MUSIC IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH. A.D. 50–600.

THE epoch of the apostles and their immediate successors is that around which the most vigorous controversies have been waged ever since modern criticism recognized the supreme importance of that epoch in the history of doctrine and ecclesiastical government. Hardly a form of belief or polity but has sought to obtain its sanction from the teaching and usages of those churches that received their systems most directly from the personal disciples of the Founder. A curiosity less productive of contention, but hardly less persistent, attaches to the forms and methods of worship practised by the Christian congregations. The rise of liturgies, rites, and ceremonies, the origin and use of hymns, the foundation of the liturgical chant, the degree of participation enjoyed by the laity in the offices of praise and prayer,—these and many other closely related subjects of inquiry possess far more than an antiquarian interest; they are bound up with the history of that remarkable transition from the homogenous, more democratic system of the apostolic age, to the hierarchical organization which became matured and consolidated under the western popes and eastern patriarchs. Associated with this administrative development and related in its causes, an elaborate system of rites and ceremonies arose, partly an evolution from within, partly an inheritance of ancient habits and predispositions, which at last became formulated into unvarying types of devotional expression. Music participated in this ritualistic movement; it rapidly became liturgical and clerical, the laity ceased to share in the worship of song and resigned this office to a chorus drawn from the minor clergy, and a highly organized body of chants, applied to every moment of the service, became almost the entire substance of worship-music, and remained so for a thousand years.

The music of the Church, however, never became entirely stationary. Slowly, for centuries, almost imperceptibly, it steadily expanded. Doctrines, liturgies and ceremonies could become fixed and stationary, but Christian song never showed a tendency to harden or contract. It contained in itself the promise and potency of life. In the very nature of the case a new energy must enter the art of music when enlisted in the ministry of the religion

of Christ. A new motive, a new spirit, unknown to Greek or Roman, or even to Hebrew, had taken possession of the religious consciousness. To the adoration of the same Supreme Power, before whom the Jew bowed in awe-stricken reverence, was added the recognition of a gift which the Jew still dimly hoped for; and this gift brought with it an assurance, and hence a felicity, which were never granted to the religionist of the old dispensation. The Christian felt himself the chosen joint-heir of a risen and ascended Lord, who by his death and resurrection had brought life and immortality to light. The devotion to a personal, ever-living Saviour transcended and often supplanted all other loyalty whatsoever,—to country, parents, husband, wife or child. This religion was, therefore, emphatically one of joy—a joy so absorbing, so completely satisfying, so founded on the loftiest hopes that the human mind is able to entertain, that even the ecstatic worship of Apollo or Dionysios seems melancholy and hopeless in comparison. Yet it was not a joy that was prone to expend itself in noisy demonstrations. It was mingled with such a profound sense of personal unworthiness and the most solemn responsibilities, tempered with sentiments of awe and wonder in the presence of unfathomable mysteries, that the manifestations of it must be subdued to moderation, expressed in forms that could appropriately typify spiritual and eternal relationships. And so, as sculpture was the art which most adequately embodied the humanistic conception of Greek theology, poetry and music became the arts in which Christianity found a vehicle of expression most suited to her genius. These two arts, therefore, when acted upon by ideas so sublime and penetrating as those of the Gospel, must at last become transformed, and exhibit signs of a renewed and aspiring activity. The very essence of the divine revelation in Jesus Christ must strike a more thrilling note than tone and emotional speech had ever sounded before. The genius of Christianity, opening up new soul-depths, and quickening, as no other religion could, the higher possibilities of holiness in man, was especially adapted to evoke larger manifestations of musical invention. The religion of Jesus revealed God in the universality of His fatherhood, and His omnipresence in nature and in the human conscience. God must be worshipped in spirit and in truth, as one who draws men into communion with Him by His immediate action upon the heart. This religion made an appeal that could only be met by the purification of the heart, and by reconciliation and union with God through the merits of the crucified Son. The believer, therefore, felt the possibility of direct and loving communion with the Infinite Power as the stirring of the

very bases of his being. This new consciousness must declare itself in forms of expression hardly glimpsed by antiquity, and literature and art undergo re-birth. Music particularly, the art which seems peculiarly capable of reflecting the most urgent longings of the spirit, felt the animating force of Christianity as the power which was to emancipate it from its ancient thraldom and lead it forth into a boundless sphere of action.

Not at once, however, could musical art spring up full grown and responsive to these novel demands. An art, to come to perfection, requires more than a motive. The motive, the vision, the emotion yearning to realize itself, may be there, but beyond this is the mastery of material and form, and such mastery is of slow and tedious growth. Especially is this true in respect to the art of music; new musical forms, having no models in nature like painting and sculpture, no associative symbolism like poetry, no guidance from considerations of utility like architecture, must be the result, so far as any human work can be such, of actual free creation. And yet this creation is a progressive creation; its forms evolve from forms pre-existing as demands for expression arise to which the old are inadequate. Models must be found, but in the nature of the case the art can never go outside of itself for its suggestion. And although Christian music must be a development and not the sudden product of an exceptional inspiration, yet we must not suppose that the early church was compelled to work out its melodies from those crude elements in which anthropology discovers the first stage of musical progress in primitive man. The Christian fathers, like the founders of every historic system of religious music, drew their material from both religious and secular sources. The forms on which the music of modern Christendom is based were in their origin and style simply the projection of the antique musical system into the new era. The principle of ancient music was that of the subordination of music—subordination to poetry and the dance-figure. It never broke entirely loose from this subjection. Harmony was virtually unknown in antiquity, and without a knowledge of part-writing no independent art of music is possible. The song of antiquity was the most restricted of all melodic styles, viz., the chant or recitative. The essential feature of both chant and recitative is that the tones are made to conform to the metre and accent of the text, the words of which are never repeated or prosodically modified out of deference to melodic phrases and periods. In true song, on the contrary, the words are subordinated to the exigencies of musical laws of structure, and the phrase, not the word, is the ruling power. The

principle adopted by the Christian fathers was that of the chant, and Christian music could not begin to move in the direction of modern artistic attainment until, in the course of time, a new technical principle, and a new conception of the relation between music and poetry, could be introduced.

In theory, style, usage, and undoubtedly in actual melodies also, the music of the primitive Church forms an unbroken line with the music of pre-Christian antiquity. The relative proportion contributed by Jewish and Greek musical practice cannot be known. There was at the beginning no formal break with the ancient Jewish Church; the disciples assembled regularly in the temple for devotional exercises; worship in their private gatherings was modeled upon that of the synagogue which Christ himself had implicitly sanctioned. The synagogal code was modified by the Christians by the introduction of the eucharistic service, the Lord's Prayer, the baptismal formula, and other institutions occasioned by the new doctrines and the "spiritual gifts." At Christ's last supper with His disciples, when the chief liturgical rite of the Church was instituted, the company sang a hymn which was unquestionably the "great Hallel" of the Jewish Passover celebration.[1] The Jewish Christians clung with an inherited reverence to the venerable forms of their fathers' worship, they observed the Sabbath, the three daily hours of prayer, and much of the Mosaic ritual. In respect to musical usages, the most distinct intimation in early records of the continuation of ancient forms is found in the occasional reference to the habit of antiphonal or responsive chanting of the Psalms. Fixed forms of prayer were also used in the apostolic Church, which were to a considerable extent modeled upon the Psalms and the Benedictions of the synagogue ritual. That the Hebrew melodies were borrowed at the same time cannot be demonstrated, but it may be assumed as a necessary inference.

With the spread of the Gospel among the Gentiles, the increasing hostility between Christians and Jews, the dismemberment of the Jewish nationality, and the overthrow of Jewish institutions to which the Hebrew Christians had maintained a certain degree of attachment, the influence of the Jewish ritual passed away, and the worship of the Church came under the influence of Hellenic systems and traditions. Greek philosophy and Greek art, although both in decadence, were dominant in the intellectual life of the East, and it was impossible that the doctrine, worship, and gov-

[1] Ps., 113–118.

ernment of the Church should not have been gradually leavened by them. St. Paul wrote in the Greek language, the earliest liturgies are in Greek. The sentiment of prayer and praise was, of course, Hebraic; the Psalms formed the basis of all lyric expression, and the hymns and liturgies were to a large extent colored by their phraseology and spirit. The shapeliness and flexibility of Greek art, the inward fervor of Hebrew aspiration, the love of ceremonial and symbolism, which was not confined to any single nation but a universal characteristic of the time, all contributed to build up the composite and imposing structure of the later worship of the Eastern and Western Churches.

The singing of Psalms formed a part of the Christian worship from the beginning, and certain special Psalms were early appointed for particular days and occasions. At what time hymns of contemporary origin were added we have no means of knowing. Evidently during the life of St. Paul, for we find him encouraging the Ephesians and Colossians to the use of "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs."[1] To be sure he is not specifically alluding to public worship in these exhortations (in the first instance "speaking to yourselves" and "singing and making melody in your hearts," in the second "teaching and admonishing one another"), but it is hardly to be supposed that the spiritual exercise of which he speaks would be excluded from the religious services which at that time were of daily observance. The injunction to teach and admonish by means of songs also agrees with other evidences that a prime motive for hymn-singing in many of the churches was instruction in the doctrines of the faith. It would appear that among the early Christians, as with the Greeks and other ancient nations, moral precepts and instruction in religious mysteries were often thrown into poetic and musical form, as being by this means more impressive and more easily remembered.

It is to be noticed that St. Paul, in both the passages cited above, alludes to religious songs under three distinct terms, viz.: *ψαλμοι*, *ὑμνοι*, and *ᾠδαὶ πνευματικαι*. The usual supposition is that the terms are not synonymous, that they refer to a threefold classification of the songs of the early Church into: 1, the ancient Hebrew Psalms properly so called; 2, hymns taken from the Old Testament and not included in the Psalter and since called Canticles, such as the thanksgiving of Hannah, the songs of Moses, the Psalm of the Three Children from the continuation of the Book of Daniel, the vision of Habakkuk, etc.; and, 3, songs

[1] Eph., v., 19; Col., iii., 16.

composed by the Christians themselves. The last of these three classes points us to the birth-time of Christian hymnody. The lyric inspiration, which has never failed from that day to this, began to move the instant the proselyting work of the Church began. In the freedom and informality of the religious assembly as it existed among the Hellenic Christians, it became the practice for the believers to contribute impassioned outbursts—which might be called songs in a rudimentary state. In moments of highly-charged devotional ecstasy this spontaneous utterance took the form of broken, incoherent, unintelligible ejaculations, probably in cadenced, half-rhythmic tone, expressive of rapture and mystical illumination. This was the "glossolalia," or "gift of tongues" alluded to by St. Paul in the first epistle to the Corinthians as a practice to be approved, under certain limitations, as edifying to the believers.[1]

Dr. Schaff defines the gift of tongues as "an utterance proceeding from a state of unconscious ecstasy in the speaker, and unintelligible to the hearer unless interpreted. The speaking with tongues is an involuntary, psalm-like prayer or song uttered from a spiritual trance, in a peculiar language inspired by the Holy Spirit. The soul is almost entirely passive, an instrument on which the Spirit plays his heavenly melodies." "It is emotional rather than intellectual, the language of excited imagination, not of cool reflection."[2] St. Paul was himself an adept in this singular form of worship, as he himself declares in 1 Cor. xiv., 18; but with his habitual coolness of judgment he warns the excitable Corinthian Christians that sober instruction is more profitable, that the proper end of all utterance in common public worship is edification, and enjoins as an effective restraint that "if any man speaketh in a tongue, let one interpret; but if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the Church; and let him speak to himself and to God."[3] With the regulation of the worship in stated liturgic form this extemporaneous ebullition of feeling was done away, but if it was analogous, as it probably was, to the practice so common in Oriental vocal music, both ancient and modern, of delivering long wordless tonal flourishes as an expression of joy, then it has in a certain sense survived in the "jubilations" of the Catholic liturgical chant, which in the early middle ages were more extended than now. Chappell finds traces of a practice somewhat similar to the "jubilations" existing in ancient Egypt.

[1] 1 Cor., xii. and xiv.

[2] Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, I., p. 234 f; p. 435.

[3] 1 Cor., xiv., 27, 28.

"This practice of carolling or singing without words, like birds, to the gods, was copied by the Greeks, who seemed to have carolled on four vowels. The vowels had probably, in both cases, some recognized meaning attached to them, as substitutes for certain words of praise—as was the case when the custom was transferred to the Western Church."[1] This may or may not throw light upon the obscure nature of the glossolalia, but it is not to be supposed that the Corinthian Christians invented this custom, since we find traces of it in the worship of the ancient pagan nations, and so far as it was the unrestrained outburst of emotion it must have been to some extent musical, and only needed regulation and the application of a definite key-system to become, like the mediæval sequence under somewhat similar conditions, an established order of sacred song.

Out of a musical impulse, of which the glossolalia was one of many tokens, united with the spirit of prophecy or instruction, grew the hymns of the infant Church, dim outlines of which begin to appear in the twilight of this obscure period. The worshippers of Christ could not remain content with the Hebrew Psalms, for, in spite of their inspiriting and edifying character, they were not concerned with the facts on which the new faith was based, except in prefiguring the later dispensation. Hymns were required in which Christ was directly celebrated, and the apprehension of His infinite gifts embodied in language which would both fortify the believers and act as a converting agency. It would be contrary to all analogy and to the universal facts of human nature if such were not the case, and we may suppose that a Christian folk-song, such as the post-apostolic age reveals to us, must have begun to appear in the first century. Some scholars believe that certain of these primitive hymns, or fragments of them, are embalmed in the Epistles of St. Paul and the Book of the Revelation.[2] The magnificent description of the worship of God and the Lamb in the Apocalypse has been supposed by some to have been suggested by the manner of worship, already become liturgical, in some of the Eastern churches. Certainly there is a manifest resemblance between the picture of one sitting upon the throne with the twenty-four elders and a multitude of angels surrounding him, as set forth in the Apocalypse, and the account given in the second book of the Constitutions of the Apostles of the throne of the bishop in the middle of the church edifice, with the pres-

[1] Chappell, *History of Music*, p. 54.

[2] Among such supposed quotations are: Eph. v., 14; 1 Tim. iii., 16; 2 Tim. ii., 11; Rev. iv., 11; v., 9–13; xi., 15–18; xv., 3–4.

byters and deacons on each side and the laity beyond. In this second book of the Constitutions, belonging, of course, to a later date than the apostolic period, there is no mention of hymn-singing. The share of the people is confined to responses at the end of the verses of the Psalms, which are sung by some one appointed to this office.[1] The sacerdotal and liturgical movement had already excluded from the chief acts of worship the independent song of the people. Those who assume that the office of song in the early church was freely committed to the general body of believers have some ground for their assumption, but if we are able to distinguish between the private and public worship, and could know how early it was that set forms and liturgies were adopted, it would appear that at the longest the time was very brief when the laity were allowed a share in any but the subordinate offices. The earliest testimony that can be called definite is contained in the celebrated letter of the younger Pliny from Bithynia to the Emperor Trajan, in the year 112, in which the Christians are described as coming together before daylight and singing hymns alternately (invicem) to Christ. This may with some reason be held to refer to responsive or antiphonal singing, similar to that described by Philo in his account of the worship of the Jewish sect of the Therapeutæ in the first century. The tradition was long preserved in the Church that Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch in the second century, introduced antiphonal chanting into the churches of that city, having been moved thereto by a vision of angels singing in that manner. But we have only to go back to the worship of the ancient Hebrews for the suggestion of this practice. This alternate singing appears to have been most prevalent in the Syrian churches, and was carried thence to Milan and Rome, and through the usage in these cities established in the permanent habit of the Western Church.

Although the singing of Psalms and hymns by the body of worshippers was, therefore, undoubtedly the custom of the churches while still in their primitive condition as informal assemblages of believers for mutual counsel and edification, the steady progress of ritualism and the growth of sacerdotal ideas inevitably deprived the people of all initiative in the worship, and concentrated the offices of public devotion, including that of song, exclusively in the hands of the clergy. By the middle of the fourth century, if not earlier, the change was complete. The simple constitution of the apostolic age had developed by logical gradations into a com-

[1] *Constitutions of the Apostles*, book ii., cop. 57.

pact hierarchy of patriarchs, bishops, priests and deacons. The clergy were no longer the servants or representatives of the people, but held a mediatorial position as the channels through which divine grace was transmitted to the faithful. The great Eastern liturgies, such as those which bear the names of St. James and St. Mark, if not yet fully formulated and committed to writing, were in all essentials complete and adopted as the substance of the public worship. The principal service was divided into two parts, from the second of which, the Eucharistic service proper, the catechumens and penitents were excluded. The prayers, readings and chanted sentences, of which the liturgy mainly consisted, were delivered by priests, deacons, and an officially-constituted choir of singers, the congregation uniting only in a few responses and ejaculations. In the liturgy of St. Mark, which was the Alexandrian, used in Egypt and neighboring countries, we find allotted to the people a number of responses: "Amen," "Kyrie eleison," "And to Thy spirit" (in response to the priest's "Peace be to all"); "We lift them up to the Lord" (in response to the priest's "Let us lift up our hearts"); and "In the name of the Lord; Holy God, holy mighty, holy immortal," after the prayer of Trisagion; "And from the Holy Spirit was He made flesh," after the prayer of oblation; "Holy, holy, holy Lord," before the consecration; "Our Father, who art in heaven," etc.; before the communion, "One Father holy, one Son holy, one Spirit holy, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, Amen"; at the dismissal, "Amen, blessed be the name of the Lord."

In the liturgy of St. James, the liturgy of the Jerusalem Church, a very similar share, in many instances with identical words, is assigned to the people; but a far more frequent mention is made of the choir of singers who render the Trisagion hymn, which, in St. Mark's liturgy, is given by the people: the "Allelulia"; the hymn to the Virgin Mother; "O taste and see that the Lord is good; The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee."

A large portion of the service, as indicated by these liturgies, was occupied by prayers, during which the people kept silence. In the matter of responses the congregation had more direct share than in the Catholic Church to-day, for now the chancel-choir acts as their representatives, while the Kyrie eleison has become one of the choral portions of the Mass, and the Thrice Holy has been merged in the choral Sanctus. But in the liturgical worship, whatever may have been the case in non-liturgical observances, the share of the people was confined to these few brief ejaculations and

prescribed sentences, and nothing corresponding to the congregational song of the Protestant Church can be found. Still earlier than this final issue of the ritualistic conception the singing of the people was limited to Psalms and canticles, a restriction justified and perhaps occasioned by the ease with which doctrinal vagaries and mystical extravagances could be instilled into the minds of the converts by means of this very subtle and persuasive agent. The conflict of the orthodox churches with the Gnostics and Arians showed clearly the danger of unlimited license in the production and singing of hymns, for these formidable heretics drew large numbers away from the faith of the apostles by means of the choral songs which they employed everywhere for proselyting purposes. The Council of Laodicea (held between 343 and 381) decreed in its 13th Canon: "Besides the appointed singers, who mount the ambo and sing from the book, others shall not sing in the church."[1] The exact meaning of this prohibition has not been determined, for the participation of the people in the church song did not entirely cease at this time. How generally representative this council was, or how extensive its authority, is not not known; but the importance of this decree has been exaggerated by historians of music, for, at most, it serves only as a register of a fact which was an inevitable consequence of the universal hierarchical and ritualistic tendencies of the time.

The history of the music of the Christian Church properly begins with the establishment of the priestly liturgic chant, which had apparently supplanted the popular song in the public worship as early as the fourth century. Of the character of the chant-melodies at this period in the Eastern Church, or of their sources, we have no positive information. Much vain conjecture has been expended on this question. Some are persuaded that the strong infusion of Hebraic feeling and phraseology into the earliest hymns, and the adoption of the Hebrew Psalter into the service, necessarily implies the inheritance of the ancient temple and synagogue melodies also. Others assume that the allusion of St. Augustine to the usage at Alexandria under St. Athanasius, which was "more like speaking than singing,"[2] was an example of the practice of the Oriental and Roman Churches generally, and that the latter chant developed out of this vague song-speech.[3] Others, like Kiesewetter, exaggerating the antipathy of the Christians to

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[1] Hefele, *History of the Councils of the Church*, translated by Oxenbam, vol. ii., p. 309.

[2] St. Augustine, *Confessions.*

[3] Rowbotham, *History of Music*, vol. iii., p. 89 *seq.*

everything identified with Judaism and paganism, conceive the primitive Christian melodies as entirely an original invention, a true Christian folk-song.[1] None of these suppositions, however, could have more than a local and temporary application; the Jewish Christian congregations in Jerusalem and neighboring cities doubtless transferred a few of their ancestral melodies to the new worship, a prejudice against highly developed tune suggesting the sensuous cults of paganism may have existed among the more austere; here and there new melodies may have sprung up to clothe the extemporized lyrics that became perpetuated in the Church. But the weight of evidence, inference and analogy inclines to the belief that the liturgic song of the Church, both of the East and West, was drawn partly in form and almost wholly in spirit and complexion from the Greek and Greco-Roman musical practice. Such an origin for the Roman chant has been quite conclusively shown by the investigations of the Belgian savant, Gevaert;[2] and since the Hellenic influence was so strong in the churches of the West, it must needs have been equally so in the churches of Greece and Asia Minor. And it was the more simple, refined and moderate phases of Greek music, together with the noble traditions of the classic age, that passed into the Christian sanctuary, dying paganism thus contributing of its last breath to swell the life that was to regenerate the world. As Schletterer correctly says: "The music of Christendom borrowed from that of the Hebrews its pious religious content; from that of the Greeks its form, structure and beauty." The Greeks stood far above all other nations of antiquity in their love for music; in their conception of its possibilities as an independent art; in the freedom, grace and expressiveness of their melody; in the taste and appropriateness with which they connected it with their most elevated religious, patriotic and festal observances. The Oriental nations loved best instruments of coarse and clangorous sound, nerve excitants, the clashing cymbal, the braying trumpet and jingling tambourine; the sacred instruments of the Greek, on the contrary, were the lyre of Apollo and the Dorian flute. The Greek's exquisite sense of proportion and symmetry, his abhorrence of violence and excess, his matchless appreciation of reason and order, of the beauty that lies in perfect adjustment of parts and delicacy of finish, his noble reserve and balance of emotion and expression—all this was as manifest in his music as in his

[1] *Geschichte der europaisch-abendlandischen Musik*, p. 2.
[2] *La Mèlopée antique dans le Chant de l'Eglise Latine.*

poetry, his sculpture and his architecture. Music was the handmaid of poetry; it blended with epic, lyric and dramatic expression into an exquisite and inseparable unity. It was the fair counterpart of that most subtle, flexible, precise and harmonious of all forms of human speech, the Attic Greek, and it shared in all the reverence and study that were bestowed upon that paragon of languages. It doubtless grew out of that language in its early estate, and both together attained their ripeness in the Athenian tragedy of the Periclean age. It shared all the rhythmic variety and suppleness of the Lesbian, Theban and Cean lyric and the Athenian dramatic ode, and found its special means of expression in the mingled intensity and billowy swing of contrasted metres and the finest shades of intonation and tonal color. Harmony the Greeks knew, if at all, only in its simplest relations. Simplicity and clearness marked all their art; music was designed to heighten the effect of poetic speech; its metre was controlled by that of the verse; song was intoned recitation; the text was paramount, and must not be obscured even for the attainment of melodic beauty. Within this limit the Greek music was the most perfect form of vocal utterance which antiquity ever devised; and the Christians, who had no thought of a system of independent music with laws of its own, could find no style of music better adapted to their needs than that form derived from old Greek practice which they heard around them. That it was associated with pagan religious systems did not condemn it in their eyes. But scanty knowledge of Christian archæology and liturgics is necessary to show that much of form, ceremony and decoration in the worship of the Church was the adaptation of features anciently existing in the faiths and customs which the new religion supplanted. The practical genius which adopted Greek metres for Christian hymns, and transformed basilikas, scholæ and heathen temples (often with monuments, votive tablets, etc., unmolested) into Christian houses of worship, would not cavil at the melodies and vocal methods which seemed so well suited to be a musical garb for the liturgies. Greek music was, indeed, in some of its phases, in decadence at this period. It had gained nothing in purity by passing into the hands of Roman voluptuaries. The age of the virtuosos, aiming at brilliancy and sensationalism, had succeeded to the classic traditions of austerity and reserve. This change was felt, however, in instrumental music chiefly, and this the Christian churches disdained to touch. It was the residue of what was pure and reverend, drawn from the tradition of Apollo's temple and the Athenian tragic theatre; it was the form of vocalism which austere

philosophers like Plutarch praised[1] that was drafted into the service of the Gospel. Perhaps even this was reduced to simple terms in the Christian practice; certainly the oldest chants that can be traced are the simplest, and the earliest scale system of the Italian church would appear to allow but a very narrow compass to melody. We can form our most accurate notion of the early Christian music, therefore, by studying the records of Greek practice and Greek views of music's nature and function in the time of the flowering of Greek poetry, for certainly the Christian fathers did not attempt to go beyond that; and perhaps, in their zeal to avoid all that was meretricious in tonal art, they adopted as their standard those phases which could most easily be made to coalesce with the inward and humble type of piety inculcated by the faith of the Gospel. This hypothesis does not imply a note-for-note-borrowing of Greek and Roman melodies, but only their adaptation. As Luther and the other founders of the music of the German Protestant Church borrowed melodies from the Catholic chant and the German and Bohemian religious and secular folk-song, and recast them to fit the metres of their hymns, so the early Christian choristers would naturally be moved to do with the melodies which they desired to transplant. Much modification was necessary; for while the Greek and Roman songs were metrical, the Christian psalms, antiphons, prayers, responses, etc., were unmetrical; and while the pagan melodies were always sung to an instrumental accompaniment, the church chant was exclusively vocal. Through the influence of this double change of technical and æsthetic basis, the liturgic song was at once more free, aspiring and varied than its prototype, taking on that rhythmic flexibility and delicate shading in which also the unique charm of the Catholic chant of the present day so largely consists.

In view of the controversies over the use of instrumental music in worship, which have been so violent in the British and American Protestant churches, it is an interesting question whether or not instruments were employed by the primitive Christians. We know that instruments performed an important function in the Hebrew temple service and in the ceremonies of the Greeks. At this point, however, a break was made with all previous practice, and although the lyre and flute were sometimes employed by the Greek converts, as a general rule the use of instruments in worship was condemned. Many of the fathers, speaking of religious

[1] For the high ideal of Greek music surviving in the decline of Greek practice, see Plutarch's dissertation concerning music in his *Morals*.

song, make no mention of instruments; others, like Clement of Alexandria and St. Chrysostom, refer to them only to denounce them. Clement says: "Only one instrument do we use, viz., the word of peace wherewith we honor God, no longer the old psaltery, trumpet, drum and flute." Chrysostom exclaims: "David formerly sang in psalms, also we sing to-day with him; he had a lyre with lifeless strings, the Church has a lyre with living strings. Our tongues are the strings of the lyre, with a different tone, indeed, but with a more accordant piety." St. Ambrose expresses his scorn for those who would play the lyre and psaltery instead of singing hymns and psalms; and St. Augustine adjures believers not to turn their hearts to theatrical instruments. The religious guides of the early Christians felt that there would be no incongruity, and even profanity, in the use of the sensuous nerve-exciting effects of instrumental sound in their mystical, spiritual worship; their high religious and moral enthusiasm needed no aid from external stimulus. The pure vocal utterance was the more proper expression of their faith. This prejudice against instrumental music, which was drawn from the very nature of its æsthetic impression, was fortified by the associations of instruments with superstitious pagan rites, and especially with the corrupting scenes habitually represented in the degenerate theatre and circus. "A Christian maiden," says St. Jerome, "ought not even to know what a lyre or a flute is, or what it is used for." No further justification for such prohibitions is needed than the descriptions of the shameless performances common upon the stage in the time of the Roman empire as portrayed in the pages of Apuleius and other delineators of the manners of the time. Those who assumed the guardianship of the morals of the little Christian communities were compelled to employ the strictest measures to prevent their charges from breathing the moral pestilence which circulated without check in the places of public amusement; most of all must they insist that every reminder of these corruptions, be it an otherwise innocent harp or flute, should be excluded from the common acts of religion.

The transfer of the office of song from the general congregation to an official choir involved no cessation of the production of hymns for popular use, for the distinction must always be kept in mind between liturgical and non-liturgical song, and it was only in the former that the people were commanded to abstain from participation in all but the prescribed responses. On the other hand, as ceremonies multiplied and festivals increased in number, hymnody was stimulated, and lyric songs for private and social edification, for

the hours of prayer, and for use in processions, pilgrimages, dedications and other occasional celebrations, were rapidly produced. As has been shown, the Christians had their hymns from the very beginning, but with the exception of one or two short lyrics, a few fragments, and the great liturgical hymns which were also adopted by the Western Church, they have been lost. Clement of Alexandria, third century, is often spoken of as the first known Christian hymn writer; but the single poem, the song of praise to the Logos, which has gained him this title, is not, strictly speaking, a hymn at all. From the fourth century onward the tide of Oriental hymnody steadily rose, reaching its culmination in the eighth and ninth centuries. The Eastern hymns are divided into two schools—the Syrian and the Greek. Of the group of Syrian poets the most celebrated are Synesius, born about 375, and Ephraem, who died at Edessa in 378. Ephraem was the greatest teacher of his time in the Syrian Church, and her most prolific and able hymnist. He is best remembered as the opponent of the followers of Bardasanes and Harmonius, who had beguiled many into their Gnostic errors by the attractive power of their hymns and melodies. Ephraem met these schismatics on their own ground, and composed a large number of songs in the spirit of orthodoxy, which he gave to choirs of his followers to be sung on Sundays and festal days. The hymns of Ephraem were greatly beloved by the Syrian Church, and are still valued by the Maronite Christians. The Syrian school of hymnody died out in the fifth century, and poetic inspiration in the Eastern Church found its channel in the Greek tongue.

Before the age of the Greek Christian poets, whose names have passed into history, the great anonymous unmetrical hymns appeared which still hold an eminent place in the liturgies of the Catholic and Protestant Churches as well as of the Eastern Church. The best known of these are the two Glorias—the Gloria Patri and the Gloria in excelsis; the Ter Sanctus or Cherubic hymn, heard by Isaiah in vision; and the Te Deum. The Magnificat or thanksgiving of Mary, and the Benedicite or the Song of the Three Children, were early adopted by the Eastern Church. The Kyrie eleison appears as a response by the people in the liturgies of St. Mark and St. James. It was adopted into the Roman liturgy at a very early date, and the addition, Christe eleison, is said to have been added by Gregory the Great. The Gloria in excelsis, the "greater doxology," with the possible exception of the Te Deum, the noblest of the early Christian hymns is the angelic song given in Luke ii., 14, with additions which were made not later than the

fourth century. "Begun in heaven, finished on earth." It was first used in the Eastern Church as a morning hymn. The Te Deum laudamus has often been given a Western origin, St. Ambrose and St. Augustine, according to a popular legend, having been inspired to improvise it in alternate verses at the baptism of St. Augustine by the bishop of Milan. Another tradition ascribes the authorship to St. Hilary in the fourth century. Its original form is unknown, but it is generally believed to have been formed by accretions upon a Greek original. Certain phrases contained in it are also in the earlier liturgies. The present form of the hymn is probably as old as the fifth century.[1]

Of the very few brief anonymous songs and fragments which have come down to us from this dim period the most perfect is a Greek hymn, which was sometimes sung in private worship at the lighting of the lamps. It has been made known to many English readers through Longfellow's beautiful translation in "The Golden Legend."

O gladsome light
Of the Father immortal,
And of the celestial
Sacred and blessed
Jesus, our Saviour!
Now to the sunset
Again hast Thou brought us;
And seeing the evening
Twilight, we bless Thee,
Praise Thee, adore Thee
Father omnipotent!
Son, the Life-giver!
Spirit, the Comforter!
Worthy at all times
Of worship and wonder!

Overlapping the epoch of the great anonymous hymns and continuing beyond it is the era of the Greek hymnists whose names and works are known, and who contributed a vast store of lyrics to the offices of the Eastern Church. Eighteen quarto volumes, says Dr. J. M. Neale, are occupied by this huge store of religious poetry. Dr. Neale, to whom the English-speaking world is chiefly indebted for what slight knowledge it has of these hymns, divides them into three epochs:

1. "That of formation, when this poetry was gradually throwing off the bondage of classical metres, and inventing and perfecting its various styles; this period ends about A.D. 726."

[1] For an exhaustive discussion of the history of the Te Deum see Julian's *Dictionary of Hymnology*.

2. "That of perfection, which nearly coincides with the period of the Iconoclastic controversy, 726–820."

3. "That of decadence, when the effeteness of an effeminate court and the dissolution of a decaying empire reduced ecclesiastical poetry, by slow degrees, to a stilted bombast, giving great words to little meaning, heaping up epithet upon epithet, tricking out commonplaces in diction more and more gorgeous, till sense and simplicity are alike sought in vain; 820–1400."[1]

The centres of Greek hymnody in its most brilliant period were Sicily, Constantinople, and Jerusalem and its neighborhood, particularly St. Sabba's monastery, where lived St. Cosmas and St. John Damascene, the two greatest of the Greek Christian poets. The hymnists of this epoch preserved much of the alertness and objectivity of the earlier writers, especially in the hymns written to celebrate the Nativity, the Epiphany, and other events in the life of Christ. In others a more reflective and introspective quality is found. The fierce struggles, hatreds and persecutions of the Iconoclastic controversy also left their plain mark upon many of them in a frequent tendency to magnify temptations and perils, in a profound sense of sin, a consciousness of the necessity of penitential discipline for the attainment of salvation, and a certain fearful anticipation of judgment. This attitude, so different from the peace and confidence of the earlier time, attains its most striking manifestation in the sombre and powerful funeral dirge ascribed to St. John Damascene ("Take the last kiss") and the Judgment hymn of St. Theodore of the Studium. In the latter the poet strikes with trembling hand the tone which four hundred years later was sounded with such imposing majesty in the Dies Iræ of St Thomas of Celano.[2]

The Catholic hymnody, so far at least as concerns the usage of the ritual, belongs properly to a later period. The hymns of St. Hilary, St. Damasus, St. Augustine, St. Ambrose, Prudentius, Fortunatus, and St. Gregory, which afterward so beautified the Divine Office, were originally designed for private devotion and for accessory ceremonies, since it was not until the tenth or eleventh century that hymns were introduced into the office at Rome, following a tendency that was first prominently recognized

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[1] *Hymns of the Eastern Church*, translated, with notes and an introduction by J. M. Neale, D.D.

[2] For criticisms and translations of the Greek hymns the reader is referred to the work of Dr. Neale already mentioned: Julian's *Dictionary of Hymnology; Encyclopædia Britannica*, article Hymns; Mrs. Charles' *Voice of Christian Life in Song;* Schaff's *Christ in Song*, and Saunders' *Evenings With the Sacred Poets.*

by the permission of the Council of Toledo in the seventh century.

The history of Christian poetry and music in the East ends with the separation of the Eastern and Western Churches. From that time onward a chilling blight rested upon the soil which the apostles had cultivated with such zeal and for a time with such grand result. The fatal controversy over Icons, the check inflicted by the conquests of the Mohammedan power, the crushing weight of Byzantine luxury and tyranny, and that insidious apathy which seems to dwell in the very atmosphere of the Orient, sooner or later entering into every high endeavor, relaxing and corrupting—all this sapped the spiritual life of the Eastern Church. The pristine enthusiasm was succeeded by fanaticism, and out of fanaticism, in its turn, issued formalism, bigotry, stagnation. It was only among the nations that were to rear a new civilization in Western Europe on the foundations laid by the Roman empire that political and social conditions could be created which would give free scope for the expansion of the divine life of Christianity. It was only in the West, also, that the motives that were adequate to inspire a Christian art, after a long struggle against Byzantine formalism and convention, could issue in sufficient artistic expression. The attempted reconciliation of Christian ideas and traditional pagan method formed the basis of Christian art, but the new insight into spiritual things, and the profounder emotions that resulted, demanded new ideals and principles as well as new subjects. The nature and destiny of the soul, the beauty and significance that lie in secret self-scrutiny and aspiration kindled by a new hope, this rather than the loveliness of outward shape became the object of contemplation and the endless theme of art. Architecture and sculpture became symbolic, painting the representation of the life of the soul, poetry and music the direct witness and the immediate manifestation of the soul itself.

With the edicts of Constantine early in the fourth century, which practically made Christianity the dominant religious system of the empire, the swift dilation of the pent-up energy of the Church inaugurated an era in which ritualistic splendor kept pace with the rapid acquisition of temporal power. The hierarchical developments had already traversed a course parallel to those of the East, and now that the Church was free to work out that genius of organization of which it had already become definitely conscious, it went one step farther than the Oriental system in the establishment of the Papacy as the single head from which the subordinate members derived legality. This was not a time when a

democratic form of church government could endure. There was no place for such in the ideas of that age. And in the furious tempests that overwhelmed the Roman empire, in the readjustment of political and social conditions all over Europe, with the convulsions and frequent triumphs of savagery that inevitably attended them, it was necessary that the Church, as the sole champion and preserver of civilization and righteousness, should concentrate all her forces, and become in doctrine, worship and government a single, compact, unified, spiritual state. The dogmas of the Church must be formulated, preserved, and guarded by an official class, and the ignorant and fickle mass of the common people must be taught to yield a reverent, unquestioning obedience to the rule of their spiritual lords. The exposition of theology, the doctrine of the ever-renewed sacrifice of Christ upon the altar, the theory of the sacraments generally, all involved the conception of a mediatorial priesthood deriving its authority by direct transmission from the apostles. Out of such conditions and tendencies proceeded also the elaborate and awe-inspiring rites, the fixed liturgies embalming the central dogmas of the faith, and the whole machinery of a worship which was itself viewed as of a certain objective efficacy, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and designed both for the edification of the believer and as an offering of the Church to its Redeemer. In the development of the outward observances of worship, with their elaborate symbolic ceremonialism, the student is often struck with surprise to see how lavishly the Church drew its forms and decorations from Paganism and Judaism. But there is nothing in this that need excite wonder, nothing that was not inevitable under the conditions of the times. Says Lanciani: "In accepting rites and customs which were not offensive to her principles and morality, the Church showed equal tact and foresight, and contributed to the peaceful accomplishment of the transformation."[1] The Pagan or Jewish convert was not obliged to part with all his ancestral notions of the nature of worship. He found his love of pomp and splendor gratified by the ceremonies of a religion which knew how to make many of the fair features of earthly life accessary to the inculcation of spiritual truth. And so it was that symbolism and the appeal to the senses aided in commending Christianity to a world which was not yet prepared for a faith which should require only a silent, unobtrusive experience. Instruction must come to the populace in forms which would satisfy their inherited predispositions. The

[1] *Pagan and Christian Rome*, p. 23.

Church, therefore, establishing itself among heathenism assumed a large number of rites and customs from classical antiquity, and in the externals of its worship, as well as of its government, assumed forms which were contributions from without, as well as evolutions from within. These acquisitions, however, did not by any means remain a meaningless or incongruous residuum of dead superstitions. An instructive symbolism was imparted to them; they were moulded with marvelous art into the whole vesture with which the Church clothed herself for the instruction, as well as the admiration, of her votaries, and were made to become conscious witnesses to the truth and beauty of the new faith.

The commemoration of martyrs and confessors passed into invocations for their aid as intercessors with Christ. They became the patron saints of individuals and orders, and honors were paid to them at particular places and on particular days, involving a multitude of special ritual observances. Festivals were multiplied and took the place in popular regard of the old Roman Lupercalia and Saturnalia and the mystic rites of heathenism. As among the cultivated nations of antiquity, so in Christian Rome the festival, calling into requisition every available means of design and decoration, became the basis of a rapid development of art. Under all these conditions the music of the Church in Italy became a liturgic music, and, as in the East, the laity resigned the main offices of song to a choir consisting of subordinate clergy and appointed by clerical authority. The method of singing was undoubtedly not indigenous, but derived, as has already been shown, directly or indirectly from Eastern practice. Milman asserts that the liturgy of the Roman Church for the first three centuries was Greek. However this may have been, we know that both Syriac and Greek influences were strong at that time in the Italian Church. A number of the Popes in the seventh century were Greeks. Until the cleavage of the Church into its final Eastern and Western divisions the interaction was strong between them, and much in the way of custom and art was common to both. The conquests of the Moslem power in the seventh century drove many Syrian monks into Italy, and their liturgic practice, half Greek, half Semitic, could not fail to make itself felt among their adopted brethren.

A notable instance of the transference of Oriental custom into the Italian Church is to be found in the establishment of antiphonal chanting in the Church of Milan, at the instance of St. Ambrose, bishop of that city. St. Augustine, the pupil and friend of St. Ambrose, has given an account of this event, of

which he had personal knowledge. "It was about a year, or not much more," he relates, "since Justina, the mother of the boy-emperor Justinian, persecuted Thy servant Ambrose in the interest of her heresy, to which she had been seduced by the Arians." [This persecution was to induce St. Ambrose to surrender some of the churches of the city to the Arians.] "The pious people kept guard in the church, prepared to die with their bishop, Thy servant. At this time it was instituted that, after the manner of the Eastern Church, hymns and psalms should be sung, lest the people should pine away in the tediousness of sorrow, which custom, retained from then till now, is imitated by many—yea, by almost all of Thy congregations throughout the rest of the world."[1]

The conflict of St. Ambrose with the Arians occurred in 386. Before the introduction of the antiphonal chant the Psalms were probably rendered in a semi-musical recitation, similar to the usage mentioned by St. Augustine as prevailing at Alexandria under St. Athanasius, "more speaking than singing." That a more elaborate and emotional style was in use at Milan in St. Augustine's time is proved by the very interesting passage in the tenth book of the "Confessions," in which he analyzes the effect upon himself of the music of the Church, fearing lest its charm had beguiled him from pious absorption in the sacred words into a purely æsthetic gratification. He did not fail, however, to render the just meed of honor to the music that so touched him: "How I wept at Thy hymns and canticles, pierced to the quick by the voices of Thy melodious Church! Those voices flowed into my ears, and the truth distilled into my heart, and thence there streamed forth a devout emotion, and my tears ran down, and happy was I therein."[2]

Antiphonal psalmody, after the pattern of that employed at Milan, was introduced into the divine office at Rome by Pope Celestine, who reigned 422–432. It is at about this time that we find indications of the more systematic development of the liturgic priestly chant. The history of the papal choir goes back as far as the fifth century. Leo I., who died in 461, gave a durable organization to the divine office by establishing a community of monks to be especially devoted to the service of the canonical hours. In the year 580 the monks of Monte Cassino, founded by St. Benedict, suddenly appeared in Rome and announced the destruction of their monastery by the Lombards. Pope Pelagius received them hospitably, and gave them a dwelling near the

[1] *Confessions*, book ix., chap. 7.

[2] *Confessions*, book ix., chap. 6.

Lateran basilica. This cloister became a means of providing the papal chapel with singers. In connection with the college of men-singers, who held the clerical title of sub-deacon, stood an establishment for boys, who were to be trained for service in the Pope's choir, and who were also given instruction in other branches. This school received pupils from the wealthiest and most distinguished families, and a number of the early Popes, including Gregory II. and Paul I., received instruction within its walls.

By the middle or latter part of the sixth century, the mediæval epoch of church music had become fairly inaugurated. A large body of liturgic chants had been classified and systematized, and the teaching of their form and the tradition of their rendering given into the hands of members of the clergy especially detailed for their culture. The liturgy, essentially completed during or shortly before the reign of Gregory the Great (590–604), was given a musical setting throughout, and this liturgic chant was made the law of the Church equally with the liturgy itself, and the first steps were taken to impose one uniform ritual and one uniform chant upon all the congregations of the Western Church.

The obscurity of the period of which we have been speaking must not deceive us in respect to its importance in the history of the Catholic Church. Among the priceless blessings which she has conferred upon the world not the least has been those forms of religious music—first the chant, then the *a capella* chorus—truly divinely inspired and nourished, which she developed in the middle ages as the purest expression that the world has known of the sentiment and motive of worship. And it was in the first six centuries, when the Church was organizing and drilling her forces for her victorious conflicts, that the final direction of her music, as of all her art, was consciously taken. In rejecting the support of instruments and developing for the first time an exclusively vocal art, and in breaking loose from the restrictions of antique metre which in Grecian and Greco-Roman music had forced melody to keep step with strict prosodic measure, Christian music parted company with pagan art, threw the burden of expression not, like Greek music, upon rhythm, but upon melody, and found in this absolute vocal melody a new art principle of which all the worship music of modern Christendom is the natural and glorious fruit. More vital still than these special forms and principles, comprehending and necessitating them, was the true ideal of music, proclaimed once for all by the fathers of the liturgy. This ideal is found in the distinction of the church style from the secu-

lar style, the expression of the universal mood of prayer, rather than the expression of individual, fluctuating, passionate emotion with which secular music deals—that rapt, pervasive, exalted tone which makes no attempt at detailed painting of events or superficial mental states, but seems rather to symbolize the fundamental sentiments of humility, awe, hope and love which mingle all particular experiences in the common offering which surges upward from the heart of the Church to the Lord and Master of all. In this avoidance of an impassioned emphasis of details in favor of an expression drawn from the large spirit of worship, church music evades the peril of introducing an alien dramatic element into the holy ceremony, and asserts its nobler power of creating an atmosphere from which all wordly custom and association disappears. This grand conception was early injected into the mind of the Church, and has been the parent of all that has been most noble and edifying in the creations of ecclesiastical music.

Judged from these view-points, there are few epochs in art history that seem to be of greater moment. The serene and touching melodies of the Gregorian chant, which carry us back near to this very era, are witnesses that the first application of these new principles was not in feeble and awkward phrases, but in forms so beautiful and appropriate that they endure while other forms of music arise, flourish and fade away. The revival in recent years of the study of the liturgic chant, and the mediæval *a capella* chorus music which grew out of it, arouses an insatiable curiosity to know the causes which set in motion so great an art movement. These causes cannot all be traced in detail, but with the aid of the scanty records much light can be thrown upon them by a comparative study of the liturgies, hymns, architecture, and the political, hierarchical and doctrinal developments of the time. By this method it may be seen that the music of the early Church was not accidental or decorative, or lacking in vital significance. It was an outgrowth of the conditions of the age, of the necessities of devotional expression, and of that peculiar genius of Catholicism that has made every external phenomenon symbolic of the spiritual life within. The Catholic Church develops, but, in essence, she does not change. The history of her music is likewise typical of her whole history. Manifold in its diversity, it has pursued one definite consistent aim, and that aim was already manifest in the first steps of its career.

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