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A TRACTATE ON

CHURCH MUSIC;

BEING AN EXTRACT FROM THE REVEREND AND LEARNED MR. PEIRCE'S VINDICATION OF THE DISSENTERS.

THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION SHINES BRIGHTEST IN ITS OWN DRESS; AND TO PAINT IT, IS BUT TO DEFORM IT.

DR. NICHOL'S DEFENCE OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

LONDON: MDCCLXXXVI.
THIS TRACTATE ON CHURCH MUSIC, IS INSCRIBED TO THE REVEREND DOCTOR CHAUNCY AND THE REVEREND MR. JOHN CLARK, THE MINISTERS; AND TO THE SEVERAL MEMBERS OF THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL DISSENTING CHURCH IN BOSTON IN AMERICA.
A TRACTATE ON CHURCH MUSIC.

THE subject before us may be resolved into a question, which, simple and uncompounded, is no other than, whether it be fit and proper to introduce the use of instrumental music into the public worship of almighty God, as being able to excite in us devout and spiritual affections?

Plain singing is universally admitted to be, at once, capable both of raising and improving sentiments of rational piety and devotion; and is commanded in the new Testament. Where the heart and understanding are so intimately interested, like every other united act of praise, it is calculated
culated to produce a good effect. But the addition of instrumental music should seem more calculated to divert and dissipate the pious affections of a reasonable service, than to fix them upon their proper objects. And if express authority be pleaded in its behalf, such authority should be proved by other evidences than a general command concerning singing. It is not enough, to say, that musical instruments are able to stir and cheer our minds; for it is not lawful for us to bring into use such things, of our own heads, into God's worship. Who knows not, that wine has the like virtue, to cheer men's minds, and warm their affections? And yet it is unlawful to use it in the worship of God, except where it is commanded, in the Lord's supper. Vain therefore are these and such like allegations upon this head. And unless it can be proved, that our minds are carried toward spiritual and heavenly things, by some hidden virtue that nature has given to these musical instruments, or by a certain divine grace accompanying them, as God's own institutions; there is really nothing said to the purpose.
The Jews indeed used music in their worship, because God had commanded them so to do, as the scripture most expressly testifies. And he set the Levites in the house of the Lord, with cymbals, with psalteries, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, and of Gad the king's seer, and Nathan the prophet; for so was the commandment of the Lord by his prophets*. God had forbidden the Jews to bring any thing into his worship, of their own head. Hence he not only shewed to Moses the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all the utensils thereof: but when the temple was to be built at Jerusalem, he shewed to David, by his spirit, both the form of it, and all the instruments to be used in it. No man, therefore, will wonder that our blessed Saviour, who reproves all superstitious rites and innovations which he found introduced into that church, should say not a word against music; since it

* 2 Chron. xxix. 25. See also Exod. xxv. 9, 40. xxvi. 30. xxvii. 8. Numb. viii. 4. Deut. iv. 2. v. 32. xii. 32. Josh. i. 7. 1 Chron. xxviii. 11—19. compare also 1 Chron. viii. 13, 14. and xxx. 12.
it was expressly appointed by God himself, and on that very account, could not be reckoned a superstitious rite, or an innovation introduced into that church. But it does not hence follow, that he would have it continued in that evangelical worship which he appointed. Nor is it difficult to give a good reason for this difference between the use of musical instruments, and the practice of plain congregational singing. For, if both these were anciently numbered among the Jewish ceremonies, neither of them ought to be used as such, under the Christian covenant. One, therefore, should be rejected as a Jewish ceremony; the other retained as the institution of Christ. And certainly a man must be blind, who does not see, that trumpets, harps, and such like musical instruments, belonged to the pomp and ceremony of the Jewish worship. But all these things are abrogated, together with the law that appointed the worship; unless any of them appear to have been since injoined by some particular command.

It has been said that the very first worship in the Christian assemblies was performed
formed in the *antiphonal* way of singing, *i. e.* by singing *by turns*, or *in parts*; and for the authority for this practice, we are generally referred to Pliny the younger *. The passage, however, which is referred to, on this occasion, would never have been thought *sufficient* for the purpose, for which it has been introduced, if it had not been read with a *strong* prejudice.

Of all the critics, who have commented on that epistle of Pliny, Catanaeus, an *Italian* *papist*, is the only man who took notice of this way of singing, though they are not wont to omit any thing relating to the *customs* of the ancients. The words *dicere secum invicem*, mean no more than *to sing together*; or as Vossius explains them, "Pliny's meaning is, that the priest was not the only person who sang; but others singing also, they stirred up one another. "Whence Tertullian, in his *Apology*, c. 39. "after he had spoken of their love feast, "adds; *After we have washed our hands, "and the candles are lighted, every one is "desired to sing to God in the midst of the "company.

"company, according as he is able, either out of the holy scriptures, or somewhat of his own composing." Nay, Tertullian, in another place in the same Apology, gives an account of christian solemnities, from this passage of Pliny; but says not a word of singing by turns or in parts. "We find," says he, "it has been forbidden to make a search after us. For when Plinius secundus was governor of a province, and had condemned some, and made others comply, being disturbed by the great multitude of the christians, he consulted the emperor Trajan; acquainting him, that besides an obstinate aversion to sacrificing, he could discover nothing concerning the mysteries [de sacramentis] but that they held assemblies before day, to sing to Christ as to God*. Where, by the by, Pliny seems to have mistaken a hymn in praise of Christ, for one directly addressed to him.

It has been further said that the Antiphone, or chaunting of the Psalms by turns,

* Tertullian c. 2.
turns, is taken notice of by Socrates, as a very early practice of the eastern churches; for he makes Ignatius to be author of it.—But that must be a rare cause, that needs such fabulous stories to defend it. Socrates himself owns, that he tells this story upon a common report, which we all know is little to be credited in such matters; and perhaps he himself did not believe it, for thus he concludes his relation,—"Such is the report concerning these antiphonal hymns."—And further, if this story has any truth in it, how came it to pass, that it should never be mentioned in the least by Ignatius, in his epistles,—by the writer of the account of his martyrdom, or by any other author before Socrates?—But to Socrates may be opposed Theodoret, an ancient writer, and as good a witness, who tells us, that Flavianus and Diodorus were the first authors of this usage. "These," says he, "first divided the choirs into two parts, and taught the singing David's psalms by turns. Which being first begun at Antioch, soon spread itself through the whole world."
world*." Now this happened about the middle of the fourth century. But, further, though Socrates is deservedly thought a very useful writer, yet he cannot deserve much credit, when he gives an account of several of the miracles and visions of the ancients; especially when we consider that he has inserted into his history, the wretched fable, of Helena's finding Christ's cross, as though it deserved to be believed†. Now if what he relates of Helena is not to be credited, much less is what he tells us of Ignatius, who lived at a much greater distance from his own time.—In what great danger must religious worship be, if it is to be ordered according to such uncertain visions!

Basil indeed zealously defends this mode of singing in his epistle to the clergy of Neocesarea, who were much offended at the bringing in of this usage, but does not deny that the ancient manner of singing had been altered in his church‡.

Further,

* Ecclef. Hist. lib. ii. c. 24. † Ib. lib. i. c. 17. ‡ Epist. 63.
Further, not only the clergy of Nesa-
cesarea, but Augustine also, judged this
usage not to have been *very laudable and
pious. " The pleasing my flesh," says
he, " which I should not suffer to weaken
my mind often deceives me, while my
sense does not so accompany my reason,
as patiently to follow it; but endea-
vours to outrun and lead it, though
it is only to be minded for the sake
of the other. And so in these things
I fin, not perceiving it, though I per-
ceive it afterwards. Sometimes, while I
guard excessively against this deceit, I
err through too great severity; but
this is very seldom. So that I wish
all the nice singing of David's Psalms
were removed from mine, and the
church's hearing: and that seems safer
to me, which I remember I have been
often told of Athanasius the bishop of
Alexandria, who made the reader of the
psalm sound it with so little alteration
of his voice, that he was more like a
person
"person delivering a speech than singing*."

Nor do the words of Jerom much favor this novel method of singing. "We must therefore sing and make melody, and praise the Lord, rather with the heart, than the voice. For this is what is here said;—singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. Let young men mind this; let them mind it, whose office is to sing in the church. We must sing to God, not with the voice, but the heart. They are not artfully to supple their jaws, and their throat, after the manner of the tragedians, that theatrical notes and songs should be heard in the church; but they are to praise God with fear, with good works, and the knowledge of the scriptures. If a man has an unpleasant voice, if he has good works, he is a sweet finger in God's ears. Let the servant of Christ so sing, that not the voice of the finger, but the thing sung may please; that the evil spirit, that was

* Concf. lib. x. c. 33.
"was in Saul, may be cast out of those, who in like manner are possessed by him; and not be let into those, who have turned the house of God into a stage."—But what would Jerom have said, if he had been present at such modern singing as is used in some places in our days?

Further, the thirty two commissioners, appointed by king Edward VI. who were the most eminent persons in the nation, both in divinity and law, found fault with this manner of singing, and advised the laying it aside. Hear what they say themselves:—"In reading chapters, and singing psalms, ministers and clerks must think of this diligently; that God is not only to be praised by them, but that others are to be brought to perform the same worship, by their counsel and example. Wherefore let them pronounce their words distinctly, and let their singing be clear and easy, that every thing may be understood by the auditors. So that 'tis our pleasure, that the

* In Eph. v. 19.
the quavering, operose music, which
is called figured, should be wholly laid
aside; since it often makes such a noise
in the ears of the people, that they
can’t understand what is said *.

These observations on artificial singing,
are no more than a natural introduction to
others upon church music.

The use of musical instruments, in the
christian church, receives no countenance
from antiquity. It is attested by all an-
cient writers, with one consent, that they
were not used in the primitive times.
Hence they figuratively explain all the
places of the old Testament, which speak
of musical instruments, as might easily be
shewn by a thousand testimonies, out of
Clement of Alexandria, Basil, Ambrose,
Jerom, Augustine, Chrysostom, and many
others. And, indeed, one can hardly for-
bear laughing, when we meet with some
of their allegorical interpretations: thus
an instrument with ten strings, according
to them, signifies the ten commandments,
as

as the unknown author of the commentary upon the Psalms, among Jerom's works, often explains it*. But the pleafantefl fancy is the explication of those words; *praise him with stringed instruments and organs†.

"That the guts being twifted by reafon " of abftinence from food, and fo all " carnal defires being subdued, men are " found fit for the kingdom of God, " to finge his praifes." Chryfoftom talks more handsomely: "As the jews praised " God," fays he, "with all kinds of in- " ftruments; fo we are commanded to " praise him with all the members of " our bodies, our eyes, &c‡." And Cle- ment of Alexandria talks much to the fame purpose.§.

Besides, the ancients thought it unlaw- ful to ufe those instruments in God's wor- ship. Thus the unknown author of a treatife, among Justin Martyr's works:

Ques. "If fongs are invented by unbe- " lievers with a deSign of deceiving, and " were appointed for thofe under the law, " be-

* In Psalm xxxii. 2. xliii. 4, &c. † Pf. cl. 4.
‡ In Pf. cl. § Predag. lib. ii. c. 4.
because of the childishness of their minds;
why do they, who have received the
perfect instructions of grace, which are
most contrary to the foresaid customs,
nevertheless sing in the churches, just as
they did, who were children under the
law?

Answ. "Plain singing is not childish,
but only the singing with lifeless organs,
with dancing and cymbals, &c. whence
the use of such instruments, and other
things fit for children is laid aside, and
plain singing only retained*.$

Chrysofom seems to have been of the same
mind, to have thought the use of such
instruments was rather allowed the Jews
in consideration of their weakness, than
prescribed and commanded. † But that he
was mistaken, and that musical instruments
were not only allowed the Jews, as he and
Isidorus of Pelusium thought, but were
prescribed by God, appears from the pas-
fages of the old Testament before referred
to.

Clement

* Resp. ad orthodox. Q. 107. † In Psal. cl.
Clement thought these things fitter for beasts, than for men *. And though Basil highly commends, and stiffly defends the way of singing by turns; yet he thought musical instruments unprofitable and hurtful. He calls them, "the inventions of Jubal of the race of Cain." And, a little after, he thus expresses himself: "Laban was a lover of the harp, and of music, with which he would have sent away Jacob: If thou hadst told me," said he, "I would have sent thee away with mirth, and musical instruments, and an harp. But the patriarch avoided that music, as being a thing that would hinder his regarding the works of the Lord, and his considering the works of his hands†." And a little before he says thus: "In such vain arts, as the playing upon the harp, or pipe, or dancing, as soon as the action ceases, the work itself vanishes. So that really, according to the Apostle's expression,—the end of these things is destruction of true piety‡."
Ifidore of Pelusium, before mentioned, and who lived since Basil, held, music was allowed the Jews by God, in a way of condescension to their childishness: "If God," says he, "bore with bloody sacrifices because of men's childishness at that time; why should you wonder, he bore with the music of an harp and a psaltery."

Nay, there are some ecclesiastical officers in the church of England, who, for their very profession and employment, would have been kept from the communion of the church, except they desisted from it. So we are informed by the Apostolical Constitutions: "If any come to the mystery of godliness, being a player upon a pipe, a lute, or an harp; let him leave off or be rejected."

From what has been said, it appears, that no musical instruments were used in the pure times of the church. The practice became antichristian, before they were received. Bellarmine himself does not deny, they were late brought into the church.

* Epist. lib. ii. ep. 176.  † Lib. viii. c. 32.
"The second ceremony," says he, "are the musical instruments, which began to be used in the service of the church, in the time of Pope Vitalian, about the year 660, as Platina relates out of the Pontifical; or, as Aimonius rather thinks, *lib. iv. De gestis Francorum, c. 114. after the year 820, in the time of Lewis the pious.*

Protestants are not disposed to deny that the church of Rome was become antichristian, when they were first brought in; even though we should allow Bellarmine's first date of them to be the true one. But a member of any part of the reformed church, may well be ashamed of that antiquity, which does not exceed the rise of antichrist. Nevertheless, it is pretty clear that both Bellarmine's dates are false, and that the use of instrumental music, in the worship of God, is much later than either of those accounts allow. For as to Platina, he seems to suspect the truth of what he wrote; "Vitalian," says he, "being care-

* *De Missa, lib. ii. c. 15.*
ful about the worship of God, made an ecclesiastical rule, and ordered the singing, with the addition (as some think) of organs *.

—Again, Bellarmine's Aimonius is not the true Aimonius. For (as Dr. Cave says) Aimonius of Fleury, who wrote De geslis Francorum, flourished about the year 1000; and his history which begins at the destruction of Troy, is brought down as far as the coronation of king Pipin, or to the year 752. For the events which are mentioned after that, and make up the latter part of the fourth and the whole of the fifth book, is the continuation of the history by another hand.

Further, that these instruments were not used in God's worship, in Thomas Aquinas's time, that is, about the year 1250, he himself is witness. "In the old law," says he, "God was praised both with musical instruments and human voices, according to that psalm (xxxiii) Praise the Lord with harp, sing unto him with the psaltery, and an instrument of ten strings.

* In Vital. † Hift. Liter. p. 597.
"Strings. But the church does not use musical instruments to praise God, lest she should seem to judaize. Therefore by a parity of reason, she should not use singing."

But Thomas answers: "As to this objection, we must say, as the philosopher, (Lib. iii. Polit.) that pipes are not to be used for teaching, nor any artificial instruments, as the harp, or the like; but whatever will make the hearers good men. For these musical instruments rather delight the mind, than form it to any good disposition. But under the old Testament such instruments were used, partly because the people were harder and more carnal; upon which account they were to be stirred up by these instruments, as likewise by earthly promises; and partly because these bodily instruments were typical of something."

—Upon which place cardinal Cajetan gives us this comment: "It is to be observed, the church did not use organs in Thomas's time. Whence, even to this day, the church

* Secunda questio. art. 4. & conclus. 4.
"church of Rome does not use them in
the pope's presence. And truly it will
appear, that musical instruments are not
to be suffered in the ecclesiastical offices
we meet together to perform, for the
fake of receiving internal instruction from
God; and so much the rather are they
to be excluded, because God's internal
discipline exceeds all human disciplines,
which rejected these kind of instru-
ments*.”

To these testimonies of the late use of
organs in churches, may be added others,
which though they vary a little, generally
agree to the late date of their introduction
into public worship.—Marinus Sanatus,
who lived about the year 1290, is said by
Bingham, to have first brought the use of
them into churches†. However it appears
from the testimony of Gervas, the monk of
Canterbury, who flourished about the year
1200, that organs were introduced more
than one hundred years before this time:
in his description of Lanfranc's church, as
it

* Cit. Hoffm. Lex. voce musica.
† Antiq. of the christian ch. vol. i. p. 314. fol. edit.
it was before the fire in 1174, he has these words "Crux australis supra fornicem or-
gana gestare solebat *.

If the practice of some foreign churches be objected here, in order to countenance this novelty. It may be answered, that "they are laid aside by most of the re-
formed churches; nor would they be "retained among the lutherans, unless "they had forsaken their own Luther;
"who, by the confession of Echard, reck-
oned organs among the ensigns of Baal. "That they still continue in some of the "dutch churches, is against the minds of "the pastors. For in the national synod "at Middleburg, in the year 1581, and "the synod of Holland, and Zealand, in "the year 1594, it was resolved, That "they would endeavour to obtain of the ma-
gistrate the laying aside of organs, and the "singing with them in the churches, even "out of the time of worship, either before or "after sermons. So far are those synods "from bearing with them in the worship "itself †."
The church of England had formerly no very good opinion of these musical instruments; as will appear from her Homilies: "Lastly, say they, God's vengeance hath been, and is daily provoked, because much wicked people pass nothing to resort unto the church; either for that they are so sore blinded, that they understand nothing of God or godliness, and care not with devilish malice to offend their neighbours; or else for that they see the church altogether scourod of such gay gazing sights, as their gross phantasie was greatly delighted with; because they see the false religion abandoned, and the true restored, which seemeth an unsavory thing to their unsavory taste, as may appear by this that a woman said to her neighbour: Alas! gossip, what shall we now do at church, since all saints are taken away; since all the goodly sights we were wont to have are gone; since we cannot hear the like piping, singing, chaunting, and playing upon the organs that we could before? But, dearly beloved, we ought greatly to rejoice and give God thanks, that our churches are delivered"
delivered out of all those things, which displeased God so sore, and filthily de-
filed his holy house, and his place of prayer *.

A great number of the clergy in the first convocation of queen Elizabeth in 1562, earnestly laboured to have organs, and that pompous theatrical way of singing laid aside, and missed the carrying it only by one vote. And in this, archbishop Parker concurred with them, or at least did not oppose them.

And it is a memorable fact that when subscription to the canons of the synod of Dort was required from schoolmasters, and even from organists, some refused to sign them. An organist, in contempt of the canons, and as a proof that he separated the consent of his mind for the music of his instrument,—declared that if they were set to music, he would play them upon the occasion, but that he could not subscribe them with a good conscience *.

* Homily of the place and time of prayer. part 2. fo. edit. p. 231. † Brandt Hist. of Ref. abridged. v. ii. p. 563.
We may add even the testimonies of Papists against the practice of singing in parts, and using musical instruments in churches. Polydore Virgil having taken notice of Augustine's dislike of that way of singing in his time, he thus proceeds: "But in our time it seems much less useful to the commonwealth, now our fingers make such a noise in our churches, that nothing can be heard beside the sound of the voice: and they who come there (that is all that are in the city) are satisfied with the concert of music, which their ears itch for, and never mind the sense of the words. So that we are come to that pass, that in the opinion of the common people, the whole affair of religious worship is lodged in these singers; although, generally speaking, there is no sort of men more loose or wicked: and yet a good part of the people run to church, as to a theatre, to hear them brawl: they hire and encourage them; and look upon them alone as ornaments to the house of God. Wherefore, without doubt, it would be for the in-
"terest of religion, either to cast these
"jackdaws out of the churches; or else to
"teach them when they sing, they should
"do it rather in the manner of reading,
"than bawling; as Austin says Athanasius
"ordered." *

Next hear the judgment of Erasmus.
"Let a man, (says he) be more covetous
"than Crassus, more foul-mouthed than
"Zoilus, he shall be reckoned a pious man,
"if he sings those prayers well, though
"he understands nothing of them. But
"what, I beseech you, must they think of
"Christ, who can believe he is delighted
"with such a noise of mens voices? Not
"content with this, we have brought into
"our churches a certain operose and thea-
"trical music; such a confused disorderly
"chattering of some words, as I hardly
"think was ever heard in any of the Gre-
"cian or Roman theatres. The church
"rings with the noise of trumpets, pipes,
"dulcimers; and human voices strive to
"bear their part with them.—Men run to

* De Invent. Rer. lib. vi. c. 2. p. 379.
"church as to a theatre, to have their ears tickled. And for this end organ-makers are hired with great salaries, and a company of boys, who waste all their time in learning these whining tones. Pray now compute how many poor people in great extremity might be maintained by the salaries of those singers." *

Lastly, Lindanus says,—"who will compare the music of this present age, with that which was formerly used? Whatever is fung now, signifies little for informing the people; which 'tis certain the ancients always designed." †

* In 1 Cor. xiv. 19. † Panopl. lib. iv. c. 78.
POSTSCRIPT.

THE editor having received from the reverend Dr. Price and the reverend Dr. Kippis, their approbation of the sentiment and design of the foregoing tractate, together with leave to publish their communications, he is happy to add such respectable testimony in favour of his attempt to preserve the simplicity of public worship. And he is the more desirous of subjoining the opinions of these gentlemen, because he knows the deserved esteem with which their names are regarded in America, and that if any thing can add honor and esteem to the name of Peirce among the body of rational protestant dissenters, it is the concurrence of a Price and a Kippis.

Extract
POSTSCRIPT.

Extract of a letter from the reverend Dr. Price, dated April — 1786

"I have read these extracts from the excellent Mr. Peirce's *Vindication of the Dissenters* with much satisfaction. I cannot but strongly disapprove instrumental music in churches. It is a deviation from the simplicity of christian worship which has a dangerous tendency and may terminate in all the fopperies of popery."

Extract of a letter from the reverend Dr. Kippis, dated May 5. 1786.

"I have read with attention the Tractate on church music, taken from Mr. Peirce's *Vindication of the Dissenters*, and entirely agree in opinion with the ingenious and learned author. The use of instrumental music in christian worship has no foundation in the new Testament, which is the standard of our faith and practice.
POSTSCRIPT.

If once we depart from this standard, there will be no end to innovations. An opening will be laid to the introduction of one superstition after another, till the simplicity and purity of the gospel service are wholly lost. Every thing, therefore, which tends to divert men from a rational inward devotion to external pomp and ceremony ought to be discouraged as much as possible.

FINIS.