

NEW-YORK, DECEMBER 1, 1849.

Church Music—Its Inadequate Compensation.

THE value of good music as an aid to devotion, and its consequent importance, are too generally admitted to require any labored argument. The antiquity and universality of its use in the church, is all that need be referred to in support of the fact. Taking it for granted, therefore, that music is of essential importance in public worship, we claim for it, on behalf of the great ends of that worship, a suitable maintenance. This claim we believe to be enforced by the same necessities and authority which require the establishment of the church, the spread of the gospel, or the support of any of the charities of religion. If this be the truth, and we see not how it can be denied, the meagre maintenance which has been so long extended, in most instances, to this department of Divine worship, particularly in our cities, is nothing short of downright sin; and we would do injustice to the true welfare of all interested in the matter were we to distinguish it as anything less culpable. With one or two exceptions, the sum usually appropriated to the maintenance of music in American churches is just sufficient to enable the person having charge of the matter to fail in performing his duty. A few hundred dollars is all that in most cases can be spared for the support of this department of worship for the term of a year. And this sum is set apart by the vestry, trustees, or music committee of a congregation, who, as a general thing, know nothing of the difficulty or expense attending the procuring of suitable voices. This meagre appropriation fails of course in tempting persons of thoroughly competent talent to the church; for, as in the smallest choirs, there must be at least *four* individuals, besides the organist, each of whom must possess certain qualifications which are necessarily the result of an expenditure of much time and money, and which, therefore, cannot in most cases be given away without an adequate equivalent—the sum of five or six hundred dollars subdivided into as many parts, it is evident, cannot afford a remuneration for the trouble, anxiety, and expense of time incidental to a year of efficient choir service in the church. The duties of the office consequently are assumed by persons illy qualified to discharge them. Or if from sheer necessity an individual who is really competent accepts this sum, his situation is presently as unhappy as that of the Israelites of old, who were required to make brick without straw. Everything is expected from him: the best voices, best performances, and the best music. The former are not to be had for the amount he is enabled to offer them; he is, therefore, compelled either to accept of such material as *can* be purchased for such a trifle—in the midst of a general dearth and demand for good voices—or he must assume the labor of quarrying for new voices, and undergo the patient drudgery of rough-hewing them for service. In either case the music suffers, and he is blamed as the cause of its inferiority. He is, therefore, after all manner of perplexity and mortification, dismissed perhaps at the end of his term, though, in every respect, thoroughly

qualified for the office, and faithful in the discharge of its duties, according to the means placed at his disposal. By the next arrangement incidental to this pennywise-poundfoolish system, the music of the congregation is reduced probably a peg lower. Meanwhile all the numberless influences of a truly appropriate and excellent order of church music are being lost to the congregation and to the community, merely that a few hundred dollars may be saved or turned into another channel. The excuse, which is usually pleaded for this ill-judged parsimony by those who have the disbursement of the church funds, is *poverty*—a plea which, in nine cases out of ten, is distinctly contradicted by the liberal contributions for other purposes of these very congregations. The fault lies usually with those who have the appropriating and disbursement of the funds, rather than with the inclination or individual ability of the members of the congregation, who, in most instances, would gladly increase the amount of their individual pew tax, were they sure that by so doing they would obtain a system and order of music similar in excellence to the church music of England and the continent—a state of things which could easily be effected with the amount of educated talent now idle in this country. The management of the financial department of most congregations is generally in the hands of men who know little of the difficulty and expense attending a well-ordered choir, and who too often suppose that musical talent is as common and as cheaply obtained as ordinary day labor. Nor can we hope for a change on this point so long as these committees are composed of men who have no practical acquaintance with music or musical affairs as they exist among us. What then, in the meantime, is to be done? Not only the interests of music generally, but those of religion itself suffer, and to a greater extent than a superficial thinker may suppose, by this short-sighted policy of robbing it of the PERFECTIONS of an art, which the Creator evidently designed should minister to its extension. We answer, no steps towards a reformation in this matter can effectually be taken, so long as men are to be found, professing to belong to the *body musical*, who countenance this system by accepting the pittance supplied for its support. What sympathy can we feel for the insults, the mortifications, the disabilities, and the difficulties of which they complain in this voluntarily assumed position; when a less amount of toil or suffering undergone in any other department of honest industry would yield them a fourfold more valuable recompense? And what force is there in the reason which is frequently urged why criticism should be spared in their case—because their abilities, forsooth, are crippled for lack of funds? Whose fault is it, we would inquire, that their abilities are thus crippled?

Our musical friends in the South and West will be pleased to hear that Mr. BROWN, so well known as an Operatic performer, and ballad singer, accompanied by an excellent concert party, will visit the following cities and towns during the ensuing winter: Nashville, Montgomery, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Memphis, New Orleans, Mobile, and returning through Savannah, Augusta, and Charleston, in each of which places he will pay his farewell visit, being his last professional appearance in these places.