

## **The Church Anthem Book.**

THE Church Anthem Book is a big book, a brave book. It would have been so easy to publish a collection of a hundred anthems of another type which would have delighted many choirs and congregations. Here is a collection which has no Stainer in it, no Barnby, no Martin, no H. H. Woodward. A brave book indeed ! Perhaps it needed courage on the part of the editors, Sir Walford Davies and Dr Ley. It certainly did require courage on the part of our Public Worship Committee, which had no little part in the making of the book ; but, undeterred by criticism of the Revised Church Hymnary, the Committee still holds on its way. But the greatest courage has still to be shown : it will be required by the choirmaster who introduces this book ; he will need to be a man of rare courage as well as of inexhaustible patience.

Is it too much to expect of critics that from the beginning they will keep any criticism they may have to make of the contents of the book separate from discussion of, and from their judgment on, quite different matters ? Much of the criticism of the Revised Hymnary has been ineffective because the critics would confuse a legitimate criticism of the book itself with their opinions on other matters with which the committee had nothing to do. Many debatable questions suggest themselves. Have anthems, as sung by the average choir, or even ideally rendered, real worship value ? That is, should anthems have a place in the ordinary public worship of every Sunday ? Is it the ideal that members of the congregation in their pews should join in the singing of the anthem ? (Anyone who has doubts on this matter should read the excellent preface to the Words Edition of this book.) Have compilers of anthologies of sacred music any right, or any need, to make changes in the musical text, original or "accepted" ? Is there any need for an anthem book in these days of sheet-music ? If the Church of Scotland is to have an official anthem book, should it not be edited by a musician who is Scottish by birth and is acting as organist and choirmaster in a Church of Scotland congregation ; the book published in Scotland and with one intention only, to meet the taste and need

of the average Scottish congregation? Such questions, apposite or silly, ought to be kept separate, so far as that is possible, from criticism of the contents.

The purpose of this book is twofold: (1) to act as a standard by which all anthems sung in our churches may be judged; (2) to give our congregations a body of anthems of varying degrees of difficulty, chosen from all the different schools.

(1) For ourselves, we think the first purpose the more important. The General Assembly in authorising the present collection for use in public worship does not say: "These anthems and these alone are what should be sung in our churches." No attempt is intended to stop choirs from using anthems in sheet form, anthems already published or, we may expect, to be published in the future. The Assembly in giving its approval says: "Here is a book whose anthems can be regarded as setting the standard for all anthems sung in our churches."

There was need for such a standard. One of the chief needs in our Scottish psalmody at present is that the choirs in our town congregations (usually large choirs with many excellent and trained singers, professional and amateur, and as a rule with a large organ) should sing worthy music and, apart from wasting their time and talents on unworthy material, not seek to give expression to the people's worship in anything less than the noblest way. These city congregations and choirs have great influence on the life and practice of the Church, not only because the great majority of the members of the Church are found in such congregations, but also because country congregations and choirs model themselves on what they hear and see done in them. It is all-important, therefore, that the music sung by our city choirs should be worthy of the place it has in the people's worship. The need of a definite standard to help choir and choirmaster in their choice of music is nowhere more apparent than in the matter of the anthem. Much will depend on the attitude the choirs and choirmasters of our city congregations take to this anthem book. We are quite sure that choirs that really work at its contents will soon not want to sing some anthems which one often hears.

But for some time past our Church has had no standard by which choirs could judge of the anthem music they were singing. The old anthem book of the Church of Scotland has long been out of print. Somehow or other the list of recommended anthems published by the old Psalmody



Committee of the Church of Scotland with the approval of the Assembly has not been used as it might have been. Musical taste has greatly changed since the Anthem Book of the United Free Church, still largely used, was compiled, and it is doubtful if even at the time of its publication it was generally admitted to set such a standard as was needed.

(2) Here is a collection of anthems which will be of tremendous help to our choirs. It contains anthems for every Sunday in the year, and for every season of the Christian Year. The index of anthems suitable for particular seasons and particular occasions will be found most helpful. The indication of anthems of which gramophone records may be obtained should prove very useful to choir-masters. Moreover, most of the anthems selected do not need large choirs. The Bach cantatas, a few excerpts from which are found here, were written for the use of a small choir, though, such is the genius of Bach, most of them acquire a new—we do not say a *greater*—beauty when sung by a large choir. The Tudor anthems definitely require a small choir. The book is extraordinarily cheap. A hundred anthems at less than a penny each! How the publishers manage to issue over five hundred and fifty closely printed pages of music at the price of five shillings we do not know.

The *format* of the book has evoked some criticism. As it happens, so good has been the sale of the first edition, that a new one is in course of preparation, and we are promised that it will be on thinner paper.

The advisability of printing the two notations, staff and sol-fa, together will be questioned. It may perhaps have added a page or two to the book and so increased its weight, but it will be on the score of legibility that the combination of the two will be most generally criticised. Certainly it is not so easy to glance over the page, but the book is not meant to be glanced over; it is meant to be worked at; and we are sure that, after really working at an anthem, choir-members will have no difficulty in following their particular parts. The fact that the Oxford University Press combines the two notations so generally in its publications shows that the method has proved both practicable and useful in the past. Any difficulty of legibility, however, is more than compensated for by the benefit of having the two notations printed together. This is the method increasingly adopted nowadays in teaching music to young

children. In the preface which Sir Walford Davies wrote some years ago to "*Hymns of the Kingdom*," he emphasised the benefit both to singers accustomed to the staff notation and to those who have hitherto read only tonic sol-fa of having the two notations printed together, the sol-fa notation creating in the mind of the ordinary reader of staff notation a sense of the place in the scale of the notes he is singing; the staff notation, on the other hand, giving "a picture of the rise and fall (and rhythm) of the melody in a way which a straight line of symbols or signs can never hope to do." It is for this reason that Sir Walford Davies so much dislikes and deprecates the publication of "*Words Only*" editions of hymnbooks (what he says does not, of course, apply to "*Words Only*" editions of an anthem book), and strongly advises the use by every worshipper, certainly by every boy and girl, of a hymnbook with the tune in both notations above each hymn.

Where possible, the close score has been used. In this way many pages were saved, and space was found for anthems which otherwise would have had to be omitted. Apart from the question of saving room, we welcome the frequent use of close score in the book. We only wish it had been possible to use it more often. For the average country organist finds playing from open score very difficult. Every organ student knows how it has to be practised. The organist who is unable to read easily from open score should, of course, take the trouble to write out the anthem or the passage in close score, but, so far as our experience goes, we find that that is seldom done, with the result either that the organist plays an accompaniment with wrong notes innumerable, or that an anthem written in open score is never sung. It adds greatly to the general usefulness of the book, therefore, that most of the simplest anthems are in close score—as, for example, Davies' "*Blessed are the pure in heart*" (6), Goss's "*God so loved the world*" (24), Wesley's "*O Lord, my God*" (68), the Arcadelt "*Angelus*," "*O Lord my God, to Thee*" (69), Schubert's "*Holy, Holy, Holy*" (31). Perhaps it is still more helpful that there are given in close score some rather more difficult pieces which an enthusiastic choirmaster may well make the gateway through which a choir may enter into the vast realm, hitherto untrod, perhaps not even guessed at, of great church music. For example (to name only a few) Bach's "*Jesu, joy of man's desiring*" (40), and "*King of Glory*" (48), leading into Bach; Ford's



"Almighty God Who hast me brought" (5), and even Gibbons's "Almighty and Everlasting God" (4), leading into the shining realms of Tudor music; Bairstow's "Jesu, the very thought of Thee" (46), and Gibbs's "Most glorious Lord of Lyfe" (58), leading into modern music. We have been sorry to hear choir members and choirmasters of the towns complaining at times of the lower setting in the revised hymnbook of some well-known hymns. Such complaining seems to us selfish, but it is so only because it is thoughtless. These forget that it is easy for the trained organist of the city church to transpose the offending setting up, if he think it desirable, whereas it is almost impossible for many of his less expert brother-organists in the country to put the hymn down. We hope that city choirs, if they are inclined to grumble at the added care required to read their parts in close score, will think of their brethren in the country to whom close score is such a help.

A book of anthems must necessarily have a page somewhat smaller than that of sheet-music. This undoubtedly means that in certain places the organist will have a busy time turning over pages, and, of course, it is in the anthems where the organ part is more elaborate that that will usually happen. Such a difficulty is inevitable where a book of anthems is used and the book is to be of reasonable size for the singers. The type is small enough as it is, for the organist with three manuals between him and his music.

When we come to deal, as we now do, with the actual contents of the book, we do well to remember its first purpose—to act as a standard for the anthem-praise of our Church. Because of that purpose, our chief concern must be not so much what has been omitted but what has been included. The test by which we judge a book of this kind is altogether different from that by which we judge a hymnbook for congregational use. There is a valid reason for a congregational hymnbook containing hymns whose words or music—either or both—are not really worthy of the people's praise; there is no reason for poor anthems in an anthem book.

Most of us will be sorry that this or that is not included; but when we ask ourselves what we would have omitted to make room for any anthem we would have liked, we are hard put to it to find a victim. Certainly the taste of the generation just past or passing has not been catered for here. Which raises the question: What is there in the book

that reflects the particular taste and fashion of the present day and is therefore likely to be ephemeral and passing? Of course no assured answer can be given to the question. Only time can tell. We ourselves are doubtful if what there is in this book which is typically modern and contemporaneous has any greater chance of becoming permanent than many popular examples of the fashion just past whose omission will be regretted by many. But because an editor cannot be certain that even what is acclaimed as best of his own day will prove lasting, he ought not for that reason to refuse to include that material in an anthology which claims to be representative of the present as well as of the past.

Difficulties of copyright probably account for certain unexpected omissions. (Is that why there is no Stanford?). We understand, too, that the length of certain anthems precluded their admission. Such difficulties have been got over to a certain extent by a supplementary list of some sixty other suitable anthems.

Judging the book, then, not by what has been left out but by what has been put in, there can be nothing but praise for the editors' selection. Such praise has been unstintedly given by the reviewers. "Not one unworthy," is the title of one review. The only one we ourselves are at all doubtful about happens to be the first in the book, Sterndale Bennett's "Abide with Me." But that may be only a personal distaste, and we are willing to admit the probability of the editors' taste being better than our own. And if the inclusion of the Sterndale Bennett leads to the disuse of other anthem-settings of the words concerning whose quality there can be no doubt at all, it will not have been given a place in vain. The fact that within a few months of its appearance the book is being used in eight cathedrals in England and the Chapel Royal at St James's, as well as in not a few of the famous old parish churches of England where so much emphasis is laid on the music of the divine service, and its quality so carefully guarded, is proof of its excellence.

The most common criticism of the contents is on the score of their difficulty, and therefore unsuitability for choirs of ordinary attainment. We think this is a criticism made by those who have made only a cursory examination of them. A first glance does indeed give the impression of difficulty, but we know for ourselves that the more we studied the material, the more we realised the thought which



the editors had taken for the choir of average and less than average capacity. Probably the fact that the simple anthems are for the most part short leads to one's overlooking them in a first examination. Anthems such as "Christ, Whose glory fills the skies" (12), Purcell's "Declare His honour" (19), Mozart's *Benedictus* (27), Harris's "O, what their joy" (75) (eighteen pages), Boyce's "Turn Thee unto me" (93) (twenty pages), Brahms's "We love the place" (96) (seventeen pages), naturally catch the eye more quickly than the simple one-page or two-page pieces. We have spoken to many organists who said, "Oh yes, a fine book, but quite beyond our choir and most choirs." We dare to think that these organists have not yet really "got down" to the book.

Certainly some of the anthems are difficult, but surely we would not have had our Church put its imprimatur on a book in which there was nothing to call forth the most earnest endeavours and highest powers of our choirs. And would not such a book have carried with it the suggestion that, to the mind of our Church, only in simplicity of anthem-music could there be sincerity of worship? But the editors have realised their ideal of making a collection of anthems of every grade of difficulty. A book that contains such things as Sterndale Bennett's "Abide with me" (1), Ford's "Almighty God, Who hast me brought" (5), Walford Davies's "Blessed are the pure in heart" (6), Arensky's "Bow down Thine ear" (9), Mendelssohn's "Cast thy burden" (11), to go through the first sixty pages only, a tenth of the book (the anthems are arranged in alphabetical order, not in chronological order or in order of difficulty)—such a book cannot be fairly said to be "difficult" or of use to well-trained choirs only. As a matter of fact the majority of the anthems are simple, both to sing and to hear. There is material here for the simplest choir within our Church.

It may be said: Would it not have been wise, then, to have had a graded index to help choirmasters in their choice? Apart from the difficulties of grading (many of the anthems have easy voice parts but difficult organ parts; e.g., the simple chorales, Bach's accompaniments to which, when transcribed for the organ, are decidedly tricky, if not something more), there is more to be said against such an index than there is to be said for it. Choir-members and choir-masters are as a rule somewhat timid. Put up a notice board in front of them labelled "Difficult," and

usually they take fright at once and choose an easier way. Far better that a choir should really try an anthem, even though it be never sung in church, than that it should carefully adhere to those marked "Easy."

The chief difficulty we observe is undoubtedly the organ accompaniment. Two really fine modern anthems, for instance, Thomas Armstrong's "Christ, Whose glory fills the skies" (12), and Harris's "O, what their joy" (75), have accompaniments typically modern in their beauty and in their difficulty. Naturally the accompaniments arranged from orchestra—*e.g.*, the two numbers from Brahms's Requiem (7 and 96), the Bach chorales, the Mozart Benedictus (27)—are difficult to play well. But these anthems, if we except the Bach chorales which can be sung without the organ interludes, are not for the average choir. Some day we hope to hear the Armstrong and Harris sung at a Choir Festival with massed voices and a fine organ.

The occasional difficulty of the organ part arises to a large extent from the editors' observance of the principle that, in ideal conditions, there should be no accompaniment played except where a real accompaniment, either "structural" or "ornamental," is required and expressly noted. To hear in a church where there is no excuse for the organ just helping the choir, the choir singing and the organ playing exactly the same notes right through the anthem, because of lack of adequate preparation and the lack of confidence which follows thereon, or, as is often the reason, because of sheer lack of imagination on the organist's part, becomes, if the anthem be a fairly long one, so maddening that one wants to yell! This book, so far as a book can, asserts the principle of choir and organ each bearing its own part in the anthem.

The accompaniments of all the simpler anthems can be played on the harmonium (even if they may entail some practising on the part of the player), which will be a great convenience in country churches.

We had hoped to get a few simple anthems for women's voices only, such as could be used in our village choirs where there are often no men or so few as to be out of all proportion to the sopranos and contraltos. If such a disproportion have to be accepted, if there be no way of remedying it, far better that such choirs should sing anthems for women's voices only rather than four-part anthems where the bass and tenor parts have to be imagined. There are five such anthems in the book (the index conveniently



marks them) and two in the supplementary list. Perhaps five is all we could reasonably expect, but a short supplementary list of such anthems would have been very useful to village choir-masters. To have included more in this case would have meant excluding four-part anthems of more general usefulness. All five are perfect examples of what such anthems may be: the lovely Purcell ground (60), Percy Buck's "O Lord God" (66) (if only the organist will not take fright at the five flats!), Dr Ley's "Rejoice in the Lord alway" (76), Baker's setting of an old French carol (99) (the harmonium player will need to use a little imagination to adapt the accompaniment), and the duet from Boyce's "Turn Thee unto me" (93). We can imagine choirs which have sung these anthems insistently demanding from their choir-master that he find for them more of a like quality.

We are glad that room has been found for so many anthems based on hymn-tunes. This, we think, is a thing greatly to be desired. The congregation likes such an anthem because it knows the tune. In this way, too, the great tunes of Christendom which are the possession of the whole Church can be made familiar to our people. Moreover, by the use made of the tune in the anthem—faux-bourdon, descant or theme of fugue—the congregation begins to acquire a sense of the build of an anthem. This is not an age in which really original work is being produced in the realm of church music. It is an age which is rediscovering and rejoicing in the treasures of the past. Such original work as is being done is largely based on these discoveries: witness the frequent use of descant in modern anthem music (*e.g.*, numbers 99, 84, 1). This may well be the feeling out after a new form of original work in such music, hinting at future developments along the line of the Bach anthems, rather than of the Tudor anthem, and pointing perhaps to the coming of a composer of the first rank who will do with the good tunes of to-day what Bach did supremely with the tunes of his time.

To conclude: This book is a challenge to our choirs and choirmasters. The writer wishes he could be more hopeful than he is of the challenge being accepted. Our organists—the older ones, at least—did not accept the challenge of the Revised Church Hymnary. We think they are beginning to realise now that they failed to rise to the opportunity. If the new hymn-book wearied them, what will they do with the anthem book? The absence of criticism of it in the

public press, where so often we meet with criticism of the hymn-book, seems ominous. Does it mean that the organists of our Church are shirking the challenge and refusing to brave the new adventure?

As the editors point out in their preface, the Musical Festival Movement (itself the product of one musical enthusiast in a little English village) reveals, time and again, what one musical enthusiast can do. Most of us have known some such case. With this book in the hands of an enthusiastic choir-master, whether in town or country, what fun next winter's choir practices will be! Going to choir practice will be an adventure indeed.

GEORGE T. WRIGHT.