SAMUEL SEBASTIAN WESLEY AND THE EUROPEAN PSALMIST (1872)

(A lecture given at the Bristol Conference, 1972)

It is very fitting that we should celebrate at this conference the centenary of the publication of S. S. Wesley’s European Psalmist; and I am glad of the opportunity you have given me of looking again at this extraordinary collection. I shall try to avoid repeating here what I ventured to write a few years ago in the closing pages of my book on the Musical Wesleys; and indeed the collection is rich enough in oddities and suggestive enough of its editor’s genius and limitations to stand another look.

The year 1872 was, as it turned out, fairly near the end of Sam Sebastian’s life. He was organist at Winchester Cathedral at the time, and had been there since 1849, having, as you will
singular sensitiveness to the merits of J. S. Bach and of Mendelssohn, there is nobody to touch him in the admittedly barren and depopulated field of English church music at that time. You would expect, then, that any collection he edited would be interesting. Well, it certainly is that. It's also a museum piece, a work-out quarry from which I think it's safe to say that there's nothing to be had now that editors haven't discovered. Yet as an historical document it is quite priceless. It gives all sorts of satisfactions—from the animal malice of the Hymn Society critic who stakes with donnish scorn at anybody who thinks Purcell wrote Burford, or Dr Burney Turbo to the gentler chuckle of the kinder reader who takes pleasure in the odd moments when the Wesley genius doesn't outmanoeuvre the congregational demand. Those moments are few enough; and there are certainly evidences of a primitive amateurism in the way in which Sam Sebastian edited most of the tunes he took from other sources. But warts and all, he's fascinating.

It's no idea to begin by looking at the first page, and then at the last three, before embarking on the book itself. The title page itself is a fine piece of Victorian display-work.

THE

EUROPEAN PSALMIST

DEDICATED BY PERMISSION TO
HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN

A

COLLECTION OF HYMN TUNES
SELECTED FROM BRITISH AND FOREIGN SOURCES
SUPPLYING, IT IS BELIEVED, MUSIC FOR EVERY METRE IN COMMON USE
IN ENGLISH CHURCHES
TO WHICH ARE ADDED
CHANTS, AN EASY SERVICE, SHORT ANTHEMS
ETC. ETC.

THE WHOLE REVISED, AND, WHERE NECESSARY, COMPOSED, BY
SAMUEL SEBASTIAN WESLEY. MUS. DOC.

LONDON
NOVELLO & CO., 1 BERNESS STREET; BOOSEY & CO., 28 HOLLYES STREET
AND
HAMILTON, ADAMS & CO., 32 PATERNOSTER ROW
1872

You turn the page, and you come to the Preface, which begins: 'The present Publication was commenced in compliance with a request made to the Editor long ago, that he would form a Collection of Psalm and Hymn Tunes, including those most commonly used in Public Worship, revised by himself. This he has done, and the result of his labours is now submitted to the Subscribers and the public in general.'
A list of acknowledgments and expressions of gratitude follows. And if you turn to the end of the book you discover who the 'subscribers' were. There is a list of something like eight hundred names, some of whom you will recognize. The Bishops of Bath and Wells, Carlisle, Ely, Gloucester, Salisbury and Winchester are there; the Deans and Chapters of Hereford, Chichester and St Asaph; the organists of Winchester, St Asaph, Cavan Cathedral, Chichester, Bristol (F. E. Gladstone), Rochester (John Hopkins); the Archbishop of York, the Dean and Chapter of Lincoln; Sir Henry Baker of Hymns A & M, Joseph Barnby, Edward Bunnett, the Duke of Buccleuch, the Dean of Durham, W. H. Gladstone, MP, William Horsley, The Reverend (later Bishop) W. Walsham How, Sir Frederick Osbald, Lord and Lady Palmerston (both deceased by 1892), Varley Roberts, Henry Willis the organ builder, Broadwood & Company, piano makers, and a certain the Reverend E. Stephen of Dw Premiership, Conway, and the Warden and Fellows of New College, Oxford. Not, as we shall later see, Dr Dykes or W. H. Monk, . . .

We may piously presume that these worthies paid up and bought their copies, so Sam Sebastian was finally in business. 'Over a long period,' he said in his preface, and yes, I think that it was a long period. I think it is quite obvious that he began on his task well before the full music edition of Hymns Ancient and Modern appeared first in 1861.

If you look through the 615 tunes that appear in the body of the book (there are chants and anthems, about which I don't here propose to speak), your first impression is that you are looking at a very old book. That is because the first thing you realise is that this is essentially a pre-A & M book, compiled by a pre-A & M mind and expressing a peculiar kind of pre-A & M attitude to music. You then find, as you come to look at it more closely, that it seems to fall into three main sections, the first of which is intelligibly subdivided and the third of which is dramatically interrupted.

The first section—numbers 1 to 260—consists of tunes in the three commonest psalm metres—Long, Common, and Short, in that order (8 long metre, 156 common metre, 19 short metre). Just occasionally there is an interloper in a less commonly used metre—slipped in perhaps to accommodate the printer's needs. But broadly, that is it. The sources of these tunes are English and German mostly—alongside many psalm tunes there appear more or less hideous redactions of chorales chopped and trimmed to look like psalm-tunes. Then abruptly you come to the second section, numbers 270 to 414, in which you have mostly German chorales in something more like their proper forms. Quite clearly this was the consequence of his seeing the Chorale-Book for England (1863) and getting in touch with Miss Catherine Winkworth, whose help he particularly acknowledges in his preface. Up to this point you have encountered twenty-nine tunes of his own composition. In the last section, 414 to 615, you have 102 of his own tunes—that is, fifty per cent of the section—together with many other tunes brought in with the specific notion either of reprinting the contributions he had made to Kemble's hymn book of 1864, whose music he had overseen, or of offering new tunes to compete with those which Hymns Ancient and Modern, in both the 1861 and 1868 editions, had brought into currency. The quite extraordinary interpolation in this section, tunes 461-486, I will come back to in a minute.

Broadly, then, you come to part I to see what tunes he thought were suitable for the metrical psalms, to part II to see how he celebrates the invasion of English hymnody by the German style, and part III to see what he wrote himself—and why.

I suppose, then, that he began—perhaps twenty years before—by making a collection of hymn tunes which he supposed to be 'in common use'. About that judgment I really don't know what to say. It is not in the nature of cathedral organists to be great hymnologists (our own Society isn't densely populated with them), and one really does wonder where Sam Sebastian ever heard any hymns. The answer may well be—at Leeds Parish Church, and it might have been somebody there—perhaps the excellent Hook, the Vicar who made that church what it is to-day—who suggested the enterprise in the first place. Even if we allow that, we must suppose that Sam Sebastian had not a great deal of experience of hymn-singing to draw on, for one can't suppose that the cathedrals would have been among the first congregations to take advantage of the famous legalising Act of 1821, nor that before that they would have been eager to embrace the evangelical habit which tacitly authorised their use in anglican worship for a generation or two before. I think that he simply got his tunes out of what he thought were the most respectable books, edited them, and put them on the heap.

That's speculation. What is demonstrable is that his taste was conservative. It is also demonstrable that he didn't know many hymn books. He lists the following as sources for the words (he always prints one verse, not necessarily the first, of the hymn he is setting between the staves)—

Hymns Ancient and Modern
Sarum Hymnal
Hymns of the United Brethren
Collection by the Rev Henry Gwyther and the Rev John Gwyther
Collection of Psalms and Hymns by the Rev C. Kemble
Collection by the Rev John Wesley and the Rev Charles Wesley
Collection by the Rev Dr Waite, Rector of Blagdon, Somersetshire
Collection by the Rev W. J. Hall.

Those were the hymn books on his desk, and it is doubtful if he saw many others. Certainly he was quite content to ascribe his tunes to the composers mentioned in those books, without verifying sources. I don't know if he had Haverghal's fairly recent reprint of Ravenscroft—if he had, he did not always open it at the right moment, since he is content to assume that pretty well every psalm tune came from Ravenscroft. He doesn't always get the names right either: he does mention Damar's Psalter, but it comes out as Denman's, and at many other points he seems to have been too bored with the whole thing to do much about proof reading. Still: in these first 256 tunes—apart from two extra metrical intruders—we have an interesting conspectus of the psalm-tune repertory as he believed it to stand. The whole corpus comes from the period from Day to 1800: he found no need to include any early 19th century material, like Horsley's tunes, or Thomas Clarke's.

The first tune is the old Hundredth, the second, Lampe's Devonshire, the third one of Sam Sebastian's own, called Morning (Rec:B: 374). Glancing through the subsequent pages we discover Gibbon's Angels' Hymn [9] in the 3-2 form, Welcombe [10] with most of the original (not very distinguished) bass, a tune called Leipzig which turns out [13] to be Wie schon leuchtet der Morgenstern crushed into Long Metre, Waremast [18] more or less as we know it but with the last line starting on the third of the scale, Winchester New [30] in triple time, the Magdalen Tower Hymn, virtually unaltered [32], Carey's [33] as LM, without the repeat; many tunes appear under names we do not now associate with them; many others appear in versions we should now regard as corrupt; Tallis's Canon [23] comes in the 18th century form—quite a pleasant melody, but some distance from what Tallis wrote; two of the tunes are by his father Samuel, one (Berkshire: CP 51) by his uncle Charles; nine of the LM tunes are his own. And one of these is Hereford [44].

I must pause on Hereford, and remind you that although many of Sam Sebastian's tunes were written for his grandfather's hymns, this was not one of them. It does indeed give us a new light on Hereford to sing it to the words he chose for it, which are part of Psalm 103 in Tate and Brady's New Version.

(Sung at conference)
from Ravenscroft called Christ's Hospital [129] which Sam Sebastian's devoted disciple Basil Harwood put into the Oxford Hymn Book. And for good measure, another fascinating tune, TARA [102], ascribed to Coombs, which again was spotted by Harwood, and just opposite it, Exeter, ascribed to Jackson of Exeter by SSW [104], but more cautiously given as 'anonymous' at OHB 194, and noted there with one very significant modification of the melody.

Much the same tale could be told, on a smaller scale, of the Short Metre tunes. But looking over this collection one gathers the impression that our good Sam Sebastian was short on one quality which we should nowadays expect to find in a hymn-book editor. He seems to have no views whatever on what makes a good hymn tune. I suppose that in those days, or anyhow in the days which he was celebrating (which were much earlier), that kind of question hardly arose. Many of the tunes he collected are simply dull and formless; an occasional one is brilliant. He was as uncritical as the editorial office of Galliard Ltd. in his choices. One would give much to discover a psalm-tune which he saw and rejected, and to be able to find out why he rejected it. Yes—but there was one reason why he certainly seems to have turned a tune down. It was proscribed if it was contemporary, unless he had written it himself. That's for sure. There is in his book, I think, one tune by a living composer apart from himself: the composer is Kendrick Pyne, whom he knew well, and who wrote in the Musical Times a most valuable memoir of SSW when he himself had achieved a very great age.

I think we had better press on. It is at 270 that SSW suddenly becomes aware of what German chorales ought to sound like. The names he gives them are almost invariably spurious by modern standards (we distinguish chorales by quoting the first lines of their original associations, except for the Passion Chorale and one or two others: he seems to have got out a map of Germany and given them ad hoc names after German cities). But here we have quite a lot of Bach, and many decent arrangements of vintage Lutheran hymns. Some of the most singable of the chorales from the two great Passions are here—and most of the chorales appear in more than one version. He comes across several things which appear in mutilated forms in the earlier pages, and generously gives them all the space they need. Occasionally there are intrusions from other styles. That particularly delightful psalm-tune, OLD 120th appears as ITALIAN TUNE [355], but nothing else is wrong with it. His OWN BOLTON gets pushed in at No. 328, and in this section, 270-414, he has ten other personal contributions, including the very early HAREWOOD [410], the successful WRESTLING JACOB [401] and the earlier and (surely) better version of winscott [370]—the one that is in OHB and CP, as distinct from the other [589] which is in the Church Hymnary. One of his best known tunes, ALLELUIA is also in these pages [592]—a delinquent yet lovable tune, in my view. Yes—taking winscott and that as examples, one observes a curious hesitance in committing himself to a musical statement. There are those two versions of winscott, there are the more remarkable two versions of orisons later on, and there is that alternative note near the end of ALLELUIA. There are many repetitions of arrangements as well—never a direct repeat, always a small alteration somewhere. ALLELUIA seems to me to epitomize this odd insecurity of temper which must have been one of the composer's outstanding personal characteristics. It's a bad tune whichever way it goes, yet it started out so very well.

It is pleasant to see, among other interlopers, Darwall's 148th, Boyce's CHAPEL ROYAL (called worton [340]) and a pleasant offering by Arne called ST MARTIN [316]. Still, once you know your chorales, there is not a great deal here to surprise you.

That brings us to section III, beginning at 415 and running 301 items, of which, you remember, 102 are by Sam Sebastian himself. This was the moment when A & M entered on the scene, and spurred him to creative work. There can't be any doubt that this is what happened. I have indicated in my book that he made a dead set at the typical A & M composers—especially at Dykes and Monk—offering new tunes for a very large number of hymns which they had set. We will come to that in a few minutes, but I think we must first of all look at the collected material. You'll rejoice to see, as a trio, 518-520, the three famous Handel tunes KEDRON (we call it DESIRING TO LOVE), STANMORE, (GOPSAL) and Dr Westbrook and company will approve the fact that he had the cadence in the fifth line right, although there are one or two blots, and of course nobody should now sing this otherwise than as John Wilson has revised it, and CHANDOS (CANNONS). Well—that is only proper, considering that it was Sam Sebastian himself who dressed it and Monk—or the two in the first of all look at the collected material. You'll rejoice to see, as a trio, 518-520, the three famous Handel tunes KEDRON (we call it DESIRING TO LOVE), STANMORE, (GOPSAL) and Dr Westbrook and company will approve the fact that he had the cadence in the fifth line right, although there are one or two blots, and of course nobody should now sing this otherwise than as John Wilson has revised it, and CHANDOS (CANNONS). Well—that is only proper, considering that it was Sam Sebastian himself who dressed it and Monk—or the two in the first

The Easter Hymn [490] ascribed to Carey, Haydn's Emperor's Hymn [494]—not exactly as anybody else prints it, but tolerably well transcribed—and HANOVER [494]—not, as you might expect, ascribed to Handel, but to Croft with a scholarly query-mark.

There isn't, of course, much room here for anything that is not his own: but there is an extraordinary interruption to which I alluded at the beginning. I myself don't know what to make of AMR 343; CP 556; AMR 399.
this batch of tunes with very odd names that suggest (to my terribly provincial mind) Switzerland. They are expansive and written on a very wide choral compass, mostly trivial in their content and congregationally quite unsingable. A fair example is 483, with the attractive title CARIOL, has the same compass, and rises high C three times, once at the end of a line. Where Wesley found these ebullient trifles I have no idea. One or two of them are marked to be sung to hymns we should know; several are associated with hymns from the United Brethren Hymn Book; others have words with which Julian gives me no help, and No. 483 has no words at all.

Well, we will come down from these heady heights and have a quick look at some of the original tunes we find in this section. Everything you know by Sam Sebastian is likely to be here: only one tune of his published elsewhere is not here, so far as I know, and that is SERAMII, which appeared in the 1916 edition of Hymns A & M for 'Angel Voices', and I suppose must have been written after 1872.

I think one of his most felicitous is CORNWALL [441], which it would perhaps be interesting to sing to the words for which he marked it. These are not 'O love divine how sweet thou art', to which it is commonly set now, but a much more robust and sonorous hymn of his grandfather's which begins 'Thou God of glorious majesty'. The whole hymn is worth recording—it is not in the present Methodist Hymn Book:

[Thou God of glorious majesty, to thee, against myself, to thee, a worm of earth, I cry, a half-awakened child of man; an heir of endless bliss or pain; a sinner born to die! Le, on a narrow neck of land twixt two unbounded seas I stand, secure, insensible; a point of time, a moment's space, removes me to that heavenly place or shuts me up in hell.]

(Sung at conference)

O God, mine inmost soul convert! and deeply on my thoughtful heart eternal things impress! give me to feel their solemn weight, and tremble on the brink of fate, and wake to righteousness.

Before me place, in dread array, the pomp of that tremendous day, when thou with clouds shalt come to judge the nations at thy bar; and tell me, Lord, shall I be there to meet a joyful doom?

Be this my one great business here, with serious industry and fear eternal bliss to ensure; thine utmost counsel to fulfill, and suffer all thy righteous will, and to the end endure.

Then, Saviour, then my soul receive, transported from this vale to live and reign with thee above; where faith is sweetly lost in sight, and hope in full supreme delight, and everlasting love.

That is as good an example as you could get of this composer at his best. You note the touch of sequence in the fifth phrase, and the gravitation towards the minor key—both prominent features of many of his more successful tunes. He was, as we all know, an unselfish composer. He could be marvellously dull; he had a tendency to go broody around one note—there is a touch of that in INNOCENCE, and it's much worse in ASHURTON [458]; and he was vulnerable to cliché—I'm afraid I can't even imagine that the famous AURELIA [451], even sung to 'Jerusalem the golden', ever sounded like a freshly-inspired tune, and there are many worse than that.

But in another mood he was an original thinker. I suppose the most startling of his tunes is ORION—which got into Congregational Praise through the urgent intercession of Kenneth Parry (whom in this place we mention with special affection and appropriateness: last time we met here he was with us). It's a non-starter as a hymn tune, but it's a tolerable song, and I suggested in that other place that its true texture is that of the string quartet playing sostenuto, as in the slow movement of 'Death and the Maiden'. He wrote the tune twice [539, 540], once with unison texture, and once, with a new second pair of lines, for four-part singing. And he wrote it for 'Abide with me'. Its first version is unique in his whole output of hymn tunes in having an independent keyboard accompaniment.

He wrote it, I say, for 'Abide with me', marking it 'Kemble, 592'. But he wrote it knowing Monk's tune which A & M had published three years before. So at last we come to the great battle. I said just now that we don't really know what tunes he 'OHB 211; 'CP 622.
would reject on principle. That is true of tunes written in ages before his own—one seemed to be much like another to him in quality. But it couldn’t be more evident that he reacted very unfavourably to the urbane style of Hymns Ancient and Modern. Here is a list of those tunes which he wrote to hymns in A & M, distinguished by actually having the A & M references above them (references, of course, to the 1861 edition with the supplement of 1868).

<table>
<thead>
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<th>No. in E.P.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Written for</th>
<th>Composer or source of tune replaced</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>422</td>
<td>Iona</td>
<td>Three in One and One in Three</td>
<td>Filitz/Monk</td>
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<td>423</td>
<td>Dover</td>
<td>Our blest Redeemer</td>
<td>Dykes</td>
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<td>424</td>
<td>Bury</td>
<td>God that madest earth and heaven</td>
<td>Monk</td>
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<tr>
<td>425</td>
<td>Calvary</td>
<td>He who once in righteousness vengeance</td>
<td>Neander/Monk</td>
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<tr>
<td>430</td>
<td>Wigan</td>
<td>Behold the Lamb of God</td>
<td>‘Old Melody’/ ‘presumably’ Monk</td>
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<td>431</td>
<td>Grosvenor</td>
<td>Jesus lives!</td>
<td>Gauntlett</td>
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<td>432</td>
<td>Bedminster</td>
<td>We love the place</td>
<td>Jenner</td>
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<td>433</td>
<td>Wensford</td>
<td>The strife is o’er</td>
<td>Palestrina/Monk</td>
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<tr>
<td>434</td>
<td>Killerton</td>
<td>Come, pure hearts</td>
<td>German 17c</td>
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<tr>
<td>438</td>
<td>Collingham</td>
<td>O sons and daughters</td>
<td>French/Webbe</td>
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<td>435</td>
<td>Providence</td>
<td>O let him whose sorrow</td>
<td>Anon</td>
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<td>440</td>
<td>Whitestone</td>
<td>Jesus meek and lowly</td>
<td>Ett</td>
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<td>500</td>
<td>Kerry</td>
<td>Sun of my soul</td>
<td>German 18c</td>
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<td>547</td>
<td>Des Irae</td>
<td>Day of Wrath</td>
<td>Dykes</td>
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<td>562</td>
<td>Askelon</td>
<td>Sing Alleluia forth</td>
<td>Monk</td>
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<td>564</td>
<td>Haven</td>
<td>Art thou weary?</td>
<td>Monk</td>
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<td>566</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>The radiant morn</td>
<td>Ouseley</td>
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<td>569</td>
<td>Patmos</td>
<td>Lead kindly light</td>
<td>Dykes</td>
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<tr>
<td>574</td>
<td>Gilboa</td>
<td>Saviour, blessed Saviour</td>
<td>Oakeley</td>
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<td>578</td>
<td>Vigilance</td>
<td>Christian seek not yet repose</td>
<td>Monk</td>
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<tr>
<td>580</td>
<td>Refuge</td>
<td>Abide with me</td>
<td>Monk</td>
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<tr>
<td>582</td>
<td>Keila</td>
<td>When morning gilds the skies</td>
<td>Barnby</td>
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Other hymns re-set by SSW to tunes made famous in the 1861 A & M, but not given an A & M reference, are

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>437</td>
<td>St Trond</td>
<td>The King of love</td>
<td>Dykes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>454</td>
<td>Trinity</td>
<td>Holy, Holy, Holy</td>
<td>Dykes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>524</td>
<td>Communion</td>
<td>Nearer, my God, to Thee</td>
<td>Dykes</td>
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The list, I think, speaks for itself. I do not think that the speculation whether had SSW been in charge of A & M and Dykes been confined to a private publication the Wesley tunes would have won the recognition that Dyke’s did. It wasn’t merely bad luck. Among the tunes in that list there are some distinguished ones. Wigan is so good that I wish somebody would provide us with some new words for it. Whittome is of great interest, I think, though more demanding than Dyke’s famous St Aelred. Some of the others have found their way into later books, but none, I think, is among his very best tunes apart from Wigan. The later books which have been kindest to SSW are the Oxford Hymn Book, Moravian Liturgy and Hymns (1949) and the still current Church Hymnary. But on the whole I think that, Wigan apart, the tunes most of know are the best ones, and the rest have passed into history.

It looks from this as if SSW wrote about 130 tunes which he himself thought fit to preserve. That is quite an output. I am sure that there would have been more good ones, more inevitably singable ones, than there are if he had not been hampered by his rather morose temperament in making that contact with a singing congregation which a tune-writer must have if his tunes are to run free. I am pretty well convinced—and several modern hymnals have, I think, confirmed this opinion—that if you are to write tunes which will run on their own impetus and be sung when you aren’t there to bully and cajole the congregation into singing them, you need to have enjoyed the experience of being there singing in the pew. This disqualifies at once all non-church Christians from competing. I can’t help that. I don’t see how anybody can write a string quartet who knows absolutely nothing about playing "Sung at conference."
stringed instruments; and a string quartet is written to be played by patient and biddable musicians. If you are to write music for the unmusical—the folk song of the Christian laosi—I think it's ten times more important that you should be able not only to write a tolerable tune but to feel what it is going to be like singing it. I doubt if Sam Sebastian had much experience of sitting in pews. As I said at the beginning—it isn't our cathedral organs that turn out to edit the best hymnals or to write the most singable tunes. They write the anthems and the organ pieces and the chants, and God bless their efforts! But to write a hymn tune you must positively enjoy and value the undifferentiated and unmusical rabble that form the congregation—the people who can't be allowed to join in cathedral music. The great tunes will always come from the parishes and the local churches; and nobody who doesn't love local churches can do what Dykes and Monk did. He was a baritone, I think, before he grew tired of such gatherings, RVW did in his earliest days.

But this Sam Sebastian did do. He did stand up for music—music that aimed high and complemented the listener—in a philistine age. He packed more music into his most interesting tunes, but there were plenty who could be trusted to empty all the music out before they had done. To SSW nothing came easily—to too many, church music came disastrously easily. SSW was a pessimist and a disappointed man; but the music he knew he never really betrayed.

And to end with, I invite you once again to look at what I regard as his greatest contribution of all: it is not a composition but an arrangement. I have written enough about it, and I have sung its praises to the point of boring my friends to tears. I don't think anybody really loves it as much as I do, and I expect I am eccentric about it. I can testify that it used to make a profound impression when it was sung by a large captive congregation in a public school. And I have Hubert Parry with me, who wrote his most exquisite chorale-prelude, called 'When I survey the wondrous cross' on it: and Gerald Finzi, who composed a string movement on it. I can't be quite wrong about this. Yes: it is Eltham [68]. He marks it for Psalm 40, and writes its last verse between the staves. We will sing it to some verses of that Psalm, as he designed it to be sung, and using those harmonies which he provided, and which give it such poignant character.

(Sung at conference)

[1] I waited meekly for the Lord, till he vouchsafed a kind reply; who did his gracious ear afford, and heard from heaven my humble cry.

[2] He took me from the dismal pit, when foundered deep in miry clay; on solid ground he placed my feet and suffered not my steps to stray.

[3] The wonders he for me has wrought shall fill my mouth with songs of praise, and others to his worship brought to hopes of like deliverance raise.

[17] Thus, wretched though I am, and poor, of me th'Almighty Lord takes care: thou, God, who only canst restore, to my relief with speed repair.

REVIEWS


It cannot be often that a privately-printed booklet has so wide and influential a circulation as the first edition of Fred Kaan's hymns. Since 1968, when they appeared, many of these have found their way into churches all over the world and into numerous hymnals.

In this new edition, all except one of the original fifty re-appear, together with twenty-one fresh hymns. It is an astonishing achievement, and one should say straight away that respect for this author's insight, imagination and English is fully maintained by the new numbers. This review will concentrate on the latter, and on the forty new tunes (no less!) which Kaan has secured from musicians of stature and which ought to make the book worth buying for themselves alone. (I am not sure that they do, but we will come to that.)

The first to note is a new hymn of creation, 'God the narrator' (2). In the metre of Bunessan (and perhaps written for that tune?), this is given a very piquant flavour by the unusual use of hyphens in the second half of each verse to build up variations on the word 'love'. Opinions will probably differ on whether the pun in line 2 comes off: 'God the narrator, logically speaking, in the beginning/shaped the good earth.' I doubt if many would recognize the reference to John 1 and 'logos' if it were not pointed out in a footnote: once recognized, moreover, it is (I feel) muddled not clarified by the ordinary meaning of the phrase 'logically speaking'.

The new Ascensiontide hymn (20) introduces a familiar crux
of Kaan's theology—In every human being he walks the world again—already seen at its most spectacular in 'Tomorrow Christ is coming' (9). Unfamiliar is the bathos of the last two lines: 'He who enlightens people, he is around and reigns.' Two new hymns of the Holy Spirit are more successful (21, 22): the first a paraphrase of Luther to a tune of 1524, and the second (in spite of an inadequately thought-through metaphor in verse 1) a vintage piece entitled 'Wind of Change'. 'Cut in us the cackle of our Babel mind;/spark us in our language/men can understand.' A paraphrase of II Corinthians 5 (29) is spoilt for me by quasi-rhymes ('around him/surroundings'; 'reason/risen') which have too much of the wrong sort of similarity. 'A Hymn for a United Service' (31) has less bite than usual but one controversial couplet: 'Show us how to meet the future,/planning boldly, acting fast' (my italics). A translation of what is reputed to be the oldest Reformation hymn (33) was worth doing for the sake of the superb Czech tune, a little reminiscent of MARTYRS.

Is a hymn on pollution a contradiction in terms? 'The Rape of the Land' (39) is well done, but I doubt if such sentiments call for singing. 'With fervent dedication' (40) prompts the same comment only rather more so. At his most mordant it seems to me that Kaan, like Brian Wren sometimes, mistakes the function of song and the inherent joyfulness, elevation and serenity of a tune like INNSBRUCK.

A pleasant paraphrase from Zambia, 'While you have time and life' (45) faces a pungent original based on the same two words, and ending: 'Save us from wasting the life of our time' (46). The latter is further notable for being supplied with two new tunes. When Patrick Routley (son of the Editor of this journal) in 5/4 vies with Christopher Bowers-Broadbent in 9/8-cum-6/8, excitement just quickens. But with 47 we are back to AU CLAIR DE LA LUNE, here used for the second time, in a perfectly ordinary arrangement which the publishers have actually had the nerve to copyright. See, for similar temerity, VREUWICH (17) and LONDON-DERRY AIR (48). This practice—and I note that Stainer and Bell have also done it, with Gibbons's song 13 (18)—seems to me an undesirable abuse of the law.

However, the words of 47 are in Kaan's best vein, marrying work and worship in a way positive yet pentitent, world-affirming yet devoted. Fifty-one, in three-line verses, has another of those footnote-needling puns which rather defeat their own purpose: 'Lord, search our hearts and know us well/and let the goodness of your spell teach us to say: Immanuel!'/ Good spell = gospel.' Nearly all the fifties are new and if there were space here each would be worth comment. Among the finest is 'Glory and anguish to God in the height' (52), whose first verse, especially, is a masterpiece of creative paradox. (It is a pity that there is no indication how the extra syllables of verse 2 are to be fitted to Quedlinburg.) 'Come to your Senses' (53) and 'Celebrating God's Reign' (54) will both surely and deservedly become favourites. Fifty-seven and 58 are for the close of worship, and less acid than 'Lord, as we rise to leave this shell' (55). Fifty-nine is a translation from German of 1597.

Finally, a metrical version of Psalm 8 (64) to join those of Psalms 23, 130 and 150 already in the first edition. This must be the only hymn to end with a couplet in brackets: these point out the Christian overlay, and need not be sung parenthetically.

I have already referred to two of the new tunes as exciting. From a range of thirteen composers, including Peter Tranchell and Alan Ridout, it is surprising that the total of excitement is not greater than it is. The only two tunes which continued to run in my head after I had been through the forty several times were common, by Erik Routley (1), and a shamelessly vamping setting by Michael Metcalf for 'He's back in the land of the living' (14). (It is a great disadvantage for purposes of reference that most of these new tunes are unnamed.) Christopher Bowers-Broadbent scores the most successes. Of his six contributions, the first (2) has an elastic feel that perfectly shows off the contours of the words. The second (8) is marred by the dloying effect of too much dominant-seventh harmony. 'An Easter Carol' (17) and 'O God of the ocean' (36) are excellent and 'Lord, do not hold us apart' (51) is a middling solution to the intractable problem of 888. The 9/8-cum-6/8 already referred to (46) is good but somewhat mannered, and Patrick Routley takes the palm in that contest of giants.

Doreen Potter also contributes six tunes, all of which strike me as well-written but unmemorable. As much cannot, alas, be said for H. W. Holmsen. It is charitable to suppose that his tunes here with their guitar-idiom and open-conceived introductions, that instrument and its crude harmonic transitions, and were transcribed for piano without regard for the difference in effect. Once might have been just tolerable: seven times must be reckoned something of a musical disaster to the book. Philip Humphreys, whose tune at 55 lacks inner logic and cohesion, has a better one to 12 which needs three hands to play it, and of which the stresses are the wrong way round for the words ('Your image we see': 'Involved in our life': 'Impisoned in systems'). Perhaps, in view of this and Mr Holmsen, one must posit the existence of an anonymous and idiosyncratic music editor—a hypothesis lent further countenance by the setting of KEWING to 11, where the climactic sixth line of the tune needs to be, but of course refuses to be, a scream of anguish three out of the four times it comes, and by 58, where the opening 'We rise . . .' is set to a plunge to bottom A.
The Tranchells are nearly all in a row—35, 36, 39, 40. All difficult, the first particularly impressive, the second somewhat let down by the words, the third a trifle overdone and the fourth back on form though (as in the third) a new melody for the penultimate verse makes it 'choir only' material. Peter Cutts (45), E. Sangster (26) and James Carley (34) are all congregational enough—though the last is over-blend. C. A. Peloquin (43) is for the gruff.

That leaves the six jolly Ridouts (plus his arrangement of Monklands, also jolly) which come in a bunch at the end. These are playful, which is a relief; and I am sure they are singable; but they are also much less interesting than I had hoped when I saw the name at the top. Denford (69) wants an 'Intro.' mark; Dempsey (66) wants quaver-slurs in bars 3 and 7, but Marriott (68) does not want a quaver-slur in the penultimate bar. At the Beaumontian syncopation in the last line of Denford it seems inevitable that the alto A will be treated as if it were part of the melody. Tastes differ. My impatience with the over-straightforwardness of these tunes may not be shared.

There is no words-only or words-and-melody edition of this collection—a lack which one would have thought would sorely limit its use.

CARYL MICKLEM

John Wesley and the German Hymn, a detailed Study of John Wesley’s Translations of Thirty-Three German Hymns, by John L. Nuelsen, DD, translated by Theo Parry, Sydney H. Moore and Arthur Holbrook, 171 pp. £1.25 from the Reverend A. S. Holbrook, 3 St Wilfrid’s Road, Calverley, Pudsey, Yorkshire, LS28 5RQ.

This is a great treasure. It is also a labour of love. Nuelsen’s original was written in German for the then Historical Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America in 1938. Shortly after it appeared, the printers’ plates were destroyed in an air-raid on Bremen. But the late Sydney Moore had a copy, which he produced at the Hymn Society’s Oxford Conference in 1948. A translation was begun by the late Theo Parry, who left it unfinished at his death in 1957. The work was taken up by other hands, including those of the by then venerable Sydney Moore himself. But in the end, the completion of the translation and the collation of texts, the preparation of notes and indexes, all fell to Arthur Holbrook, and although some of the present work is by other people, and we have some pages of the unique work of Moore included in the text, the whole would never have seen the light without Mr Holbrook’s devoted labour.

What we now have is a nicely-produced photostatic reproduction of typescript, on book pages of normal size, which preserves a quite unique and irreplaceable account of John Wesley’s translations from the German. German hymnody, and the pre-Wesley attempts to translate it into English, is dealt with in the opening pages. Wesley’s methods and skills are then celebrated in the ensuing chapters; learned notes and a transcription of the originals and the translations follow in an invaluable appendix.

The reader will especially notice Sydney Moore’s ‘Epilogue’—it covers only one page (67), but it asserts with emphasis the doctrine that without the influence of other cultures, the hymnody of any one culture becomes atrophied and attenuated. And it is clearly true that the special vitality of English-speaking hymnody is entirely due to the foreign influences which, during the past nearly 250 years, have been allowed to work on it. Consider how it would have been had we never had this pioneer work of Wesley. We should have been singing in half a dozen metres to half a dozen tunes hymns which no doubt contained some inspired lines but which offered a very limited range of hymnodic skill and of Christian experience.

Before Wesley there was virtually no international traffic in hymnody between the continent and Britain. What there was, was feeble and unpromising. But since his time Englishmen have learnt German tunes as well as their own. Can one imagine a time when nobody in England knew Nun Danket? Yet without Catherine Winkworth we should not have known it.

What mattered so much was that Wesley could not only translate, but write; indeed, his translations read just like English hymns—not least because he did not scruple to alter the metre of the original when that suited him (as in ‘Commit thou all thy griefs’). The translations once made good and attractive English hymns, and the bridge at last was built.

It is especially fascinating to me to read this book, since recently I have become involved in the international project of Cantate Domino, in which not only have many new German and French, Swedish, Dutch and Hungarian hymns (to mention only five of many more languages) had to find English translations, but some English hymns have had to be translated into European and Eastern languages. One sees there how relatively light our exports have been compared with our imports, and how Sydney Moore’s principle is vindicated when the hymnody of one country is enriched by that of another. Apart from a little traffic between the German and Genevan traditions, there really was almost no serious translation work done before Wesley embarked on his work. So these 33 hymns are a most important historical monument.

And a few of them are great hymns. This is what this book
so ably and affectionately brings to our attention. For any of our readers it is an indispensable addition to any educated hymnological library, and we urge them to send at once for a copy. We honour Arthur Holbrook for, among so much other valuable work, making it available.

E.R.

ENQUIRY

Dr Osborne, the editor of the new Canadian Hymn Book, asks for information about Charles Jeffries, who wrote the hymn 'Speak forth your word, O Father'. His enquiries have brought no conclusive answer, and he asks that if anyone knows the answer he should communicate with him direct—

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