

Gay

Church Music in Farmington in the Olden Time

AN
Historical Address
DELIVERED AT THE
ANNUAL MEETING
OF THE
VILLAGE LIBRARY COMPANY
OF
FARMINGTON, CONN.

May 6, 1891

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BY JULIUS GAY

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PRESS OF THE CASE, LOCKWOOD & BRAINARD COMPANY

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James L. Whitney,
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ADDRESS.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Village Library Company of Farmington:—

We have been called together this evening, in accordance with the articles under which we are associated, to hear of the prosperity of our library, and to select those who for another year shall care for its well-being.

In bygone times, whenever the citizens of this state were called upon to exercise the elective franchise, it was customary to designate some learned divine to deliver for their guidance and encouragement an annual election sermon. Far be it from me to invade the sacred office or to assail your ears with lessons of such ponderous wisdom. Some, however, who heard the account of the library of a century ago have desired to go back with me another century and hear something of that still older time. A rude age it was, but rudeness seen through the mists of two centuries ceases to be repulsive. The petty discomforts of life are forgotten, and even the uncouth becomes picturesque. There is a strange fascination in looking back on the deeds of your own ancestors; and the very localities where they lived—trivial to all others—seem sacred in the sight of their descendants.

You will hear of no libraries in their rude cabins. They deemed the Bible and the Psalm-Book sufficient for their wants. The one was for a time their only law book, and with the other their souls rose on the wings of song out of their gloomy surroundings to the God who had brought them hither, and who they believed would still sustain them.

What, then, was the music which was as dear to them as the breath of life?

Rude it may seem to our ears; trivial it could not have been. The gay soldier of King Charles's court derided it. Tennyson tells how —

“The Roundhead rode,
And hummed a surly hymn.”

but when on Marston Moor the Ironsides of Cromwell raised their battle psalm and, roused to frenzy, rushed upon the Cavaliers, they learned full well the power of Puritan psalmody.

No doubt many of you say, “Have we not heard this old music over and over again, and, dressed in the very apparel of our ancestors, ourselves helped to sing it? By no means. The music of the Old Folks' Concert is all comparatively modern. This town had been settled more than a century when William Billings was born in Boston, in 1746, and in due time gave to the world those strange tunes which suited the taste of a former generation, and have not yet wholly lost their charm: Majesty, in which the vision of Ezekiel is portrayed, David's Lamentation, The Anthem for Easter, and numerous other pieces, well known to you all. Still later was it when Timothy

Swan, born in Worcester in 1758, and living now in Northfield and now in Stamford, inheriting a tinge of insanity from his mother, wrote that wild, weird tune, Ocean, in which he strives to picture how, while —

“The winds arise,
And swell the towering waves,
The men astonished mount the skies
And sink in gaping graves.”

Daniel Read who sang

“O may my heart in tune be found,
Like David’s harp of solemn sound.”

or again, in the plaintive minor strains of Russia, compares man, whether of high degree or of the baser sort, to “a puff of empty air,” or in triumphant notes rejoices —

“While shepherds watch their flocks by night,
All seated on the ground ;”

or shrinks with horror at the dreadful end of the wicked as he sees them stand on slippery rocks while “fiery billows roll below,” died in New Haven so lately as 1841.

What, then, was the music of our forefathers in their first sanctuary ?

It was simply the music they had been accustomed to sing in the churches of Old England. The settlers of this town came from Hartford, and were, for the most part, members of the so-called Braintree Company, which came from the County of Essex in England. They did not, therefore, like the Plymouth Colony, spend twelve years on their way in Holland

until, as Winslow said, they were like to lose their language and the name of English, but brought straight from the village churches of England the songs they had learned in their youth. Cotton Mather tells of their neighbors of the Salem church, that the Rev. Mr. Higginson, calling up his children and other passengers into the stern of the ship, to take their last sight of England, said, "We will not say, as the Separatists were wont to say at their leaving of England, 'Farewell, Babylon! Farewell, Rome!' but we will say, 'Farewell, dear England! Farewell, the Church of God in England, and all the Christian friends there. We do not go to New England as Separatists from the Church of England, though we cannot but separate from the corruptions in it.'"

They brought with them two metrical versions of the Psalms; that of Henry Ainsworth which was used mostly in Massachusetts, and that of Sternehold and Hopkins which found favor in this State. I have myself a copy brought over by one of the first settlers of this town. Its quaint old title is worth repeating.

"The Booke of Psalmes: Collected into English Meeter, by Thomas Sternehold, Iohn Hopkins, and others: conferred with the Hebrew; with apt Notes to sing them withall. Set forth and allowed to be sung in all Churches, of the people together, before and after Morning and Evening Prayer: As also before and after Sermon: and moreover in private houses, for their godly solace and comfort, laying apart all ungodly Songs and Ballads, which tend onely to the nourishment of vice, and corrupting of youth."

It has, besides the metrical version of the Psalms, several pieces of Old English Church Music, a few of which I name because they form part of a book actually in use in this town nearly, if not quite, 250 years ago. The following certainly do not sound much like the music of the conventicle as the author of *Waverly* loved to describe it: The Benedictus or Song of Zacharias, The Magnificat or Song of the Blessed Mary, The Nunc Dimittis or Song of Simeon, The Athanasian Creed, The Pater Noster or Lord's Prayer, The Ten Commandments, and many other set pieces. The music, of which there was a considerable variety, was printed with the old-fashioned square-headed notes and without bars except at the end of each line of the words, the C clef being invariably used, a sore puzzle to modern performers. Only the melody was given which was to be sung by the whole congregation in unison. Some few of the more rigid Puritans objected to congregational singing, and argued that, as one man prayed and preached, so only one should sing; a refinement of solo music which did not prevail. That these men looked upon singing simply as an act of devotion, without the slightest thought of anything æsthetic in it, appears when they proposed to exclude female voices, and argued further: "Because it is not permitted to a woman to speak in church, how then shall they sing? Much less is it permitted them to prophesy in the church. And singing of Psalms is a kind of prophesying." These objections, though not sustained by the great body of the worshipers, were nevertheless answered at length by the Rev. John

Cotton, in a tract published to help the introduction of the famous Bay Psalm Book, which was compiled by about thirty New England divines, and was printed at Cambridge in 1640, the year in which this town was settled. It was the first book printed in the United States, and has become so rare that a copy was sold in 1879 for \$1,200. It lacked the musical notes in the early editions, a most disastrous omission, as will soon appear.

A few years later, in 1718, Cotton Mather, best known by his famous *Magnalia*, published the *Psalterium Americanum*, which also lacked the printed notes. It was a very exact translation of the Hebrew, written in smooth and elegant English blank verse, but people missed the rhymes and the rude vigor of the old version, and would have none of it. It possessed one remarkable provision, said to have been invented by Richard Baxter, by which a number of the Psalms could be sung to any of the meters then in use, Long, Short, or Common,—a device which would commend itself to any luckless leader of a prayer meeting, who has come to grief in attempting to sing a Long meter hymn to a Short meter tune.

The metrical version of the Psalms was usually bound up with the great family Bible, and was too heavy and costly a book for common use in the churches. It was the custom, therefore, in this scarcity of singing books, for one of the deacons to read the Psalm a line at a time, and when the singers had finished that line, to read the next, and so on until the Psalm was concluded. There were no hymns in use

and no favorite Psalms which the congregation, becoming familiar with, could in time sing without the book. They deemed it their solemn duty to sing all the Psalms in course, just as they read their Bibles through from Genesis to Revelation, and then began again; and it worried their consciences not a little that in the early editions, Sternehold and Hopkins had not rendered all of the one hundred and fifty Psalms into meter. Still, as several had more than one hundred lines, and one over seven hundred, "deaconing out the Psalm," in this lack of books, was an evident necessity.

Let us now spend a Sabbath in the first meeting-house which stood on our village green, and, so far as may be, learn how our fathers worshiped within its walls. As all days are alike open to our choice, we select the year 1676 for our visit. You need not listen for the signal of the bell; you will have to wait 44 years for that sound; but the drum will be beaten at the time of divine service, and also an hour before.

Let us join the train of worshipers as they approach the sanctuary from all parts of the little village. They are, for the most part, on foot; but some from the outlying farms are on horseback — the good wife on a pillion behind the good man, with the youngest child in her arms, while the rest of the family — the sturdy sons and daughters — follow on foot, family intermingled with family, and much paired according to the law of a natural selection older than Darwin. The meeting-house stands where the second and third house were afterward built. Doors open to the

east and south, and very likely to the west. Within stands the lofty pulpit, directly beneath and in front of which is the deacons' seat, where the two deacons of the church—Deacon Stephen Hart and Deacon Thomas Judd—are already sitting. Above, running part way around the house, is a gallery, where the youth of both sexes are divided off from the rest of the assembly,—a most ingenious device for setting their high animal spirits and inherent love of mischief at constant war with the solemn decorum demanded by the tithing-man. The rest of the people are seated according to the custom of Puritan churches soon afterward formulated on our records, with “respect to age, office, and estate, so far as it tendeth to make a man respectable, and to everything else which hath the same tendency.” Prominent we shall see the civil magistrate, in the person of his Honor John Wadsworth, Commissioner of the General Court, and next in rank that majestic personage, the captain of the train-band, whose office every boy looks forward to as the goal of his youthful ambition. Behind them sit the lesser dignitaries, the Lieutenant, the Sergeant, the Ensign, the Corporal. I must humbly beg their pardon if I have not set them down in the proper order, for you might as well address one of them without his exact title as to salute the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, by her family name, simply as Mrs. Guelph. It is well that you have entered among the first comers, for the house is filled to its utmost capacity. Every available nook and corner is made to yield a seat for some devout

worshiper. Soon after this, to relieve somewhat the pressure, "the town gave unto Ebenezer Steele, Joseph Judd, Thomas Lee, Nathaniel Lewis, and Samuel Judd, a liberty to build them a seat over the short girt at the easterly end of the gallery, on the condition that they do not damnify the other seats in the meeting house." This was but a temporary relief. There was no longer room for the youth in the gallery, and to let them sit with their parents in the Holy of Holies below was not to be thought of. It would interfere with the etiquette of precedence in the seating of the house, and no European court ever was more rigid in this than were the worshippers in the old Puritan meeting-house. Nevertheless something must be done to accommodate the patriarchal families of our ancestors. The problem of how Noah stowed away all the animals in the ark, proposed by Dr. Johnson to little Miss Thrale as a pretty question in arithmetic, was as nothing compared to it. At length a compromise was effected by which some of the older and more sedate of the young women were admitted below, and "the town by vote gave liberty to Lieutenant Judd's two daughters, and the Widow Judd's two daughters, and the two eldest daughters of John Steele to erect, or cause to be erected, a seat for their proper use at the south end of the meeting-house at the left hand as they go in at the door, provided it be not prejudicial to the passage and doors."

And now the guard of eight men with muskets at shoulder march in at the door, and, stacking their arms within reach, take the seats assigned them on

either side. Why this armed invasion of the house of God? Simply because the noble savage is on the war path. News has just reached the town that Hezekiah Willet, brother of the pastor's wife, has been slain by the savages over at Swansea. Only a few months since Jobanna Smith of this town was killed at Hatfield, and Roger Orvis wounded. Nor have people forgotten the murder in their midst a few years before of a woman and her maid, and the burning of several houses. True, the murderer had been duly executed at Hartford in a manner too brutal to relate, and, if tradition be correct, his head had been set up on a pole, — an object-lesson for the instruction of the untutored savage. Just now they are unmindful of the lesson, and any moment King Phillip and his warriors may fall upon the village. Now that the last roll of the drum has sounded, and all are in their places, with stately step and reverend demeanor the pastor, Samuel Hooker, walks up the aisle and ascends the lofty pulpit. He comes fresh from the honors of Harvard, where for his graduating thesis he has argued in the affirmative one of those subtle metaphysical questions so delightful to the early New England mind, "Whether an all-perfect being can be perfectly defined." More recently a fellow of that college, he declined a call by the church in Springfield, and was here installed as the successor of his brother-in-law, the Rev. Roger Newton.

The service begins with a prayer continuing about a quarter of an hour. The pastor then reads and expounds a chapter and announces the forenoon psalm.

One of the deacons, or some devout man of sufficient musical gift, arises and reads, in a sonorous voice, the first line of the psalm —

“The man is blest that hath not bent,”

and, sounding the first note as near D as his skill admits, launches out bravely in the old choral. One by one the assembly join their voices until the line is finished, when the leader reads again the second line

“To wicked reade his eare,”

and the whole congregation having now caught the melody, join in the tune, only resting their voices for a mightier shout, while the deacon reads the third line —

“Nor led his life as sinners do;”

and so alternately reading and making the forest echo with their song, they conclude with —

“And eke the way of wicked men
Shall quite be overthrown;”

and sitting down, with their souls, if not their voices, attuned to the praise of God, await the discourse of the beloved Hooker as he turns the hour-glass and announces his text. I cannot describe his sermon. Twice he preached the annual election sermon, and twice the General Court ordered it printed, but no copies are known to have ever existed. After a concluding prayer and a blessing the people retire for a little time to their homes to eat their frugal Sabbath meal and talk over the lessons of the day.

The afternoon service is like the morning, except, after the concluding prayer, all children born

since the last Sabbath are presented for baptism, no matter what the weather, no one daring to incur, what seemed to them, the terrible responsibility of deferring this solemn rite. One of the deacons now rises and announces, "Brethren of the Congregation, now there is time left for contribution, wherefore as God has prospered you, so freely offer." The magistrates first, and others in the order of their rank, now come forward and bring their offerings to the deacon at his seat. Then new members, if there are any, are admitted, a concluding psalm is sung, if time permits, and with a blessing the congregation is dismissed.

I have said that the first editions of the Bay Psalm Book were printed without the music. As a result the people sang by rote, forgot in time all but three or four of the tunes, and sang these in as many ways as there were singers. To remedy the evil the publishers of the Bay Psalm Book began about 1690 to add the notes of the only twelve tunes then in use, viz.: Litchfield, Canterbury, York, Windsor, Cambridge, the 100th Psalm Tune, and six others, the names of which have ceased to be familiar.

So little was known of musical notation that such directions to the leader as these were printed:

"First observe . . . the place of your first note, and how many notes above and below that, so as you may begin the tune of your first note, as the rest may be sung in the compass of your and the people's voices, without Squeaking above or Grumbling below."

For six of the twelve tunes "a cheerful high pitch" is recommended for the first note. For the

One Hundredth Psalm Tune "a note indifferent high," and a low note for the remainder; and these directions were as concise as would be understood.

By the year 1720 the singing in all the churches had become so desperately bad that ministers began to preach in earnest the need of reform. Cotton Mather published his "Accomplished Singer" in 1721 for the encouragement "of those who are learning to sing by Rule and seeking to preserve a Regular Singing in the Assemblies of the Faithful." The Rev. Thomas Walter of Roxbury the same year published a singing-book in the introduction to which he says, "At present we are confined to eight or ten tunes, and in some congregations to little more than half that number," and as for the ornamental notes introduced according to the individual taste of each singer, he says "much time is taken up in shaking out these *turns* and *quavers*; and besides, no two men in the congregation quaver alike or together, which sounds in the ear of a good judge like *five hundred* different tunes roared out at the same time." In our own State the Rev. Nathaniel Chauncey of Durham published a sermon in 1727 in defense of the new or regular way of singing by note, in which he answers four objections. The fourth and no doubt the principal objection of the old people was, "It looks very unlikely to be the right way, because that young people fall in with it; they are not wont to be so forward for anything that is good." His answer was introduced by a somewhat free rendering of Job 32: 9, namely, "As old men are not always wise, so young men are not

always fools." The Rev. Timothy Woodbridge also preached a sermon at East Hartford the same year which was printed and largely circulated in aid of the Reform. Singing-schools began also to be established, and the war between the old way and the new way began in good earnest. It lasted until just before the breaking out of the Revolutionary War. Let us see how it fared with the old church in Farmington. A period of forty-eight years has passed since our last visit to the old meeting-house. The beloved Hooker sleeps beneath the sod of the old burying ground, though no stone marks the spot. There has been a long interruption of the pastoral relation. Ineffectual calls have been extended by the town to Mr. Joseph Parsons, to "the much esteemed Mr. Jabez Fitch," to "the much esteemed Eliphalet Adams," to "the worthy Mr. John Buckley," to "Mr. Daniel Hooker," to "Mr. Ephraim Woodbridge," and to "the worthy Mr. Nathaniel Eells." Finally a committee has been ordered to undertake the long and perilous journey through the wilderness to Nantasket near Boston in search of a minister. The town treasury being unequal to supplying funds for so important an expedition, a loan, to be repaid at the rate of two shillings for one, has been negotiated. The Rev. Samuel Whitman returns with the committee, and the town votes him thanks for "venturing the difficulties of such a journey to serve us." A new meeting-house has been erected during his pastorate, and now, on the 7th of April, 1724, the church votes "to delay the admission of regular singing into the church." Two

months later, June 9th, they vote to "take a year's time to consider and look into the way of singing called regular," and "that if any person or persons shall for the future presume to sing contrary to the lead of the chorister appointed by the church to the disturbance of the assembly and the jarring of the melody, he or they shall be looked upon and dealt with as offenders." Nevertheless, this very thing happened, and the testimony before the court which followed will throw more light upon the musical ways of the past than any words of mine. The parties concerned have been a century in their graves and cannot be harmed.

"February 19, 1724-5 The testimony of Jonathan Smith is as followeth, viz.: I being at the house of God or place of public worship in Farmington the 24th day of January, 1724 5, it being the Sabbath or Lord's Day, and after prayer our chorister, viz.: Deacon John Hart did fit or set a tune to the psalm that was offered to be sung, which tune is commonly called Bella tune, as well he might, it being as proper or more proper to that psalm than any other tune. And soon after said Chorister had set said tune, I heard an unwonted sound, something like hollowing or strong, strong singing to my disturbance and the jarring of the melody, which caused me to observe from whence it came, and perceiving that it came from Capt. Joseph Hawley, I took particular notice of his ascents and descents, and according to my best judgment and observation, said Hawley (after his manner of singing) sang the tune commonly called Southwell, *alias* Cambridge Short Tune, and said Hawley continued said disturbance the greatest part of said singing."

John Hooker, Esq., promptly fined Capt. Hawley for a breach of the Sabbath, but as the captain was a member of the General Assembly, he brought the fol-

lowing petition to that body, which states with much humor and with learned puns his view of the case. Though printed many times it is worthy of repetition.

“To the Honorable, the General Assembly at Hartford, the 18th of May 1725: The memorial of Joseph Hawley one of the House of Representatives humbly sheweth: Your memorialist, his father and grandfather and the whole church and people of Farmington have used to worship God by singing psalms to his praise in that mode called the Old Way. However, the other day Jonathan Smith and one Stanley got a book and pretended to sing more regularly and so made great disturbance in the worship of God; for the people could not follow that mode of singing. At length it was moved to the church whether to admit the new way or no, who agreed to suspend it at least a year. Yet Deacon Hart the chorister one Sabbath day, in setting the Psalm, attempted to sing Bella tune, and your memorialist being used to the old way as aforesaid did not know *bellum* tune from *pax* tune, and supposed the Deacon had aimed at Cambridge short tune and set it wrong, whereupon your petitioner raised his voice in the said short tune and the people followed him, except the said Smith and Stanly and the few who sang aloud in Bella tune, and so there was an unhappy discord in the singing as there has often been since the new singers set up, and the blame was all imputed to your poor petitioner, and John Hooker, Esq., Assistant, sent for him and fined him the 19th of February last for breach of the Sabbath, and so your poor petitioner is laid under a heavy scandal and reproach and rendered vile and profane for what he did in the fear of God and in the mode he had been well educated in and was then the settled manner of singing by the agreement of the church.”

The memorial continues at great length, but if all the memorials written by Capt. Hawley during the contention and still preserved were printed, they would make quite a good-sized book.

A single extract from the records of a Justice Court in Wethersfield shows how the youth of this town looked upon these proceedings.

“Asahel Strong of Farmington being presented . . . for that he did in company with several others in the night after the 13th day of November last past, it being the night next following the Sabbath or Lord’s Day, at the place of parade or mustering in said Farmington, where Capt. Hawley usually trains his company, make and set up something called a gallows with a strange picture or image fixed thereon with ‘lybels’ upon it &c., thereby notoriously defaming, reviling and traducing Capt. Hawley of Farmington, though in a clandestine manner under the name of vetge [effigy?] or some such word, which actions or doings of his are contrary to the public peace of Our Sovereign Lord the King, his Crown and Dignity.”

Two years later the Ecclesiastical Society, on the 17th of March, 1726-7, expressed their great dislike of the “way of singing of Psalms which is recommended by the Reverend Ministers of Boston with other ministers to the number of twenty or thereabouts.”

But the matter did not rest there. Some of the parties were disciplined by the church. A council of the neighboring divines was convened on the 18th of January, 1730-1, and memorials lengthy and spirited were presented. Finally the church, August 4, 1737, more than twelve years after the beginning of the trouble, decided the learned decision of the council too difficult for their understanding, and that they would drop the whole matter.

After the conclusion of this unhappy strife, the church had rest many years. The elders had triumphed, but the younger singers waited their time. On

the 17th of December, 1750, the Ecclesiastical Society voted "that they would introduce Mr. Watts' Version of the Psalms to be sung on Sabbath days and other solemn meetings in the room of the version that hath been used in time past." This was a long step forward. True, some of the hymns describe the future state of the wicked in a manner too realistic to please our modern taste; and Dr. Watts himself in his last years desired to recall some of his verses, but having parted with the copyright was unable to prevent the publication of what was no longer in accord with the more tender and loving feelings of his old age. Still very many of his hymns will be sung in our churches so long as devout worshipers shall admire whatever is majestic or reverential.

Twenty-three years more pass. The reform advocated by the twenty divines half a century before has been preached in season and out of season from all the Congregational pulpits of New England. Tracts and sermons have been printed and scattered broadcast; singing schools have become the most popular amusement of the young, and finally the old men who stood up manfully for the old way have one by one ceased their earthly songs. The change was finally made without opposition, when, on the 12th of April, 1773, the Ecclesiastical Society "Voted that the people who have learned the rule of singing have liberty to sit near together in the same position as they sat this day at their singing meeting, and that they have liberty to assist in carrying on that part of divine worship."

Of course a radical change of method did not at once go smoothly, and the next year a committee had to be appointed "to compromise the difference among the singers;" but differences among singers have been known since that time. The change was made by other towns of the state about the same time. In one of the churches of Windsor, in 1771; in Farmington and Simsbury in 1773: in Norfolk and Columbia in 1774: and in Harwinton in 1776. The change was not always made so easily as with us. In some churches the deacons persisted in lining out the psalm; but the new singers having once got well under way with the first line, kept straight on with the rest of the psalm, carrying everything before them like a whirlwind and leaving the deacon in hopeless despair. But not always. We read of one deacon who sat down in grim silence, biding his time, and when the young people had finished their musical antics, arose, and with trumpet tones which rang through the house, announced "Now let the people of the Lord sing." And they did it, though for the last time, in the good old way. The historian of Worcester, Mass., tells us that in 1779, after the town had voted to adopt the new way of singing, "after the hymn had been read by the minister, the aged and venerable Deacon Chamberlain, unwilling to desert the custom of his fathers, arose and read the first line according to his usual practice. The singers, prepared to carry the alteration into effect, proceeded without pausing at its conclusion. The white-haired officer of the church, with the full power of his voice, read on until the louder notes of the collected

body overpowered him, and the deacon, deeply mortified, . . . seized his hat and retired from the meeting-house in tears." Nearer to us, in 1773, the History of Simsbury tells of the employment of a teacher of music who, "after practicing some time, appeared with his scholars in church on a Sunday, and the minister having announced the psalm, the choir, under their instructor's lead, started off with a tune much more lively than the congregation had been accustomed to hear. Upon which one of the Deacons, Brewster Higley, took his hat and left the house, exclaiming "Popery, Popery!"

And now that more elaborate music began to be sung, instruments were allowed to guide the voices. First the pitch pipe, and then that horror of the older Puritans, the great viol, followed by the little viol, the flute, the bassoon, the hautboy, the clarionette, and if there were any other instruments known among them, all were introduced to praise the Lord and triumph over their elders.

And now, breaking loose from all restraint, whether religious or esthetic, with their taste founded on the patriotic songs that helped to usher in the War of the Revolution, the young men sang with wild enthusiasm the noisy fugue tunes of the day. William Billings was the pioneer of this style of music. Born in Boston, blind of one eye, and otherwise deformed in person, taking snuff by the handful from his open pocket, he pursued the trade of a tanner, and as he tended the mill for grinding bark, wrote out his intricate fugues on the wall with chalk, and sung them with a voice of thunder such as has been seldom be-

stowed on man. His first book "The New England Psalm Singer," was published in 1770, the title page being enlivened by a doggerel of his own composition,

"O, praise the Lord with one consent,
And in this grand design,
Let Britain and the Colonies
Unanimously join."

Somewhat later he kept a music store, his sign projecting out over the sidewalk painted BILLINGS' MUSIC in big letters on both sides. He was much annoyed by the ungodly youth of Boston, who amused themselves by tying cats together by their hind legs and hanging them on his sign. Their unearthly screams in connection with the words BILLINGS' MUSIC, expressing the popular opinion of his performances. Samuel Adams, the "Father of the Revolution," while he relied on such men as John Hancock to influence the wealthier and more cultured classes of Boston, made good use of Billings and his music in stirring up the masses against the British rule. To the tune Chester, Billings set the words,—

"Let tyrants shake their iron rod,
And slavery clank her galling chains ; "

The 137th Psalm "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion," he paraphrased as "By the rivers of Watertown we sat down and wept, when we remember thee, O Boston."

. . . "If I forget thee, O Boston"

"Then let my tongue forget to move,
And ever be confined.

Let horrid jargon split the air,
And rive my nerves asunder:

Let hateful discord grate my ear,
As terrible as thunder."

A wish which his own music amply fulfilled.

Billings' own description of his music is as follows :

"It has more than twenty times the power of the old slow tunes ; each part straining for mastery and victory, the audience entertained and delighted, their minds surpassingly agitated and extremely fluctuated, sometimes declaring for one part, and sometimes another. Now the solemn bass demands their attention,—next, the manly tenor ; now, the lofty counter,—now, the volatile treble. Now here,—now there,—now here again. O, ecstatic ! Rush on, ye sons of harmony ! "

Time will fail to describe more at length this noisy music, with the best specimens of which you are already familiar, or how by slow degrees a better style took its place.

Let us not, however, leave the subject without some slight attempt to understand the position of the worthy men of old who clung so tenaciously to the barbarous methods of their day, during their long war with the so-called "regular singing" of their children. They sung in their rude way as their fathers and their fathers' fathers had before them. Their three or four tunes had become so sacred to them that we are told "the people put off their hats, as they would in prayer when they heard one sung, though not a word was uttered." Some believed the tunes inspired equally with the Psalms themselves, and that they had been taught by the very voice of Jehovah speaking face to face with man as with Moses on Sinai.

They held singing to be an act of devotion commanded by Him to whose ear their rude melodies and the more delicate tones of their children were alike as vanity except as they helped to bear upward the contrite soul of the worshiper. And now to sit in silence, debarred the right to worship as they believed the Word of the Lord commanded, while their children in no devotional mood performed their pretty tunes, was indeed hard to bear.

Like the patriarchal Cotter of Burns,

“ They chant their artless notes in simple guise;
 They tune their hearts, by far the noblest aim;
 Perhaps Dundee’s wild warbling measures rise,
 Or plaintive Martyrs, worthy of the name :
 Or noble Elgin beats the heav’nward flame,
 The sweetest far of Scotia’s holy lays :
 Compar’d with these, Italian thrills are tame ;
 The tickl’d ears no heart felt raptures raise :
 Nae unison hae they with our Creator’s praise.”

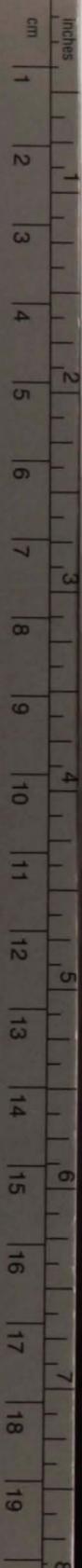
So sang our fathers in the sanctuary, generation after generation, until one by one they lay down to rest in the old burying-ground with an unfaltering trust that sometime, at the mighty blast of the arch-angel’s trumpet, they should arise and stand in their flesh before God, singing with a now united voice, the glorious song of the redeemed.

Kodak Gray Scale



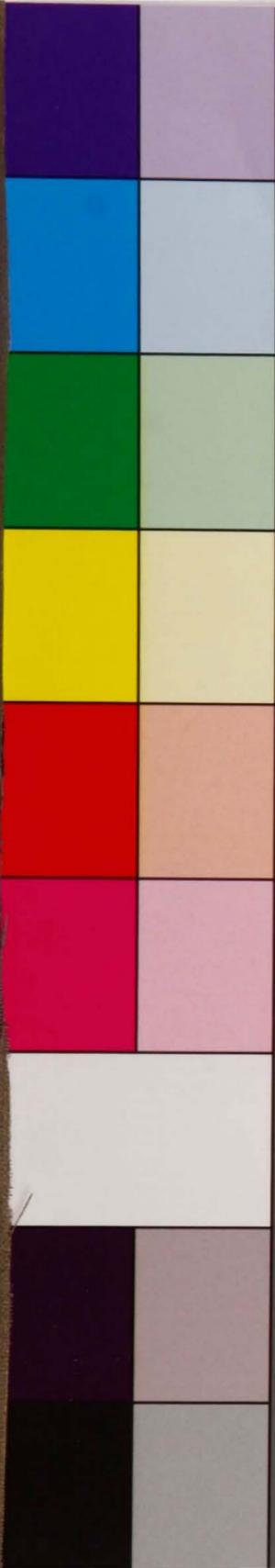
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A 1 2 3 4 5 6 **M** 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 **B** 17 18 19



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Blue Cyan Green Yellow Red Magenta White 3/Color Black



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