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THE USE OF SMALL CHURCH ORGANS

BY

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FOREWORD

SYDNEY LOVETT's handbook supplies a long-felt want.

He, like many another church musician and teacher, has felt the need of a more enlightened understanding and appreciation of organ accompaniment; an accompaniment at once suited to the number and state of the voices available, and skilfully adapted to the limited resources of a small or unsatisfactory organ.

Authors of text-books for the most part rightly base their instruction upon the more generous possibilities of a large three- or even four-manual instrument. But it must not be forgotten that, in the great majority of cases, the main task of the unfortunate player is to make the best of a bad or worn-out job.

I commend this thoughtful and useful pamphlet to all who desire to learn how this problem may best be solved.

STANLEY ROPER

THE USE OF SMALL CHURCH ORGANS

By SYDNEY H. LOVETT, F.R.A.M., F.R.C.O.

MANY of our country parish churches possess organs which, tonally, are very beautiful. Some of these instruments, dating from a period during which the voicing of flue pipes reached a standard of subtle beauty never excelled, might be considered 'Strads' among organs. It is sad to think that such instruments are, for various reasons, seldom heard at their best.

In all too many cases the condition of these old organs renders them almost unplayable. Some are in a woeful state of disrepair through age, neglect, or lack of means: the mechanism worn, noisy, and uncertain; the structural work decayed and worm-eaten; even the pipes themselves on the point of collapse.

A hasty view of the matter will suggest the scrap-heap and, when means permit, substitution of a modern instrument, possibly not so suitable in tone, but playable and reliable. A more sympathetic consideration will admit the possibility of restoration, embodying reverence for past craftsmanship with preservation of much of that quiet beauty of tone, so appropriate to the spirit of worship, the secret of which seems to be passing.

Another hindrance to the effective use of these old organs is the inadequacy and inconvenience of their pedal-boards. Many of the smaller instruments are virtually chamber-organs and have, perhaps, an octave or so of pedals quite unsuitable for use by feet of average size, fitted quite wrongly in regard to relative positions and practically unplayable and useless. Although the standardization of pedal-boards is so essential to the organist, who plays by touch and not by sight, this reform is comparatively recent. Indeed pedals of any sort were not fitted to English organs until long after their use had been general in other countries; and even now new pedal-boards are sometimes made which do not conform to standard measurements.

In those small organs which have no pedal pipes at all, a complete pedal-board of standard measurements (R.C.O. or Wesley-Willis) with a manual-to-pedal coupler is nevertheless of the greatest possible use. It releases the left hand to perform what is its correct function, i.e. a tenor part whilst the pedals play the bass; it enables four-part music to be played with a perfect legato in many places where the disposition of the parts creates difficulties in this respect for inexperienced players and others, as for example *Hy. A. & M.* 24, 1; it enables music in five, six, or more parts to be played with comparative ease, and it allows the player to practise and perform real organ music as it was written. All organs worthy of the name should have a complete pedal-board of 30 notes, of standard gauge and measurements, and in correct position relative to the manuals. In those parishes (not a few) where no player is available

who can play upon the pedal-board, the device by which the lowest note of any chord played on the manual sounds upon the pedal-pipes (at will) should be adopted and fitted. And the organist should set to work to make good his deficiency so as to enjoy the advantages mentioned.

It needs perhaps scarcely be mentioned that, apart from artistic questions altogether, the cost of new organs is today so heavy that everything that can be preserved and restored should be. It is necessary, however, before old pipe-work of good tone is dealt with, to ascertain that the firm consulted has a sympathetic regard for the tonal ideas of the old masters of the art. It is fatally easy to exchange the quiet all-pervading tone of old organs for costly modern work which may be intrinsically unsuitable.

In the playing of these small organs, particularly during Divine Service, much variety in method and tone may not, at first sight, seem possible. The ordinary technique of organ-playing is, nevertheless, capable of extension in several directions which make more variety available. These methods find opportunity, perhaps, more in the simple portions of the Service such as the accompaniment of psalms and hymns and in improvised voluntaries. In modern 'Services', Anthems, and voluntaries the actual notes are printed in full as they are to be played, with instructions for registration which may be approximately followed. But in the older works it is necessary to read such instructions as are given in the light of some knowledge of the history of organs and of church music. Even as late as the works of the Victorian E. J. Hopkins there occur many indications as to stops which must not be taken literally now-a-days upon modern organs.

It is often not realized that hymn and chant-books print merely four *voice* parts and that it does not follow that the printed notes are the only or even the best way in which accompaniments may be played. In fact it is not too much to say that, given a competent four-part choir, their actual notes are often better sung unaccompanied or accompanied by something which contributes an independent factor to the general effect. If a four-part choir is completely dependent upon an organ for assistance with its notes, for 'boosting up' or for obscuring its imperfections, the singers had far better be employed mostly in simple unison, thus allowing more adequate time for practising those parts of the music sung in harmony. Make-shift and distorted part-singing (so commonly heard) is of no value, and if once allowed, may become habitual and even un-noticed by many. 'Less harmony and better' would be a good plan in many churches. Sir Walford Davies, in *Music and Worship*, suggested that four-part singing should be done by a few more skilled who might practise together at home. Given then four-part singing which *is* reasonably independent, as all four-part choirs should be, the organist will be freed from constant 'nursing' of uncertain singers and have opportunity for development of variety of accompaniment and for the utilization of his resources in a far more artistic manner. It may be said too that this study of variety in accompaniment is much more interesting

and important for the organist than the practice of the cheap and meretricious voluntaries sometimes heard. And the good working knowledge of harmony which such a study will require is really essential to every church musician who cares for the artistic value of his work.

Methods of extending the resources of small organs are not fully treated in instruction books for the instrument and cannot receive much attention during ordinary courses of lessons.[1] They are rather to be acquired through observation of experienced masters of the art at their work—such observation as was possible, for instance, in the days when organ students more commonly began as articled pupils of cathedral and other eminent organists.[2]

Let us suppose a small organ of two manuals with a complete pedal-board and containing the stops commonly found in such instruments. A good many (but not all) of the suggested methods of playing will apply also to an organ of only one manual and pedals.

First as to pedals and bass-parts generally:

It is commonly understood that the playing of the pedal-part an octave lower than written is bad. This statement should be qualified. The method is bad only when followed from a wrong motive, namely, to avoid the difficulty of playing the bass in its proper position, or because of lack of skill with the right foot, or to allow that foot to remain upon the swell-pedal unnecessarily. It is quite legitimate to play the pedal-part an octave lower with the deliberate intention of securing more weight, especially from organs lacking that quality. But the bass, being already an octave lower through being played upon a 16 ft. stop, should normally be kept in its proper octave. The upper pedal-pipes have a plumpness of tone of which full advantage should be taken. A well-written orchestral double-bass part keeps that part generally up, thereby enhancing the effect of the lowest notes when they do occur.

Another recommendation frequently given and needing constant repetition is that the pedals should not be continuously used. Such a habit nullifies their effect, often obscures what should be clear and sacrifices one of the best and easiest means of variety, besides neglecting the opportunity of effect which the *re-entry* of pedals always gives, often in a most striking manner.

Pedal parts should always be phrased. Their punctuation is no less vital than that of any other part—sometimes more so. As the sound of weighty pedal notes needs considerable breathing space to achieve the phrased effect, especially if the pipes are slow in speech, the last minim of a phrase often becomes a crotchet and other terminal notes proportionately shortened. Pedal phrasing is also one of the best means of securing rhythm, so needful for directing singers from the organ-stool. Although choirs whilst singing are seldom conscious of anything, how-

[1] But see 'Organ Accompaniment', J. F. Bridge (Novello), and 'Organ Accompaniment', H. W. Richards (J. Williams).

[2] It is in the hope that I may be able to recall methods observed through intimate association with a good many eminent organists during the past forty years that I am writing these notes. (S.H.L.)

ever played, which sounds in unison with their voices, they are very sensitive to the withdrawal or imposition of weight. Texture and phrasing, rather than loudness, are often the chief elements in accompanimental control.

A great deal more use might be made of staccato pedals combined with legato manuals. This effect is analogous to that of pizzicato of double-bass and 'cello in orchestral playing. In some cases the left hand should play the bass with the tenor part legato whilst the pedal pipes alone perform the pizzicato, but in other cases it is effective to allow the pedal and the coupled manual bass both to be staccato whilst tenor, alto, and treble remain legato.

The playing of a pedal part in octaves is a useful method of obtaining a weighty bass but it needs great skill to preserve legato even in simple bass parts. Quick changes from heel to toe and vice versa are involved, and the ability to slide backward or forward on heels and without releasing the depressed key, especially in approaching or after quitting a short key. The method is therefore only for the expert. A pedal octave-coupler would be useful in small organs. Modern pedal-playing makes much more use of heels, and consequently less of crossing of feet than did the earlier methods. The Stainer school of pedalling may be supplemented from books by Burnham Horner and Ellingford (Novello) and an article by the latter in *The Organ* of July 1927 should be studied. Skilled players are often able, whilst using a lever swell-pedal, to carry the left foot alone as high as the upper B flat upon radiating pedal-boards, such a procedure requiring facility in the technique mentioned above and the ability to play intervals as wide as fourths with one foot whilst preserving perfect legato.

A manual bass in octaves (with R. H. playing remaining parts) is occasionally possible where the range of the part permits. This supplies a 16 ft. bass effect other than the monotonous wooden pedal, but it needs careful consideration of the fingering; changing fingers and free use of 4th and 3rd fingers in place of successive 5th in left hand.

Manual Technique

No satisfactory organ playing can be achieved without mastery of real legato, phrasing, and rhythm. Schumann said that every student of the pianoforte should take a course upon the organ also, to learn what real legato means and how to acquire it. It is true that many who play upon pianos never do acquire it, masking their failure in this respect by insidious use of the sustaining pedal. Upon the organ this deficiency is at once exposed to the musician but the general public fails to detect wherein lies the fault. Many of the younger generation, indeed, have their taste vitiated by familiarity with the effect of organs treated as instruments of percussion in places other than churches. Real legato demands meticulous attention to the matter of fingering and command of such devices as changing fingers upon a key, &c. All this can be studied in such organ Tutors as those of Stainer, Alcock, Buck, and

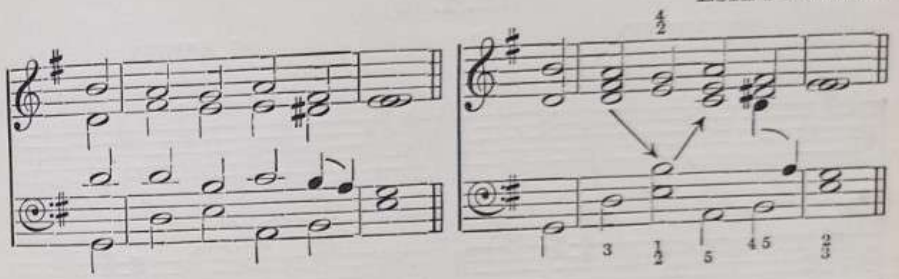
Ellingford, and the young organist might well begin by comparing the accompaniments to the unison verses of Goss's *Praise, my Soul* with the verse set for four voices in harmony.

The equal division of four vocal parts upon two staves of short score does not necessarily imply a like division between the hands. Especially in playing upon manuals alone, difficulties arising through wide separation of parts must be studied to discover the best points at which to transfer temporarily to the other hand any part which is moving beyond convenient reach.

Ex. 1. (*a*)

PRINTED PLAYED

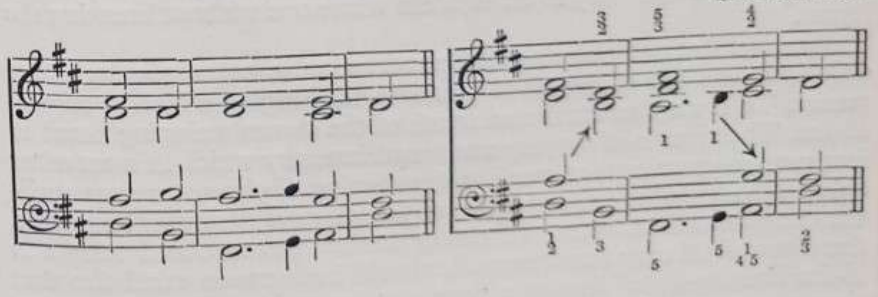
ESTE'S PSALTER.



Ex. 1. (*b*)

PRINTED PLAYED

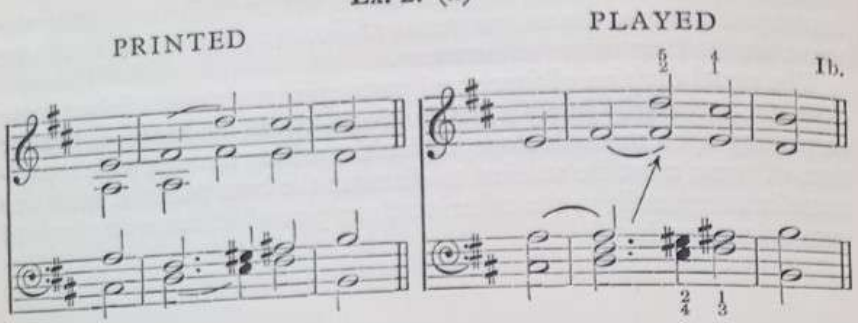
'STRACATHRO'.



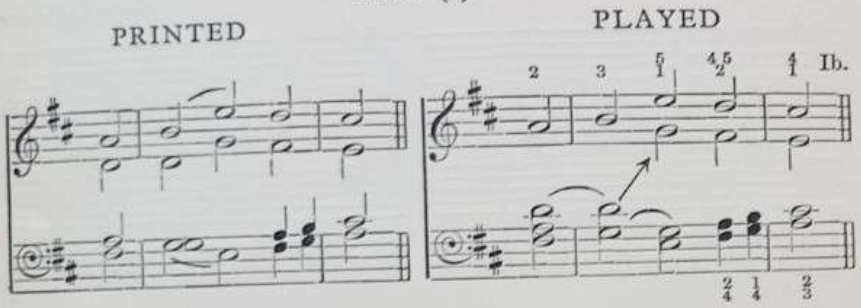
Ex. 1 (*a*) and (*b*), printed above, illustrate treatment of cases arising out of distance between tenor and bass parts.

Ex. 2 (*a*) and (*b*), below, show successions of 6ths not easy for small hands to play legato, and how they may be simplified.

Ex. 2. (*a*)



Ex. 2. (*b*)



Small problems in legato playing such as these are common in hymns and chants but in most cases they can be solved by part-transference and good fingering. It will be noticed from both Ex. (*b*) that any finger can slip from a black key to an adjacent white one without breaking the legato.

Phrasing. Lack of phrasing and punctuation in organ playing is not only inartistic but is also detrimental to the singing which it accompanies. To it may be attributed much of the slovenly singing heard in choirs. The niceties of varying stress and intensity which in most other instruments contribute so much to the shaping of phrases are not available on the organ, and the methods of phrasing are what may be termed one-dimensional. Accuracy of timing in key pressure and release is therefore of primary importance. It should be borne in mind also that if the holding-up of rhythmic flow is to be avoided, the punctuation time must come from the note preceding, and that the spacing thus induced will produce apparent stress on the first note which follows. For example, – ⏑, – ⏑, will be expressed by crotchet, quaver; crotchet, quaver; even if all the notes are printed as crotchets.

A striking example of the efficacy of phrasing is still remembered by those who heard Stainer, at St. Paul's Cathedral, play the whole of Bach's great E minor Fugue (known as the 'Wedge') which fills eight

pages in Peter's edition, upon a single diapason stop. They have said that the interest was completely maintained throughout, solely by the aptness of the phrasing.

Rhythm. Owing to the nature of its tone-production and the mechanism between finger and pipe, the need of rhythm is more strongly felt in the playing of the organ than any other instrument. The word rhythm denotes much more than the mere presence of dotted notes and a prevailing staccato. It is used in reference to movement in various aspects. There is the rhythm of pulsations or beats; that of figuration within or combining such beats; the rhythm of phrase; and that other rhythm, evident in all works of art, which is cumulative, directional, and operative throughout a design, giving it unity. Musical rhythm, in a word, is Life, manifest within the sphere of time. Technically, beyond the obvious interpretation of notational time values, it will be found to be closely bound up with phrasing, accentuation, and quantity. Vitality cannot emanate from a sluggish mind, and the first requirement for a rhythmic performance is a lively interest in the music itself. Students may be referred to a chapter in Stanford's *Musical Composition* and to the many references in Plunket Greene's *Interpretation in Song* (both Stainer and Bell). See also a chapter in Stewart Macpherson's *Form in Music* (J. Williams) and another, by W. R. Anderson, in Bacharach's *Musical Companion* (Gollancz).

Variety in Accompaniment

Even upon the smallest organs variety may be obtained by means of diversity in pitch, texture, weight, or tone-colour, by use of melodic prominence, &c.

Pitch. In the accompaniment of an efficient four-part choir considerable contrast may be attained by use of stops varying in pitch or by changes in the position of the hands upon the manuals. In this latter method recourse will be had to inversion of parts. (See books on 'Organ Accompaniment' previously mentioned.) But to achieve adaptations of vocal parts at sight demands practice and a knowledge of harmony.

The Fauxbourdon and Descant versions in hymnals and in such books as *The Descant Hymn Book*, vols. i and ii (Novello), *Descants on Hymns in the English Hymnal*, Geoffrey Shaw (O.U.P.), and *The Tenor Tune Book* (Faith Press) may also be used for the same purpose.

Texture, weight, and power. Although, in their application and effect, these qualities overlap at certain points, they must not be confused one with another. *Texture* has reference to the number of parts and to their spacing. Tenuity of two or three parts (or even a single strand of melody) may be contrasted with increased density up to five or six parts. The components may also be at close intervals or widely apart. *Weight* refers to the gravity of the tone employed, the number of parts engaged and the pitch at which they operate. *Power* denotes the intensity of the tone, the number of stops combined or the number of pipes contributing their quota of sound. Experiment will reveal an almost infinite variety in the

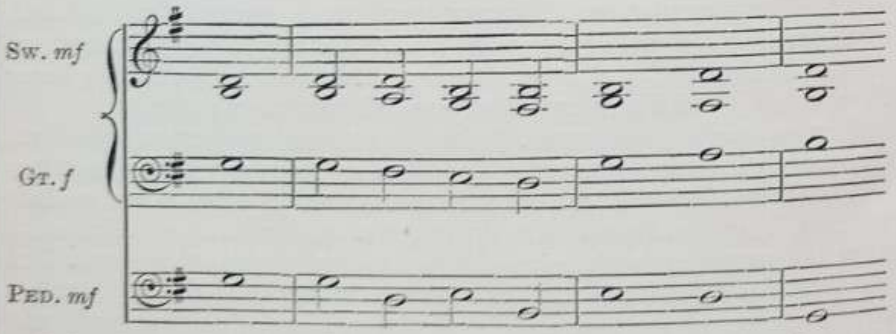
combinations of these qualities, and opportunities for appropriate use constantly occur.

Added parts. Enrichment of texture by means of extra parts must not be taken to justify indiscriminate and unmusical 'doubling' by such notes as may happen to lie under the hands at the moment, but rather the addition of a definite part or parts to those existing. The opening of Mendelssohn's 6th Sonata furnishes an example of a five-part chorale for the organ, but for purposes of accompaniment the method is often best used in conjunction with some inversion of the upper parts, thus allowing more space for interlinear additions.

Melodic prominence has other value besides that of variety. It generally (but not always) requires the use of two manuals. The commonly used method of giving a soprano part prominence in the R.H. may be found in most organ Tutors and in a very useful book *The Young Organist* by T. Linekar (Larway), a collection of Hymn-tune Studies arranged in various ways which include the method mentioned and the use of the C clef. Though effective in the softer combinations of stops, this way of playing is not so satisfactory upon a larger scale, when leading congregations, because the difficulty of obtaining suitable balance in the Swell organ accompanying the Great melody often demands a good deal of use of the swell-pedal, and this may disturb the legato of the pedal part. No device justifies careless pedalling.

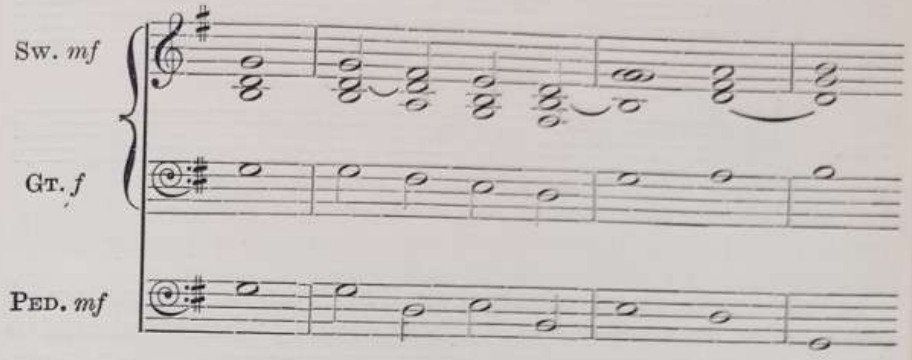
A better plan for obtaining melodic prominence upon a large scale is to transfer the melody to the tenor octave, a reversion to the 16th-century manner, as may be seen from the tenor-melody versions of metrical psalm-tunes now being revived in our hymnals, which versions may be used for the purpose. This method is far the most effective way to use Great Diapasons melodically and also the larger chorus reeds such as Cornopean or Trumpet, which always sound best within their tenor register. The tenor melody may be accompanied in a variety of ways. Ex. 3, a literal transcription of the accompanying parts, is unsatisfactory owing to the ineffectiveness of the low R.H.

Ex. 3



It is always advisable that any adaptation of the vocal parts for purposes of accompaniment, made without preparation of written notes, should be as simple as may be, because an organist's attention is necessarily occupied during Service by many and various details. In Ex. 4, a very commonly used form, this is ensured by retaining the melody in R.H., whilst duplicating and amplifying it by the L.H. solo. The tenor part, being in R.H., has at one point to become a 2nd soprano part to bring it within reach. This often occurs.

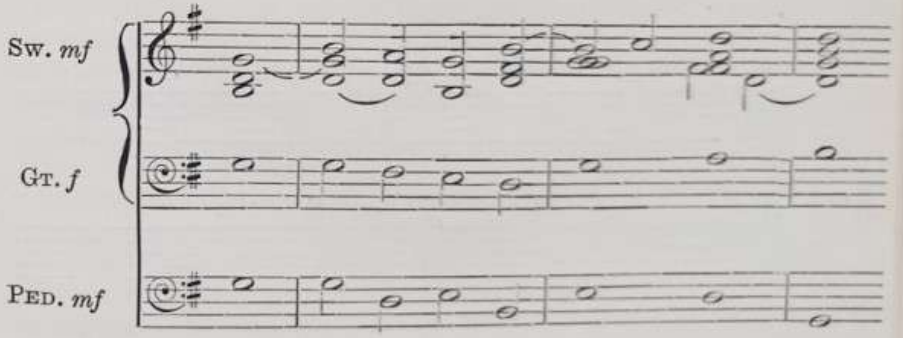
Ex. 4



Ex. 5 shows a form more akin to the 16th-century use mentioned. The top part is a descant to the principal melody.

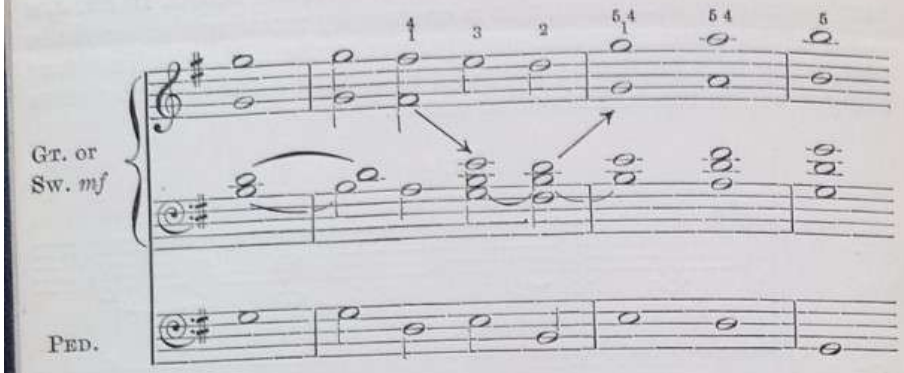
It needs musicianship to contrive such things at sight; their preparation, however, is an interesting musical exercise which provides the most artistic and satisfactory arrangement.

Ex. 5



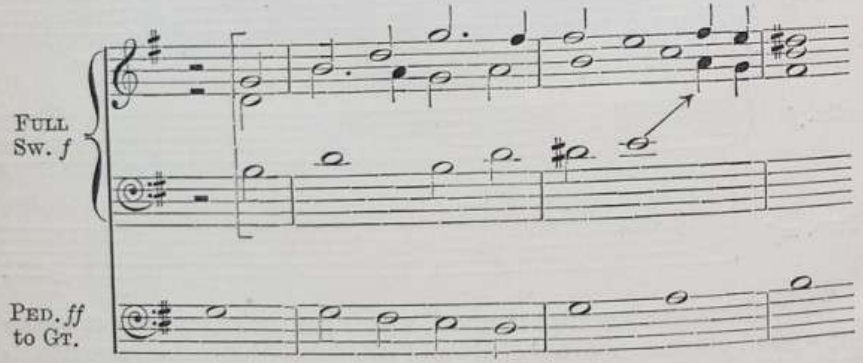
Ex. 6 illustrates another method, which has the advantages of ensuring a good prominence to melody and satisfactory balance of accompaniment, all upon one manual. It is a most useful means of leading a congregation without undue loudness. No 4 ft. stops should be used nor heavy 8 ft. either. One or two soft stops on Gt. coupled to a few on Sw. (shut) are ample. Great attention to fingering is needed, and it will be noted how the L.H. helps out the R. and thus makes legato easier. Its necessary practice is well repaid by its utility.

Ex. 6



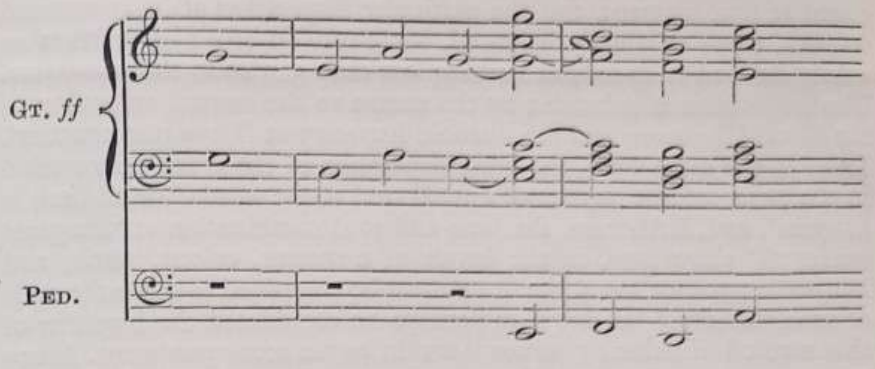
In Ex. 7 a melody is placed in the bass. This inversion requires careful consideration. Few melodies are really satisfactory when transferred to the bass, as even the works of well-known composers sometimes witness. We must not tolerate the effects produced by those writers of marches who simply let loose their melodies on bass trombones accompanied by a few primary triads which fit very ill. The difficulty arises largely through melodic cadences being unsuitable as basses, and skilled re-harmonization is always necessary. Young organists are advised, if they wish to adopt this plan for unison verses, to use a version from one of the books mentioned later. It is perhaps most effective when used to accompany very large assemblies of massed voices in unison.

Ex. 7



Unison verses of hymns may often be started by four notes—or even a whole line—in octaves upon the manuals, breaking into extended harmony with pedals (see Ex. 8). This is effective musically and a useful indication to singers.

Ex. 8



Another effective method of accompaniment for large masses of voices in unison is to play throughout a verse upon a 'Pedal-point' (or rather 'points', as it is seldom that a tune will fit a Tonic Pedal throughout). For example, 'Dundee' may be played lines 1 and 2 upon tonic pedal, lines 3 and 4 (up to last bar) upon dominant pedal.

Reharmonization of tunes (especially at sight) to accompany unison singing should only be attempted by those having an adequate knowledge of harmony and after considerable practice. Even then, good and simple models only should be followed. The imposition of successions of chromatic chords upon a diatonic tune, which is not infrequently heard, is an error of taste to be deprecated. Unless reharmonization can be very well done some simple inversion of parts is preferable. A few examples which are simple enough may be found among *Varied Harmonies to Hymn Tunes* (O.U.P. 1924) and *Varied Accompaniments* (O.U.P. 1937), both by Eric Thiman, but those by Bairstow, Lloyd, and a set published by Clowes are, in general, too elaborate under conditions envisaged in this booklet. It is good to remember that the variety gained by a few well chosen simple chords is often more seemly and effective than a more ambitious harmonization.

Tone-colour—Registration

Choice of stops and their combination goes deeper than desire for variety or even the expression of personal interpretation. The effect of qualities of tone-colour is often dependent upon choice of moment, the particular range or pitch of the music, or upon ideas conveyed by the verbal text. Thus the use of certain stops appropriate or effective at one time and at one pitch may be quite ineffective in other circumstances. And the impressions induced all depend upon certain associations within the mind of the player or hearers. This cannot be treated in a few words, but one or two familiar examples may be given.

In S. S. Wesley's well-known 'Blessed be the God and Father', during the middle section, just after the reiteration of the words 'in fear' by the treble soloist, occurs a chord of the diminished seventh. Two of its notes are allotted to an open flute stop and the remaining two to a soft reed

(an effect in orchestral wood-wind scoring). The choice and pitch of this chord at that moment, and the particular disposition of its contrasted colours, when accurately balanced, constitute an effect of eeriness so subtly devised as to exhibit nothing less than genius in the composer. The impression is enhanced by the return to the neutral colouring of the Swell Diapasons and the diatonic harmony at 'Love one another'. Later in the same work, the bleak depression of the E flat minor triad in the lower middle register of a swell reed at the words 'for all flesh is as grass', and, farther on, the flute and reed combination at 'the grass withereth' show how, in the hands of a master, colour, pitch, and harmonic resource can at the fit moment be combined to serve the ends of interpretation.[1] Wesley may perhaps be considered the inventor of this method of inducing 'atmosphere' in organ accompaniment. Many other instances might be adduced from modern composers.

These are not the imitative effects of the old-fashioned organist who loved to depict phenomena of nature, but rather the calling up, by allusion, of associated ideas latent within the mind of the hearer.

Choice and combination of stops. No organ is so small but that experiment will reveal more variety than at first seems likely. Modern use tends towards keeping tonal families (such as flutes, diapasons, strings, and reeds) apart rather than combining them. Thus a combination of Dulciana, Open Diapason and Principal, will be set in contrast with Claribel and 4 ft. Flute, and so on. It is probably true to say that the older types of tone were more capable of being blended and that the modern are more distinctive. The following less usual combinations may be tried with a view to the extension of variety in tone:

A soft enclosed reed as a low bass balanced with remaining parts on soft flute-work;

A Gamba 8. and soft flute 4. combined;

Oboe 8. and Principal 4. 8ve lower;

Dulciana 8. and Fl. 4. 8ve lower;

Echo Gamba 8. and Lieb. Bourdon 16. 8ve higher;

Lieb. Gedact (encl.) 8. should sometimes be heard in its extreme upper register, and its upper-middle register accompanied by Dulciana or Gamba Bass;

Gamba tone alone in middle tenor register, either solo or harmony;

Flute 8. in R.H. with reed or string tone L.H., with parts interlinked.[2]

[1] This anthem should be studied in detail. Every page shows ingenuity successfully applied, both in vocal and instrumental parts. And this will be more apparent to those who know the history of the circumstances under which it was composed and first performed.

[2] Opportunities for utilization of such effects occur most conveniently during improvisation, because tone-colour and music can then be made mutually suggestive and adaptable to one another in an equal degree. Space will not admit more than passing reference to a subject of wide scope and interest. Its mastery is one of the attributes distinguishing the artist-organist from the merely mechanically proficient.

The Great organ should often be used uncoupled, and single stops should frequently be heard alone and in contrast one with another.

The hands may occasionally be spaced an octave or more apart and thus produce the effect available in large organs by the use of Super and Sub-Octave and Unison-off couplers. Elgar uses strings *divisi pp* in this way at moments of great solemnity.

The study of organ compositions from Mendelssohn to the present day—especially of the French and modern German schools—will reveal many other effects of tone-colour, and orchestral scoring will suggest much that is analogous without being necessarily imitative.

In 'playing over', fancy combinations should be avoided and solo stops seldom used; usually nothing is better than a Dulciana—without pedals. It should also be remembered that the object of 'playing over' is to establish the pitch and to indicate the pace at which the item is to be sung. Taste or lack of it can be shown even in so small a matter as giving the note or 'intonation' for the priest. The tone should be neither obtrusive nor abrupt.

Many of the suggestions made above in regard to accompaniment imply a considerable knowledge and musicianship beyond the mere ability to play printed notes from vocal score. It should be generally appreciated that such a study is an essential part of the equipment of every efficient church organist, and one that may in some cases lead upward even towards the highest sphere in music—the creative.

The following books, in addition to those already mentioned, are useful in regard to subjects dealt with:

The Complete Organist, Harvey Grace (Grant Richards).
Organ Pedalling, Ellingford and Meers (Musical Opinion).
Book of Chorales for Organ Students, arr. Phillips and Jones (O.U.P.).
Organ Playing, M. P. Conway, Ch. Mus. Soc. Shorter Papers, No. 9 (O.U.P.).
The Liturgical Organist, Godfrey Sceats (Musical Opinion).

Attention may also be drawn to extensive bibliographies in *Music and Worship*, Walford Davies and Harvey Grace, and *Music in Church*, the Report of the Archbishops' Committee (Church Information Board).