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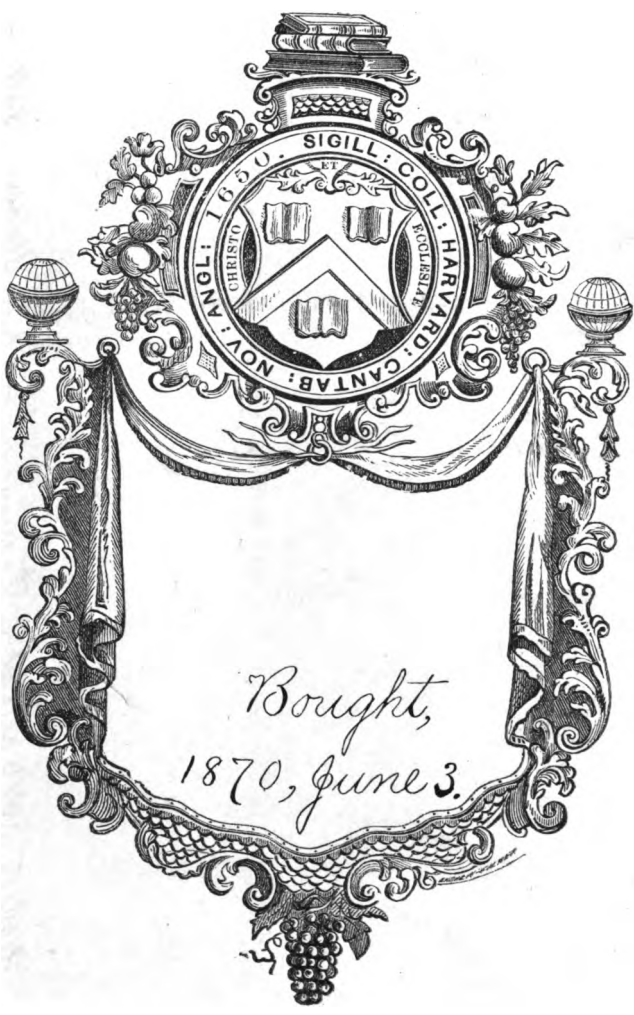
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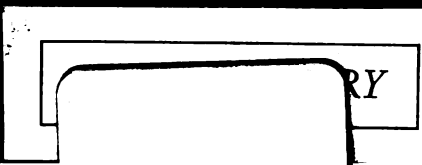
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Nevin, J. W.

ADDRESS

ON

SACRED MUSIC;

DELIVERED

AT THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE

Handel and Hastings Society,

IN THE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, PRINCETON, N. J.

DEC. 5, 1827.

W. W. Burleigh
BY JOHN W. NEVIN,

ASSISTANT TEACHER IN THE INSTITUTION.

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ORATION ON MUSIC.

NATURE, as well as revelation, has thrown a peculiar interest around the whole subject of Music. The science of sounds is, in itself, wonderful and mysterious. As it unfolds itself to the inquiring student, he is amazed to find, that, where he had dreamed of almost none, the most perfect and immutable system reigns. He learns, that the vast variety of tones, with which the ear may be assailed, are not, in their nature, that confused and anarchial multitude, without distinctions of right, and without abiding relation, which he once imagined; but, that they form, on the contrary, a regular society, pervaded throughout with the principle of order and definite law. A natural and original proportion is discovered to have place through the universal family. Sound stands related to sound in natural position and place; and yet more mysteriously in native constitution. This last is a relation of essential and original *character*, as its peculiarity in one is found more or less congenial with its peculiarity in another. Every sound has, as it were, a genius and a temper, more or less accordant with the genius and the temper of its companions, and the intimacy of its communion with each of them is graduated by the measure of this sympathy alone. Hence, while some sounds can never associate with the smallest friendship, others are adapted to unite in concurrent *harmony*, or to proceed in close succession with the movement of *melody*. This agreement the *ear* is constituted by the Almighty to feel, as truly as the *eye* is framed to perceive the relations of beauty in the visible world. The field of sound has its scenery of variety, resemblance, and proportion, equally with the field of light, and displays in

its arrangement the same wonderful adaptation to the mental constitution of man. On investigation, it is found, that this connexion is suited in its nature to become a source of important *moral* results. Sound strangely corresponds with feeling, and is fitted to wield, by the magic of its combinations, a most powerful control over all the machinery of the heart.

Having made these discoveries, philosophy is compelled to believe, that they intimate some wise and benevolent design, into the scheme of which they enter as parts, and in which may be found a full reason for *all* their phenomena. In view of so grand, complicate, and original an array of power, she cannot avoid the conclusion, that some particular provision has been made in nature to give it adequate movement and effect. *Principles* so mysterious and important she can never imagine to have existence, without some corresponding constitution to call them out in appropriate *action*. Where then are we to find that arrangement of Providence, which the nature of sounds and their relation to the soul of man urge us to seek; an arrangement suited rightly to occupy and improve so vast a resource? It is found most strikingly in the human voice; and in the power of art, which God has granted men, to constrain into organic arrangement, after the manner of that original pattern, the tones that lie scattered in wild variety through nature.

An inquiry into the nature and laws of the human voice cannot fail to excite admiration, as well as that which investigates the marvellous philosophy of sound. We must be struck with wonder, to find in its conformation, the principles of this philosophy minutely recognized, and a *capacity* of music beautifully responding to all the mystery of its abstract doctrine. It is only in the voice of man, that any *natural* provision is made for the full practical display of that doctrine. The vocal powers of inferior animals are fitted to bring only a very small part of it into view, even if they were

under the cultivation of intelligence and art; and throughout the inanimate creation, a natural disposition of sounds, in any such arrangement as music requires, is not to be found in a single instance. In the human voice alone, the Author of nature has established such an arrangement, and formed an adequate instrumental medium, for bringing into the fulness of life and action the powers that lie, by Himself concealed, in this mystic world. Each single voice is an instrument accurately graduated to the natural distinctions of sound, and is in itself adapted to produce their succession in all the combinations of MELODY. Then, by the multiplication of voices thus constructed, resource is secured for new combinations, such as HARMONY delights in. Nor is the provision which has been made in favour of harmony merely such, as must *necessarily* have resulted from the arrangement that melody required. It extends beyond that simple arrangement. It embraces an additional contrivance, and indicates a new and distinct design of Providence. The natural scale of sounds, which the voice is fitted to climb or to descend, might have been in all individuals the same, without affecting the cause of melody. But upon examination we find, that, although the *extent* of this scale is allowed to vary but little in different cases, the particular *range* of musical space, through which it is appointed to rise, is determined with striking variety. One voice differs from another voice, in the local sphere of sound which it is constituted to occupy. One may ascend a height, which another attempts in vain; while the second finds an equal victory, in exploring the downward deep. Variety in this respect prevails to some little extent, without any generic character, in cases where the general basis of vocal sound is the same. But it becomes a far more wonderful phenomenon, when it is found, with definite and universal law, sundering one half of the multitude of human voices from the other, by the interval of a whole octave. Why should the female voice be elevated

in its key so far above the male? Or, if it be imagined that some such elevation might be expected, in order to correspond with the comparative delicacy of construction which distinguishes the sex in other respects—where shall we find a reason for that remarkable admeasurement which has determined its degree? Why is the general range of voice, in this class of our family, removed from that which belongs to the other, with the precise interval of one series of natural and original sounds? Mere MELODY, we have said, needed no such constitution. Its meaning must be sought, in a design to bring into action other principles of musical science. It is an arrangement that has respect to HARMONY. Her laws call for wide space in which to act with full advantage. The materials she loves to combine, are not all to be gathered in a single field. In that variety of vocal pitch, therefore, which we have contemplated, she finds a beautiful accommodation to her wants. The common scale of sounds, traversed by any single voice, would afford too little room for her proper exercise; but when that scale is extended by conjunction with others, her requisite range is secured—her movement proceeds with liberty and ease.

Thus wonderful is the provision made in the human voice for the exhibition of musical sound, responding in all respects to its original philosophy. The intention of such a provision cannot be doubted. It cannot be supposed to have regarded any thing else, than that *moral* end, to which, as we have already seen, the laws of sound are mysteriously adapted. The varied modulations of which the voice is capable, are suited to give to language expressive eloquence and power, in its common labour of unfolding thought. This is the music of speech; an engine of moral force immeasurable, designed of God to be employed with the most salutary action in favour of truth, but by the wickedness of man not seldom perverted from its high purpose, and played with tremendous ruin under the direction of error or unholy passion. But the

design of this, though it be so vast in its results, takes up only a small part of that provision which we have been called to contemplate. It finds its full expenditure, only in the harmony of song. Its whole complicated preparation points distinctly to this end, and indicates an intention of God to have it employed, no less than the kindred melody of speech, for his own glory, and the moral interest of his creature man.

Such is the conclusion, to which we are led by natural reason. The faculty of music has been implanted in man for *moral* use. Nature, accordingly, embraces the resource with instinctive interest. From the beginning of time, and in every region of earth, the art has been cultivated with more or less refinement. Its wondrous power has been, with different degrees of skill and success, drawn forth from its natural treasury, the voice; and it has found, besides this, a new, magnificent provision, gathered by the care of science, for its use, out of the general world of sound. The natural resource, furnished from heaven, has been assisted and extended by the contrivance of art. In conformity with the original design of God, and as it were by his own suggestion, *instrumental* tones have been made to conspire with *vocal*. Harmony has exulted in new enlargement. The energy of sound has been elicited through new varieties of combination, and by modulations of every different form. Thus cultivated from the earliest ages, Music has ever been employed with wonderful effect. The magic of her power is acknowledged through the whole world. It is wielded to open the secret springs of feeling in the soul, and to find for them a channel, through which their swelling stream may pour itself abroad. It is employed to cherish, or to create, the most opposite emotions: to inspire with joy, and to oppress with sadness; to tranquilize the spirit, and to fill it with tumultuous passion; to dispose the heart to love or pity, and to animate it with the fury of war; to elevate the soul in virtuous sensibility, and to plunge it low in the sensuality of sin. Alas, that

it should be found so often enlisted in the service of unhal-
lowed passion. Yet in its abuse, we behold its power, as
much as in its proper use. While we lament the wrong di-
rection which its instrumentality too frequently receives,
we may still admire the moral force displayed in its action,
and perceive its native fitness to serve, under right control,
the sacred cause of virtue.

But after all, it is not difficult to discover, that its general
tendency among men, in spite of that corruption which seeks,
in this case as in so many others, to convert the gift of hea-
ven into an instrument of hell, is still to elevate and purify;
so that we can clearly trace its excellent and merciful de-
sign, through all the disadvantage which, in this fallen world,
it is made to experience. Hence, even among heathen na-
tions, Music has been honoured as the handmaid of religion,
and invested, more or less, with a kind of sacredness and so-
lemn dignity. Nations, barbarous and refined, have consent-
ed in the idea, that its natural and appropriate use was, to
surround the majesty of virtue with impressive interest, and
to inspire the soul with high and noble sentiments. Admired
as the symbol of that universal and wondrous symmetry, that
reigns through the frame of *material* nature, it was still more
honoured as having mysterious sympathy with the right, con-
stitution of that which is *moral*. Plato and Aristotle united
their authority, in recommendation of the art. They were
struck with its natural power and tendency to promote the
better feelings of the heart; and taught, accordingly, that it
became political wisdom to employ it, in the midst of its other
resources, for the refinement of social character, and the cul-
ture of general morals.

Surely, if Music presented itself to our notice, invested
with no other interest than this which mere nature has flung
around it, it would become us to honour it with attention
and respect. Its philosophy merits our investigation, as stu-
dents. Its art claims our regard, as persons of cultivated

taste. Its moral energy demands our serious consideration, as those whose whole profession has for its end the moral welfare of men. The wonderful wisdom and design, displayed in the arrangement of the various principles and means that conspire for its production, are entitled to our admiration, as those who ought to take pleasure in looking up through nature to her glorious cause. The power of song implanted in ourselves, by a particular natural constitution, is reason enough to move an inquiry, whether we are not each one directed, by an intimation from heaven, to cultivate its use.

And if we could discover no other advantage likely to result from such care, there might be found to *us* an object worthy of it, one would imagine, in its direct tendency to improve the general voice. If there be indeed a music in speech that can most seriously assist the persuasiveness and the authority of truth, and if culture can avail in any degree to clothe the voice with its power, it is certainly of high importance, that such, as mean to be all their lives employed in recommending and urging with their lips the solemn truths of religion, should secure to themselves, as far as possible, its high advantage. Whatever therefore may contribute to this object merits their attention, and ought to be improved. But is it not obvious, that the cultivation and exercise of voice which music requires, cannot fail to promote its power of eloquence? The qualities which it seeks to acquire, by repeated exercise, for the one purpose, are precisely those which are needed for the attainment of the other. The strength—the compass—the distinctness—the smoothness, and the complete subordination of vocal sound, which Music demands, and by its discipline secures, are the very materials which eloquence calls into service, and which are essential to all expressiveness and force of language. It is not indeed a matter of course, that every individual, who excels in singing, must excel also in speaking, or that the skill which is possessed in the second art, must in every case correspond

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with its measure in the first ; because, although the materials are in general the same which are wanted for both, the science of their right combination is, in one case, materially different from that which has place in the other. The same elements, to secure the two results, need to be compounded in different ways, and with different kinds of skill. But is it a small matter, to have these elements secured for use ? Without their preparation, the art which teaches to unite them rightly together, can effect nothing.

BUT we are not left to learn the importance of Music from its natural history alone. Revelation surrounds it with new dignity, and commends it to our regard with more imperious authority. In the Bible, we find a use worthy of its wonderful nature. God himself, who bestowed the gift, unfolds its principal design. What was before but imperfectly imagined, is now clearly decided. Music is emphatically a sacred art, deriving its type from heaven itself. While it is allowed, that the mere entertainment of taste, and the humanization of social feeling, come truly and deservedly within the compass of its original intention, that intention is shown to embrace a still higher and more magnificent end. From the commencement of time, the art has been made to hold a prominent place in the solemn worship of God. Its power has been consecrated, with especial appropriation, to the service of religious devotion ; as being suited to call into action the more elevated feelings of piety, and to give them proper expression to the glory of their great Object. Here, the remarkable arrangement of voice, which we have just been admiring, finds its highest reason. Single melody and united harmony are required alike to act in this service. Every individual is called upon to honour God with his private song, and voices of every different key are commanded to mingle their tones in sounding concert to his praise. "Young men and maidens, old men and children," persons of every

age and sex have their part to bear, in this worship of the great congregation. "Let them praise the name of the Lord; for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven."

We are not capable of comprehending the manner of existence and action, which belongs to unembodied spirits in heaven. On this account, the language of the Bible, when heavenly things are described, often accommodates itself to our infirmity, by presenting them under images that belong only to earth; so that it is not always easy to determine, how far its representations, of this kind, are to be received in their literal sense. In such cases, however, it is not important that we should absolutely determine. It is enough for us to know, that something has place in the spiritual world, either altogether the same with the thing of earth whose name it is made to bear, or at least so corresponding to it, in its nature and use, as to be more fitly represented to our minds by the image of that thing, than it could possibly be in any other way. We learn from the Bible, that Music holds a distinguished place in the worship of heaven itself. The angelic hosts are represented as sounding the high praises of God, with the harmony of song. To celebrate the work of creation, the morning stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted for joy. To celebrate the Redeemer's birth, a multitude descended to earth, and, in accents heard by mortal ears, filled the air with triumphant praise. If, however, we must believe, that angels, in their proper form, do not literally mingle sound with their worship before the throne, we have still assurance, that nothing on earth has more affinity with their celestial employment, than the sacred harmony of music used to honour God, among the children of men. This therefore we ought to respect, as the type of that most glorious worship, which engages the armies of cherubim and seraphim, in the courts of heaven. There is no other exer-

cise of earthly devotion, that is represented in like manner to bear the lively image of angelic adoration.

But, whether actually found in the service of angels or not, Music has more to do with heaven than as a mere symbol. It is appointed to be heard there, throughout eternity. The anthem of redeemed millions is to sound there, with perpetual praise. No voice, emancipated from the dominion of the grave, will be silent in the upper sanctuary. The faculty of song will no longer be regarded with indifference, or wasted through neglect. The gift will then be precious. The talent will be held in universal honour, and cherished as the especial ornament of man's reanimated nature. For what price, think ye, would a saint, in heaven's world of praise, be content to resign the power of Music? What inducement, can ye imagine, might move him to bury its advantage in silence and disuse?

Thus fitted, and destined, for the service of the church on high, it is no wonder, that Music has been appointed to hold an eminent place in the worship of the church on earth. It is no wonder, that it was required to mingle so much with the ancient service of the law and the temple; that so much care was employed to secure its proper cultivation for religious use; that sacred song entered so materially into the idea of glorifying God with the lips, as it was entertained by the pious Israelite; that it found so much place in private and in social devotion; that it was made to bear so illustrious a part in the solemn gatherings of the nation to celebrate the great festivals of Jehovah. And it is no wonder, that, when the outward pomp and ceremony of that ancient dispensation were commanded to pass away, and to give place to the more spiritual economy of the gospel, this service of praise should still be found, retaining all its importance and all its obligation. The more spiritual the church became in its constitution, the greater fitness there was that her worship should be adorned with that, which is in its nature adapted to her last

and most glorious condition. Hence Music receives new honour in the second testament. It is commended to the regard of christians not only by the example of their great Master himself, and his first followers, but by explicit and positive injunction also of the Holy Ghost.

Having weighed all these considerations, can we feel, as if the art of music were a thing of slender moment in itself, or as if it were entitled to our attention only in a light degree? As the moral creatures of God, furnished by himself, with the capacity of song, for his praise, is it a matter of little interest to our consciences whether we occupy the talent, or bury it, as it were, in the earth? As members of the church of Jesus Christ, may it be with us a mere question of taste, to cultivate our natural power, and employ it in the sacred service he has appointed, or to omit this care, and excuse ourselves from all regard to his will? No: the obligation rests with solemn force upon every one,—not merely to make melody in our hearts unto the Lord, while others hymn his praise,—but, if the capacity be in us at all, to lift up also our own voices in the sacred song. *We* cannot without guilt withhold a tribute that *God* demands. To *feel* no obligation in such a case, is sin. Where the faculty is granted, and its exercise enjoined, how can we innocently refuse to employ it? We are bound to cultivate it, and consecrate its use to the honour of the Most High. The art of sacred music, then, challenges our regard with solemn authority. If the same feeling that abounds in heaven, urge us not to seize with alacrity a resource so much in honour there, the written commandment of God is displayed, and the claim of duty charged home upon conscience.

Such is the general obligation. It is manifestly a duty incumbent upon all, who have physical capacity to sing, to cultivate the talent. It becomes each one of us to consider, whether Music has received from *him* that care and atten-

tion, which it is entitled to receive from *all*. However others, with less advantages of knowledge, may discover indifference and insensibility to the force of duty, it is surely meet, that *we*, who are called to be especially familiar with the Master's will, should not be found deficient with the same neglect. But we are pressed with more than the general obligation in this matter. To the common personal responsibility is added another, rising out of our peculiar relation to the church. Those, who are called to occupy the first place in the sanctuary, and to superintend its worship, are officially required to employ their care over every appointed service. A minister is by his station, then, bound to consult the right order of music in his congregation. He is not at liberty to withdraw himself from concern with it, or to leave it, as it were, to shift for itself. He must, if he behave himself rightly in the house of God, put forth a positive influence in its favour. He cannot, indeed, in this case, as well as in others, be without *some* influence. If it be not *salutary*, it must be pernicious. The minister, who gives no care to promote the proper exercise of sacred music in his church, contributes to its degradation and neglect. His *example* cannot be without injury. If the pastor show indifference about the public singing, the people will naturally become infected with the same feeling. If the pastor manifest the interest which he ought to feel in the subject, something of the same sentiment will diffuse itself among the people, and the music of the church will be redeemed from disgrace. It is then evidently the duty of every one who seeks the pastor's office, to cultivate acquaintance with this consecrated art, for Zion's sake, as well as to comply with the common obligation. If he have a voice that can be tuned to song, it should be prepared with care for the service of the sanctuary. He should determine to be an example to the believers in this, as in every thing else that religion enjoins. He should feel, that in his preparatory training, Music has a so-

lemn claim upon his time and care, which he cannot disregard without unfaithfulness to God and to his church. And should he be so unfortunate, as to have no capacity.—

But let us pause here a moment, to consider this phenomenon. Can it be, that an original faculty of our nature, inserted in its common constitution with so much wisdom and design, and having so much relation to the moral structure of the soul—so much importance in all the system of religion ordained of God—so much adaptation to the natural spirit of devotion, as it breathes on earth, or swells with bursting praise in Heaven; can it be, that such a faculty has been altogether withheld from a part of the human family? It is very possible, that individual cases of complete defect, in this way, may be permitted occasionally to occur; just as the faculty of speech, or any other natural power, is found essentially wanting, by a mysterious providence, in some few of our race; or, as rare instances of departure from the proper human *form*, are met with in every age. But all these deviations are to be regarded alike, as anomalies in nature. It cannot be allowed, that they are so numerous in the case before us, as to form a real variety of constitution among men. Anatomy reveals no such variety. The organic arrangement, on which musical sound depends, is not discovered to belong only to a *portion* of mankind. It is a general characteristic of the human frame. And if it were not thus, it would form indeed a strange contradiction to the order of its construction in other respects. No such partial dispensation is suffered to prevail, in the case of any other faculty that distinguishes our nature. In some individuals, the natural structure, in which such a faculty resides, may be less favourable to its exercise, than it is in some others; but to have the structure absent altogether in some, while it is provided for others, is not the way of our creation.

What then are we to think of the multitude of cases, that meet us wherever we go, of voices incapable, we are told, of

all musical culture? More than a few, it is probable, in this present assembly, are ready to assure us, if the inquiry were addressed to them, that they are labouring under this very disadvantage, and so feel an entire exemption from that obligation which it has been attempted to enforce. Can we deny the reality of all such imagined defect? By no means. It is, undoubtedly, the calamity of some, that they *cannot* learn to sing, though they honestly make the attempt. But it is a calamity of *education*, not of *nature*. A natural power may be literally extinguished, by being long neglected: Muscles, that were originally disposed to move in compliance with the will, may, by being left a great while without employment and discipline, forget their obedience and refuse their proper action. No person doubts, that the power of articulating vocal sound, so as to form speech, is common originally to all our race. Yet even this important advantage, for want of example to call it forth in exercise, may gradually fail, and at length be lost, there is reason to believe, in complete annihilation. No wonder, then, that the power of song should actually experience this melancholy fate in a multitude of instances. A long period of life is often allowed to pass away, before any serious effort is made to bring it into action. Example is wanted, in early life, to suggest imitation or to instruct exertion. A low sense of its value prevails, in riper years, to perpetuate the neglect. For want of use, the faculty becomes at length materially impaired. Then, if perchance some disposition to improve it begins to be felt, the first attempt is met with discouragement. Perseverance, to recover the ground that has been lost, is wanting. The imagination of natural incompetency is admitted without much reluctance. Indifference, accordingly, receives new license; and thus, in the end, the ruin, which has never been vigorously opposed, exults in complete victory.

With this view of the matter, therefore, the existence of an entire defect of musical power, in some cases, is admitted.

At the same time, it is denied that any such incurable defect exists in a great number of cases, where it is imagined. Mature age is needed, in general, to seal the mischief with this, its last, fatal impression. So long as any thing of the pliancy of youth remains, there is encouragement to attempt the discipline of the voice. There may be, perhaps, in a few instances, a total loss of capacity for music, even in youthful age; the calamity may occasionally anticipate its usual hour. But examples of this kind are not to be admitted with light evidence. Most of the cases which claim to be such, are only cases of partial difficulty, which resolution might effectually surmount. The evil is in its progress, but not yet escaped beyond the reach of remedy. Experiment, many times repeated, has abundantly confirmed this fact. By vigorous determination, victories have been achieved over refractory voices, in instances of the kind in question, where it seemed to be most truly an object of despair. The power of Music has been resuscitated from what appeared the lethargy of death itself. Persons, who had to encounter the greatest difficulty at first, by persevering effort, have not only attained the same ground with others, more favoured with advantage, but even outstript them in improvement, and secured a foremost rank among the friends of sacred song. Thus rose to its lofty eminence of skill, out of the most unpromising rudeness, *that* voice, which now the Music of our country acknowledges to be her highest ornament. The error into which many fall, in this matter, is to try themselves by comparison with those around them, who have voices able to command tuneful sound. Finding no such ability in themselves, and having never considered how much the power of education may accomplish in this case, they at once refer the difference to original constitution, and abandon all thought of cultivating music, under the full impression, that the requisite faculty is radically wanting.

It becomes us, then, to beware how we entertain the notion

of a natural exemption from the duty, which we have been considering. We ought to presume, that the obstacle, which may stand in our way, is not insurmountable; and to remember, that a difficulty which it is in our power to overcome, can never discharge us from the force of obligation. It is a matter of so much importance to the church that her ministers should be skilled in music, that every one, who is looking to the sacred office, ought to feel himself required to spare no pains, which can possibly subject his voice to the discipline of its art. It is not suitable for him, were it even proper for others, to satisfy his conscience with only a small effort for this end. He is not at liberty to say he has no voice for harmony, until the experiment of cultivation has been made with laborious patience. After such an experiment alone resulting in complete failure, may he honestly conclude, that the gift of nature has been irreparably lost.

But, should he be in reality thus unfortunate, has Sacred Music no more claim upon his regard? Far otherwise. He is still bound to seek some acquaintance with its principles, and to cultivate a proper sensibility to its power. To give right impulse to the singing of a congregation, by exhortation and advice, which is a business that belongs to every Pastor, knowledge and taste are both essential. Without such qualifications, as he will not be likely himself to feel any genuine interest in the subject, so will he be in danger of giving a hurtful, rather than a salutary, impression to the zeal of his people, should he ever assay to call it into action.

If there be truth in the things that have been spoken, Sacred Music should find her most cordial entertainment in such a House as ours. A Theological Seminary, like the schools of the prophets in ancient time, should be her favourite resort. Here, her interesting art should be cultivated and cherished, with universal zeal. Every room should be

familiar with holy song ; every voice attuned to its power. And when the evening hymn rises from this Oratory, its sounding harmony should bear on high some tribute from each single tongue. At least, no voice susceptible of discipline, by any care, should be found without its contribution of praise. There should be among us, a constant, general, and systematic attention to music. It should be cultivated, not as an accidental interest, but as one that properly belongs to a course of education for the ministry. A correct musical taste should reign through all our body, and perpetuate its power from class to class. The character of our singing should be elevated far above the common standard. A vigorous influence in favour of music should be always going forth from this place, into the Presbyterian church. Such an influence is greatly needed, and from no other than such a source can it emanate, with successful strength. The negligence and bad taste, which prevail in so many parts of our church on this subject, may call forth, and are calling forth, lamentation and censure from other quarters ; but the malady needs a far more powerful remedy. The principle of reform must issue, through the pulpit, from the THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL. The true way to improve the style of singing in our churches, is to have it excellent in our Seminaries. One advantage of a Theological Seminary, and by no means a small one, is the favourable opportunity for the cultivation of sacred music that it affords to candidates for the ministry ; the proper improvement of which must operate so beneficially upon the general church. Most important therefore it certainly is, that the opportunity should, in every case, be so improved.

Need we ask, if that opportunity has been rightly improved in this institution? and, whether Music is, in reality, held in that honour among us, which its high nature merits, or cultivated with that care which our relation to the church solemnly demands? Who does not feel, that there has been a

sad negligence upon this point, and that there is still utterly a fault among us, in the general indifference with which it is regarded. The art of singing occupies no prominent place, among our objects of interest and attention. It is left, in a great measure, without respect, and without care. The need of systematic and serious attendance upon its discipline, is but partially acknowledged. The time, which it demands, is too generally withdrawn entirely from its use, under the impression, that other pursuits would be injured by compliance with the claim. The culture of the voice, accordingly, is left, in a lamentable degree, to mere accidental influence. Our music receives too much of its character from without, varying every year with the greater or smaller accession of cultivated voices, which each successive class contributes to its service: whereas, it ought to possess a manly independence—a continual security of resource within itself—a dominion too firmly established to be affected by causes so fluctuating and uncertain; whereas, it should constantly renew its strength, by powerfully assimilating to itself all the materials of tuneful sound, that come within its reach, and thus flourish in perpetual vigour. The evil, that exists among us in this thing, is too palpable to be denied or doubted. It stares us in the face, whenever we are gathered in this room to unite our evening worship, before the throne of God. It is not enough, that no greater, or that even less, defect is observed in our singing, than is common in other christian assemblies. It ought to present a vastly more perfect character. As an assembly of *theological students*—we have too many voices dumb with silence; too many, that disturb with undisciplined movement the order and freedom of harmony.

The evil, if rightly weighed, is not one of slight importance. It calls for remedy, with a loud voice. It will not become us, merely to contemplate its form, or even to regret its reality, and then turn away without one active attempt to secure

a reformation. It has no incurable necessity in its existence; we may, and we ought, to take measures for its removal.

Is it asked, How shall we proceed? The way is simple and plain. As a *first* measure, as many of us as have formed some acquaintance with the rules of music, and have voices already subjected in some degree to its art, ought to combine together, to seek, with systematic care, still farther improvement, and to control by united strength the style of our general singing. Every individual, qualified for the purpose, should feel himself under obligation to unite in this attempt. Even, if any such should imagine himself no longer in need of musical training, as far as his own interest is concerned, he ought still to regard the interest of the Seminary, and of the Church, and come forward to encourage and promote, with all his power, a measure that contemplates so seriously the advantage of both. When a work of reformation is going forward, no strength, that is suited to assist its progress, ought to be withheld from its service.

In this association, some degree of refinement in musical taste and skill, more than common, should be aimed at. It is a vain imagination, that refinement of this sort, such as is not needed for the common service of the sanctuary, is a thing of little moment in itself, or unworthy of care. For those, who are to give tone to the music of churches, it is certainly important in no small degree. They will need all its advantage, not to produce the same refinement in their congregations, but merely to redeem the general taste from barbarism itself. The continual tendency here, in every society, is downward. Music left to itself will have a low character, and it will never rise without vigorous encouragement; nor will it sustain itself above wretched rudeness, unless it be continually held up by such an influence as the pulpit alone can exert. But if there be no refinement, or cultivated taste, in the minister, how can he employ that influence? No influence can be of any avail to elevate or to sustain, which

does not proceed from knowledge and taste altogether *above* the common standard. It is to be lamented that so many whose authority cannot fail to control the character of our church music, have appeared to think, that such influence is not necessary, or even desirable. Under the impression, that piety needs only the most simple style of song, and that to go beyond that style is to hinder rather than to promote its edification, they have not unfrequently discouraged all genuine improvement, and contributed the weight of their opinion to perpetuate the worst taste in their churches. No doubt, there may be an excessive refinement in sacred music, as well as in sacred eloquence; but why therefore should we be satisfied with the most unpolished rudeness in the one case, more than in the other? There is a Scylla here as well as a Charybdis, which it becomes us to dread and to avoid. It needs no great discernment, however, to perceive on which side the most formidable danger is pressing, at the present time, in our own church. It would be broad irony; to affect a fear that the worship of Presbyterian congregations, in our country, is in danger of being spoiled by excessive refinement in the music of the sanctuary.—But the prosperity of Music *among ourselves* requires such attention as we now recommend, as well as the consideration which has just been urged. A degree of excellence in practice is necessary to secure continued interest and attention, such as the art deserves, in time to come. The more elevated and perfect the style of singing can be rendered among us, the more likely it will be to sustain itself in strength, from year to year, and the more salutary will be its influence abroad.

The Society, whose first anniversary we this evening celebrate, *has* been formed to carry into action, as far as possible, the recommended plan. It contemplates, in its ultimate design, no merely partial or transient interest. Besides the immediate individual improvement of those who embrace

its advantage, it has for its object, to secure a general, systematic, and lasting attention to Sacred Music in this Seminary; and thus to extend an effectual influence in its favour far out into the Presbyterian church. If its frame seem feeble now, and inadequate altogether to such an undertaking, it does but indicate the more strongly the evil that reigns around, and the necessity of vigorous opposition to its power. It argues a general defect, that such a society has as yet been able to gather to itself no more of size and strength; but it furnishes surely no reason to omit, or to relax exertion for the accomplishment of its excellent design. What is now weak may soon, and ought soon to become strong. There are materials among us suited to enlarge its growth, and they should not, they cannot with propriety, be withheld from this important service. If the obligation to contribute their use, wherever they are found, has not been hitherto felt, it ought now to be seriously weighed and complied with. Our Society challenges the assistance of every capable voice, as her proper right.

But the great interest, for which we plead, demands *another* measure. The uncultivated voices among us, and such as have never yet bowed to the regular art of music, ought to be subjected immediately to its discipline. Let all who have been hitherto held under the constraint of silence, when the praises of God have been sung, determine with honest resolution to attempt an escape from a necessity so unhappy. A vigorous and patient exertion will, in most cases, overcome the malady, which they have been accustomed to imagine radical and incapable of cure. And let as many as are conscious of some musical power, and do not entirely refrain from using it, but have not as yet reduced it to the order which Music's law prescribes, be persuaded to undertake the important work. Let them remember, that whatever plea others may seem to have for their negligence, *they* can have none; for if culture may recover a voice out of rude

desolation itself, much more may it invigorate, and extend, and refine its capacity, where it is already unfolded with some natural improvement, though it be irregular and scattered throughout with disorder. And it is not a becoming presumption, in any one, that his voice is fitted to move in the concert of song, without impropriety, under the mere guidance of the *ear*—his own ear too, that has been so little exercised to discern the delicate relations of harmony, and to discriminate between evil and good in the modulation of sound. He ought to believe, that Music has an art and a meaning, which lie deeper far than his uncultivated taste can fathom. And he should feel, that however the common multitude, of those who sing in our churches, may be content to neglect all thorough culture, and to have *their* voices borne along, in the worship of the congregation, with the general sound, without knowledge or certainty, it is not fit, that *his* should be heard moving in the same vague and dependant style. A student of theology—a candidate for the pastor's office—with the best opportunity of improvement, he should secure to his voice the correctness, the dignity, and the stability, which education only can impart.—Let all then, who have not yet done it, engage with one accord to make themselves familiar with the elements of Sacred Music. Thus, many may soon be prepared to combine their strength with our infant Society. By continual accession to its force, it will become more effective in its action. It will gain power to control the general sentiment from year to year; to infuse interest and zeal into every coming class; to create continually new resource for itself; and so, to perpetuate its being and its health even to distant time.

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