

**AN APOLOGY FOR
CHURCH MUSIC AND
MUSICAL FESTIVALS**

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An apology for Church music and musical festivals by Edward Hodges

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EDWARD HODGES

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AN
APOLOGY
FOR
CHURCH MUSIC

AND
Musical Festivals,

IN ANSWER TO THE ANIMADVERSIONS OF
THE STANDARD AND THE RECORD.

BY
EDWARD HODGES, MUs. Doct.

OF HENRY HUGHES COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE; AND ORGANIST OF THE CHURCHES OF ST. JAMES
AND ST. NICHOLAS, BRISTOL.

"And let the roving organs loudly play
The praises of the Lord in lively notes;
The whistles, with hollow throats,
The choristers the joyous anthem sing,
That all the woods may answer, and their echoes ring." Spenser.

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AN APOLOGY
FOR
CHURCH MUSIC, &c.

THERE IS NO science, human or divine, of such universal acceptation among mankind, as that no man can be found to impugn its pretensions. In this age of subversion, therefore, wherein all religion is denounced as priestcraft, and civil government as tyranny, we are not to wonder that music also should have its adversaries. And yet, if, in the whole range of human contemplation, there be any one thing which would seem less likely than all others to stir up strife and contention, that subject is the science of sweet sounds. Man, in all ages, from the infancy of the world to the present day, has recognised its power, and bowed to its influence. In every clime, from the frigid regions about the poles, to the burning plains of the torrid zone, music has been appealed to as the *laborum dulce lenimen*, the joy of buoyant youth, the solace of declining age. Practised by saints and angels, lauded by sage philosophers, encouraged by grave legislators, and sanctioned not only by the usage of time but by almost an identification with the most solemn offices of our most holy religion, it has come down to us to be aspersed and vilified in this our day as a pursuit utterly unworthy of an intellec-

tual being, and in its noblest exhibitions to be stigmatized as a profanation of our ecclesiastical edifices.

Now although nothing has been recently alleged against church music which has not been adduced and triumphantly refuted, again and again, in past times; yet forasmuch as it is possible that some persons may be carried away by the specious plausibility with which old sophistries have been tricked out, I have thought it not amiss, in the absence of a better champion, to attempt a brief reply to what modern gainsayers continue so pertinaciously to advance. This is the more necessary inasmuch as the opposition at present is principally conducted by two most respectable public prints, viz. the *STANDARD*, which may be considered as the organ of the high-church section of Toryism, and the *RECORD*, which may with equal truth be deemed the representative of the opinions of the so-called Evangelical party in the establishment. Had the "railing accusation" been confined to that portion of the public press which trades in sedition and revels in the imaginary perspective of the progressive destruction of all our venerable institutions, civil as well as sacred, the reproach might have been borne with honour, and suffered to pass unheeded as the idle snail which leaves its slimy track upon the village steeple. Every Christian musician (and I trust there are many such) feels on the occasion with David, the man after God's own heart, and yet the most musical king the world ever saw, when he bemoans himself in Psalm LV, "For it was not an enemy that reproached me, then I could have borne it; neither

was it he that hated me, that did magnify himself against me, then I would have hid myself from him:" a psalm appropriately addressed "To the chief musician on Neginoth." Still I should not have had recourse to this method of defending the science which I have the honour to profess, had not the editor of the STANDARD refused to insert a short communication which I addressed to him in reply to some of his animadversions; contenting himself in his notice to correspondents with calling me "an enthusiast," and informing the public that "he could not accommodate his conscience to be the means of disseminating *opinions* which he believed to be erroneous,"¹ although the letter referred to consisted principally of a statement of *facts*. Although this conduct of the editor would seem to be a departure from that straightforward rule of rectitude which I would fain believe has been and is generally his actuating principle, I cannot be very angry with him on the occasion, as it has afforded me an opportunity of throwing into a more permanent shape the few arguments which I hope shortly to bring forward.

The STANDARD from time to time, for many months last past, has dropt hints of its antipathy to music. At length it began to speak more distinctly, and under date of the 26th March has a passage of this sort:

"Sensuality of every kind, feasts and festivals, whether culinary or musical, *for both are alike sensual*, ought to be for ever excluded from the seats of learning and religion."

¹ As this quotation is made by memory it is not likely to be verbally correct, but I believe that the sense is accurately preserved.

But its grand attack was perpetrated on occasion of its laudation of the conduct of the Bishop of London, in refusing to patronize the proposed festival in Westminster Abbey. Accordingly, in the paper bearing date March 31, we find such sentences as the following:

"If the Bishop thinks with us, that the propriety of employing a Church as a place of *sensual recreation*, or as a place for the collection of money, received in *consideration of enjoyment of any kind*; if the Bishop thinks with us that the propriety of such an employment of a Church is at best doubtful, it is surely not merely his right, but his duty to avoid taking part in the approaching festival."

"Our views are altogether practical. Laying out of view, for the present, the higher question, whether the application to *secular uses* of things usually devoted to the uses of religion be directly sinful or otherwise, we are quite sure that it is, consequentially, injurious to the interests of the Church that permits it."

"It is almost an instinct, or if it be not an instinct, it must be amongst the earliest truths that open to the mind, which teaches that the things of this world cannot be permitted to intrude upon the consideration of the next, and the services which these last enjoin, without detriment to the purity of religious feeling. Nor must we lose sight of the fact, that at present the Church of England is, in the strictest sense of the word a Church militant; that she is beset with enemies, by no means scrupulous in their warfare—with enemies who could easily enough convert a *muster of singers and fiddlers* in one of her principal temples, with an apparatus of check-takers and door-keepers to collect money for hearing these *singers and fiddlers*, into a very opprobrious similitude of a theatrical representation; and, unquestionably, they who would so represent a musical festival in a cathedral, would find ready hearers amongst the *non-musical part of the world, that is, among nineteen-twentieths of the population*, including ourselves in the unhappy majority. It is very true, there are those who think that music may be made subservient to the cultivation of religion; but it is a doleful truth that there are also those, we are persuaded the *great majority*, if they dare confess it, who feel even the *very small infusion of music usually permitted in our liturgical service, an obstruction, rather than an aid to their religious contemplations*. The truth of the matter is, the musical faculty is not indigenous to our soil.² We must not fall into the common mistake, that a love of songs is a taste for music, even were

² The editor, perhaps, had forgotten that England has acquired among foreigners the musical appellation of "The Ringing Island."

we a *singing people, which we are not*. It is merely the gratification which arises from the combination of variety with regularity, as expressed in sounds, the same which we see exhibited in dancing, which adds to whatever pleasure is afforded by the words of a song,—but we must not get into a metaphysical treatise. Suffice it to say, that as the uninitiated in music do not go to musical festivals for the sake of devotion, so it may reasonably be doubted, that *many* who do go to such festivals may be classed with those who go to church

'To hear the music there ;'

and that *many more* deceive themselves into the notion that their feelings are religious, when they are little better than animal sensations."

Here follows a long quotation from the "Life of Mary Jane Graham," which is very excellent but not to the point, seeing that it is an eulogy upon sacred music, rather than a deprecation of it, and concludes with a touching exhortation to those who are affected by it not to mistake the feelings excited *by music only*, for the influence of genuine religious sentiments : after which the article proceeds,

"And now one word to church music generally—a word which we think it the more imperative to offer, because we have observed a *strong disposition amongst some of the best ministers of the Church, to increase its quantity* by chaunting, to the organ, the '*Te Deum*,' the '*Jubilate*,' the '*Nunc dimittas*,' [dimittis] and other portions of the church service, so eloquent, so full of masculine dignity in their composition, that *music, or any other added ornament, cannot fail to deform them*. The word that we would say, we shall put into the form of a question. Has church music proved favourable to devotion amongst the humbler classes? Has the addition of an organ increased the congregation of country churches? Nay, has it not had the reverse effect? Has it not deprived the people frequently of the interest which they took in what we may intelligibly, though not properly call as a distinction, the vocal part of the church service? Our own experience certainly concludes unfavourably to the use of instrumental music in Divine worship; and for a reason which we have hinted above, we wish to see all the musical part of the service within the old limits, which were sufficient to give rest to the clergyman."