert-hall is not necessarily applicable to the selection of voluntaries for use in the Church Service. But as it is absolutely essential that the organ should not be treated as an imitation orchestra, and that in the transcription of instrumental pieces the object should be solely to express the inner musical idea in the terms of the organ, so it is with vocal music. The organ cannot imitate the sound of the voice: its province can only be to translate the ideas expressed vocally by the composer into organ phraseology. Why such devices as the stop called *Vox Humana* or that mechanical contrivance, akin to the concussion bellows, which disturbs the flow of wind by a series of regularly recurring palpitations, should be supposed to bear a resemblance to the human voice, is hard to imagine: but it should be clearly grasped that the conventional use of such expedients to represent voices is quite inartistic. It is a degradation of the organ to use it as a piece of mechanism to imitate sounds which are alien to it, a task in which it can be beaten on its own ground by a £5 gramophone! Fancy stops, tremulants, &c., are legitimate enough as true organ effects (if it is admitted that they are of themselves beautiful): but if regarded as imitations of other instruments or of voices the best that can be said of them is that they are a hopeless failure.

The use of themes associated with certain words brings us to the consideration of the next part of our subject—

4. *Extempore playing.* This, again, opens up a very wide question which cannot be dealt with from a technical point of view in this paper. When extempore playing is advocated in the following remarks we must assume that it can be *well done*.

The great extemporist is no doubt born, not made, but there is no greater mistake than to suppose that extemporizing cannot be studied and practised like any other form of playing. It is indeed a vital part of the equipment of every organist, for in any Church Service occasions are sure to arise where it is almost necessary, even if it is a case of only a few bars. Yet there is no department of playing which presents so many pitfalls and for which the preparation is usually so inadequate. For all but the elect it is useless to trust to the inspiration of the moment. Granted facility, imagination, and skill in extempore playing a wide field of usefulness is open to the organist: by the appropriate use of suggestive themes, as outlined above, he may construct voluntaries that are as full of teaching as many a sermon, and that touch the heart of the worshipper as deeply as the most faultless specimen of intoning. But for all its power, extemporizing is a great snare. With practice comes fluency, and with fluency comes ease. And it is often easier to extemporize a voluntary than to play written music. There is a good deal to be said for the extempore voluntary before Service: it is often difficult to find a sufficiency of suitable pieces of the right length and right character. But there is little to be said for the extempore concluding voluntary. For one thing, the considered and written thoughts of a composer are almost certain to be more edifying to the listener than the spontaneous effusions of the performer, however clever he may be. At the cathedral with which the writer is associated, ever since the

organ was rebuilt four years ago a regular piece has been played at the afternoon Service every day, and on no single occasion has its place been taken by an extemporization. Before leaving the subject of extempore a few very simple principles may be mentioned which apply equally to voluntaries or interludes or any form of improvisation: it might seem superfluous to mention them, were they not so often entirely neglected.

(a) Extemporize in a definite time: it is a good plan to 'count' while you extemporize.

(b) Extemporize in a definite key and sequence of keys; and end in the same key as you begin.

(c) If you cannot memorize your subjects easily, do not be ashamed to write them down.

(d) Besides adhering to strict time, try to give your phrases some rhythmic character of their own. If a succession of notes of exactly the same length are played on the organ, it is impossible, owing to the lack of power to accent, to determine what time they are in. Therefore strive to alternate long with short notes so that the rhythm may sound clear and definite to others as well as yourself.

(e) Do not use the pedals the whole time, and do not keep entirely to the middle of the key-boards.

(f) Do not be afraid of rests.

(g) Single notes and two- or three-part harmony often afford a great relief: do not make your chords too 'thick'. 'Muddiness' is one of the greatest of crimes in organ playing.

So far we have been concerned mainly with the consideration of general principles and theories. It is now necessary to consider the various uses of the voluntary or interlude in some detail, and in as practical a manner as possible.

The introductory voluntary. In some churches this consists of a piece of music played before the Service,

which may be of practically any length: in such a case the only necessary consideration is its suitability to the Service which is to follow. But very often the length of the opening voluntary is determined by certain external factors. One of the most popular of our Church 'conventions' is the use of vestry prayers: in some cases these are said quietly in the vestry and are responded to quietly by the choir; but very often the response is made chorally, or in such an audible tone as easily to be heard in the church. Now if a voluntary is being played and this is suddenly interrupted by a loud 'Amen', the effect is simply intolerable: it is utterly inartistic and to a musical person painfully irreverent. If the vestry prayers *must* be audible in the church—high episcopal authority has urged that they should not be—it cannot be too strongly insisted that the organ must be silent during their rendering. The same applies to the ringing of church bells. If the bell is audible in the church the organ ought *never* to start until the bell has ceased. Such conflicts of sounds are to the musical person perfectly hateful. In many churches it is the custom to commence the Service with a processional hymn: this may not be liturgically correct, but at any rate in those churches where the organist has not a great repertoire, where he cannot extemporize well, or where the organ is a poor one, it solves the difficulty of an opening voluntary. It is generally acceptable, and can easily be made musically effective. Yet a third possibility exists in such cases: it is for the choir and clergy to walk in in silence: this dignified custom prevails at certain Oxford Colleges and no doubt elsewhere: and the plan would have much to commend it in many churches where the musical opportunities are slight. Far better no voluntary at all than a bad one, or a good one badly played.

It is the custom in some churches to 'play over' the tunes of chants and hymns: this should never be *necessary* if there

is an efficient choir, for if the choir do not know the tune before it is time to sing it, playing it through once will certainly not teach it them. Such a practice may, however, be desirable for the humble reason of giving the congregation time to find their places. If the custom is followed it is important that the 'playing over' should be simple, correct, and unobtrusive: fancy stops, tremulants, &c., are best avoided, and it is most important that the time should be clearly set at which the subsequent music will be sung. One sometimes hears chants 'given out' at a lightning speed, at which they could not possibly be sung: or hymn tunes played over with any amount of 'expression' but absolutely no rhythm. Coming to the anthem, we find that the custom of a preliminary prelude has found its way from the cathedral to the parish church. Fortunately, it would seem, the days of the long and elaborate extempore prelude to the anthem, even in cathedrals, appear to be coming to an end: such performances, admirable though they may be in themselves, are not necessary, and tend to lengthen the Service to an undue extent. The short prelude to the anthem, if artistically conceived, is a pleasant link with tradition: but it is not necessary, and, at any rate in parish churches, should be confined within the limits of a few bars. At other places during the Service there will probably arise from time to time occasions where a few bars have to be extemporized: for instance, at the end of a hymn. These interludes should be as carefully handled as the larger improvisations. Nothing is more irritating on these occasions than an aimless succession of chords in no particular key and in no particular time. At many churches it is the custom to have soft music played during the Communion of the people. Here is a golden opportunity for the organist to play some of the soft and simple Chorale Preludes of Bach and other writers: or a suitable extempore on some suggestive theme may be most appropriate here:

though perhaps best of all is a softly sung unaccompanied hymn, with long silences between each verse. Only those who have tried this can realize the value of occasional silence in our Services.

The concluding voluntary, from the point of view of the soloist, affords the greatest opportunity in the Service. Here is a real chance for executive skill. As elsewhere there is no place for personal display—for above all things the true church organist should aim to focus the attention of the congregation on the spirit of the Service as a whole, and not on himself or his instrument: but here at least he may give the best of his powers as his contribution to the worship, and may use the full resources of his instrument to the glory of God. The choice of concluding voluntaries is only limited by their suitability to performance in church. Practically the whole of the works of the great writers for the organ are available, and there can be no possible objection to the finest pieces being chosen if they can be performed adequately.

It is very important that the concluding voluntary should not start immediately at the end of the Service. Nothing causes a greater jar than to hear a brilliant finale started almost before the last words of the Blessing have died away. The best plan is to allow a few seconds' absolute silence after the Blessing: then to play softly till the choir have left the church. If the vestry prayers are audible the organ must cease entirely while they are being sung, and the voluntary may then start. In any case the violent contrast between the last words of the Blessing and the loud start of the voluntary must be avoided at all hazards.

It should not be forgotten that the final voluntary gives the only practical chance to many people of becoming acquainted with the literature of the organ, and that the selection of pieces should be representative and educational.

Variety should be aimed at, and the choice should not be restricted to one style. It must never be forgotten that the ordinary congregation comprises people of many different tastes, and the organist should try in turn to suit all tastes except the bad. Too much severe music is therefore to be avoided, as well as an undue amount of 'fancy work': it is useless to alienate those whom you wish to teach.

In many churches it is the custom to give a short recital after the Sunday Evening Service: this is an excellent plan—beneficial to the organist and interesting to the congregation. If the programmes of these recitals are well arranged they may become quite a powerful musical force. They should of course be based primarily on pure organ music, but under certain circumstances arrangements are not only quite allowable but even desirable. Many of those who attend such recitals are not regular concert-goers and may have no opportunity at all of hearing a good orchestra. Surely it is better that they should become familiar with such works as the slow movements from some of Beethoven's symphonies or the Prelude to 'Parsifal' or other great classics, even through an organ arrangement, than that they should never hear them at all. Perhaps in places where good orchestral music is easily to be heard there is little reason for playing arrangements, but in other places they are justified by their educational value. Then certain very beautiful works are so seldom to be heard in their original setting that they are likely to be almost unknown or forgotten unless they are kept alive by transference to the organ. Such things as the slow movements from many of Haydn's symphonies, or Handel's overtures, to mention obvious examples, are seldom to be heard on the orchestra—and they make excellent organ pieces. At the same time it is necessary to enter a word of protest against the indiscriminate use of orchestral pieces as organ voluntaries. Certain popular selections from Wagner, for instance (though in

themselves playable to some extent on the organ) are about as unsuitable in connexion with a Church Service as anything can be.

The responsibility of the organist for the purely instrumental music in the Service, apart altogether from the choral portion, is tremendous. To avoid pitfalls requires the utmost tact, the greatest readiness, a good technical equipment, and a fine sense of fitness. By his success in these matters it is possible for the organist to do very much towards inducing a true spirit of reverence into the whole Service: by his failure he can strike a jarring and distracting note which may for some people ruin everything. This matter of solo playing, then, is not to be passed over lightly or treated as of comparative unimportance. It should be regarded as one of the highest and most important functions of the organist, and should receive proportionate consideration and preparation.

The organist has it in his power to make or mar the whole of the music of the Service: if he is careless or slovenly in the matter of his voluntaries he will at least miss a great opportunity; if he always treats them with the attention and care that they deserve, he will acquire an influence for good which it is beyond his power to estimate.