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CATHEDRAL MUSIC

C. FOSTER BROWNE, organist and choirmaster at the Christchurch Cathedral, recently contributed to the 3YA Winter Course talk series, "The Changing World," a talk on cathedral music. He reviewed the history of western religious music and entertained his listeners with some amusing anecdotes of vestry and organ-loft. Here is the text of his talk.

CATHEDRAL Choirs have a long and honourable tradition. As far as England is concerned, we know that one of the first acts of St. Augustine, when he arrived in 597, was to establish a Choir School which is now King's School at Canterbury, the oldest Public School in England. So, long before the Norman Conquest, and long before England had a unified monarchy, the English Cathedral Tradition in musical mat-

in Birmingham and Timbuktu. Furthermore, as the Liturgy is designed for all men everywhere, modern music (which is so often essentially the *personal* expression of its particular composers) would be rather out of place in the liturgical services of the Church. Sir Richard Terry, in speaking of this matter, tells the story of his visiting a church where the stained-glass windows were representations of the Hebrew Prophets, but the artist had used members of the family who had given the windows as models for the prophets. When Sir Richard expressed some surprise at a prophet wearing mutton-chop whiskers, his companion said, "Oh yes, that is Uncle Henry. He is an excellent barrister, but he is not a success as Ezekiel."

Tradition Maintained

Changes, of course, have come, but when we look back on them we can see that throughout them all one broad tradition has been preserved, and that compositions which are within that tradition have lived and those which have departed too far from it have enjoyed only a transitory fame. The first great change was the use of harmony instead of the single melody of the ancient plain-chant. This started about the 9th Century and reached its finest flowering with the great Polyphonic School of the 16th Century. Another change came about then, when a new style of harmony was evolved and instrumental accompaniment was introduced. The older polyphony was always sung a *capella*, or unaccompanied. The 18th Century was not a grand one in Church history in England and except for a few great writers it was a period of decline musically. In the latter part of the 19th Century, Sir Charles Stanford's compositions, together with his great personal influence, once more put church music on a better footing, in the field of composition, and there are many composers of the present day who are ably carrying us through a period of reconstruction, looking to the great strength of the past and using what is fitting in the modern style.

Ancient Customs

The life of a Cathedral throughout the ages has not been subject to much change. The boy choristers have a long and honourable history of hard work faithfully performed, and the present day chorister is like his predecessors. He is a normal healthy youngster who is proud of doing a good job.

Many interesting old customs are associated with the Choristers. In early times there was the ceremony of the Boy Bishop. This took place on the Feast of St. Nicholas, who is the Patron Saint of choirboys, as well as of sailors, thieves, vagabonds and scholars—a motley collection. Starting on this day and continuing until the Feast of the Holy Innocents—and in some places for a longer



C. FOSTER BROWNE

ters was being established, a tradition which has come down unbroken to the present day.

Cathedral music is written in a manner that is governed by its conditions of performance. That is to say, it is written for a small choir of boys and men and is meant to be performed in large and resonant buildings. Music written for a large chorus would naturally not be so effectively sung by a Cathedral Choir, but, to greater degree, music written for a Cathedral Choir would lose a lot of its grace and beauty sung by a large mixed choral society. It is only reasonable to expect, therefore, that the great changes which have come about in secular music and even in oratorio style, are not likely to have had any marked effect on Church music.

Music for All Men

Let us consider the purpose of Church music and Cathedral music in particular. Its main function is to render in music the Sacred Liturgy, whose words are set for every day of the year and which have not varied for many centuries either in time or place. To some minds this may seem a weakness or even an absurdity, but let us remember that the Liturgy is concerned with eternal truths and eternal truths do not alter. If a thing is eternally true it is true in the time of King Alfred and in our own day, it is true in Hong Kong and Valparaiso,

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