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HYMNS FOR ANTI-SLAVERY PRAYER-MEETINGS

BY NEIL DIXON

Among the interesting collection of hymn-books housed in the John Rylands Library in Manchester, is a little known volume with the above title. *Hymns for anti-slavery prayer-meetings* was published in London in 1838, but it was closely connected with Sheffield, where it was available for sale, and, according to its preface, profits from its sale were to be donated to the "Sheffield Ladies' Association for the Universal Abolition of Slavery". This little collection of nine hymns is of interest as one manifestation of the campaign for social justice that has been waged by hymn-writers of many centuries.

These nine hymns increase in interest to the hymnologist when he considers their authors. Two hymns each were contributed by James Montgomery, Bernard Barton, and Ann Gilbert, and Josiah Conder contributed one (the others are by Frances Rolleston and 'Cruciger'). Moreover, all the hymns had been commissioned, "composed, and kindly presented to the Editor, expressly for this little publication" (preface). We do not know

who the editor was. It is pleasant to speculate that it might have been Montgomery, in view of the association with Sheffield, but it could equally well have been Frances Rolleston or the pseudonymous 'Cruciger', or someone else who did not himself contribute a hymn.

So much for background. Turning to the hymns themselves, we notice first a singular lack of editorial consistency. We observe 'thee' on page 12, but 'Thee' on page 14, and other similar defects. The hymns themselves, however, repay the efforts of the reader.

All of them are eager and impassioned. Bernard Barton, for instance, begs God to requite the tyrant:

Liberty-imparting Spirit!
Breathe on Afric's fettered race;
That, through thee they may inherit
This divinest gift of grace.

Thou canst break their bonds asunder,
Thou canst cast their yoke away;
Speak! and in a voice of thunder,
Which the oppressor must obey.

Tell the man who dares to barter
In his brother's flesh and blood,
He has broken the high charter
Of our common brotherhood!

And for this will stand indicted
At the judgment-seat on high,
There to be by God requited
For usurped authority! (Hymn 8)

But for the slaves, Barton prays for divine mercy and for a sense of spiritual liberty:

But to the oppressed, heart-broken,
Speak in tones of gentlest love;
And may every word, thus spoken,
Bear a blessing from above.

Tell them of a freedom greater
Than of man was ever won;
Given them by their great Creator,
In his Spirit, through his Son!

Where that Spirit has possession
Of his heart, the slave is free;
And in spite of man's oppression,
Is a child of liberty!

We have quoted Barton's hymn in full because it voices three themes which pervade the whole collection: (i) Tyranny and racial exploitation are deadly sins; (ii) The oppressed need spiritual

freedom as well as material freedom; (iii) Unaided man cannot save the oppressed—God's powerful help is needed.

Ann Gilbert is particularly sensitive to the third theme:

In dire extreme, to Thee we turn,
All other hope denied;
Surely our hearts within us burn,
Since first to Thee we cried!

Sustain us, through whatever length
Of struggle yet may be,
Till thou exalt thine arm of strength,
And set the Prisoner free. (Hymn 7)

But she also senses the contrast between liberty in England and the oppression which faces the slave, and the contrast leads her to write, in her other contribution:

We thank thee, Lord, that here we stand,
At liberty to sing and pray;
No tyrant rules this happy land,
Whom we must ask, before we may!
Great God! one mercy more we crave—
Freedom to serve thee for the slave!

We thank thee, for the gospel call,
To every ear so freely sent;
That rich and poor, and great and small,
Have leave, in England, to repent!
Saviour! one mercy more we crave—
A *preached* Gospel for the slave!

And should we live till years have flown,
Before these wretched ones are free,
We should not, Lord, deserve our own,
If we forgot *their* liberty;
No! still, from earth and heaven we'd crave
Freedom and *Justice* for the Slave! (Hymn 2)

In a fine hymn, Josiah Conder invokes the power of God:

How long shall men by Christ redeemed,
As beasts of burden be esteemed;
And those by Grace Divine renewed,
Be doomed to hopeless servitude?

What though of different hue and race,
Brethren by blood, co-heirs of grace,
Our prayers, our sympathy they claim;—
Their wrongs our sin, their bonds our shame.

Judge of the earth, the orphan's God!
Break by our hands the oppressor's rod:
Oh, when shall every slave be free,
New-born to glorious liberty? (Hymn 4)

Scriptural imagery abounds in *Hymns for anti-slavery prayer-meetings.* Barton, for instance, compares the lot of the slaves with that of the Hebrews in Egypt:

Thou with an outstretched arm didst bring
The Hebrew slaves of yore,
From under Egypt's cruel king,
To Jordan's olive shore.

For *these* thy mighty arm make bare,
Stretch forth thy saving hand;
That they may peace and quiet share,
In freedom's promised land! (Hymn 3)

Frances Rolleston's hymn, also full of biblical allusion, is specially written for women:

We can but weep, while Thou canst aid,
We can but pray, — Thou, Lord, canst save!
Deliverance, e'en as thou hast said,
We for our father's victims crave.

The widow's mite, the orphan's prayer,
The tear of pitying poverty,
Our hands, our voices, shall declare
A nation's deep repentant cry.

Miriam, in strains of glory, hailed
The Triumph of her fathers' God;
The wife of Lapidoth prevailed,
And broke the prostrate tyrant's rod.

Mothers in Israel — daughters, — wives,
On Britain's as on Judah's shore,
To freedom's cause devote your lives,
Servants of God, serve sin no more! (Hymn 5)

In a hymn which contains phrases reminiscent of several of his other hymns, the great Montgomery adds his weight to the cause:

The gates of brass our Saviour broke,
The bars of iron he overthrew,
To lighten every galling yoke,
And every manacle undo;
From man, man's bondsman to set free,
Captive he led captivity.

Lord, as from sin, death, hell, thy power
Unchains the souls to thee that cry,
Of slavery bid the final hour,
Of Jubilee the first, draw nigh;
Oh! haste to set the Negro free,
And captive lead captivity. (Hymn 9)

The hymn attributed to 'Cruciger' is equipped with Scripture references, of which there are twelve; it is full of sympathy for the slave, and expresses the idea that a man's colour matters less than his spiritual status:

O hear those mournful suppliants cry.
Write down their tears, their groans, their grief,
And end their dread captivity,
And send them quick and sure relief.

Black is this Church, but fair her worth,
Because "the Son has made her free",
And Aethiopia does stretch forth
Her ransomed hands, O Lord, to thee.
(Hymn 6)

132 years after these hymns were published, some of them still have a strange poignancy. In a world which still knows, knows only too well, the tragic effects of racial prejudice, those words of Conder still ring true for the Christian:

What though of different hue and race,
Brethren by blood, co-heirs of grace . . .

It is salutary to remember that in 1838 Montgomery the Moravian, Conder the Congregationalist, and Barton the Quaker co-operated in the propagation of a cause which today unites hymn-writers of many branches of Christianity. The nature of the tyranny is changed somewhat, perhaps, but the cause of Montgomery and Barton is essentially the same as that of many of the hymns and songs of Kaan and Carter and Dick Jones in our own day.

We end our survey with a quotation from the first hymn in *Hymns for anti-slavery prayer-meetings,* and, in doing so, we may ask ourselves whether these words of Montgomery are of merely historical interest, or whether they still have force in our time:

Hast thou not seen, not seen from high,
A sore afflicted race ?
Hast thou not heard, not heard their cry,
And wilt thou hide thy face?

And wilt thou turn thine ear away?
How long, O Lord! how long,
Shall weakness lie to power a prey,
And right be ruled by wrong?

Is there no mercy for the slave?
None, with the tyrant, none;
Then stretch thine own right hand to save;
Speak, and it shall be done.

MY FAVOURITE HYMNS

Record of the lecture delivered on 26th May, 1970, at Charterhouse, Godalming, to the Annual Conference of the Hymn Society of Great Britain & Ireland.

by JOHN L. GARDNER

Mr. Gardner began by disclaiming any right to be regarded as an hymnologist (a judgement with which we disagreed) and saying that he could speak only as a practising musician who, from his childhood, had been aware of hymns. He would interpret a hymn as a metrical composiion inteded to be sung by *everyone* in a religious service and only one or two of his examples would assume the presence of a special choir.

He affirmed there were two demonstrable essential qualities in a good hymn tune, (1) memorability and, (2) a certain objectivity. Regarding the latter, a tune must be able to express a variety of moods. Few tunes were composed for particual texts and only a broad parallelism between words and music was expected by compilers of hymn books: but a poem could change its mood from sadness to joy, or from despair to triumph, in the course of a verse—certainly in the course of three of four verses. Reflecting upon tunes he liked he found in them the capacity to interpret sadly or joyously and to fit a number of texts.

His first example was an excerpt from the motet *Ave Maria* by Josquin Des Pres. It was played over on the gramophone. It had the metrical regularity of a hymn, the catchiness of a good tune, great simplicity and almost incredible beauty. Examining its form, he pointed out that each phrase of the music was of the same length and that each phrase closed on the tonic key of C major. There was nothing so elaborate as a movement to another key. The second phrase was exactly the same as the first (memorability depends a good deal on repetition) and only in the third and fourth strains did the composer go elsewhere. Buried in this apparently immediately spontaneous piece of music, however, is a most sophisticated musical technique. The tenor voice sings the same tune as the soprano a fifth lower and a beat later: the tenor could sing the tune a fifth lower two beats later and the music remain equally good: the tenors could also sing the tune a fifth lower three beats later and the music remain good though not quite so interesting. Another attribute is that it is very charming when played fast. This excerpt was used in the Play, "Martin Luther", and there was subjected to various kinds of musical treatment including that of being played fast on instruments with percussion. It sounded quite different but equally charming. "Great tunes" he said, "Can be imbued with highest subjection and yet, somehow, exist apart from the individual."

The lecturer then turned to Luther. Whether Luther created,

re-created, or only assembled tunes, he was responsible for some of the most beautiful melodies in Christian use. Mr. Gardner sang Ein Feste Burg, in German, as it first appeared. He drew attention to its Gregorian undertones; the very way the notes followed each other suggested Plainsong. The musical form is A.A.B., which is found in many Folk songs, chorales and some hymn-tunes. The first section, A, is sometimes varied in its second statement, sometimes, as here, unvaried: B. is a kind of chanson, or closing song (expounded by Hans Sachs in the second act of 'Die Meistersinger' as the progeny of the first two phrases—he uses the metaphor of father, mother and offspring) and this kind of closing song carries the tune to a fine conclusion. Bach's setting is more four-square and, he felt, less interesting. The passing notes brought in between leaps in the melody had also diminished for him the quality of the tune.

The second Chorale example was WACH AUF! a very beautiful morning hymn. 'See how beautifully the middle section evolves from the first! This, to me, is the *sine qua non* of a good tune.'

Thought was next focussed on a tune which came out of the same Renaissance period, which had had many texts, and been associated with farewells and sadness at parting but compensated for sadness by an inner joy. At the basis of personality there was such a hope and optimism that sadness at parting does not cause one to fall to bits. The tune was INNSBRUCK, written by Heinrich Isaak. The shape of this tune is represented by the formula A plus B and then A plus B with a difference. In some melodies the B with a difference only involves a change in the closing bars or even the concluding note. The first phrase led into 'strange country' but then Isaak resumes from the very beginning and goes right through to the end and, when he gets there, is so pleased with what he has written that he plays the end through twice.

Bach set this tune in a different musical arrangement. Owing to the musical style of his era, Bach turned his tunes into a simple 3/4 or 4/4 time, or their equivalents. He does, however, produce a very beautiful setting and it is remarkable that the same tune could produce two such treasures of music. This has been set since. One of the last things Brahms did was to write a chorale prelude on this tune, 'O Welt, ich Muss Dich Lassen'. 'In INNSBRUCK you can say 'goodbye' to life, to a city, to a girl, and it is all figured here, for it brings together the very highest musical, artistic and religious and every other kind of feeling. '

'The Scottish Psalms—a real kind of hymnody—why are they the everlasting repository of our musical affectations?' All these tunes have a clear kind of metre: there is no question of free rhythm, as in the Lutheran Chorales. Their very squareness seems to be part of their quality, like the buildings in which they were first sung. DUNDEE was his first choice, from Ravens-

croft's Psalter, 1621. It has the two-fold binary form, simpler than that found in INNSBRUCK and more memorable than that of the Lutheran Chorales. In this tune the form is very simple because the second phrase and the fourth have the same melody. The difference is in harmonic emphasis, which is done with such restraint by Ravenscroft that it can only be described as high art. The tune flowers in the third phrase; it takes you up into another stratum and then lets you gently down to a full conclusion. 'It is better for a tune to flower later than at the beginning, otherwise you may feel that you have summer at the beginning and that the rest is winter.'

YORK was also a very beautiful melody, with leaps upwards of fourths and descents of seconds. The third phrase echoes the first but the fourth does not replicate the second "There is nothing for these tunes but a plain setting and any attempt to make them more interesting by giving them elaborate harmonies kills them. Many of them will take a descant.

Returning to German hymnody, Mr. Gardner took an example from the big collection of metrical psalms made by Heinrich Schutz, *Psalmen Davids* (1619). These are not at all like the Scottish Psalms because the verses are longer and the music more elaborate. The neccessity to connect their music with the people lay near the heart of later Renaissance and early Baroque composers and this is seen not only in the fact that Schutz set the German language mostly, and was the first great setter of the German language, but also in the style of his music. It contains repetition which lies at the heart of the popular style. This setting, VON GOTT WILL ICH NICHT LASSEN, a very beautiful piece, hovers over the ground between the congregational hymn and the choir piece, though it seems popular enough to be called a hymn.

Mr. Gardner judged the most popular tune of the 19th century to be PRAISE MY SOUL, by Goss. It is too big, too fundamental, too much like the east wind to argue with. What is its secret? It has all the ingredients mentioned above but its economy in construction is part of its secret. There are two motives in the first phrase, which have almost a Lutheran ring about them and then he develops both these ideas. Particularly good is the way he takes those falling notes sung to 'King of Heaven' and makes them into a refrain but changes their accentuation slightly. When he wants to finish the second phrase he does so by turning to the descending four-note motive- "Who like thee His"—and makes them go upward. It is conceived in a moment like all great art.

Some alternative settings in English hymn books were now considered. A favourite poem of the lecturer is, Brightest and best of the sons of the morning, by Bishop Heber. He came to know it through the tune, EPIPHANY (*AMR* 75) by Hopkins. There is a Mozartian quality about this tune—a certain grace and elegance.

It dealt with its musical motives in a stylish and shapely way. It was a gentle tune and the poem, too, was gentle. He had seen the poem set to a tune called LIME STREET, (*SP* 85), which he found unexceptional, without musical logic, competent but dull. In the *English Hymnal* this poem was set to LIEBSTER IMMANUEL, probably because Heber's was a Christmas poem. This reflects a tendency on the part of some compilers of hymn books if there is a tune by Bach to fit a hymn to use it. But we should remember, as Schweitzer points out, that when Bach was harmonising his chorales he was obsessed with the expression of words—the particular words which were to be sung over against those particular cadences. Often when these chorales are put to alien words they do not fit very well.

The lecturer had hoped to look at some tunes which seemed to him to fail because of flimsiness of structure but time allowed for only one example. He took, DIADEMATA. This, to him, was composition and not art. The structure was binary and Dr. Elvey, the composer, had inspiration in the first phrase. The balancing phrase was good, too, but then he seemed to forget what he had written. The continuance had no relevance to what had gone before and the last phrase could be the last phrase of many tunes. Mr. Gardner concluded, 'I think good hymn-tunes are wonderfully organised and also effortlessly organised. Goss did not say, "I will take these four notes for my first phrase and then make them into a refrain" It came to him in one'.

[Reported by W. J. Little]

ON CONGREGATIONAL SINGING—THE NEXT CHAPTER

By ERIK ROUTLEY

Every eleven years or so I submit to my wife's appeals to 'do something about the study'; normally I don't stay the course for much more than a couple of hours, and there is consequently a sort of permanent detritus of paper that has accumulated in corners, and been transported bodily from one manse to another, and rested otherwise undisturbed for a very long time. Helplessly floundering in one of these projects the other day I came across a yellowed and tattered thing which proved to be certain pages of the Congregational Quarterly recording what I said to the General Assembly of the (then) Congregational Union of England and Wales about the denomination's need for a new hymn book. The date was 9 May, 1944—almost exactly half my lifetime ago. I was the fall guy who was appointed to move the resolution that a committee be set up to edit and produce this new hymn book. It was, of course, what appeared seven and a half years later as *Congregational Praise*.

And those, you may say, were the days. Why, there was still

a *Congregational Quarterly*, and a very high-class literary periodical it was. We could in those days afford it; there was a quorum of Congregationalists who could read and write. I suppose that if it existed now it would cost thirty shillings a copy. We thought we were in an age of transition and uncertainty then, but compared with what we have around us now, what security and assurance we rested in! How sure I was (to come down to the point) what a good hymn was and wasn't! I had been taught by Bernard Manning what to say about hymns, and by Martin Shaw what to say about tunes (I had never met either), and there it was. Subsequent events have proved how merciful it was that there were other and more liberal influences at work in the preparation of that hymn book—which I still think might be worse, and would have been worse without those influences.

Exercizing the peripatetic ministry which has fallen to my lot during the present year I have been to some extent able to find out what the churches have made of this book; and while in choosing hymns for unknown congregations I have tended to be conservative and cautious (after all, you may always have an assassin of an organist who will make everything longer than three verses sound hellish), my impression has been that in twenty years congregations have learnt plenty. It's absolutely safe to expect ABBOT'S LEIGH to 'Glorious things of thee are spoken.' There's no question about LOVE UNKNOWN. You positively avoid DOWN AMPNEY and LOBE DEN HERREN because they're becoming hackneyed. Eric Shave's EASTWOOD has become a second national anthem for Congregationalists, and Eric Thiman's MILTON ABBAS a third. And so forth. While there's plenty that people have never, or rarely, sung, there really is quite a handsome proportion of material which was new to those people in 1951 and which is now part of the accepted furniture.

Mostly, I should suspect, they have learnt all this by a sort of osmosis; the consciousness of these 'new' things just grew without much nurture. I very much doubt whether congregational practices were ever anything but a very unusual exercize. There were booster-meetings in the early years when people gathered together to sing, and be admitted to the mysteries and dangers of the new hymn book. But as a rule the learning of new material has been a very accidental business. And if something was tried that didn't get a good reaction at once, it tended to get dropped and forgotten for good. I should expect that we have been well behind the Methodists, though maybe a yard or two ahead of the anglicans, in these matters.

But it's still true that when we introduced these 'new' hymns to our people we always tended to assume that we were teaching them something that was better than what they knew, something enriching and valuable. We knew where we were, and defended

KINGSFOLD against VOX DILECTI, and ALBERTA against LUX BENIGNA on ground we were quite sure was firm. We had the young people with us, for they had been brought up on *Songs of Praise*, or the Briggs derivatives, at the (still new-fangled) School Assembly, and on the whole what we offered was what they had been asking for.

All of which leads me to ask—what now corresponds to the zeal with which in those days we commended 'good standards' in hymnody? In what I am about to say I mean to defend, indeed to plead for, a large extension of congregational education in hymnody: but I cannot do that without sentimentality unless I show and share some knowledge of the quite different forces which are working against us. In those days I was speaking of we were up against ignorance: we guessed, and it turned out that we weren't too far wrong, that once people got hold of what we taught, those people would be grateful. We judged those who resisted us to be stubborn and pig-headed and prejudiced—and there we weren't so far wrong either.

I suppose in a sense we (and by 'we' I mean those of us who were promoting that particular book in the early fifties) were fortunate. We didn't really (it now seems) go very fast or leave many people behind. We didn't attempt to offer people the most radical material from *Songs of Praise*. We were much more like the *English Hymnal* in that much of our new stuff was old stuff that people had never known. We didn't offer anything so austere or athletic as John Ireland's *other* tune in S.P. [164] or even as Geoffrey Shaw's tune to 'Praise the Lord, ye heavens, adore him.' I think we were right, anyhow in both those cases. We did judge that certain secular musicians had missed the point of hymnody and written what might be good music but wasn't congregational music. We put our money on ABBOT'S LEIGH. But what we were consciously avoiding, or denying ourselves, was musician's music—music which we were not faulting because it was vulgar or trivial or unmusical, but merely because we were sure that Jones wouldn't swallow it. I think we had only one moment of midsummer madness, and that was in including a certain tune not by Schoenberg or by Bax, but by Samuel Sebastian Wesley. (I have often said, and still do say, that I like a hymn book to contain one or two such things even if nothing comes of them).

Well, what has happened since is history that every reader of this page will know. People are asking whether there ought to be hymns at all, whether there ought to be a church at all. Christian leaders are advising people not to go to church. More particularly, every canon by which church music was judged in the days when even the revised edition of the Archbishops' Committee's report on church music came out has been questioned, and there is a powerful school of thought which says that they should be abandoned. None of this is wholly wrong, even if certain actions and attitudes

derived from it are, I think, quite dangerously wrong. I have myself contributed to this conversation; for a long time I have suspected judgments which invited church music to be 'dignified', and what I would now say by way of paraphrasing that is that church music may well be so constructed as to earn the epithet of 'dignity', but that if you try to make something dignified you are in danger of such absurdity as waits you if you try personally to *be* dignified. (I know organists who think it's undignified ever to play otherwise than strictly *legato*). I am sensitive—in the view of some, over-sensitive, and I daresay they are right—to the casual singing of words whose imagery has become 'dead metaphor.'

And so I suppose that I ought not to complain when the churches fill their praise-lists with music composed by people who were making a dead set at 'dignity'. For that is what the music of the Church Light Music Group seems plainlly to have had as its aim. I ought not to be as careful as I am never to choose 'At the name of Jesus' in a strange church because I know what tune will be substituted for the ones I should have hoped for. I ought, possibly, not to have told a youngster who wanted the 'new tune' to— never mind what—that I had also taken pains to see that no drinks containing cyclamate were served from the church cafeteria.

But none the less I do say that, and act thus. For of course I am not primarily interested in attacking dignity; what I want is to promote integrity, and that is a quality which that kind of music seems to me to lack as lamentably as the forgotten tunes of Barnby lack it. I would have everybody sing 'At the name of Jesus' to KING'S WESTON; I have no objection to EVELYNS myself, but I have received quite downright reactions against it in my own congregation. Very well—I shall wait for KING'S WESTON, and not capitulate to—you know which.

We are also invaded by the 'folk' cult—and this is a more serious problem, since there is so much to be said for it. Here we do have new words and new thoughts which are at their best incisive and irreplaceable. I know, I think, only one hymn of the 'folk' kind that I should wish to sing otherwise than in association with the General Confession: for nearly all of them seem to be somewhat abrasive in their approach to things. But I have not in any way receded from an admiration for Sydney Carter which began when I first heard 'Good Friday' in 1962. Nor for Malcolm Stewart.

Yet (as the presbyter in Revelation would say) I have this against the hymnody of the folk-cult, that if you aren't very careful it becomes very boring. It becomes boring in the way that a certain kind of amateur post-Barthian preaching became boring among my own contemporaries. It is always in danger of communicating the Gospel as one long nag: and the guitar, an admirable instrument when played musically, has the dangerous limita-

tion of being unable, except in the hands of a Bream, to communicate counterpoint. How often those guitar-symbols over modern tunes supply harmony which is dull, or worse, illiterate! How often one must, when transcribing a tune for guitar, remove some subtlety, some good conversation between bass and melody, whose removal leaves the tune a pale spectre of what its composer intended! There is about much that is urged for the renewal of the church today a healthy and inspiriting vigour: but the great danger is that its results will be so infinitely dull as to reduce worshippers to mindlessness. What could be further from the aims of those who have been digging at the roots of our religious customs than that? But what could be a more impressive proof of the truth of what I here urge than what actually happens at certain kinds of popular service nowadays? A diet of unalloyed Sankey would be dull; or one of unvaried Dykes; and I'll allow that a long series of Sunday anthems composed by the worthy men of the 1925 pedagogic school can become remarkably flat and profitless. Folk music with guitars may be no better. Most of its composers aren't Bachs.

By such arguments as these it can, I think, be shown that whatever additions and embellishments may be offered in musical worship, the most serviceable musical form for congregational praise is the hymn, and that there is no serious competition with a decent organ decently played for its accompaniment. Nor is it difficult to show that most of the popular objections we hear nowadays to the traditional kind of hymn are really objections to hymns ill chosen, ill played and ill sung. Heaven knows our congregations are patient, and it is surprising, once one has noticed the true true ground of such protests, that the protests are not more frequent and even more violent than they are. Those who choose hymns too often fail to take them seriously as lyrics or as music; those who play them too often play unrhythmically and monotonously; and it is not surprising at all that in consequence the congregation utter them listlessly.

I am therefore led to urge that hymns be treated by liturgists and musicians alike as precision instruments. It can now go without saying that as literature and music they should be worthy, since we have said all that a generation and more ago. On the whole there is much less doggerel, in-group lyric in our services, and much less enervating music, than there was two generations ago. We have come to appreciate the possibilities in hymns for communicating the truth with gracefulness and public courtesy. We have not yet on anything like such a general scale appreciated the precision in their use which gives them a chance to do what their gifted authors and composers designed them to do.

All three parties to the activity of hymn-singing can usefully study this subject. In the first place the clergy who choose the

hymns (or whoever does what is properly the clergy's business at that point) will surely find pleasure in distinguishing the special qualities of each hymn in the repertory available to them; the special value, for example, of the short, crisp, epigrammatic hymn, such as 'Spirit of mercy, truth and love', or 'Come, thou long-expected Jesus', and the corresponding effect of the expansive and spacious hymn, like 'Wachet Auf' or 'Eternal ruler of the ceaseless round;' and the particular quality that is imparted to the hymn by its tune, which whether it be familiar or strange, emphatic or yielding, will be the chief interpreter of the words to the singer. Liturgy must decide the categories from which the choices are made, but good taste and sensitiveness to the individual quality and purpose of hymns will help to decide which ones within those categories will be right for such and such an occasion, and which will go well with each other. I doubt if it is necessary for the minister choosing hymns to be in any active sense musical; it is sufficient if he can imagine the sound of the hymn he has chosen as sung by the people for whom he is choosing it. If he positively cannot do that, then he would be wise to take his organist closely into consultation and let him scrutinize his praise-plan before it is finally passed.

The organist, secondly, can get plenty of profit from studying the *minutiae* of hymns, and especially from studying the qualities of those which have been chosen for him in any particular service. It is his business not only to be able to play them in such a way that the congregation is positively assisted in singing but also to contribute something to the success of *that* particular hymn at *that* point in *that* service. If he and his minister are at one in their methods of choice, this will be easy for him. If not, he can compensate to some extent for any failure of attentiveness on the minister's part. Beyond all that, he must be prepared to play properly, to take trouble with registration and phrasing, and at all points to aim at a professional standard of competence.

But when all this is done, what of the congregation? It is becoming increasingly clear that the worshipping life of a congregation will be much enriched if there are some occasions when the people can be helped to appreciate the precision-qualities of hymns. Congregational practices are two generations old at least—that is, if you take them back to Walford Davies and Martin Shaw; of course, if you count the practice-sessions at Carrs Lane and Union Chapel, Islington, in the mid-19th century their history is far longer. But they are still an unusual and slightly self-conscious activity. Too often they take place after a service, less often before a service: but rarely indeed to they happen *within* a service. I cannot speak for churches of other communions, but I am bound to say that such experience as I can draw on indicates that a few minutes at the beginning of a service—when the

people are all assembled and before they have had the chance to opt out—can be perfectly naturally and suitably given to congregational practice of a hymn in that same service which for any reason needs that attention. Enough time is wasted in public worship, especially in the Free Churches, by the prodigal splashing about of unnecessary words to make it possible to say that with a little economy at that point, ten minutes of practice can be accommodated without the slightest risk of inconveniencing the congregation by finishing late.

But there is a greater difficulty, and that is implied in the question who is to conduct this practice. Most people to-day would say that if you happen to have either a minister or an organist who combine skill in communication with skill at their craft, then you are lucky and you can go ahead: but if the minister isn't musical, and the organist can't put three sentences together, then you're stuck.

Quite so: but that isn't taking the matter seriously. That's giving in at the first steep pitch. I suppose there are churches where the minister can't speak and the organist can't play: there I agree that nothing much can be done. But suppose there is a minister with reasonable pastoral sense and a reasonable gift of communication, and an organist with a reasonable amount of judgment and interest in the subject. Let the minister perhaps instruct the organist in elementary speech techniques. Let him say firmly 'You've got ten minutes, and at the end of the tenth minute I shall start my part of the service whether you're finished or not.' Let him encourage the organist to talk to the congregation as he talks to his choir. Let there be a very modest program—one hymn, perhaps, or at the most, two; and let the speaker have decided beforehand what precisely he wants to say. Surely by a sharing of gifts in this way something can be managed? We presuppose a deputy playing the organ, although it is far from impossible for the practice to be taken with a piano (there usually is one) or even unaccompanied.

But devices of that kind ought to be invented for the very important purpose of keeping hymnody fresh and spirited. It is vital that the congregation should be taken into the workshop and shown round—shown why hymns are chosen, what makes them great, what pleasures can be got from singing them. Plenty of use should be made in small churches of R.S.C.M. Commissioners, or other people in the neighbourhood who can take a congregational practice occasionally with special skills. Anything is better than letting everybody, parson, organist and people, get bored with hymns.

Now if we can say that, then we can go on to say that the opportunities for extending the repertory today are greater than they have been for a century. Many of us thought twenty years

ago that although there would be plenty of new tunes, there wouldn't be many new hymns; but we have been proved wrong by Albert Bayly, Fred Kaan, Brian Wren, J. R. Peacey, Fred Pratt Green, John Geyer, Emily Chisholm and all the rest of them. And as if this were not enough, we have new kinds of congregational-cum-choral music, like the Dunblane Canticles, and that superb Hymn to The Trinity in which Pratt Green and John Wilson recently collaborated, and the Langlais Canticle of the Word, and the Gelineau psalmody. And we have many experiments in organistic and instrumental accompaniment, prelude and interlude chiefly as a result of the fertilizing of the Calvanist traditions by modern Lutheranism. For 'ferial' occasions there is a repertory waiting to be used which will soon make anything second-rate in the exisiting repertory not only incongruous but positively unnecessary. 'Lone and dreary, faint and weary' can sink without trace. As for the festal occasions, those great times when choirs and congregations unite for communal and ecumenical praise, the opportunities are enormous—provided they be grasped, and interpreted, and welcomed with a readiness to practise.

There is one other person who can help in introducing modern congregations to the felicities of hymn singing, and that is the editor. Hymn-book editing has shown signs in recent years of the same precision-minded approach which I am venturing to commend in hymn-users. I am bound to add that some very infelicitous examples have also appeared in recent years. But the two Supplements of 1969 both showed a strong and educated editorial conscience. (I must add, in honesty, that I wish that a combination of initial haste and later delay had not conspired to produce such an editorial hotchpotch as another 1969 publication). It seems at last to be accepted that words-only editions are useless. That is excellent. It is what Walford Davies said sixty years ago. But editors can go further—and in *Hymns and Songs* they did. Unfamiliar tunes are much easier to learn from the full music edition when their melodies are printed on a third stave above the four-part or organ score. But beyond that—the opportunity for future editors may well lie in the direction of providing for many hymns a proper instrumental introduction to replace the familiar 'play-over'. It is easier to do this, obviously, when there is no doubt about the tune that is associated with the words; and in order to give full effect to the advantages of this innovation certain congregational habits would need to be altered, such as fumbling with gloved hands for number 554 unil the first verse is well advanced. Indeed, there is much to be said, when a large and unwieldy, not to say unbiddable, congregation has to be handled, for what I once heard in a broadcast from Coventry Cathedral—the first verse being

sung by the choir, and the congregation taking up the tale as the hymn advances.

Editors have for quite a long time now abandoned expression marks, and after the unfortunate experience of the *English Hymnal* have abandoned indications of tempo. Metronome marks turn out to be of little use because of the difference between one building and another, and one congregation and another; yet I am not sure that the occasional general indication of speed would be out of place. *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (1904) used the occasional mark of that kind where there might be danger of a tune's losing its character if it were misinterpreted. *'Slow'*, occasionally applied, would mean 'slower than you usually go,' rather than 'as slow as Westminster Abbey'. I expect it is right to stick to the practice of omitting expression marks from the verses: we had better go on assuming that the organist can read, unsafe though the assumption may be in some surviving cases.

But what it all comes to is this. We need—and the Hymn Society might well devote some attention to promoting—a new consensus of study directed at the precision-tool aspect of hymns. This is the next step that will take us a stage further than the point we were brought to by the pioneers of the last generation. We need some agitation in those places where ministers are trained. If they're trained to sing Evensong why not train them also to communicate the more vulgarand earthy pleasures of hymnody? As for the musicians—why, I am in no position to doubt that at the Royal School of Church Music they are well brought up in these matters, but I think one can gain quite formidable diplomas elsewhere, which are respected by the church authorities, without knowing very much about them.

And finally the ministry of the musician ought to be properly recognized by the church authorities. In those places where there are patterns of authority fairly firmly laid down the musician's position is still somewhat less recognized than it should be; if he is able to exercize his ministry it is because he has the good fortune to be working with a sensitive parson. In non-authoritarian churches like mine perhaps the problem is either non-existent or insoluble (depending on how you look at it). Where there are recognitions of status, the musician should certainly have his. I understand that certain churches are strangely obstinate in this matter, and if it is not altogether impudent to say so I believe that the Methodist church is in an unusually favoured position to give a lead if it would.

Congregational singing, anyhow, could be at the beginning of a quite new chapter. It need not collapse under the pressures of economics or of passing fashion. In the parishes, and the cathedrals, and the campus-chapels, it has the opportunity, at this moment, of prospering for the edification of the whole church.

But it won't have that good fortune unless somebody is prepared to do some strenuous work.

HYMN WRITING TO-DAY

By Frederick Pratt Green

[Editorial note: We are glad to reprint this article which originally appeared in *The Methodist Recorder,* 1 October 1970, and are grateful to the editor of that journal and to the author for permission to do so. Frederick Pratt Green, Methodist minister, is now well known as one of our most fertile and imaginative hymn writers. Several of his pieces are in *Hymns and Songs.*]

I have been asked to tell you how a modern hymn writer approaches his task. I can only do this by telling you how I myself approach it. As one who did not start by writing hymns in earnest until late in life, after a long apprenticeship in the workshop of poetry and because my friends insisted that new hymns were needed, it is quite natural that I should be interested in the relationship between poetry and hymn writing.

A poet writes to please himself and to satisfy his creative impulse. If he wants his poetry to be read, and therefore to be published, he will be compelled to give some thought to the problem of communication, to 'getting it across', but this will be for him a secondary matter.

The hymn-writer, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with 'getting it across'. He must write with sufficient clarity for a congregation to do two things at once: grasp the meaning of his words and sing a tune. The poet can afford a degree of obscurity denied the hymn-writer. It's a relief, in Newman's poem we have turned into a hymn, to pass from the obscurity of

> O generous love! that he who smote
> in man for man the foe
> the double agony in man
> for man should undergo

to the simplicity of

> And in the garden secretly
> and on the cross on high
> should teach his brethren and inspire
> to suffer and to die.

The greatest hymns are masterpieces of profound simplicity. The trouble is, in aiming at profound simplicity it is all to easy to achieve only the commonplace and the trite.

The hymn-writer, of course, is limited in other ways. The poet is free to write about anything which stirs his imagination, and he lets his poem take the appropriate shape. But the hymn-writer is not only restricted to the field of religion, however widely this is

interpreted; he has also to subject himself to strict metrical forms. He can scarcely ever allow himself those variations within a metre which the poet so skilfully uses to avoid monotony. With the best will in the world, it is almost impossible to get the accent on the right note in every verse!

Ideally the hymn should fit the tune like a glove. How beautifully Gustav Holst's CRANHAM fits the first verse of 'In the bleak midwinter'! That it doesn't fit the second verse wasn't his fault but Christina Rossetti's, and only hers because we have turned her poem into a hymn. This is why—if I may indulge in a personal confession—I prefer to write a hymn to a tune than to write the hymn and then try to find a suitable tune. This, very recently, a friend waved EAST ACKLAM [1] in my face and challenged me to write a harvest hymn to fit it. This is the way I like to write a hymn; but it is not at all the way in which I would write a poem.[2]

What about the *modern* hymn writer? What makes a hymn-writer modern is not that he happens to write in 1970 but that he is in sympathy with contemporary Christian attitudes and expresses himself, as far as possible in a hymn, in the modern idiom.

By 'contemporary Christian attitudes' I mean a less anthropomorphic conception of God; I mean a realization that the Church must be a Base for Operations in the world as well as an Ark of Safety for the faithful; I mean a discipleship which regards Jesus as not just the Man for Ourselves but as the Man for Others; I mean sharing the humanism of the age without accepting the conclusion that there is no God to praise.

We all agree that the classconsciousness of Mrs. Alexander's famous lines

> The rich man in his castle,
> the poor man at his gate,
> God made them high and lowly
> and ordered their estate

is intolerable to-day, and that her admonition

> Christian children all must be
> mild, obedient, good as he

is pleasantly quaint in a carol but equally intolerable on all other counts. As an example of a modern hymn take no. 67 in *Hymns and Songs,* which begins—

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[1] By Francis Jackson: **HS** Appendix

[2] Mr. Green has more recently, at a suggestion from the same source, written a hymn to the Holy Spirit to carry John Dykes Bower's LUDGATE.

The God who rules this earth
gave life to every race;
he chose its day of birth,
the colour of its face;
so none may claim superior grade
within the family he's made.

That is modern because it expresses, in present-day language, our concern about racial equality. Perhaps if Mrs. Alexander had lived today she would have written like Richard Jones, or like Geoffrey Ainger, whose lovely carol (*HS* 76) is plainly modern:

Truth of our life, Mary's child,
you tell us God is good;
prove it is true, Mary's child,
go to your cross of wood.

You will notice, with approval, that Mr. Ainger had to write his own tune to it. Or did he begin with the tune? I wish I knew!

Whether the modern hymn-writer—and perhaps specially the folk-hymn writer—has achieved a breakthrough remains to be seen. It also remains to be seen whether the hymn itself, in any recognizable form, will survive an age which looks like computerizing the numinous out of religion.

GEOFFREY BEAUMONT

1903-70

The death of Father Gerard, as he was known at the end of his life, or the Reverend Geoffrey Beaumont, as he became internationally celebrated in hymnody, took place in August, 1970, and removed from our company the first major figure in 'Church Light Music'. Indeed, in this genre of music no other name is half as famous as his. The style of this school of composition is known as 'Beaumont' just as another style is known as 'Sankey.'

He was a controversial figure, naturally. The first widespread recognition of one of his pieces must have been the broadcasing of his tune to 'Lord, thy word abideth', from Martock parish church on 14 October 1956. This at once impressed listeners as a new kind friendly, open-hearted tune, and so beguiling was its rhythm and melody, and so workmanlike its construction, that many had very high hopes of what the style might do for English hymnody. It is probably fair to say that these hopes were not realized, unless it is fairer to say that they misconceived the true aim of Beaumont's invention. When his *Folk Mass* appeared in early 1956 it at once became well enough known for a question to be asked about it on *Any Questions*? and for the whole matter of church music style to become a general talking point. From some quarters the style was hailed as a genuine breakthrough in favour of sincerity and hospitality in worship; from other quarters (notably from the late

Dr. Greenhouse Allt) it was roundly denounced as being hardly better than an imposture.

Neither of these enthusiasms was without exaggeration. It is even yet, fifteen years after the first of these happenings, far too early to come to any reliable judgment. Provisionally it may be guessed that the question Beaumont asked concerning the quality of reverence and 'separateness' in church music was a question rightly asked, and that Beaumont did not wholly fail to provide a good answer. Like Sankey, he had imitators who had much less than his 'flair', and who showed that it is more difficult to write this kind of music than it appears to be. The one expected thing in the development of the cult of Church Light Music was the interest which Malcolm Williamson showed in it in the early 1960s. Apart from his contribution, the cult has remained strictly amateur.

As is well known, the principle was that church music should sound less remote from the experience of modern people, especially of modern young people, and should sound a more welcoming note than that heard in orthodox church music. Metaphysically it was a direct repudiation of the principle 'only the best is good enough for the church', which guided such people as Walford Davies, Martin Shaw and Vaughan Williams. Beaumont, the most modest and outgoing of men, never claimed that his music was good. He claimed only that it was equally suitable for use in church and in other far less expected places for the communication of the Gospel. And it is certainly true that it sounded no more incongruous in the pub (a favourite instrument of his was the pub piano) than it sounded in the sanctuary.

It was never 'jazz', although it made some use of rhythms which jazz musicians also use. It was more strictly the style of the 'musical' drama or the pantomime. It was too little intellectual, and at the same time too superficial in its admission of emotion, to be called jazz. It may be true, therefore—though one should be cautious about dogmatizing on such a matter—that it appealed most to youthful and activist Christians, and less to the unevangelized heathen. It may also be true that some of the effects of releasing into the church this casual musical idiom were not fully expected or allowed for by their inventor.

About all this there remains general doubt, even if some of us have personal convictions which it would be insincere to try to hide. What there is no doubt about, according to all who met him, was the remarkable personality of Beaumont himself. He held many varied charges in the Church of England—at a Cambridge college, at the British chaplaincy in Madrid, and in Camberwell; late in life he joined himself to the Community of the Resurrection, and it was as a missionary to South Africa that he died, suddenly and in full harness. He wrote a good deal of

church music, only a little of which could be called hymnody. Undoubtedly he will rank in history with the great troubadours of evangelism. E.R.

THE REVEREND DANIEL T. NILES, B.A., D.D., D.TH.

1908-1970

Daniel Thambyrajah Niles, Ceylon, was the grandson of a convert to Christianity who became a Methodist minister. "D.T." as he was affectionately known, became one of the outstanding Christian statesmen of our century. Before the last war he served as Secretary of the World YMCA: was elected co-Chairman of the Youth Department of the World Council of Churches in 1947: Secretary of the East Asia Christian Conference at its inception in 1957 and its President in 1968: elected one of the Presidents of the WCC at Uppsala 1968 and he was President of the Methodist Church of Ceylon at the time of his death.

During his period as Secretary of EACC the "EACC Hymnal" was mooted and he was appointed General Editor. One of his main aims was to present the whole range of theological truth. He found insufficient material available from Eastern sources and contributed, in the end, by way of original verse, translations and adaptations, no less than 44 of the 100 hymns in the Asian Section. This Hymnal is in wide use in Asia and is in use in Africa. One of his original contributions can be found in "Hymns and Songs" —the Supplement to the Methodist Hymn Book—No. 28

W.J.L.

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