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The Royal College of Organists
SOWERBUTTS COLLECTION
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HYMN TUNES

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HYMN TUNES

WHEN we call our act of corporate worship a 'service' we mean, if we are not using words at random, that in it we are serving God, that we are offering something for His acceptance. It seems, therefore, inconceivable that we should be content to offer anything short of our best. In that Presence there is no place for personal vanity or slovenliness or unskilled presumption: the thought, be it of prayer or of praise, must be the highest that we can conceive, its expression the purest and most reverent that we can utter.

So far we are all agreed. But when we come from principle to practice we are struck by one very remarkable discrepancy. In that part of the service which is devoted to prayer we are careful to maintain a standard of dignity, of earnestness, and above all of authority: in that part which is devoted to praise neither the Church nor any articulate public opinion within the Church maintains any standard at all. *Scribimus indocti doctique*, and apparently everybody is welcome. No doubt there are some churches in which the personal taste of organist or precentor supplies a sufficient working criterion; in the vast majority this is not so, and music good, bad, and indifferent is accepted with equal complacency.

This is specially true of our hymn-tunes. Among

those which are in current use may be found some of the finest melodies ever written; from them the level descends until it comes at last to examples which are wholly unworthy of any place in divine worship: which are trivial or sentimental in feeling, ill-written and ill-harmonized in style; which gained their currency by some tiny point of colour or some misused reminiscence of better work, and have kept it partly by our carelessness and partly by sheer custom and familiarity. Now it is of particular importance that our hymn-music should be first-rate: it is congregational, and therefore most directly affects the whole body of worshippers; it is recurrent, stanza by stanza, and therefore a fault becomes by sheer repetition especially wearisome and offensive. The ground, in itself sufficient, on which we plead that all our Church music should be the best of its kind is here reinforced by a more personal and intimate appeal. Good melody is ennobling to those who sing and to those who hear; of bad melody the utmost we can hope is that it should fail to produce the harm of which it is capable.

Here occurs a possible rejoinder. 'You are arguing', it may be said, 'as though good and bad were terms of universal acceptance, whereas they are notoriously fluid and indeterminate. On what do you base your distinction? And what if the tunes which you call bad are found in practice to quicken and stimulate other members of the congregation? Is it not of more importance that they should be attracted to worship than that we should satisfy your canons of aesthetic taste?' To this I would answer:

1. Between the best tunes and the worst there is an intervening marchland which affords plenty of scope for discussion and dispute. There are many examples which a critic would hesitate to classify: melodies in which some touch of genuine feeling is marred by an illiterate style,

or in which dignity of movement is carried to the point of sternness and austerity. But above these are melodies about which no one has any doubt at all. Nobody questions the supreme excellence of 'St. Anne' or the 'Old Hundredth' or 'Now thank we all our God'. Here is no fluid or indeterminate standard, but universal acknowledgement and consensus. Not only are these the tunes which most fully satisfy the needs of the musician; they are the tunes which appeal most directly and certainly to the hearts of the whole people. At these heights there is no controversy of rule and measure; others abide our question, they are free.

2. 'But some bad tunes are popular also.' Yes, and will continue to be popular until they are found out. We in this country have always been at the mercy of false prophets—many of them, it may be observed, men of blameless personal character. Our grandfathers admired Robert Montgomery: our fathers admired Thomas Haynes Bayly and Martin Tupper: we scatter a few pinches of incense upon literary altars which the next generation will forsake. It is precisely the same with our hymn-tunes. The little sentimental part-songs, which were added to our hymnology about half a century ago, have wound themselves by use and association round the hearts of many of us; and we so take them for granted that it requires some effort to criticize them. But this effort is now being made. There is an increasing number of people who are really hurt and offended by them and whose pleas for consideration should not be any longer overlooked. Experience shows that all people prefer the greatest tunes as soon as they grow familiar with them; that cheap and catchy melodies pass with the changing fashions, and only the best endures. Even if that were not so I should still hold that the dignity and purity of our services have the first claim on our allegiance.

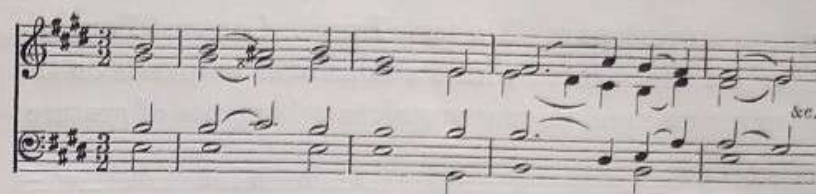
But if it be true, as I firmly believe it to be, that the noblest tunes become also the most widely beloved, there is surely no reason left for taking the less noble into consideration.

3. What, then, are the characteristics by which we may distinguish the better from the worse? Briefly and compendiously they may be arranged under the following heads. A good hymn-tune is one of which the emotional content is appropriate to its place and occasion; of which the melody is well drawn—not made up of notes which bear no clear relation to one another, nor insisting with wearisome iteration on a recurrence of the same note; of which the rhythm is stately and dignified, not vulgar or trivial or obtrusive; of which the harmonic parts (especially the bass) are interesting and distinctive, solving, not evading, the problems which the melody suggests; one of which the stanza grows in value and beauty from the opening statement of the first line to the closing response of the last. To call a tune bad means that it is weak, or dull, or luscious, or that its melody is ill drawn, or that its harmonization is unskilful or perfunctory, or that it sinks from the first line onwards into bathos and anticlimax. It may be well to illustrate this by a few contrasted examples.

(a) Ravenscroft's 'Bristol' opens with the following melodic phrases:



a pure dignified statement of a devotional theme. Uglow's 'St. Vincent' takes the same general theme and treats it thus:



with its dignity lost, its purity tarnished, its whole tone softened and sentimentalized.

(b) 'Hanover' is, among many others, an instance of a fine curve:



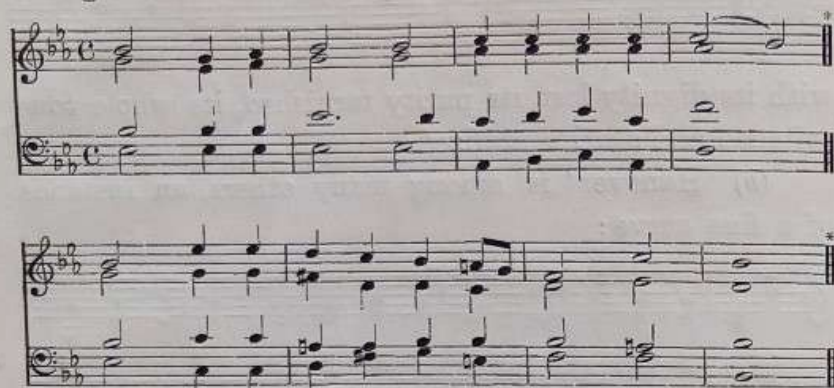
Contrast the tune of 'Change is our portion here', which contains the same note twelve times in succession:



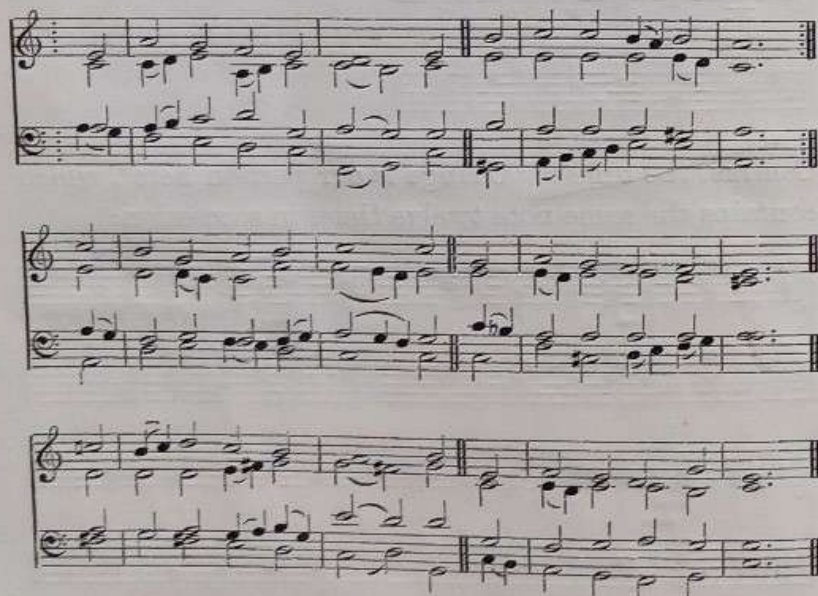
which annoys at a first hearing, and after three or four verses becomes intolerable.

(c) Of noble rhythm there is an endless variety: the stateliness of 'Luther's Hymn', the sweetness and artistry of Attwood's 'Come Holy Ghost', the strong jubilant

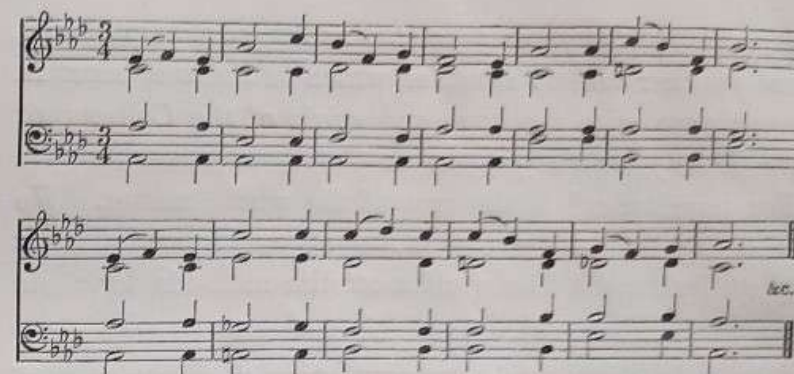
march-movement of 'Ein feste Burg'. Contrast Barnby's 'For all the saints', with its continual emphasis on the wrong words and its inappropriate vehemence of gesture:



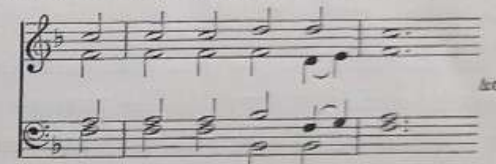
(d) Here again is an example of harmonization in which every part is vital:



Here is one in which it is not: one which sacrifices everything to an attempt at emotional colour, fails even in that, and commits more than one grammatical blunder in the process:



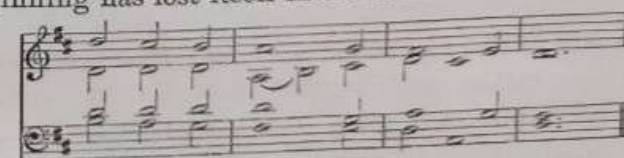
(e) Finally, to set criticism on a higher plane (for climax is the hardest of all ends to achieve, though it is triumphantly achieved by the best tunes in our hymnals), 'Nun danket alle Gott' begins with the following phrase:



and grows in beauty and richness until it comes at last to the full satisfaction of its final cadence. Dykes's 'Rievaulx' opens with a similar phrase, weakened and marred by the too frequent repetition of the same note:



and gradually loses in value as it proceeds, until it comes to a last line which has no more character than a scale in a singing exercise. The stream which ran thin at the beginning has lost itself in the sands:



I would ask any reader to compare these examples with one another and to consider which of them is most in accordance with the tone and spirit of the Collects, or the Litany, or the prayers in the Communion Service. For here indeed is the root of the whole matter. We who are jealous for the music of our hymns do not plead for remote ideals and recondite methods, for 'cold intellectualities and the subtleties of counterpoint'; we are not advocating any particular kind or school of composition: all we beg is that inferior tunes should not be selected when the best are to be had for the asking. There is an abundant wealth of noble hymn-music which has come down to us through the centuries and is not yet exhausted; the Office Hymns, the tunes of Luther, of Bourgeois, of Ravenscroft, of our best English writers from the seventeenth century to the present time, the great tunes of Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, the hundreds of German chorales, pure gold refined in the fire by the genius of Sebastian Bach; the treasury is full to overflowing, and we may gather from it where we will. In so wide a range there is plenty of room for legitimate choice and preference: with such gems at our command there is no need that we should ever make an offering of tinsel and coloured glass.

All, therefore, that is needed is that we should make some effort at discrimination. Nor is this effort difficult. Musicians who have tried the experiment tell me that to point out the defects of an ill-written melody is usually to secure instant and ready assent. 'I did not notice that', people say; 'I did not think of that before': and so they come to agreement. It is of course most easy to do this in the most flagrant cases: let us begin by discarding the most flagrant—or, better still, let us begin by so satisfying ourselves with excellence that we have

no taste left for anything that falls short of it. It is of no avail to talk about prohibition or restraint—such words as these will only raise false issues and provoke needless antagonism. But it is just that we should ask in this matter for the sympathy and co-operation of all who are directly engaged in the practice of Church music; or, if that be too much at the present stage, at any rate for open argument and a fair hearing. 'Do you realize', I would say to them, 'that the music of the Latin Church once sank, by sheer carelessness and neglect, into such degradation that it was all but prohibited by a Church Council? Do you realize that at one time in the history of our own Church "Greensleeves" was sung as a hymn, and at another time "Rule, Britannia"? Do you realize that we have again come to a period in which, by indifference and want of standard, music is admitted into our services which not only gives actual pain and offence to an increasing number of worshippers, but is in their opinion wholly unworthy of the purpose for which it is intended? If so, will you not take some steps to remove the causes of offence? Will you not at least weigh the opinions and accept or answer them?'

In order, therefore, to prepare for such discussion and, I hope, for such ultimate agreement, the Committee of the Church Music Society here issues a list of hymn-tunes which may serve as a statement of its position. The tunes are taken from the collections most in current use: from *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, from *The English Hymnal*, *The Oxford Hymn Book*, *Songs of Syon*, and *The Scottish Psalter*.¹ They are sufficient in number for use throughout the whole Christian Year; they represent

¹ For reasons of space, the last two are not here formally collated. Many of the tunes here indicated are to be found in one or other of them; and it is hoped that a complete collation will be made later.

in standard and quality what we believe to be the best attainable until the day comes (*tandem veniat precamur*) when a complete corpus of the best hymn-music can be compiled. It is needless to add that the members of the Committee claim no authority in the matter; they are students who have worked at this subject, as other students have worked at it; who have convinced themselves that a standard is attainable, and who for many reasons would be glad to see it attained. To put the point briefly: there is an acknowledged evil, an evil which causes growing dissatisfaction. If a remedy is to be found, some one must begin to look for it in the hope that others will join in the quest; this is the reason, and this only, why the present list is put forward.

Nor does the choice of books imply any disregard or disparagement of other collections: on the contrary, some which are not here included may on various grounds be specially commended to notice. *The Yattendon Hymnal*, too short for congregational use, is, within its limits, of incomparable value; and it is much to be hoped that we may some day see it enlarged and made more easily accessible. The volume edited by John Farmer for the Clarendon Press is full of good tunes, and is well adapted to the particular needs of schools and colleges. Hymnals of great merit are in use at the Temple, at St. John's College, Cambridge, and among other learned societies; a few of wider range and more general scope, such as *The Welsh Hymnary*, can readily be brought into line with the present collation. Indeed, the chief difficulty lies not in the paucity of material, but in its almost bewildering multiplicity and extent. And this difficulty does not touch or affect the question of an attainable standard.

APPENDICES

THE Church Music Society does not, as such, concern itself with anything more than the *tunes* of the various hymnals collated. As an outcome of the Society's work within its proper sphere, Appendix I has been compiled. But it is felt that the practical value of Appendix I will be small indeed to any one seeking to know to what tune any given hymn might be sung, but who has not time or inclination to pursue a rather elaborate system of cross-references. With a view, therefore, to the convenience of those who desire to see at a glance what tune recommended is suitable for a particular hymn, Appendix II is subjoined.

As a general rule, the Society has observed its practice of not including in its scrutiny the works of living composers. Where, however, the metre of the hymn is unusual, and no other tune is available, an exception has been made.

Plainsong tunes are not, as a rule, taken into account. It is assumed that nothing can be more proper than the use of the genuine old melodies with the words to which they belong.

Tunes for mission hymns and children's hymns are not included.

The four compilations here considered are, as will be recognized by their initials, the 1875 edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, and the 1904 edition of the same; *The English Hymnal*, and *The Oxford Hymn Book*.

APPENDIX I

Where there is more than one version in use, that which is indicated by thick type is recommended in preference to those indicated in small type. The medium-sized type is used when the versions are identical, or all of value.

Several tunes are known by more than one name; these are indicated as far as possible.

	A. & M. i (1875)	A. & M. ii (1904)	E. H.	O. H.
C.M.				
Abridge	282	485	369	185
Albano	315	283	327	154
Bangor		166	300	280
Bedford; Liverpool	238	478	367	138ⁱ
Belgrave		419	511	
Binchester			398	212
Bishopthorpe		41	408	88 ⁱⁱ
Bristol	53	51	6	46
Bromsgrove	427	214	204	133
Burford		456	447	
Caithness		563	445	
Crediton		61		
Dundee (French)	80	83	43	219
Dunfermline			64	
Eatington		387	639	246 ⁱ
Haweis; Richmond		493 ⁱⁱ	375	279 ⁱ
Hunnys			79	
Lincoln	143	165	140	303 ⁱⁱ
Lobt Gott, ihr Christen				75
London New	373	409	394	205
Loughton		343		
Manchester New		544	168	109
Martyrs	495	125	449	
Martyrdom	238		367	138ⁱ
Melrose			451	
Metzler's Redhead No. 66	150	176	144	231 ⁱⁱ
Nun danket all' und bringet Ehr	459	248	421	
Praetorius			549	
St. Anne	165	403	202	273
St. Austin			638	
St. Bernard	112	118	71	230 ⁱⁱ
St. Columba (Irish)		16	490	
St. Flavian			(87.87)	
St. Fulbert	320	281	161	152 ⁱⁱⁱ
St. Hugh	125	140	139	231 ⁱ
St. James	535	420		
	199	344	210	307

	A. & M. i (1875)	A. & M. ii (1904)	E. H.	O. H.
C. M. (continued)				
St. Leonard	278	417		
St. Magnus; Nottingham	301	171	147	295 ⁱⁱ
St. Mary; Hackney	93	103	84	82 ⁱ
St. Paul; Aberdeen		591	561	
St. Peter	176	491	265	141
St. Stephen; Newington	328	290	337	262
Song 67		450	197	224 (pt. i)
Southill			638 ⁱⁱ	
Southwell (Irons)	236	375		225
Tallis's Ordinal	78	26	46	79
Tye		314		
University		512	98	180
Walsall; Faith		294	13	35
Westminster	169	321	441	250
Westminster New		443		256
Wigton			354	
Wiltshire	290	405	502	311
Winchester Old	62	64 ⁱⁱ	30	120
Windsor; Dundee (Scotch)	90	97	332	224 ⁱⁱ
Yerk; The Stilt	237	388	472	72
D.C.M.				
1st Mode Melody		117	78	
2nd Mode Melody			3	
3rd Mode Melody			92	
Old 22nd			163	193
Old 44th		400		8
Old 81st	439 ⁱ	217	211	132 ⁱⁱ
Old 107th			493	
Old 137th		517	404	229 ⁱ
St. Matthew	369 ⁱⁱ	552	526	
Soll's sein			288	
Tranmere; Christ Church		331		
L.M.				
Ach, bleib bei uns		15 ⁱⁱ		
Alfreton		76 ⁱ	81	
Angel's Song	3	6	259	4
Attwood		180 ⁱⁱ	156	
Beccles; Ach Gott und Herr		87 ⁱⁱ	329	
Berkshire		8 ⁱⁱ	122	125
Brockham				187
Bromley			401	149
Cameronian Midnight Hymn		336 ⁱⁱ		
Commandemens				153
Das neugeborne Kindelein			111	
Das Leiden des Herrn		48 ⁱⁱ	36	
Das walt Gott Vater			101	
Der Tag bricht an		619	167	
Duke Street		822		
Eltham		79 ⁱⁱ		186
Ely; St. Catherine's	75	373		
Galilee	220	141 ⁱⁱ		
Hampton				

APPENDIX II

The first lines of translations of the same hymn frequently differ. This is indicated as on p. 27, 'By precepts taught' (A. & M.); 'The fast as taught' (E. H.).

The form in the E. H. of Faber's hymn 'Souls of men, why will ye scatter?' omits the verses prior to that beginning 'There's a wideness in God's mercy' (see p. 36).

<i>Tune given in one hymnal only.</i>	<i>First Line of Hymn.</i>	<i>Version recommended.</i>	<i>Name of Tune.</i>	<i>Metre.</i>
O. H. 178 ¹¹	A charge to keep I have A few more years shall roll A living stream, as crystal clear A safe stronghold our God is still (God is a stronghold and a tower)	O. H. 314	St. Edmund; Dedication Bath New St. Stephen; Newington Ein' feste Burg	S.M. D.S.M. C.M. 87.87.66.667
E. H. 114	Abide with me (<i>repeating 4th line</i>) Again the Lord's own day is here Ah, holy Jesu Alleluia! Alleluia! hearts to heaven Alleluia! sing to Jesus Alleluia! song of sweetness All glory, laud, and honour All hail! adored Trinity All hail the power of Jesus' Name All people that on earth do dwell	E. H. 70 ¹	Old 124th Beccles; Ach Gott und Herr Herzliebster Jesu Austria; Haydn Alle Menschen müssen sterben ¹ Alleluia; Tantum ergo Valet will ich; St. Theodulph Ilsley; Bishop University Old 100th	10.10.10.10.10 L.M. 11.11.11.5 87.87. D. 87.87. D. 87.87.87 76.76. D. L.M. C.M. L.M.

¹ This tune (as its name indicates) was written for this metre. The melody in its proper form is only found in A. & M. ii. 588. But the harmonies of J. S. Bach given in A. & M. i. 127, E. H. 128, O. H. 102 are the only ones recommended. These versions can easily be restored to the form of the original.