

400 YEARS IN MUSIC: Coming Celebration of Reformation and Luther's Hymns
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The Reformation Quadricentenary Committee, organized by the Lutheran Society, has caused to be republished Clarence Dickinson's essay on "The Influence of the Reformation on Music," which the New York Committee is sending out to stimulate interest in Martin Luther's reforms as they affected congregational singing in 1517, and to suggest such music as may be sung by way of commemoration in this 400 anniversary year. Luther's famous hymn leads a sample program, as given at Union Seminary recently, with selections from Adam Grumpeltzbalmer, Melchior Vulpus, and Hans Zachs, the hero of Wagner's opera as well as Samuel Scheidt, Delphin Strungk, Heinrich Schuetz, J.S. Bach, Handel, and Mendelssohn.

A brief of the effects of the Lutheran movement on church music, in addition to its revival of congregational singing, is here found to include the hymns and metrical versions of the psalms, which could be sung by the people; the departure from the Gregorian modes and adoption of the diatonic-chromatic scale in composition, first used by Grumpeltzhalmer in Germany and by Goudimel and other writers for Calvin's French Psalter; the taking of the air from the tenor and giving it to the soprano; the employment of lay singers, the use of soloists in the church service, and of the organ both as accompaniment and as a solo instrument, and finally the introduction of music as a study in day schools, with the development of "subjective, introspective, dramatic church music," which led to the Protestant cantata, the Passion and oratorio.

Martin Luther as a boy singing before Mrs. Cotta at Eisenach is quaintly pictured on the cover of the little pamphlet, printed by the H.W. Gray Company here. There have been few reformers, says Mr. Dickinson, who have not given special attention to music. John Wycliffe has left us no evidence of his interest in sacred songs, or use of them to further his movement of reform, but his followers, his 'poor priests,' who went about singing their Gospel into the hearts of the people were known as Lollards, a nickname derived from the old Anglo-Saxon verb *lullen*, to sing, the root of our word lullaby.

"The great reformation in Bohemia, so strongly influenced by Wycliffe, of which the leader was John Huss gave to the world the first Protestant hymnal, for which Huss wrote hymns in Latin and Czech. Of his followers, the Ultraquists or Calixtines published the Czech hymnal in 1501 and the United Brethren in 1503, or twenty years before Luther. These hymnals were based on poetic versions of the psalms, old Latin hymns, religious songs in the vernacular, and secular songs. Both Huss and Calvin established schools of sacred music in connection with their respective churches."

The Swiss reformer Zwingli, was "perhaps the most highly cultivated musically" of these men. In childhood a remarkable singer, he could also play seven instruments, and is known as the composer of several Reformation hymns. His advice to students was, "Do not fail to study music, for nothing is more fitted to rejoice the heart of man troubled by chagrin, or weakened by too many severe studies; nothing makes a man more of a man." His enemies called him the "Evangelical Flute," and said of him: "He goes through the

land, this new Orpheus, leading the beasts.” They said this in derision; he might have gloried in the truth of it.

The greatest of all reform movements was that led by Luther, says Mr. Dickinson, and its supreme importance is recognized by the fact that it is referred to simply as “The Reformation.” One of the urgent needs of the new congregations was something to sing. Luther wrote to Pastor Hausmann at Zwickau, “I would we had many songs which people could sing; but we lack German poets and musicians, or they are unknown to us, who are able to make spiritual songs of such value that they can be used daily in the house of God.” After his translation of the new Testament, he himself turned to writing hymns which were sincere outpourings of the heart.

There is evidence in the writings of Luther’s adversaries as to the popular result. “The people are singing themselves into the new doctrines,” wrote one of these, and another said, “Luther’s songs have damned more souls than all his books and speeches.” His first evangelical hymnal was published in 1524 by Luther’s friend, Johann Walther. It contained four of Luther’s own hymns. In the same year he wrote fourteen more, and before his death sixty collections of hymns had been issued. He did not found a separate school of church music, but worked to have music taught in the day schools throughout the land. It was he who first said, “the devil can’t bear music.”

The tunes for the Lutheran hymnals were composed for them or were borrowed from earlier Latin hymns, Bohemian hymns, and sacred and secular folksongs. The French historian and critic, d’Anjou, two centuries later could affirm, “of a truth, Luther, in causing simple, easy, appealing melodies to be adopted, learned in the schools, and sung with the organ, powerfully developed in Germany a feeling for music.” The Lutheran chorales gave back to the people that participation in public worship which had long been denied them. Of these well known, stately chorales, the first of all is the so-called Luther’s hymn, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God,” which the poet Heine called the “Marseillaise of the Reformation.”

“A powerful aid in the popularization of the Reformation,” Mr. Dickinson adds, “was the singing of its teachings by mastersingers.” In France, the troubadours rendered service of inestimable value to the reformed faith; in Germany, the minnesingers were as ‘voices crying in the wilderness’: some of the greatest among them, as Walther von der Vogelweide and Hugo von Trimberg, poured forth invectives and pleaded for that reformation for which they paved the way. When it did come, the greatest of the mastersingers, Hans Sachs, was its loyal adherent. With joy he greeted Luther as the ‘Wittenberg Nightingale.’”

The music of Protestantism must express the sentiment of its text. It was felt, for instance, that a Psalm was not fitly set when the same music was used for all its stanzas, which differed so greatly in content. Therefore, the Calvinist composers, Goudimel, Bourgeois, La Jeune, and others even back to the little known Pierre de Manchicourt in 1544, set the different verses of a Psalm to different music. In Germany the Passion was traditional in giving the words of Christ to a bass and the narrative of the Evangelist to a

tenor, but there were recitatives and arias which revealed the believer's active part in the drama and its emotional effect on him, as well as the commentary of the chorales in which the congregation joined.

Composers later broke more completely with traditional forms, even as used by Bach. In the greatest oratorios as "The Messiah," by Bach's contemporary, Handel, and the "Elijah," "St. Paul," and "Hymn of Praise," by Mendelssohn, who though of Jewish birth, was yet vividly conscious of the spiritual impulse of the Reformation – perhaps because his wife was a daughter of a Protestant pastor of the French church in Frankfort – the most poignant expression is given to the longings of the soul. The Reformation did not stop with creating new forms; it revived old ones. The unaccompanied motet of the earlier Church has been taken up again by such modern composers as Hugo Wolf and by Georg Schumann in his setting of Luther's Psalm XIII.

Luther composed unforgettably lovely carols, such as the simple and tender "Away in a Manger No Crib for a Bed," which he wrote for his son, "little Johnny Luther." Many later men have used Lutheran chorales as the foundation for the important works, and especially the great 'marching song of the Reformation,' "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." Besides its appearances in numberless chorale preludes by composers all the way from Hans Leo Hassler to the modern Max Reger, the famous song is found in a solo and chorus in Meyerbeer's opera, "Les Huguenots," and as the theme in an overture by Raff, of the Nicolai-Liszt "Festival overture," and of Mendelssohn's "Reformation Symphony."