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# ENGLISH CATHEDRAL MUSIC



FROM EDWARD VI TO EDWARD VII



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MINOR CANON OF WINDSOR, HON. FELLOW OF ORIEL

FORMERLY PRECENTOR OF BRISTOL CATHEDRAL

AND AT ONE TIME

DIRECTOR OF THE CHOIR OF ST. GEORGE'S CHAPEL, WINDSOR

To Edward VII

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*by*

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**FROM EDWARD VI TO EDWARD VII**

## PREFACE

**THIS BOOK** has been planned to give some account of the music written for the English Cathedrals and for those Collegiate churches and chapels in which professional choirs have been established by ancient endowments for the performance of the daily choral Services.

The term 'Cathedral music' rather than 'Church music' has been chosen for the title because the book deals almost exclusively with those two elaborate types of composition, the 'Service' and the Anthem, which are the outstanding features of Cathedral usage in contrast to that of Parish churches which is ordinarily of a simpler and more congregational character. 'Church music' is the more comprehensive term of the two; for it includes every kind of music designed for use either in Cathedrals or in Parish churches. It is too wide for the present purpose.

During the best part of three centuries following the introduction of the English Prayer Book little Church music was performed apart from the Cathedrals and Collegiate chapels. The modern type of Parish church choir scarcely existed either in towns or villages before the time of the Oxford Movement, and the music was limited almost entirely to metrical psalms and hymns, sometimes performed to the accompaniment of wind and stringed instruments played by local musicians.

Meanwhile during the past hundred years the music of the Parish churches has developed on lines that differ in character from those of the Cathedrals. Two distinct departments in Church music have thus been set up. In response to the reasonable demand for simpler anthems and Services, either for the Canticles or for the choral Eucharist, a Parish church repertory has been built up which includes much music of a high

standard which is mainly modern. The longer anthems of Purcell, Boyce, and Wesley, for instance, are not suitable for ordinary use in Parish churches whereas they are typical examples of the best kind of Cathedral music. It is unnecessary to enlarge upon this point in relation to the settings of the Canticles and the music written for the Holy Communion Service.

It is reasonable that in London and other large cities a few Parish churches should work upon Cathedral lines as regards the musical features of their Services, but these should provide the exceptions to the very general rule that the Cathedral usage is out of place and unsuited to parochial worship. On the other hand, it is equally wrong that the Cathedrals with their special resources, equipment, environment, and traditions should draw too liberally upon the Parish church repertory to the exclusion of music which can only be heard to real advantage in 'these great buildings'. The plea for brevity and popularity is utterly unworthy as an excuse for this.

The period covered here is defined in the title as 'from Edward VI to Edward VII'. The obvious starting-point seemed to be the introduction of the Prayer Book. This was not to ignore the fact that English Cathedral music is far older than that. Much has recently been done to bring to light the music of the fifteenth century and earlier. The Old Hall manuscript, the Eton manuscript, and the Worcester Cathedral manuscript are among the treasures which have been made accessible in modern notation by such scholars as Sir Richard Terry, the Rev. A. Ramsbotham, the Rev. Dom Anselm Hughes, and Sir Ivor Atkins. These deal entirely with the old Latin rites of the Church, whereas the present book makes a dividing line in beginning with the music of the English rites.

To draw a line at which to end was less easy. It is undesirable to discuss the work of living composers, and

the criticism of contemporary Art in all its branches is notoriously difficult. The close of the reign of Edward VII suggested itself rather aptly. It marks an epoch in English history in many ways, more particularly because it so nearly coincides with the outbreak of war in 1914. The exclusion of living composers for instance involves the exclusion of Basil Harwood's music, which certainly belongs to the period dealt with in the final chapter; yet if single exceptions are made difficulties at once arise.

An appendix is added to include examples of weekly music lists or programmes that have actually been performed by some of the leading choirs. These may serve to convey some idea of the large amount of English Church music that is being sung every day in these magnificent buildings throughout the country. Some older lists are added as examples of their particular period.

The author is grateful to many of his friends for suggestions and advice, more particularly to Dr. H. C. Colles, Sir Sydney Nicholson, Dr. H. G. Ley, and Dr. W. H. Harris.

E. H. FELLOWES

THE CLOISTERS, WINDSOR CASTLE

*March, 1941*

## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

The demand for a second edition of this book provides a welcome opportunity for correcting a few small errors, more particularly those that have crept into the text of the musical illustrations. It is very gratifying evidence of a general interest in Cathedral music at the present time that the first edition should have been so soon exhausted.

EDMUND H. FELLOWES

THE CLOISTERS, WINDSOR CASTLE

*June 21st, 1944*

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## *Chapter I*

### MUSIC AND THE REFORMATION

CHAOS MUST have prevailed in 'Quires and places where they sing' when the drastic changes in the Church Services came first into force. Much has been written on this subject from the liturgical and religious point of view; but very little attention has hitherto been drawn to the musical problems that must have confronted precentors, organists, choir-masters, and composers, when the time-honoured forms of the Latin liturgy and usage were swept away, to be replaced by something so fundamentally different from them as the Book of Common Prayer issued in the vernacular tongue.

It is not proposed here to discuss in detail ecclesiastical changes involved in the history of the Reformation Movement, but a brief outline may be found helpful in relation to the subject of Cathedral music.

It has been well stated <sup>1</sup> that in order to understand the Reformation it must be studied throughout the whole period from 1509 to 1662, thus carrying us, in terms of English music, from Fairfax to Purcell. The forces which brought about the actual changes do, in fact, date at least as far back as the accession of Henry VIII, and they continued to exercise their effect until the publication of the Prayer Book in its final shape in 1662.

But even earlier than this, the growth of independent thought, and with it the influence of the rising middle classes of Society, was already conspicuous in the reign of Henry VII, having developed as an aftermath of the Wars of the Roses. Closely associated with these tendencies there came in his son's reign an ever-increasing thirst for learning, together with a wider and more liberal spirit of inquiry, such, for instance, as would not accept tradition unless its value could be proved

<sup>1</sup> *Dictionary of English Church History*, Ollard and Crosse, p. 488.



under close examination. Added to this, as an inevitable corollary, came a much more general study of the Scriptures and a consequent demand that an English version of the Bible should be made available for the laity. This demand was in course of time satisfied by Cranmer with the publication of 'the Great Bible' in 1539, from which, incidentally, comes the familiar version of the Psalms which is still retained in the Prayer Book. This led on to a feeling that the Services of the Church should be conducted 'in a tongue understood of the people'.<sup>1</sup>

The crisis, as is well known, was precipitated by political influences of quite a different character, closely affecting the personal interests of Henry VIII. The two outstanding events in this crisis were the suppression of the Monasteries, and the introduction of the Book of Common Prayer. These were the two events which vitally affected the history of English Church music, leading, as they did, to the creation of conspicuous types of musical composition, entirely new and individual in style; for the English Cathedral Anthem and the so-called 'Service' belong exclusively to the Anglican Church. The choral services, as rendered daily in the English Cathedrals, are unique in the world of modern music; nothing quite like them exists on the Continent of Europe. They were the creation of the English composers in the mid-sixteenth century. But the task of these composers, especially in 1549, was tremendous, and their brilliant success in dealing with it should be recorded among the many notable achievements that make the Elizabethan era so famous in English history.

Returning to the brief outline of the Reformation Movement, the story does not end with the appearance of the First Prayer Book in 1549. In 1552 the Second Prayer Book of Edward VI, as the result of prolonged debate and controversy extending over the three intervening years, superseded the First Book, which was clearly not a final measure, and was perhaps not intended to be so by its chief promoters. The new Act of Uniformity<sup>2</sup> enjoined that the Second Book should come into general use on All Saints' Day 1552.

In the meanwhile, John Marbeck had published his *Booke of Common Praier noted* in 1550.

<sup>1</sup> *Articles of Religion*, No. XXIV.

<sup>2</sup> 5 and 6 Ed. VI, c. i.

The Second Prayer Book introduced many alterations ; and even those of minor importance made various details in Marbeck's musical setting out of date. It is doubtful whether the use of Marbeck's 'noting' would have survived these changes for long ; but his work was in any case swept away, together with the Second Prayer Book itself, in no more than eight months after the latter had come into use. Edward VI died in July 1553. His sister, Mary I, succeeded him on the throne, and the Latin rites were restored.

Once again the Church musicians were put to some confusion. But for those that conformed to the change—and already there were several notable composers who were writing music for both the Latin and the English rites—the difficulties did not compare with those of 1549, when the need had been to find something quite new for English use. There was plenty of available music for the Marian reaction. And these conditions prevailed until the accession of Queen Elizabeth. Nevertheless the growth of the newly-founded English school of Church music suffered a severe check. It is impossible to say, with so little evidence available, how all these constant upheavals, ranging over some twenty years from the dissolution of the Monasteries until the accession of Elizabeth, affected the activities of musical composers. But during those twenty years there had been time for new ideas to take shape and to ripen ; and in the minds of men of such outstanding gifts as, for instance, Tallis, Tye, Shepherd, and Parsley, to mention no others, definite principles must have been forming and coming to maturity ; so that when once more the English rites came into use under Elizabeth, the necessary experience had been gained, and the problems could be faced, as indeed they were, with brilliant success. But the Marian gap of five years accounts for much in reference to the marked advance shown by comparing the English compositions of the period of the First Prayer Book and those of early Elizabethan days. Moreover, the influence of the Italian school, both in secular and Church music during these two decades, must not be overlooked. Italian music itself had progressed far during this same period, and its influence on the Elizabethan composers contributed much to their development, even though it did not impair the national and independent characteristics of their style.

A fresh Act of Uniformity was passed in April 1559<sup>1</sup> which authorized a further revision of the Prayer Book ; it specified the Feast of St. John the Baptist as the day on which it was to come into use. This revision in no way concerns the musical details of the Service. But the period of controversy between rival religious partisans within the Anglican Communion extended after this into the seventeenth century.

Further alterations in the Prayer Book were made in 1604 following the accession of James I ; but these were of minor importance. His reign and that of Charles I were notable for the rivalry between extreme Protestant and Calvinistic teaching on the one side, and that of the conservative churchmen, as championed by Bishop Andrewes and Archbishop Laud, on the other.

The Civil War, the execution of Charles I, and the period of the Commonwealth followed. During this period the Puritan party gained and held the ascendancy, and the English Church itself went near to complete extinction. This was another tremendous blow to English Church music, still only in its adolescence and following, as it did, the decay of the great school of Elizabethan composition. The Cathedrals were closed by Order of Parliament ; the clergy and choirs were dismissed ; organs were mutilated and music-books destroyed. Incidentally, this wholesale destruction of music-books has caused the irretrievable loss of an unknown quantity of anthems and Services composed by the Tudor musicians.

For some fifteen years Church music was non-existent in England. Secular music, both vocal and instrumental, escaped such a fate. Then came the Restoration of the Monarchy in the person of Charles II, and with it the resumption of the Church services. 'Quires' were again 'places where they sang', and the full choral Services were restored in the Cathedrals and Collegiate chapels and churches, never to be interrupted again in their daily observance from that day to this. The Church musicians had no easy task, after fifteen years or more of silence, in reviving the musical features in their full glory. The voices of the former choristers had broken many years before, and traditions, which mean so much in the training of boys' voices, were completely forgotten. The organists and choir-masters had to lay entirely new foundations

<sup>1</sup> 1 Eliz., c. 2.

upon which to rebuild the Cathedral choirs, and also to collect and train the boys.

It was in May 1662 that the Restoration Act of Uniformity was finally passed, and Deans and Chapters of every Cathedral and Collegiate church were ordered to obtain an official copy of the Prayer Book, as finally sanctioned by that Act, before the following Christmas Day. The Prayer Book of 1662 is the Prayer Book as we know it to-day; and its issue may truly be said to mark the actual completion of the Reformation Movement, dating back in its origin, as already stated, to the accession of Henry VIII in 1509.

In this extended period of more than a century and a half the two outstanding events that have special bearing upon the history of English Church music are, as has already been stated, the suppression of the Monasteries, and the issue of the Prayer Book in 1549. They need therefore to be considered here at further length.

Firstly, the suppression of the Monasteries. This was not the work of a single day, nor the result of a single Order or Decree. In 1535 Thomas Cromwell, in addition to the other high positions in the State which he held, was appointed Vicar-General in causes ecclesiastical for the purpose of carrying out the Act of Supremacy.<sup>1</sup> It was in the summer of that same year that Sir Thomas More suffered martyrdom on Tower Hill, largely through the instrumentality of Cromwell; several executions of monks had already taken place. Commissioners were appointed to visit and collect information about the monasteries, and in due course their Report, reinforced by an Act of Parliament, resulted in all the minor monasteries, abbeys and priories under the value of £200 per annum being condemned. That was in 1536. The greed of the king, as well as many of his courtiers who shared in the plunder, was encouraged by this initial success, and it soon became clear that the larger religious houses would suffer a similar fate. In the years 1538 and 1539 almost the whole of the work of suppression and expropriation was completed. In the autumn of 1539 the magnificent Benedictine abbeys of Reading, Glastonbury, and Colchester, which were among the last survivors, were surrendered and destroyed, and their Abbots summarily executed.

<sup>1</sup> 26 Hen. VIII, c. i.

Westminster Abbey itself surrendered on January 16th, 1540. It was at first re-founded by Henry VIII as a Cathedral church, the Abbot becoming Dean in association with six Canons and six Minor Canons. Subsequently in 1550 the bishopric was surrendered and suppressed, and the Abbey-church united to the see of London. In 1560 Queen Elizabeth re-founded the Collegiate church as a Royal Peculiar, staffed by a Dean and twelve Prebendaries.

Westminster Abbey was not alone among the monastic establishments that were re-founded by Henry VIII as Cathedral churches. Those that were so reconstituted came to be known as Cathedrals of the new foundation, in contrast to the establishments of the old foundation which from medieval times had remained under the direction of secular clergy. These latter continued their existence unchanged in the troubled period of Henry's reign. The new foundation Cathedrals include Canterbury, Winchester, Durham, Oxford, Chester, Gloucester, Worcester, Rochester, Norwich, Ely, Peterborough, and Carlisle.

The suppression of the Monasteries struck a very severe blow to English Church music. In a large proportion of them the daily Services were fully choral, and choirs of men and boys were provided for by their endowments and statutes. Song-schools were in consequence very numerous throughout the country, and these were ruthlessly swept away by Thomas Cromwell and his men when the monasteries perished. Many hundreds of singing-men were deprived of their position and thrown on to their own resources to earn a livelihood as best they could; the loss to Music was incalculable. The fate of Waltham Abbey will serve as an illustration of what occurred in similar establishments throughout England. An inventory taken at the time of its suppression and dated 24th March, 31 Henry VIII,<sup>1</sup> gives a list of the names of some seventy persons who received a small gratuity on being deprived of their office. This list includes the singing-men, headed by Thomas Tallis, who, it may fairly be assumed, was organist and Master of the choristers at Waltham. Five choristers were mentioned in this inventory, and apparently about twelve singing-men, though the exact number cannot be precisely ascertained from the original document. The inventory also

<sup>1</sup> P.R.O., Exchequer K. R., Church goods 11/24.

shows that there was 'a lytell payre of organes' in the Lady Chapel, and that in the choir was 'a great larg payre of organs' and 'also a lesser payr'. Assuming, at a conservative estimate, that out of a total of some six hundred monastic establishments suppressed, considerably more than two hundred were equipped on anything like the same scale as at Waltham Abbey, it will be recognized that upwards of three thousand singing-men, and a corresponding number of trained musicians, as their choir-masters, were thrown out of employment; undoubtedly a very large number of song-schools throughout England ceased to exist. Tallis, as we know, was fortunate enough to have come under the notice of Henry VIII in earlier days when the king was fond of paying visits to Waltham; and he was soon given a place in the Chapel Royal. But a great number of trained musicians must have been faced with ruin, or have been compelled to abandon music for some other source of livelihood.

On the other hand, the disestablishment of the Monasteries may not have proved so complete a misfortune to the cause of English music as might appear at first sight, even though it must have involved a large measure of individual hardship. The fact that a large number of trained musicians and chorister boys were diverted to lay occupations may be one of the reasons why the English people in all classes of life were so generally skilled in music in Elizabethan times a generation later.

Turning to the other outstanding event of the Reformation Movement, the Act of Uniformity was passed on January 21st, 1549; it ordered that 'the Book of Common Prayer and none other' was to be used on and after the Feast of Pentecost, which fell on June 9th that year. Dismay must have filled the hearts of Church musicians, who perceived that at one stroke all the music with which they had been familiar, and the traditions inherited from time immemorial, had been finally destroyed. Even the music-books were condemned to destruction. The musical settings of the Mass, the Motets, and all other sacred music wedded to the Latin language, were completely ruled out. It was necessary at once to provide music for the Anglican Use in the Cathedrals and similar establishments; this included the Versicles and Responses, the Psalms, the Litany, the Canticles (both for Mattins and

Evensong) as well as Anthems. As regards the replacement of the Latin Mass the immediate need was at first supplied with some existing English settings of the whole Office of the Holy Communion, including *Sanctus*, *Benedictus*, *Agnus Dei* and *Gloria in excelsis*. But on this subject more will be said presently.

By Whitsuntide 1549 the demand for musical Services in English had already to some small extent been anticipated. That the substitution of the English language in place of Latin in the Church Services had been spreading with considerable force is demonstrated, as will be shown presently, by the contents of certain music-manuscripts. Church musicians were not behindhand in seeing what was coming. A form of Litany with English words had actually come into existence before the close of the fifteenth century. In 1544 the Litany, revised by Cranmer with English words, was published by Thomas Barthelet almost exactly in its present form, with each clause adapted to the music of the traditional Latin plainsong.

Another of the earlier steps towards the use of the English language in Church Services was taken when the Primer of Henry VIII was issued in 1545.

Musical Services on a Cathedral scale were being performed in English for some time before the passing of the Act of Uniformity. Among the early music-manuscripts is a remarkable set of three part-books now in the Bodleian Library at Oxford.<sup>1</sup> The date usually assigned to them is *circa* 1546-7. They are known as the 'Wanley' music-manuscripts for the reason that at one time they were owned by the famous librarian Humfrey Wanley, who presented them to the Bodleian Library early in the eighteenth century. Unfortunately the tenor part-book is missing, for the set should consist of four part-books to make it complete. The missing book had without doubt disappeared before Wanley's time. But although this is to be deplored on the ground that the text of all the music in this set of books is incomplete, yet it in no way detracts from their historical interest and importance. These books include between eighty and ninety musical compositions set to English words, including the Morning and Evening Canticles, two harmonized settings of the plainsong of the

<sup>1</sup> Bodl. Lib., Mus. MSS., E. 420-2.

Litany, a large number of anthems, and, what is still more remarkable, ten English settings of the Office for the Holy Communion, complete with *Kyrie*, *Credo*, *Gloria in excelsis*, *Sanctus*, *Benedictus* and *Agnus Dei*.

Even at the eleventh hour a little time remained for the composers to tackle the problem of providing music.

The Act of Uniformity was passed in January and more than four months intervened between that date and Whitsunday, June 9th, the appointed day upon which 'the Book of Common Prayer and none other' was ordered to be used. None the less, as stated at the opening of this chapter, bewilderment must have prevailed among those responsible for the appointment of sufficient suitable music for performance at the daily Services. The problem of discovering satisfactory types of composition, especially in such vital matters as those of style and design, called for a rare degree of imagination and technical skill on the part of the musicians.

How that call was answered is well known ; for in the period that followed England was acknowledged to hold the supreme musical position among all the nations of Europe. Before the close of the century English Cathedral music could successfully challenge that of Italy and the Netherlands.



## *Chapter II*

### CATHEDRAL MUSIC. A NATIONAL HERITAGE

THE FUNDAMENTAL change brought about by the substitution of the English language for Latin in the churches throughout the country,<sup>1</sup> had the effect, incidentally, of laying the foundation-stone of a new structure in the realm of Church music. English Church music, and more particularly Cathedral music, as we know it to-day, has its origin in the Reformation Movement.

The national character of the English choral Service is a subject of the highest importance to Churchmen, and especially to Church musicians, but it should also appeal in the strongest terms even to those English musicians whose interests may be mainly concerned with secular music. The English Anthem is a musical form that is distinctively and exclusively national ; so too is the traditional form upon which the 'Services' or musical settings of the Canticles, are constructed, not to mention the Anglican method of chanting the Psalms. During the 400 years that have elapsed since the Prayer Book was first introduced, a wonderful repertory of this class of music has been built up by successive generations of English composers. It is true that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the standard both of the composition and performance of Cathedral music was allowed to degenerate to a deplorable extent ; and it is significant that this lapse coincided closely with the decay of spiritual and religious life of the Church of England. But, even so, an unbroken chain, albeit a slender one at times, unites modern Church musicians with those of the Tudor and Restoration Periods. They hold the same ideals in their effort to provide music worthy of its supreme

<sup>1</sup> Latin was allowed, and is still allowed to be used where it is understood, namely in College Chapels at the Universities and at Winchester and Eton ; also in Convocation.