

JAILED FOR INNOVATIONS!

The Composer Of "The Old Hundredth" Was Too Modern

(Written for "The Listener" by "SOUTHLANDER")

DONALD VOORHEES, musical conductor of one of America's broadcasting chains, included Billings's "Old Hundred" as a contribution from U.S.A. to a suggested Victory Concert. Most people know the old tune called "Old Hundred," or "The Old Hundredth," which originated many hundred miles away from America. For years we have used one form of it, not only for Psalm 100 in metre, but also for "Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow," that versification of the *Gloria Patri* which we call the Doxology—and which a little girl once called the "dog's holiday." It has even done service for a sung grace before meat, "Be Present at Our Table, Lord."

The composer was Louis Bourgeois, who was born in Paris about 1510. He followed John Calvin to Geneva, where the Consistory appointed him master of the choristers. They also entrusted him with the duty of providing music for the metrical psalter, which was then

being prepared both in French and English, for at that time there were many English and Scottish exiles in Geneva. In addition to his other duties, Bourgeois found time voluntarily to train the children of the town in music. The authorities were so impressed with his character and work that they not only admitted him to the rights of citizenship, but also exempted him from certain duties which the citizens of that time had to perform, such as going on guard, so that he might have more leisure for his special work.

Hint for Home Guards

I suppose that some choirmasters and other musicians in New Zealand, who have to parade with the Home Guard, will feel envious of Bourgeois, but wait a minute—the Genevan choirmaster and composer had plenty of troubles of his own. He was employed by the town council, or Consistory, as they called it, and the members of the council don't seem to have been musicians. First they reduced his salary, and even Calvin (who knew the value of church music) was

unable to have their decision rescinded. In spite of this discouragement, Bourgeois continued with his work, and many of his tunes have been revived in modern hymnals.

Shocking Modernism

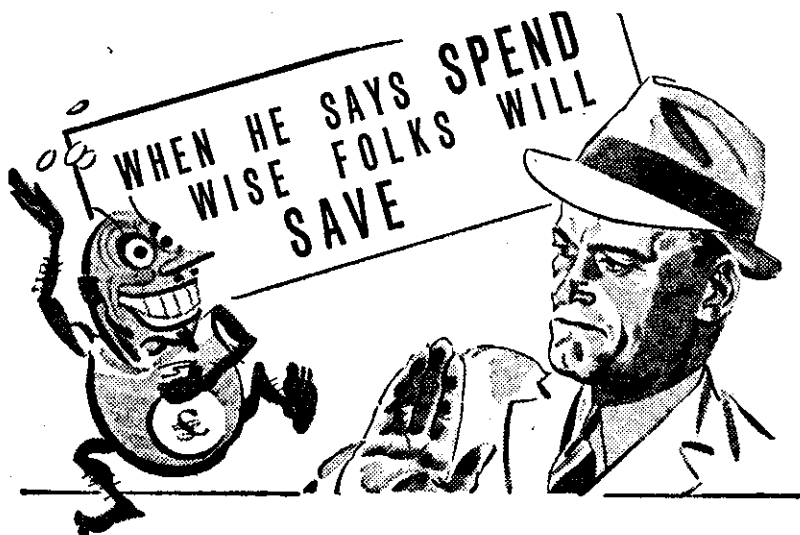
The city fathers in Geneva, however, were very conservative in their musical tastes, and considered Bourgeois was on the high road to a shocking modernism. They warned him, and then a terrible thing happened—one Sunday the choir sang "unauthorised alterations on certain well-known tunes!" So in the year 1551, the composer of "The Old Hundredth" was brought before the town council and sentenced to imprisonment. After 24 hours, Calvin used his influence and had him released, at the same time giving him a lecture, I suppose the same sort of thing that ministers sometimes have to say to choirmasters, "You know the sort of crowd we have to work with, so for goodness' sake go slow on the modern stuff," and so on.

Bourgeois seems to have taken this in good part, but musically he refused



"For goodness' sake go slow on the modern stuff"

to stand still. He next tried to introduce part-singing, and this time the wrath of the council was so great that he at last decided his talents would be better appreciated elsewhere. He left Geneva and now vanishes from history, after rendering priceless service to the psalmody of the Reformed Church. Ironically enough, the alterations for which he suffered later received official sanction and passed into general use.



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