

### III.—DESK AND TUNING FORK.

THE auld precentor occupied in parochial life a position of no small importance. Together with the beadle and the minister, he was a person of coveted dignity; not because of his personal estate—he might be the poorest in the parish—but because he too, like them, held office in the kirk. He was observed with a feeling of reverential distinction—a token of respect which, in course of time, he came to regard as his lawful right rather than as a voluntary homage. Clad in his black gown, and seated behind his letteran, which was placed immediately below the pulpit, the leader of psalmody was, in his own estimation, equal to the beadle. The precentor of pre-Reformation days has thus been sketched by honest Allan Ramsay :—

“The lettergae of holy rhyme  
Sat up at the boord head,  
And a’ he said was thocht a crime  
To contradict indeed.”

One of the most remunerative appointments in connection with the Auld Kirk was the precentorship of Dunfermline Abbey Church. As a natural consequence there were many candidates for the office whenever a vacancy occurred. From these candidates a leet of perhaps half-a-dozen songsters was chosen, each appearing in his turn before the

congregation with a view to appointment. The choice was made after the present-day fashion of selecting a clergyman, and, if there were such persons as "stickit ministers," there were also "stickit precentors." This being put on probation was the trying point in the precentor's life. In *Guy Mannering*, Sir Walter Scott tells us that Dominie Sampson's first appearance in the pulpit was his last; and in like manner has the precentor entered the letteran at once for the first and last time. At the close of last century one of the candidates selected to appear before Dunfermline Abbey Church congregation was a young man well-known in the parish. The appointed Sabbath came and found him in the coveted desk. All went well during the assembling of the congregation, but when he rose to commence the first psalm he was overcome by seeing so many familiar faces directed towards him, and, laying aside the book, he darted from the desk down the aisle, and out of the church. Who led the singing on that Sabbath is not on record but the "stickit precentor" disappeared from the parish, leaving no trace behind him. All attempts at discovery proved futile, and gradually the incident lapsed into silence. However, at the distance of fifty years, a gentleman from abroad took up his abode near Dunfermline in a mansion he had erected, and in course of time owned himself the subject of the narrative.

Although elected to the post, these parochial

musicians were, as we have said, in many cases devoid of musical qualifications.

Not far from Peebles there was a precentor who had little music, but much sense. He was the amusement of the youths by his dramatic whisper to the tenor at his side as he was about to set a tune, "Am I heich or laich or just about richt?"

"Dear me," said a stranger to her niece, "what kind o' singin' dae ye ca' that?" "Oh," replied the niece, "that's juist oor precentor's ordinary." "Weel, weel," was the stranger's remark, "if the Almichty's pleased wi' *that*, He's easy pleased, and maun he's nae lug for music."

The limited powers of the precentor were once illustrated by a request made by the musician himself. A minister from the south, while on a visit to Ballachulish, was asked and agreed to preach in the district church. Prior to the service he received a visit from the precentor, who addressed him with the words, "Plaise, your reverence, I can only sing twa tunes, sae ye mauna gi'e me three psalms."

In connection with the precentor's inability for the post of leading the praise, an anecdote is told of the functionary who fulfilled the duties of the desk to Dr. Chalmers at times. Some years before the Secession the great theologian was in the habit of preaching occasionally to a small gathering of the common people in the village of Water of Leith. The place of meeting was a store-room in the tannery

premises of Messrs. Legget. Mrs. Legget adjusted his bands for him very neatly before he left the house, but had little credit for her care, except from the Doctor himself, for the bands were round at the back of his neck before he got far into his sermon. Dr. Chalmers was greatly pleased with his precentor on these occasions, perhaps, says the narrator, because he knew even less about music than the precentor himself. "Tammass" was a stalwart old man who had graduated in psalmody in some anti-Burgher congregation, and had a perfect mastery of the science of variations, grace notes, slurs and cadences *ad libitum*, which are now heard only on the hillside at a Highland communion. Dr. Chalmers never failed to compliment the old man at the close of the service on his admirable singing, which, he told him, he enjoyed so much the more because he never heard anything like it in these modern days. One night Tammass modestly disclaimed the usual compliment because he had "gane aff the tune." "Nonsense," said Chalmers, "you sang as well as I ever heard you." "Ay, but it's true, Doctor; I gaed aff the tune at thegither. I began wi' *Irish*, an' I lost it in the second line. But I caught the *French* in the third line." "Weel done, Tammass," returned the preacher, clapping him on the back, "you should have been at Waterloo."

A young precentor once stuck with a tune, and several times tackled the line—"Teach me, O Lord, the perfect way." An old farmer listening patiently

to his several attempts, remarked, "Od, laddie, I'm thinkin' the Lord has muckle need to teach ye."

A minister in a northern church once gave out a psalm of somewhat awkward metre. The precentor, who seemed to be like his Ballachulish brother, made half-a-dozen ineffectual attempts to fit a tune to it, the congregation assisting. There was unfortunately nothing in stock of the proper size; all the measures were a size too large or too small, and the indignant precentor was at last compelled to remonstrate. Looking up at the pulpit, he said, in solemn indignation—"Look here, meenister—if ye be to gi'e oot psalms o' that kind, ye'll ha'e to sing them yoursel', Gi'e us the 'Auld Hunder!'"

The precentor, like the minister, was human, and age often rendered him unable for the post. Like the clergyman, however, he was slow to give up his position, maintaining that he was quite capable, despite his years, of conducting the praise. An aged Doctor of the National Church, who had an aged precentor, was often waited upon and requested to urge the musician to resign. The minister, reluctant to part with a servant so long in office, put off for some time, but at last determined to convey the message to the musician, or, at least, to throw out a hint that his resignation was desired. Meeting the worthy functionary one day, the minister entered into conversation with him, and in the course of the talk said, "By the way, John, some o' the folks were remarking that you were scarcely so able

for the singing now, and were suggesting——” Without allowing the minister to proceed further, John broke in, “Ay, ay, sir, that’s just what some o’ them ha’e been sayin’ to me about yersel’.” “If that be so,” returned his reverence, “they must put up with both of us a little longer.”

A minister, while on a visit to England, noticed that when the pastor stopped praying the choir sang “Amen,” and pleased with this order of things, he resolved to make the innovation in his own service. The first Sabbath after his arrival home he arranged with the precentor that at the end of the prayers he would drop a pea on his head as a signal for him to sing “Amen.” At the end of his first prayer, the precentor felt a shower of peas fall on his head, and began singing “Amen! Amen! Amen!” as fast as he could, when the minister, leaning over the pulpit, whispered, “Wheesht, wheesht, Jock; *the poke’s burst!*”

Innovations in the service of praise were strongly resented by the precentor, and in his opposition he was not infrequently backed by the congregation.

In 1746 the General Assembly recommended that in private worship the Psalms should be sung without the intermission of reading each line, and when, some years later, this change was adopted in public service it was the cause of much annoyance. Mr. Barrie tells us of a certain Mistress M’Quhatty who nearly split the Auld Licht Kirk over this “run line,” as it was called. “This innovation,” says

the author of "Auld Licht Idylls," "was introduced by Mr. Dishart, the minister, when he was young and audacious. The old, reverent custom in the kirk was for the precentor to read out the psalm a line at a time. Having then sung that line he read out the next one, led the singing of it, and so worked his way on to line three. Where run line holds, however, the psalm is read out first, and forthwith sung. This is not only a flighty way of doing things, which may lead to greater scandals, but has its practical disadvantages, for the precentor always starts singing in advance of the congregation and, increasing the distance with every line, leaves them hopelessly behind at the finish. Mistress M'Quhatty protested against this change, as meeting the devil half-way, but the minister carried his point, and ever after that she rushed ostentatiously from the church the moment a psalm was given out, and remained behind the door until the singing was finished, when she returned, with a rustle, to her seat. Run line," adds Barrie, "had on her the effect of the reading of the Riot Act."

Some time after the introduction of "run line" another important change was made in connection with the Auld Psalmody. The precentor, who had hitherto led the singing himself, was to be associated with a band of singers, known as "the choir." A strong prejudice was entertained by some of the auld ministers against this innovation, and amongst these was the worthy Dr. J—— M——, of G——.

This gentleman was once officiating in a church where the new fashion prevailed, and in rendering the first psalm the choir had, in the Doctor's opinion, monopolised the music, thus preventing the congregation from joining in the service. At the close of the singing he rose and read another psalm, which, he said, was intended for the congregation, *not* for the band.

During the precentor's term of office many humorous incidents occurred. Reading the lines—

Like pelican in wilderness,  
Forsaken I have been.

a worthy precentor amused the congregation by reciting—

Like paitriks in a wild bird's nest,  
For sure I've never seen.

An eccentric character, by name M'Minn, who resided in the parish of Crail, was schoolmaster, precentor, and session-clerk. He held the latter office under the ministerial administration of the Rev. Patrick Glas. This clergyman, having heard his precentor charged with drunkenness, resolved to administer to that functionary the privileges of a pulpit rebuke. When Sabbath came, the reverend gentleman took as his theme "Temperance," and in the course of his sermon said, "For you who are sailors, and are ignorant persons, there may be some excuse when ye fall into the temptation; but I'm



grieved to learn that no further back than last week, my own schoolmaster, Mr. M'Minn, was seen the worse of drink on the public street." At this unlooked for assault, the wondering precentor rose from his seat, and, looking in the direction of the pulpit, exclaimed, "It's a great lee ye say, sir." This interruption was resented by Mr. Glas, who commanded the beadle to remove Mr. M'Minn from the letteran. After the precentor had been ejected the service was continued. On the following day the worthy schoolmaster threatened the minister with legal proceedings for defamation of character. This turn of affairs led to an inquiry, when it was found that the charge was baseless and was the result of animosity. The clergyman at once offered reparation, and Mr. M'Minn agreed to accept an apology, if publicly given forth from the pulpit. Accordingly, on the succeeding Sabbath, Mr. Glas, previous to commencing the service, expressed his regret for having charged Mr. M'Minn with a crime of which he was innocent; and, "in token of his innocence," he added, "I now call on the church officer to replace him in the letteran." The beadle at once proceeded with his order, and reinstated the precentor—a vindicated man.

If Mr. M'Minn was zealous for his good name, the following precentor was as anxious that his musical abilities should be known. A minister preaching for a neighbour took occasion at the close of the service to compliment the precentor on the

excellence of his work. The musician listened with great dignity to the favourable criticism, and replied, "Weel, minister, it has just ta'en me twenty years to be perfect."

The gift of song was not the only talent which the old precentor thought he possessed, and here is a story of a precentor who prayed for his minister, not that he might be made perfect for the pulpit, but that he might be kept right. "Willum" had an exquisite tenor voice; but, strange to say, prided himself, not on his musical abilities, but on his gift of prayer. His prayers were very quaint, and there is preserved the fragment of one given on one occasion. The minister was away on a holiday, and "Willum" evidently thought that he needed to be carefully looked after. "O, Lord!" he prayed, "ye ken whaur oor minister is, although he's oot o' oor sicht a'thegither, sae juist keep your e'e on him, an' guide him into the straucht road."

In the Parish Church of Fettercairn, the custom of the precentor reading each single line before it was sung by the congregation gave rise to an unlucky introduction of a line from the first psalm. In most churches in Scotland the communion tables are placed in the centre of the church. After the sermon and prayer, the seats round these tables are occupied by the communicants while a psalm is being sung. One communion Sabbath, the precentor noticed the noble family of Eglinton approaching the tables, and likely to be kept out by those



pressing in before them. Being very zealous for their accommodation, he called out to an individual whom he considered to be the principal obstacle in clearing the passage, "Come back, Jock, and let in the noble family of Eglinton;" and then, turning to his psalm-book, took up his duty, and went on to read the line, "Nor stand in sinners' way!"

A similar humorous incident occurred at Blackford during the incumbency of the Rev. Sir Henry Moncrieff, Bart. The minister intimated that a portion of the 71st Psalm would be sung, whereupon the precentor rose and pronounced the line, "To many I a wonder am." At this a titter ran through the congregation, when the official, thinking that he had made a mistake, proceeded to repeat the line. This repetition seemed to increase the merriment, and many had to conceal their faces under the bookboards, or bury them in their handkerchiefs. This attracted the attention of the minister, who, rising in the pulpit, and looking down on the wondering precentor, exclaimed, "So you are a wonder, John; turn your wig." The strange spectacle presented by the musician with his misplaced headgear, viewed in connection with his recitation of the first line of the psalm, had produced the ill-timed laughter.

There is a story told of an amusing incident of a minister's belief in the bewitching influence a precentor could exercise over a preacher. The incident happened in the parish of Ballingry, Fife-

shire. In the church there the duties of the precentor's desk, about the middle of last century, were discharged by the parochial schoolmaster, who was a person of superior intelligence and education. The minister was of weak intellect, and a little superstitious. He attributed his inferior pulpit appearances to the influence of the precentor, who, he alleged, somehow bewitched him. On one occasion, he made a pause in his discourse, and proceeded to declare that so long as the schoolmaster occupied the letteran he must remain silent. The schoolmaster was proceeding to retire, when Sir John Malcolm, Bart. of Lochore, the principal heritor, descended from his seat in the gallery, and insisted that the desk should not be vacated. An unbecoming disturbance ensued which led to a permanent retirement of the leading inhabitants from the parish church, and to the erection of a place of worship in connection with the Secession, in the neighbouring village of Lochgelly.

An Aberdeen minister was preaching on one occasion on the tie that binds the congregation to the preacher, and with a view to emphasis, said, "My brethren, supposin' me to be the shepherd, and you to be the sheep, and Tammas Sangster to be the sheep-dog"—Tammas, who was the precentor, at once rose and exclaimed, "I'll be no man's sheep-dog, minister." The preacher, hoping to soothe the ruffled temper, said, "I was only speaking mystically, Tammas." "Na, na," replied the

angered precentor, "I ken fin' ye was speakin' maliciously, so as to gar the folk lauch at me when we get oot."

The precentor, we have said, considered himself equal to the minister. While Dr. Blair was incumbent of the High Church of Edinburgh, the leader of the psalmody was one of these all-important personages. One Sabbath the rev. doctor had been absent from the pulpit, and meeting his precentor on the following day he enquired how matters got on in church during his absence. "'Deed, no vera weel, I daur say," was the reply; "I wisna there, Doctor, ony mair than yoursel'."

"It's aye the way, Doctor," remarked an old-fashioned precentor, "it's aye the way; when folk ken ye are to preach, and I'm to present, there's a fu' kirk to listen to baith psalm and sermon."

We have spoken of timidity on the occasion of the precentor's probation, and this timidity often makes its appearance after the precentor has been appointed to office. A young and bashful ploughman was once elected to the post in a country parish, but, conscious of this weakness, repaired to his predecessor (who had vacated the situation owing to age) for some advice. "Man, Jeems," said the young musician, "I'm awfu' nervish when I stand up to sing, and I wish ye could gi'e me a cure for't." "I can do that brawly, Willie," returned the veteran master of the song, beaming with the gathered experience of fifty years in the desk; "just

tak' some coppers in your pouch, and when it's near singing time, jingle them up wi' your hand, It gi'es ye a fine feelin' o' independence, an' acts wonderfu' in calmin' the nerves."

A minister was unintentionally as hard on the precentor on one occasion. He announced the 45th Paraphrase thus, "At the third verse, 'Dost thou not know, self-blinded man!' The tune is *Kilmarnock*."

In olden days it was the custom in the kirk to sit while singing and to stand during prayer. When this order of things was reversed there were some of the very orthodox ministers who looked upon the change as an immediate step to Romanism, and who would on no account tolerate it. One of these ministers, officiating in a church to which a precentor was appointed, was somewhat surprised to find that the leader of the psalmody kept his seat during the singing along with the congregation. This the clergyman was opposed to. It had been the custom for the precentor to stand, and his reverence approved of the old rule, although he would not fall in with the new order in regard to the congregation. For some Sabbaths the worthy official kept his seat, but at length the minister, remonstrating with him, suggested that it would be better for him to stand when leading the praise. "Na, na, sir," replied the musician in a tone of authority; "if it's wrang for the lave to stand, it's wrang for me, sae I'll juist sit."

It is told of a precentor who, considering his office to be of some meaning, prayed on one occasion thus, "Whaur twa or three are gathered in Thy name, we ken that You're in the midst o' them; an' may we provide Ye the nicht wi' gweed enterteenment."

The congregation was not pleased when it had not a precentor, and sometimes it was not pleased when it had one. Before the days of choirs and organs, it was no uncommon thing for the enemies of the precentor to show their ill-feeling towards him by trying to "sing him doon." One strong-lunged individual who had set himself this task became such a general nuisance that strong measures had to be adopted. On Sabbath when he had become specially outrageous, the beadle, acting by instructions, went and snatched the book from his hand, and carried it off in triumph. Continuing just as if nothing had happened, the irrepressible singer trolled forth to the exultant strains of "Scarborough"—

"I'm independent o' a beuk  
While psalms are bein' sung  
There's nae a psalm atween the brods  
But I hae on my tongue."

In some churches where there is no instrumental music, and where the time-honoured custom of taking the collection by means of ladles is still adhered to, the choir sometimes sings an anthem or hymn to drown the noisy clink of the coppers.



In such a church in Banffshire recently a candidate for a vacant pulpit had finished a prosy discourse, when on the taking of the collection, the choir stood up and sang the all-too-suggestive hymn, "Return, O wanderer, to thy home."

It was the custom in some places for the precentor to receive the proceeds of an annual collection for his services. One Sabbath, after sermon and prayer, the minister said in one breath, "Let us conclude the public worship of God at this time by singing part of the fortieth paraphrase. Before singing this paraphrase I have to intimate that the usual collection will be taken next Sabbath for the precentor :—

The wretched prodigal behold,  
In misery lying low,  
Whom vice had sunk from high estate,  
And plunged in want and woe.

And so on to the end of the fifth verse."

The old repeating tunes, which are now almost unknown, led to some absurdities when practised. It is related that a certain church in connection with one of the smaller sects cherished a desire to sing these repeating tunes, and was wont to amuse itself by singing a hymn with a somewhat ludicrous repetition. It was—

And catch the flee——  
And catch the flee——  
And catch the fleeting hours.

Here is a story of another kind relative to psalm

tunes. Dr. Rogers, the author of several volumes illustrative of Scottish life and custom, used to relate many pithy stories. One night at a party he was asked to sing a song. "Me sing?" he replied; "I never sang but once in my life. It was when a boy at the manse of Dunino, in Fife; my father was parish minister there. I, at that time, took a great fancy to learn psalm tunes, so one Sabbath morning I went up to the garret to practise, and I was singing away, and thinking I was doing grandly, when my father came to the bottom of the stair and cried up, 'Come down, you rascal; sawing sticks on the morning of the Lord's day!'"

In the Secession church near Glasgow some sixty years ago, the precentor fell asleep during service. On this being observed by the beadle from his seat at the foot of the pulpit stair, he got up and whispered to some members of the choir, "Is that Paterson sleepin'?" and being answered in the affirmative, stepped forward and administered a sound shaking to the delinquent precentor. But the humorous part of the proceedings followed when the preacher gave out the opening lines of Paraphrase xii.,

"Ye indolent and slothful! rise,  
View the ant's labours and be wise."

A precentor, named Tam, was fond of the bottle, and this caused him often to be late, and repeatedly

nearly suspended. It came at last, however. One morning, after "soda" and other things had been used, he went to the kirk. He started the first psalm and the second, but when the third came he was fast asleep. On one trying to wake him he announced his return from dreamland with the words, "I'll juist tak' ae glass mair, Wull." He resigned on the Monday.

The use of tuning-forks horrified many douce worshippers. "See what things are comin' to," exclaimed an old woman, when she saw the new instrument. "See what that craiter's daein'—ackwally usin' *cauld steel* in the service of God."

The tuning-fork was of much service to the precentor, but even some of those who did use forks, and could read music a little, were not always sure of taking the keynote correctly. An individual of this description went to try for a country church, accompanied by an old precentor who was to act as guide, philosopher, and friend. During the reading of the first psalm, the young fellow kept continually sounding his fork and taking his keynote, until the patience of his companion became exhausted, when the musical probationer was met with the query, put in a louder voice probably than was intended, "Fat are bum, bummin' at, ye gype! canna ye be quate till the minnestir has deen readin'?"

Willie, a precentor and a lover of instrumental music who lived in a northern parish, dared to play

his organ on Sabbath, and for this reason was not liked by many in the village. He delighted to tell how, once when he was playing, a man, coming up to the door, stopped, and then began to "curse and swear at me 'cause I played on the Sabbath."

Once when practising a tune, one of the bass singers, referring to a certain note in his part asked, "Fat d'ye mak' o' this chappie wi' the thingie like a window aside 'im?" "Oh, that's a sharp," was the reply, "but tak' nae notice o't; it's only pitten there to bamboozle simple folk."

In speaking of the precentor it is necessary to say a little regarding his book.

In the kirk there was but one book of songs in use, and that was the Psalter. One of the fundamental principles of Presbyterianism was that nothing should be introduced into the worship of God unless sanctioned by the Almighty; and, acting on this principle, it employed, in the services of the sanctuary, the Psalms of David. These, it held, were inspired compositions, and it used them in the kirk to the exclusion of all others. Of course, there was one thing inseparable from the Psalter, and that was the auld music. To this our pious forefathers tendered no objection, and so the psalms, wedded to their fine old tunes, have continued almost the same for centuries.

In proof of the auld psalmody being purely national, Dean Ramsay tells us he was informed that many of the tunes were composed by artizans,

such as builders, joiners, and blacksmiths. Robert Burns, in his immortal picture of an auld custom, describes the different characters of some of the airs. In his "Cottar's Saturday Night," he says :—

" 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 heavenward flame,  
 The sweetest far of Scotia's holy lays :  
 Compared wi' these, Italian trills are tame,  
 The tickled ears no heartfelt raptures raise ;  
 Nae unison ha'e they wi' our Creator's praise."

The auld minister was passionately attached to the auld psalms, and this was seen—we might say *painfully*—when the General Assembly recommended the introduction of the metrical translations which are now known as the Paraphrases. That edition of the psalter which was published in 1649 was amended and completed in 1708, and some forty years later a committee was commissioned to prepare the collection of verses of sacred poetry entitled, "Translations and Paraphrases of several passages of Scripture." This addition to the psalmody was in due time laid before the public and appeased their appetite for novelty until 1775, when another revision and extension was made.

This volume of "human hymns" was, as we have said, the cause of much discord. The auld minister would on no account adopt them; for he

was as decided as the auld matron who declared that she would have none but the "Psalms of Dauvid." They maintained that no other aid in worship was required, and, in their own parishes at least, the resolution to reject the new collection died only when the minister's reign was ended.

The Rev. Colin Campbell of Renfrew was especially antagonistic to their use, and would on no consideration admit them to a place in his psalmody. On the evening of a communion Sabbath, the clerical brother who had been assisting at the dispensation of the Lord's Supper, opened the service by giving out one of the lately authorised translations. Before the precentor could begin, Mr. Campbell started to his feet and exclaimed, "Let us sing a part of the 72nd Psalm, the 8th verse—

'His large and great dominion shall  
From sea to sea extend.'

Then, turning to his reverend assistant, he added, "Wi' a' your hymn-hymnin' is there ony hymn like that?" History tells the psalm was sung.

In one of the opposition churches, a plan was adopted whereby no minister, stranger or other, might indulge in a divergence from the songs of the "sweet Psalmist of Israel." In this instance the leaves of the Bible, at the Paraphrases, were firmly glued together. On one occasion, when a probationer was to fill a pulpit in the border land, he thought some of the new translations might be

more appropriate to his sermon. The probationer tells the story himself. He says—As I sat in the vestry a man cam' in that I took to be the precentor, so I gi'ed him what I usually gi'e to toun kirks, a psalm, a paraphrase, and two hymns. He took them, put on his glasses, and lookit at my writin' gey scornfu' like. "Hymns," said he. "Na! we sing nae hymns here, an' we're nane sae carin' for the paraphrases neither." "Oh," I said, "I could easily find psalms to suit my subject." "Ay, and I think they micht ha'e served ye too," says he. The story is told by S. R. Crockett, in "The Stickit Minister," and in a letter to the present writer he says, "It may interest you to know that the story is quite true, and happened to myself."

In a remote parish in the West Highlands the Rev. D. M'L—— had been found fault with for introducing hymns into the church service. The minister was indignant at the fault-finding, and at the close of the service he expostulated with his opponents after the following manner, "My frients, her nainsel will be no singer; she'll pe like a great many more, wantin' the vice; but she'll like the godly hymns tat tae Lawland have, and she'll like the psaulms tat David sung too. Bit she'll no care an she'll no peety tae ignorance on tae pairt o' this congregation whateffer. Ye'll plaw tae pipes an' ye'll skirl the cronachs a' tae week moroffer, and tat's nae sin; pit when ye'll hear tae hymns o' God sung on tae Sabbath, ye're like tae good men

of old, tae goodness forsakes ye evermore. Weel, my frients, tae Presbytery has ordert tae hymns to be sung, an' tae will be sung, an' her nainsel' wull like to hear them sung, ay, wi' a squal far louder nor the pipes could evver be made ta skirl. May God pless ye all, an' may ta music pe glad to ta ears whateffer. Amen."

The pulpit has often been occupied by ministers who claimed among their talents that of writing poetry, and many of these poets came to the front when it was proposed to introduce the Paraphrases. Here was a grand opportunity for some of these pulpiteers' compositions winding down the stream of time to the sea of immortality, and many of the clerical bards tendered metrical versions of the Scriptures for acceptance. One of these, coming from Caithness, might have hailed M'Gonagall as its author. The piece itself has found a resting-place in the tomb of forgotten literature, but the concluding stanza survives to bear witness to the "genius" of its author. It runs as follows:—

"Satan shall rive them all in rags,  
That wicked are and vain;  
But if they're good and do repent,  
They shall be sewed again."

Some years ago it was proposed in the supreme court of one of the churches to revise the existing edition of the Psalms. On this occasion the poetic talent possessed by the pulpit was again drawn



forth. One reverend gentleman, who was an earnest supporter of the proposal, laid an *amended* version of the 23rd Psalm before his brethren for approval. The proposal, it may be said, was never given effect to, and possibly it was this incident that led to the failure of the project. The last couplet will suffice to show what was intended to supersede the existing composition. It runs :—

"Surely goodness and mercy all days of my life  
Shall follow me, follow me, follow me, rife."

The comparison of the two paraphrases shows how the sublime and the ridiculous can claim the one origin. What the feelings of the "sweet Psalmist of Israel" would have been if he had been privileged to hear a congregation join in this doggerel outburst it is difficult to imagine. But, after all, the clergyman's labours may not have been in vain. Who knows but that it was his amended version of the 23rd Psalm that aroused the Jacobite songster to pen the immortal lay, "Wha wadna follow thee, bonnie Prince Charlie?"

In later years much was done towards the extension of the psalmody in its several branches. Every sect provided its own peculiar hymnal, sung its own peculiar hymns, and accepted, if it so pleased, the additional aid of instrumental music. As might be expected, the further introduction of "human hymns" was a cause of much discord, and this was also the case in regard to including the "kist o' whistles" as a means of worshipping the

Divinity. In the parish of Kennethcrook, when the introduction of hymns was made, the opposition was fierce in some quarters. John, the beadle, was discussing the matter with a friend. "We care naething at a' for hymns," said John, "naething at a'; sae lang we get the Psaulms of Dauvid and the Paraphrases we manage fine." "Ay," said John's opponent, "that's a' richt enough, but ye ken your Bible as weel's me, an' ye maun ken that it speaks about praising God wi' psalms and hymns and speeritual sangs; and forby, it says that there's to be harps in heaven." "Juist so," returned the worthy beadle, "juist so; the folk in heaven can dae what they like on thae points, but we'll no' ha'e it here on ony accoont."

An attempt was made some time ago to arrive at more uniformity of worship by doing away with the hymn books peculiar to the various sects and instituting a joint hymnal. The proposal was heartily entertained, and after some years of labour the Joint Hymnal Committee laid its production before the various ecclesiastical courts. The work was subjected to a searching criticism, and by the National Church was rejected as inferior to the collection which they already possessed. Of course, while this was a formal judgment, there were many informal criticisms passed on the hymnal. One minister of the kirk, who was very displeased with the new book, suggested an alteration on a verse in one of the compositions. The verse was

from "Onward, Christian Soldiers," and will be easily identified in the suggested emendation, which ran—

"We are sair divided,  
Awfu' bodies we.  
Little hope of doctrine  
Less o' charity."

The Kirk of Scotland rejected the hymnal entire, but at the end of a year reconsidered its decision and sanctioned what has since been published as "The Church Hymnary." In the year that elapsed, however, the suggested alteration by one of its ministers was lost sight of.

The precentor himself has had to a large extent to remove to make room for the organist. A country precentor, finding himself in Glasgow one Sabbath, went with a friend to the service in the Cathedral, which is famed for its finely-trained choir and the organ-playing of the accomplished conductor. The anthem sung on the occasion had a somewhat lengthy instrumental introduction. On being asked after the service what he thought of the singing, the countryman replied, "Oh! nae that ill ava, but I'll tell you what: the conductor, puir fellow, had an awful job to get the keynote for the anthem. He wad be better to use a tunin' fork like masel'."

"James, what's keeping you?" said the minister to his man one day shortly after the introduction of instrumental music into a rural parish. "There's nae hurry the day," returned the beadle. "That

new organist is a volunteer. Wait a wee till he's ower wi' his volunteerin'."

If the elaborate preliminary on the organ was too much for the precentor, it would also seem that that old-world character had little sympathy with some kinds of classical music. The waltz movement in Mozart's Twelfth Mass was peculiarly distasteful to him, and he used to exclaim, "It's ondacent, forbye bein' onchristian: an' it aye brings me in mind o' cleek your pairtner, han's across, an' doon the middle!"

In a country church a number of ministers were assembled to perform a ceremonial function. The organist getting tired of the sacred pieces, broke into some operatic selections. By-and-bye one of the "white ties" of the old school approached, and said to the performer, "May I speir what that is you're playing?" "It is an oratorio called *Patience*," replied the organist. "Ay, I thocht it must ha'e been frae some fine sacred piece, an' I was juist remarkin' to my reverend brithers that it breathed resignation in every note!"

A valuable organ had just been erected in a country church. "Weel, Betty," said an old lady, "what dae ye think o' a' this ongaun noo?" "Oh!" was the reply, "I can pit up wi' onything gin I get a kin' o' guid sermon."

The musical service in other churches has sometimes given amusement. A story is told of Jenny Bayle, who resided in Blairgowrie. Jenny was

said to be defective about the upper storey, but nevertheless she had a very sarcastic tongue. On the Episcopal Church being completed, a great many of the people went to see what kind of service the "Piskies" had, and to hear their grand organ, it being the first adopted in the district in connection with church service. Some said it "was awfu'," others that "it was a perfect dancin' wey-o'-daein', jumping up and doon a' the time." Jenny, happening to hear the fag-end of some of these expressions, resolved that she would attend and see for herself. Accordingly on Sabbath she donned her sowback mutch and Sabbath gown and took her way churchwards. The neighbours were astonished, as Jenny had not been known to go to a church before. On entering Jenny found the service had commenced. The congregation were repeating the responses, "Lord, have mercy upon us," etc. Jenny, thinking they were referring to her, cried out, "Lord, ha'e mercy on us, did ye never see a gown made oot o' an auld cloak afore?" As no notice was taken of this remark Jenny quietly dropped into a pew belonging to one of the upper class, who put in an appearance almost immediately after. At this moment the chant was given out for the Te Deum, the people rising to their feet and the organ pealing forth the opening notes. Jenny was politely asked to leave the pew and enter another. "Ah, na," replied Jenny, who misunderstood what was wanted, "I never could dance a' ma days, an' I'm

ower auld noo to begin sic daftlike capers." "Come away, come away, my good woman," urged the pew-opener, "the people are waiting." "Weel, if I maun come oot, I wull come oot," replied Jenny shaking out the flounces of her gown; "play's up the 'Birks o' Aberfeldy.'"

It was a laconic admonition which was administered by the organist of an Episcopal Chapel in Buchan on one occasion. The organ-blower—who was also the organist's wife—had allowed the contemplation of a neighbour's bonnet to interfere with the proper discharge of her duty. Craning his neck in the direction of his absent-minded spouse, the angry husband, forgetful alike of the sanctity of the place and the respect due to the wife of his bosom, electrified the congregation by exclaiming, "Blaw, ye jaud!" a command which it is needless to say had the desired effect.

Thus far and no farther. We have said a little of our friend who is fast passing away. His successor we have merely mentioned, for he has yet to be tried. With all his imperfections, the precentor had some redeeming features, and was generally a favourite in the parish. In the march of ritualism—a march which some affirm is the approaching to a higher ideal of worship—much that was sacredly associated with the auld Kirk is being swept away, and whether the claims of ritual be right or wrong, it is with many misgivings that we bid farewell to our friend of the desk and tuning-fork—the auld precentor.