

Tercentenary of the Scottish Psalter of 1635.

IF we are to be quite candid with ourselves, we must admit that the contribution which Scotland has made to the development of the great art of music is not a large one. It is true that we have a heritage of folk tunes which any nation might envy and that from time to time we have produced some good minor composers, but, as a nation, we are apt to neglect both our tunes and our composers and to look for music anywhere rather than at home.

The Church of Scotland cannot claim to be without blame in this respect. It has consistently neglected its own treasures, and has always been too prone to borrow things of infinitely less value from its neighbours. One has only to think of its hymn-books to be convinced of the truth of this, and though, with the production of the Revised Church Hymnary, some restitution of our ancient glory has been attempted, a mass of first-rate music still awaits revival. If Scotland had produced no musical monument other than the great Psalter of 1635, she would still have one unassailable claim to a place in the general story of music's development, and no arguments can explain, far less condone, the Church's neglect of that great anthology.

In the three hundred years which have elapsed since it was first published, there appears only one voice crying in the wilderness and proclaiming its true value. That one voice, curiously, was raised at the precise moment when "Hymns Ancient and Modern" made its first appearance to the detriment of the nations' taste in Church Music. In 1864, the Rev. Neil Livingston, of the Free Church of Stair, by Ayr, called attention to the merits of the book in the most practical way by issuing a complete reprint with many closely printed pages of scholarly dissertations, facsimiles, and appendices.

The Church of his time was completely apathetic and vastly preferred the cheap sentimentality of the English hymn-book to the rugged grandeur of the Scottish tunes. The Church of to-day is still apathetic and has left it to a distinguished Roman Catholic musician, Sir Richard Terry, to publish a new edition in this tercentenary year. The

preparation of this volume, soon to be published by Messrs Novello, has been a labour of love for Sir Richard, and I feel proud to have been the accidental instrument in introducing him to Neil Livingston's reprint. I happened to show it to him during one of his visits to Edinburgh, and he straightway became so enthusiastic that he wrote a stirring essay under the title of "A Forgotten Psalter" (Oxford University Press), in which he calls attention to the rich variety of the metres employed. There are "ninety-nine psalms in common metre, eleven in long metre, and five in short metre. It has also thirty-five more Psalms which exhibit no less than *twenty-seven varieties* of metre." He also notes the amazing melodic resources of the composers in achieving rhythmical variety inside the bounds of the stereotyped common metre. This rhythmical variety is what we Scotsmen sacrificed for the Victorian "flat-ironed" equal note versions of our great psalm-tunes.

Sir Richard's forthcoming edition will consist of two main sections. In the first he has conformed to present day usage in transferring the tune from the tenor part to the treble and has harmonised it appropriately. In the second he reprints "The Psalter in its original form, with words complete and music in the original notation." It has been my privilege to see proof sheets of the first part, and I can testify to the care and reverence with which Sir Richard has accomplished his task. The publication of the book will be a glad day for Scottish Church Music, and will give us all the opportunity of restoring our neglected masterpieces to their rightful place in worship.

The 1635 Psalter was, of course, a compilation based on previously issued psalters such as the first Scottish Psalter of 1564, and that of 1615. It contains many of the same tunes but, in addition, has a wealth of new material. It opens with the Common Tunes which, as they have no words attached to them, are obviously meant to be sung to any psalm with words in common metre. There are thirty-one of these and the most striking thing about them is the variety of rhythms which they show. It is impossible without the use of music type to show this variety, but some idea of it may be obtained by contrasting the form of "French" with that of "Martyrs" in the Revised Church Hymnary. The "gathering" notes are, of course, always there at the beginning and end of each line, but inside the lines themselves there is much interest, and the rhythm of a tune like "Dundee" is entirely different from that of

"Wigton," (another which can be studied in the R. C. H.), or that of "Dumfermling," which has not yet been exactly restored.

The melodies themselves are for the most part full of vigour and health. Some, like the well-loved "French", have the perfect build of a real folk-tune. Others, like "Newtoun" (known to us as "London New"), and "Stilt" (known now as "York"), stride on their way with giant steps and a rare virility. The Editor of the original book, E. M., whom I like to think of, not as the courtly musician of the "Chappell Royall of Stirling," but as the Edward Millar "in Blackfriars' Wynd who teaches bairns," says of the tunes in his preface that there are "some grave, some light, fitting diverse dispositions." Every mood seems to be represented and each tune has a different character—a fact appreciated by Robert Burns—no mean judge of a good tune—when he wrote of "Dundee's wild warbling measures," of "plaintive Martyrs," and of "noble Elgin."

Several of these Common Tunes have, of course, never dropped out of current use, but they all have been subjected to the "flat-ironing" process. What a strange idea it was that God could be praised only by a succession of dull equal notes! The best way to celebrate the tercentenary of this book will be to restore to all the tunes their original rhythm and then bring them all back into the service of the sanctuary.

The next section consists of "some Psalms in reports"—to quote again from the preface "for the further delight of qualified persons in the said Art." There are eight of these and, though the particular psalms for which the settings are intended were specified, no indication was given as to how the words might be made to fit the music. In his new edition, Sir Richard Terry has added the words in accordance with the practice of contemporary composers of motets and madrigals, and so has made them available for choirs.

In them, the "church part" or the main tune is, as usual, in the tenor. An English Psalter of 1567 says, "The tenor of these partes be for the people when they will syng alone, the other partes put for greater queers or such as will syng or play them privatlye."

To this "church part" were added three, or, in one case, four parts in free counterpoint with a good deal of imitation. Livingston explains the word "reports" as meaning "either a *carrying back*, that is, after a passage has been started by one harmonic part, taking it back to the same

point and starting it again by another : or *carrying again*, that is, repeating one passage by the parts in succession. Or if the tune referred to echoing, answering or what is now called imitation, the idea is still the same."

The tunes which are used as the foundation for these elaborate motets are usually the proper tunes for the particular psalms and come from various sources. The additional counterpoints are probably the work of a group of Scottish composers who are mentioned in the preface and about whom Livingston has, with characteristic assiduity, unearthed a lot of information. E. M. seems not to have harmonised the tunes himself but to have taken pains, as a good Editor should, to get the most authentic version of the arrangements of earlier musicians. He "acknowledges sincerely the whole compositions of the parts to belong to the primest musicians that ever this kingdom had, as Deane John Angus, Blackhall, Smith, Peebles, Sharp, Black, Buchan, and others famous for their skill in this kind. I would bee most unwilling to wrong such shyning lights of this Art, by obscuring their names and arrogating any thing to my selfe which any wayes might derogate from them: For (God is my witness) I affect not popular applause."

The part-writing, though it lacks the ease and polish of the work of the great contemporary English composers, is none the less interesting and strong, and the "Psalms in Reports" might well occasionally replace an anthem in "quires and places where they sing."

These Psalms are followed by the preface from which I have already quoted. It is a delightful piece of writing, and I cannot, in passing, resist the impulse to quote the author's statement of his reasons for compiling the book:—"The motives moving mee hereunto are chiefly God's glorie, the advancement of this Art, the saving of pains to teachers hereof: the incitation of others to greater acts of this kind, the earnest desire of some well affected, the imployment of my poor talent; together with an abuse observed in all Churches, where sundrie Tribles, Basses, and Counters, set by diverse Authors, being sung upon one and the same Tenor, do discordingly rub each upon another, offending both musicall and rude ears which never tasted of this Art: which unhappie fault I thought might happily bee helped, and the Church musick made more plausible by publishing this Booke."

The main body of the book then follows—"the whole book of Psalms in verse, with contents and proper tunes

to each Psalm and accompanied on the margin by the prose version from the Geneva Bible." The two proper tunes which seem never to have become dissociated from their own Psalms are the Old 100th and the glorious Old 124th, but great as these are, they are matched by ever so many more. Several have reappeared in the Revised Church Hymnary. The proper tune for Psalm 107 is the fine tune for Hymn 151; the tune of Psalm 122 is associated with Hymn 167; that of Psalm 113 with Hymn 217, and that of Psalm 77 with Hymn 355. If anyone takes the trouble to look up these tunes, he will not see the 1635 Psalter mentioned as their source. They are all older tunes and this Psalter is really a very complete and excellent anthology. This is not the place to consider whence the tunes came. Terry, following up Livingston's researches, gives an exhaustive list in his preface. It is, however, interesting to find such things as a version of the "Vater Unser" set as a proper tune to Psalm 112.

The feature of the proper tunes as of the common tunes is the strength and variety of the rhythms. I wish one could be sure that even those examples which have been revived from the old French Psalters were to-day being sung in our Churches, but I fear that one of the hymns mentioned above—"When morning gilds the skies"—is still being sung to the Barnby tune and that ministers, organists, choirs, and congregations are not only missing the thrill of a magnificent tune, but are losing the opportunity of linking themselves musically with the religious song of their ancestors.

After the Psalms there were printed fourteen spiritual songs or hymns with directions as to the proper tune to which they should be sung: the Ten Commandments (sing this as the 51 Psalme): A prayer (sing this as the 27 Psalme): The Lord's Prayer, a very prolix version with nine six-line stanzas (sing this as the 112 Psalme): Veni Creator—eight verses of eight lines each (sing this as the 95 Psalme): The Song of Simeon (sing this as the 19 Psalme): The twelve articles of the Christian belief (sing this as the 61 Psalme): The humble sute of a sinner (sing this as the 22 Psalme): The lamentation of a sinner (sing this as the 6 Psalme): The complaint of a sinner (sing this as the 143 Psalme): The song of the Blessed Virgine Mary (sing this as the 19 Psalme): The Lamentation (sing this as the 59 Psalme): The song of Moses (sing this as the 32 Psalme): A thanksgiving after the receiving of the Lord's Supper (sing

this as the 137 Psalme) : A spirituall song (sing this as the 110 Psalme).

I cannot help feeling that it is in wedding these tunes to the words that the compiler of this Psalter made his only musical error. Livingston says that a "proper tune is one assigned to a particular Psalm as peculiarly adapted thereto." It seems as if the only reason for suggesting some of these tunes for the hymns is a similiarity in metre. One can hardly imagine that a tune of which the mood is that of the jubilant nineteenth Psalm would be an ideal expression of the "Nunc Dimittis," or that a thanksgiving after the Lord's Supper would be ideally mated by a tune proper to the 137th Psalm. Yet, who can tell? We Scots are queer folk. Do we not sing "Scots wha hae" to the same tune as "The Land o' the Leal"?

It is obviously impossible in a short essay which is only the attempt of a musician to give some impression of the effect which these tunes have on him, to delve into the history of this remarkable book. The mantle of Neil Livingston has fallen on Dr Millar Patrick, our greatest living authority on the music of the Church. He has been engaged for long in checking Livingston's researches and in filling up blanks in his work, and the results of his labours are shortly to be published. I am looking forward to his book eagerly, and I have no doubt that it, along with Sir Richard Terry's reconstruction of the music, will give us food for much thought. There is no need to ask if we have progressed with regard to church music in the past three hundred years. The mawkish sentimental hymn-tune is a poor substitute for our old Psalm tunes. We have definitely slipped back. What are we going to do about it?

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