

BOTH SIDES OF THE ORGAN QUESTION.

[We consider it our duty to keep controversial questions out of the Record. We do not, however, see that there can be harm in admitting the communications of a respected brother, who seeks to state the arguments on both sides.—EDITOR.]

MR. EDITOR,—I know that some of your readers would be pleased to have a brief statement of the arguments *for* and *against* the use of musical instruments in the public worship of God. I would not presume to write for the learned theologians and logicians who have solved and finally disposed of this question; but I would write for the benefit of certain Elders and members of our church who are deeply interested in this subject, but who have not, as yet, had both sides of the matter presented to their minds.

The intention of this article may require me to state that the term *organ* simply signifies *instrument*; and that an organ of music therefore means, in a general sense, any kind of musical instrument. Harps, flutes, violins, and cymbals are all organs: although the term is applied almost exclusively to that complicated wind instrument of many pipes, called somewhat contemptuously, in Scotland, “the kist o’ whistles.”

I purpose selecting only such views or arguments as appear to me to have any tendency to a right decision of the question. It would be tedious to notice all the views which one has met with in conversation and in print, on the subject. For example:—one person says, “I like the sound of the organ; it is heavenly: I would vote for the organ.” Another

* That is, “with hearty commendations.”

says, "I dislike the organ: it is always associated in my mind with street organ-grinders and their queer accompaniments." Another says, "I hate the organ, because it reminds me of Popery and of Popish tendencies." Another says, "If King David should walk into church with his harp, what would you say to him?" And still another says, "If it be the will of God that we should have organs, of course we shall have them." While Professor E——— declares that, "The question is one of taste rather than conscience or scripture."

Now, the readers for whom I write are no doubt disposed to regard this question as one of *religious taste*: and one which involves the welfare of the Church and the honour of God. They would fain know what is the will of God: what taste they should cultivate: what musical likes or dislikes they should cherish: and what we ought to say to David or to any other person who should walk into one of our worshipping assemblies with harps, flute, sackbut or psaltery, for the purpose of using it in the service of praise.

But we need some rule to guide us in our judgment. What shall it be? Not our feelings—our preferences or prejudices—which are often bad counsellors in matters of religion; not the roll of great names arrayed on either side of this question; not any selfish considerations connected with ease, expense or trouble, in the event of our adopting or rejecting musical instruments. "The word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy God." So says our Catechism; and our Confession of Faith adds that, "there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed."

Taking, then, this only safe rule to guide us let us examine the question. And as the advocates of instrumental music lay claim to a very high antiquity for their practice—antiquity reaching not only to the days of David, but to the day when Miriam and the women of Israel praised God with psalm and timbrel at the passage of the Red Sea: and as these advocates of instrumental music demand the reason why the organs of music should be now silenced in public worship, it seems proper to begin with the

Reasons against Instrumental Music.

1. Instrumental music, in the worship of God, was an *essential* part of the typical, sacrificial service of the Jewish temple: which service has been all abolished by Christ. This kind of music was "essentially connected with the morning and evening sacrifice, and with the sacrifices to be offered upon great and solemn days. But as all the sacrifices of the Hebrews were completely abolished by the death of our blessed Redeemer, so instrumental music must be abolished with that service."

2. "There was no need, in the New Testament, for a particular commandment abolishing instrumental music. Indeed, it is not the ordinary manner of the writers of the New Testament to inform us what Divine institutions were to be abolished, but only what observances were to take place under the gospel." The silence of the apostle Paul, on this subject, is easily accounted for. Neither Jewish Synagogues nor Christian churches had any musical instruments in those days. It was fully understood that such instruments belonged exclusively to the Temple at Jerusalem.

3. The worship required under the New Testament dispensation is worship "in spirit and in truth," in opposition to the typical and sacrificial worship of the old and abrogated Mosaic ritual. And, in so far as the service of praise is concerned, the New Testament sanctions by precepts

and Apostolic examples, not instrumental music, but only vocal,—the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, making melody in our hearts to the Lord. The harps mentioned in the Book of Revelation are evidently to be understood merely as emblems of symbols, like the crowns, psalms, white robes, incense, candlesticks, stars, and other symbols of that Book, which it would be vain to interpret in a literal sense.

4. If we introduce instrumental music, we admit, in part, a sacrificial service; after which “there is no barrier, in principle, against the priestly system in all its fulness; we may, without hindrance, put the formal, for the spiritual, the symbolical for the real.” Instrumental music is not fitter to be adopted into the Public Worship of the Christian Church, than the incense, the candlesticks, and the other shadows of the Mosaic law.”

5. Instrumental music, even where no sacrificial idea attaches to it, has the effect of carnalizing the worship of God, by changing the spiritual service of praise into a sensuous, scientific performance, not always to the edification of the Church or the glory of God, but too often for the honour of the musicians, and the gratification of the musical taste of the hearers. Thus the service of God is profaned, and the house of prayer turned into a concert-room.

6. It destroys congregational singing, as may be proved by visiting almost any congregation in which the organ is used.

7. “It is worshipping God by machinery.” Whether the bellows be driven by hand-power or water-power; and whether the organ be of the common sort or of the grand swell order, it ever impresses us with the idea of its being a complicated piece of machinery, and of its being out of keeping with the simplicity and spirituality of Gospel worship.

8. Instrumental music is inferior to that of the human voice, when the vocal powers are cultivated as they ought to be. “The vocal music of the imperial choristers in St. Petersburg incomparably surpasses, in sweetness and effect, the sounds produced by the combined power of the most exquisite musical instruments.” “The tones of the human voice, while they are the most simple, are at the same time the most perfect, the most accurate, the most pathetic, and the most sublime, and the best qualified to convey the sentiments of the devout heart in solemn praise to God.” “What is styled Cathedral worship may, for a little time, please and surprise by its novelty; the effect, however, is very transitory, and sometimes produces ideas in the mind very different from devotion.” “When the praises of God are sung by every individual, even of a plain, unlettered country congregation, where both the heart and voice are engaged, the effect is much more noble, and much more salutary to the mind of a Christian audience, than all the lofty artificial strains of an organ, extracted by a hired organist, and accompanied by a confused noise of many voices, taught at great expense to chant over what their hearts neither feel nor their heads understand.”

9. “Instrumental music is neither enjoined, nor authorized, nor encouraged, by the word of God, to be used in the public worship of Christians.”

10. From the history of the Church it appears that the Fathers, the Schoolmen, and the greatest of the Reformers (of the sixteenth century), condemn it.

11. It is contrary to the uniform practice of the Presbyterian Churches of Britain and Ireland since the Reformation.

12. Its introduction would be “a highly inexpedient and dangerous innovation, having a manifest tendency to disturb the peace of the Church, to offend many serious Christians and congregations, and to produce a schism in the body.” Even “the discussion of it is a perilous agitation.”

Lastly, the arguments in favour of instrumental music are mere “plausi-

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bilities," which have all been refuted and disposed of by eminent theologians in whose judgment we may have the utmost confidence.

Such is an outline of what seem to me to be the chief reasons and views advanced in opposition to the organ in public worship.

I shall state the reasons advanced in favor of the organ in my next.

A. McK.

Correspondence.

BOTH SIDES OF THE ORGAN QUESTION.

(Second Letter.)

MR. EDITOR,—In my last letter on “Both sides of the Organ Question,” I indicated the rules that should guide our judgment in the matter; and I gave what may be regarded as a brief but fair statement of the objections or reasons usually advanced against the use of the organ. I would now give an equally brief and fair statement of the reasons or arguments commonly urged in favour of the use of the instrument. I must, first, however, apprise some of your readers that, it is not easy to state the arguments on both sides without *appearing to plead* either *for* or *against* instrumental music. The design of this and the previous letter, is simply to give an impartial statement of what both parties have said, written, and published. The arguments of each party are, I believe, fairly given, both as regards the selection, the nature, and the expression of them. There is, I acknowledge, a strong temptation to allow these writers, in an article like this, to indulge in a pleading or controversial style of argument, but this you wisely forbid in the pages of the Record. The bare argument—unadorned; in all its littleness or greatness; in all its weakness or strength; without any of the embellishments of rhetoric; and without any accompanying appeals to the passions—this is, I presume, what you approve of, and this is what honest and intelligent seekers after truth desire, so as to form an unprejudiced opinion, and give a conscientious decision on the Organ Question.

As the arguments on this side of the question have a relation to those of the other, it is proper, both for the sake of reference and from the nature of the subject, that I should follow very much the same order as in my last communication.

Reasons in Favour of Instrumental Music.

I. It is denied that instrumental music, as an accompaniment to singing, was an *essential part* of the ceremonial law of the Jews : and that for the following reasons—namely :

(1.) That the ceremonial law is found, in its perfection, in the Books of Moses ; and, that, therein we find no requirement of either singing or instrumental music properly so called, in the worship of God. The only instruments of a musical kind required, were the silver trumpets, which were not accompaniments to singing, but were used for calling assemblies, ordering the march of camps, summoning to battle, announcing the approach or commencement of seasons or festivals ; and latterly, they were used in the Temple to call the Levites to their desks for the music ; and to sound, at sacrifice, during the intervals of music while the people worshipped in silence. The silver trumpet seems to have answered, in religious affairs, among the Jews, the purpose of the bell among christian nations. From the days of Moses, until those of King David, embracing a period of several hundred years, sacrifices were usually offered without psalms and without their accompanying instruments. Therefore, instruments of music were not *essential* to sacrifice, and, indeed, formed no part of it.

(2.) In the days of David both the psalms and instruments of music were divinely appointed innovations, not in the *sacrificial* but in the *devotional* part of the public service of the sanctuary. The instruments equally with the psalms were for the purpose of *praising the Lord*. But the service of *praise* and the service of *typical sacrifice* were then as they were before the days of David, totally and essentially distinct. And as to the instruments themselves they belonged to the psalms or service of praise, but not to the service of sacrifice.

(3.) The instruments of music, in the Temple, were not, so far as we know, typical of anything. Even with regard to the silver trumpets the Bible is silent as to any typical meaning which they had. In the Book of Revelation mention is made of the harp as a symbol ; but so are other things such as vials, trumpets, horses, &c., which we do not on that account alienate from their proper literal use. It is, therefore, considered better for both parties to keep the Apocalyptic harp out of the present question. But as to “the instruments of David,” it is nowhere affirmed, implied, or hinted at, either in the New or Old Testament, that, that they typified anything whatever. Neither is there anything in their nature or use which seems to lead to anything like a typical or symbolical meaning. The only thing which the Bible declares as to their purpose is, that they were for *praising the Lord*.

(4.) The chief reasons for the use of instrumental music in connection with sacrifice, were chiefly these, namely :—

(1.) The Jews were a musical people, and it was right that they should use their musical talents, acquirements, and instruments for the glory of God. Thny used instrumental music at marriages, at social feasts, (Isaiah v, 12 ; Luke xv, 25 ;) in celebrating victories and the praises of the victors ; in allaying angry passions, and in consulting God, (2 Kings iii, 15 ; 1 Sam. xvi, 18 ;) in going to sacrifice and in returning from it, in the schools of the prophets, (1 Sam. x, 5 ; Isaiah xxx, 29 ; 2 Sam. vi, 5, 15 ; at funerals, (Matthew ix, 23 ;) and in the palaces of Kings, (Ecc. ii, 8.) There was therefore a fitness that the house of God—the palace of the Great King, (Chron. xxix, 19 ;) when it was built have, with other things befitting a palace, the ordinance of instrumental music.

(2.) The hour of sacrifice was the “hour of prayer,” when *Psalms* were sung. But the *Psalms* were written, or composed, expressly to be sung

to instrumental music. The word Psalm, both in Greek and Hebrew, is derived from a word which signifies *to strike*, namely, the strings of an instrument; and the titles of the Psalms indicate that they were intended to be accompanied by instrumental music. Whether, therefore, the Psalms were sung in public or private, in the courts of the temple, or under the domestic roof, the usual and original manner of singing was with instrumental accompaniments. This accounts for the presence of musical instruments at sacrifice; they were simply the usual and ordinary accompaniment of Psalms.

The conclusion which the advocates of instruments arrive at, from these considerations, is rather a bold one:—They say, that it would be as reasonable to abolish the Psalms themselves as to abolish instrumental music, for both the Psalms and instruments were equally used at sacrifice in the Jewish temple; and they formed together the one service of praise.

II. It is maintained, that the New Testament dispensation of grace, neither requires nor implies the duty of laying aside instrumental music in the worship of God. The writers of the New Testament scriptures mention not a few things of the old Jewish religion which were to be abolished, such as the Levitical priesthood, the Temple of Jerusalem, bloody sacrifices, divers baptisms, the passover and other festivals, (Gal. iv, 10;) and, by apostolic example, the seventh day Sabbath. The Apostle Paul treats particularly of what things were “done away,” or “taken away” by Christ’s fulfilling of the law; but neither this Apostle nor any other writer of the New Testament, expresses or implies that instrumental music was among “the beggarly elements” or the things that “had decayed and waxed old.”

III. It is maintained, that, the scriptures both of the Old and the New Testament warrant the use of instruments of music in the Christian Church; because

(1.) The Old Testament scriptures sanction and require it, not as a ceremonial or symbolical service, but as a moral duty. To praise the Lord with stringed instruments and organs, (Psalms cl, 4;) is often insisted on in the book of Psalms as a duty. What was a moral duty *then* may be a moral duty *now*. Assuredly, the playing now on musical instruments, such as pianos, melodeons, organs, flutes, violins, etc., should all be done to the glory of God, or not done at all.

It is *possible* to do so now as of old. If it be *impossible*, then all such instruments should be laid aside. But if we can glorify or honor God, in *private*, by such instruments, we have in the scriptures, the unrepealed sanction of God to do so in *public*.

II. The New Testament, at least in Eph. v, 19; sanctions instrumental music in the worship of God.

It is but right, however, to state that some of the advocates of the organ attach little or no importance to this passage in its bearing on the present question. Professor E——, for example, says, “The passage in Eph. v, 19, so often appealed to by both parties, says nothing for either.” Others, of this class of writers, however, strenuously maintain, that, the passage is clearly in their favor. Its words are these, “Speaking to yourselves in Psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing making melody in your heart to the Lord.” The pro-organ interpretation is substantially as follows:—

(1.) Here are three kinds of poetical composition to be used in the worship of God, “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.” Of the *spiritual songs* we know but little. Hymns were generally sung without instruments; thus, the Saviour and his apostles “hymned” at the institution of the Lord’s Supper, (Matt. xxvi, 30;) and Paul and Silas “hymned” in

the Philippian prison, (Acts xvi, 25.) But *Psalms*, as already noticed, were expressly intended for instrumental accompaniment; and are here evidently intended to represent something different from hymns and spiritual songs.

2. The outward service in which they are to be employed. (1.) "Speaking to yourselves in them. They are to be used in social and public worship; and, probably, there is intended here the use of them in alternate or antiphonal singing, which Pliny refers to as the common practice of the primitive christians. (2.) "Singing and making melody." In the original Greek the word for singing is "*adontes*," and both parties agree that it refers simply to *the use of the voice* in the praise of God. The English words "making melody" are as expressed in the Greek by the one word, "*psallontes*;" and it is maintained that this Greek word, which the Apostle employs, is one which implies and expresses not only the use of the voice, but also and chiefly the use of a stringed instrument. It is the word from which *Psalm* is derived. It occurs in three other places of the New Testament. In (Rom. xv, 19; and in 1 Cor. xiv, 15;) it is rendered, in our English version, simply by the word "sing," but in James v, 13; it is more fully translated by the words "sing psalms." The New Testament Greek Dictionary gives these three meanings of the word, namely, "To touch or strike the strings or cords of an instrument; to play on a stringed instrument as an accompaniment to the voice; also, to sing praise." But it is maintained that the Apostle having just exhorted us in the preceding word to "sing" with our voice, must mean something different by this word; and the only difference which the word allows is the use of instruments in praise. The advocates of the organ translate the word "*psallontes*" by the English word "lyre-playing," and maintain that the "melody" in our common translation means *instrumental melody*.

3. There is the inward or spiritual service, "in your heart." The whole service of song is to be performed *heartily*; with the spirit and the understanding also. We are to sing in our hearts and play the lyre in our hearts: the outward service being but an expression of what is in the heart.

4. The whole service is to be done "to the Lord." Not to gratify our musical taste, not to catch human admiration; but to honor God.

IV. It is maintained that there is nothing Romish or ritualistic in instrumental music; for the following reasons:—

1. In the Pope's own chapel, at Rome, there is no instrumental music; and the same absence of such music may be found in hundreds of Roman Catholic churches and chapels throughout the world; which shows that it is not an essential or needful part of the Romish or ritualistic system.

2. Instrumental music has long been employed in the worship of God by the leading Protestant denominations; such as the Lutherans, the Dutch Reformed, the Waldenses, the Church of England, the Old School Presbyterians, the New School Presbyterians, the Congregationalists or Independents, the Baptists, and various kinds of Methodists. Now, it would be wrong to charge all or most of these denominations with Romanism or ritualism, since we find among them some of the most intelligent and zealous defenders of Protestantism.

3. As to that particular kind of instrument, called by way of eminence *the organ*, it is true that it was introduced into Europe, between the seventh and tenth centuries, when Romanism was dominant: Romanism did not originate it, but, on the contrary, opposed it. Prof. Karl Hase, in his History of the Church, says "it was introduced in face of continual opposition to all instrumental music." Professor E—— says that, before organs had been brought into Europe, "they had long been in use in the

East, and also in some parts of Africa." In the Imperial Dictionary of the Bible, edited by the Rev. Professor Fairbairn of Edinburgh, there is an article on Music by Professor Lorimer, D.D., in which it appears that the Temple of God, at Jerusalem, had probably its organ. He says, "Innovations upon ancient usage were from time to time introduced; and, among these, mention is made in the Talmud of the use of an instrument in the later Temple, which would seem to have been of the nature of a wind-organ, provided with as many as a hundred keys, and the power of which was such, according to Jerome, that it could be heard from Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives, and farther."

4. The use of the organ is not ritualistic at all. Its use is to guide the voice in singing; give the proper pitch in the music, and sustain the voice at that pitch; enrich the music, and embolden timid singers. "Nobody ever thinks of praising God by the mere sound of the organ."

The organ is therefore neither Romish nor ritualistic, although Romanism and ritualism have both abused it.

V. The organ is found to be a great help in congregational singing. In support of this assertion, the following proofs are given:—

1. There is nothing in the nature of instrumental music to injure or destroy the music of the voice.

2. The natural tendency of all good instrumental music is to excite or prompt us to sing; especially, as the Apostle says, when "we know what is piped or harped."

3. There are now not a few Presbyterian congregations in Britain which never could get good congregational singing until they introduced instrumental music. (See Rev. Alex. Cromar's Vindication of the Organ.)

4. There are hundreds, nay, thousands of Christian congregations, including those of the Methodists, Congregationalists, Baptists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Dutch Reformed, Old and New School Presbyterians, Waldenses, Scotch and English Presbyterians, in which there is hearty congregational singing, accompanied by instrumental music.

5. In those cases where the use of the organ is attended by the decay or lack of congregational singing, the true cause or causes of the evil complained of must, consequently, be traced elsewhere than to the organ. It will be found that such causes as the following are at work, namely:—deadness of religion; the proud and foolish opinion that it is not fashionable to sing in church; the erroneous opinion, that it is not the people's duty and privilege to sing; the want of musical training and taste among the people; and, above all, the introduction of new, strange, and difficult music, which the people cannot sing. Even choirs and precentors, without organs, may thus destroy congregational singing. The remedy for this is found, not in the rejection of the organ, but in placing organists, choirs, and precentors under the control of the sessions or spiritual rulers of the Church, that the leaders of our sacred music may be restricted to simple and well-known tunes.

VI. It is agreed by both parties that we should employ our *best music*, as of everything else, in the service of God. The advocates of the organ, however, maintain that the best music is the combination of the instrumental with the vocal. In support of this opinion, they adduce the following facts:—

1. That all nations, since the days of Jubal, have preferred this kind of music.

2. That our choicest public musical entertainments are conducted according to this opinion.

3. That our houses are furnished with musical instruments, in accordance with this opinion; and we think that even our household concerts are rather tame and flat if without instrumental music.

5. But the strongest proof of the correctness of the opinion is the fact that God himself chose this combination of the instrumental and vocal to be the style of music in his holy temple.

VII. The history of the Christian Church shows that, from the beginning, there have been two parties in connexion with this question. Fathers, schoolmen and Reformers, who differ among themselves on this subject, cannot be our guides, however much we may respect them for their personal worth.

Some of them do not even agree with themselves. For example, the pious and philosophical Clement of Alexandria, who flourished about the year of our Lord 200, first denounces all instruments of music, especially the pipe and flute, as being "more suitable for beasts than men, and the more irrational portion of mankind." He then gives the most fanciful spiritual meanings to the instruments used in the Jewish temple. The "psaltery" means our tongue; "the lyre" is the mouth; "the timbrel and dance" is the resurrection of the dead; "the organ" is the body; "the strings or chords" are the nerves. All this spiritualizing and denouncing of instrumental music is followed by what seems a permission to use it; for he says, "if you wish to sing and play to the harp and lyre, there is no blame. Thou shalt imitate the righteous Hebrew king in his thanksgiving to God."

Where great men differ thus with themselves and among themselves, we are left necessarily in the position of judges—to judge for ourselves; and we are left with the only safe rule to guide our judgment—"the word of God; and the light of nature and Christian prudence ordered by the general principles of the word."

Mr. Editor,—I see that I am a little more lengthy on this side than the other. For this I am scarcely responsible; because the advocates on this side are themselves more lengthy and expect, in justice, to be reported accordingly. It is not the *quantity* but the *quality* of the wares of each party that we are to judge of.

In conclusion, judging from the past history of the Church, and from what we see in the Scriptures, it is scarcely to be expected that we shall all be of the same opinion concerning this question. We shall therefore require great patience, forbearance, and charity. Schism would be, doubtless, a far greater evil than either having an organ or being without one. We require time to think; to think calmly, prayerfully, and without prejudice.

McK.

Baltimore, Nov. 1867.

[While not admitting the force of all the arguments stated by our correspondent on this side of the question, we readily admit the fair and moderate manner in which he has stated them, and we heartily agree with him in his closing remarks. Schism in the Church would be an evil greater than any advantage that the warmest friends of organs could expect to result from their introduction. EDITOR.]