Abilene Christian University Digital Commons @ ACU

Stone-Campbell Books

Stone-Campbell Resources

1889

The Organ in Worship: A Sermon Delivered in the Main Street Christian Church, Lexington, Ky., May 11, 1889.

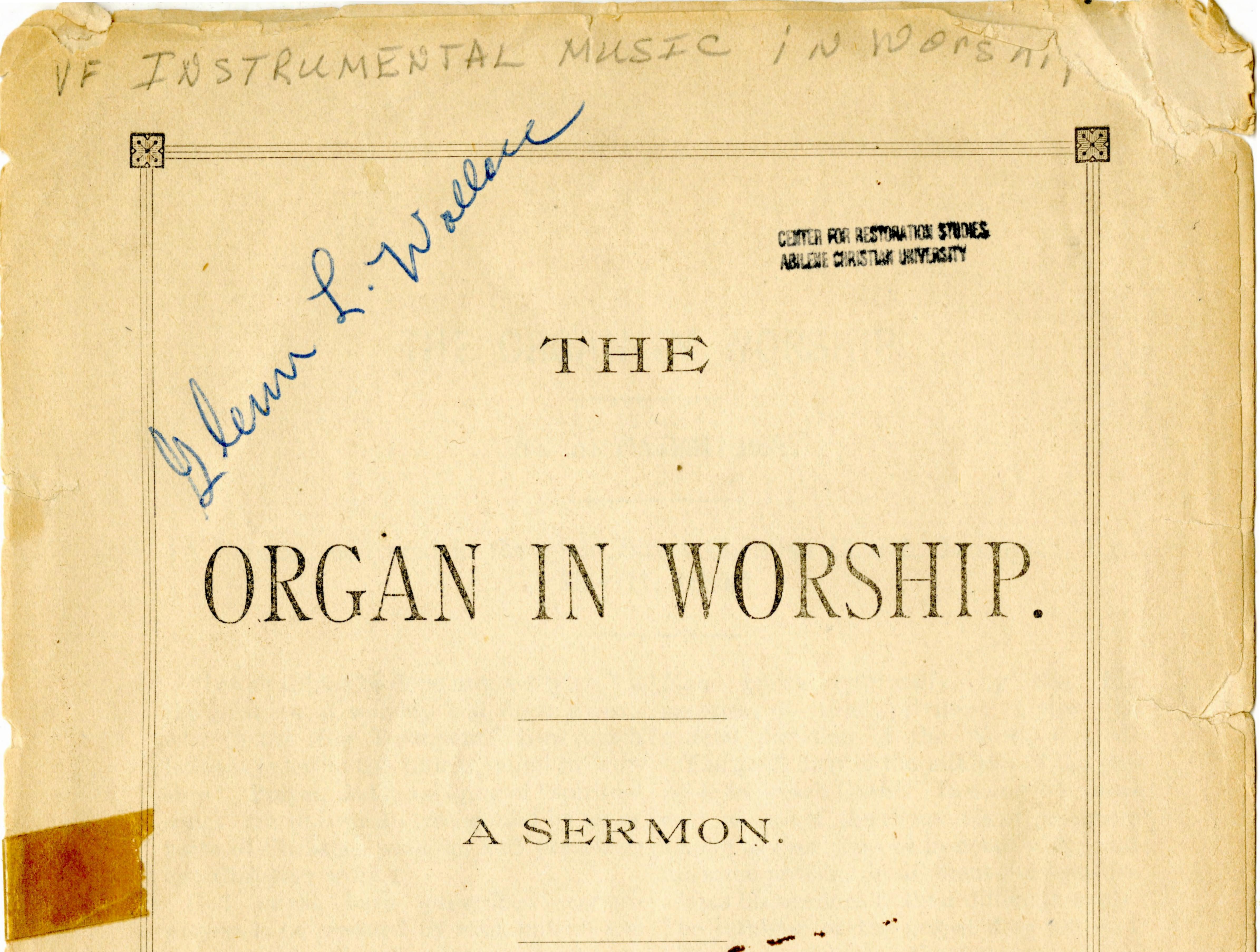
A. Fairhurst

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.acu.edu/crs_books Part of the <u>Biblical Studies Commons</u>, <u>Christian Denominations and Sects Commons</u>, <u>Liturgy</u> and Worship Commons, <u>Music Commons</u>, and the <u>Practical Theology Commons</u>

Recommended Citation

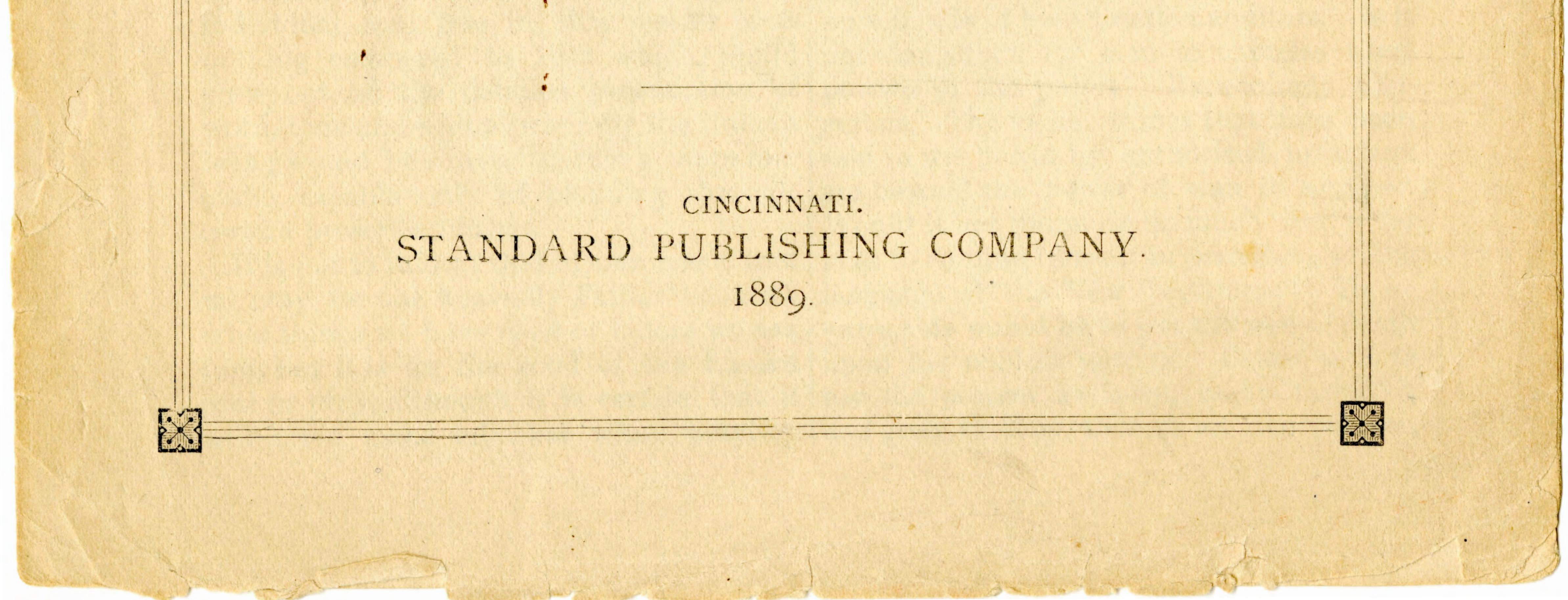
Fairhurst, A., "The Organ in Worship: A Sermon Delivered in the Main Street Christian Church, Lexington, Ky., May 11, 1889." (1889). *Stone-Campbell Books*. 203. http://digitalcommons.acu.edu/crs_books/203

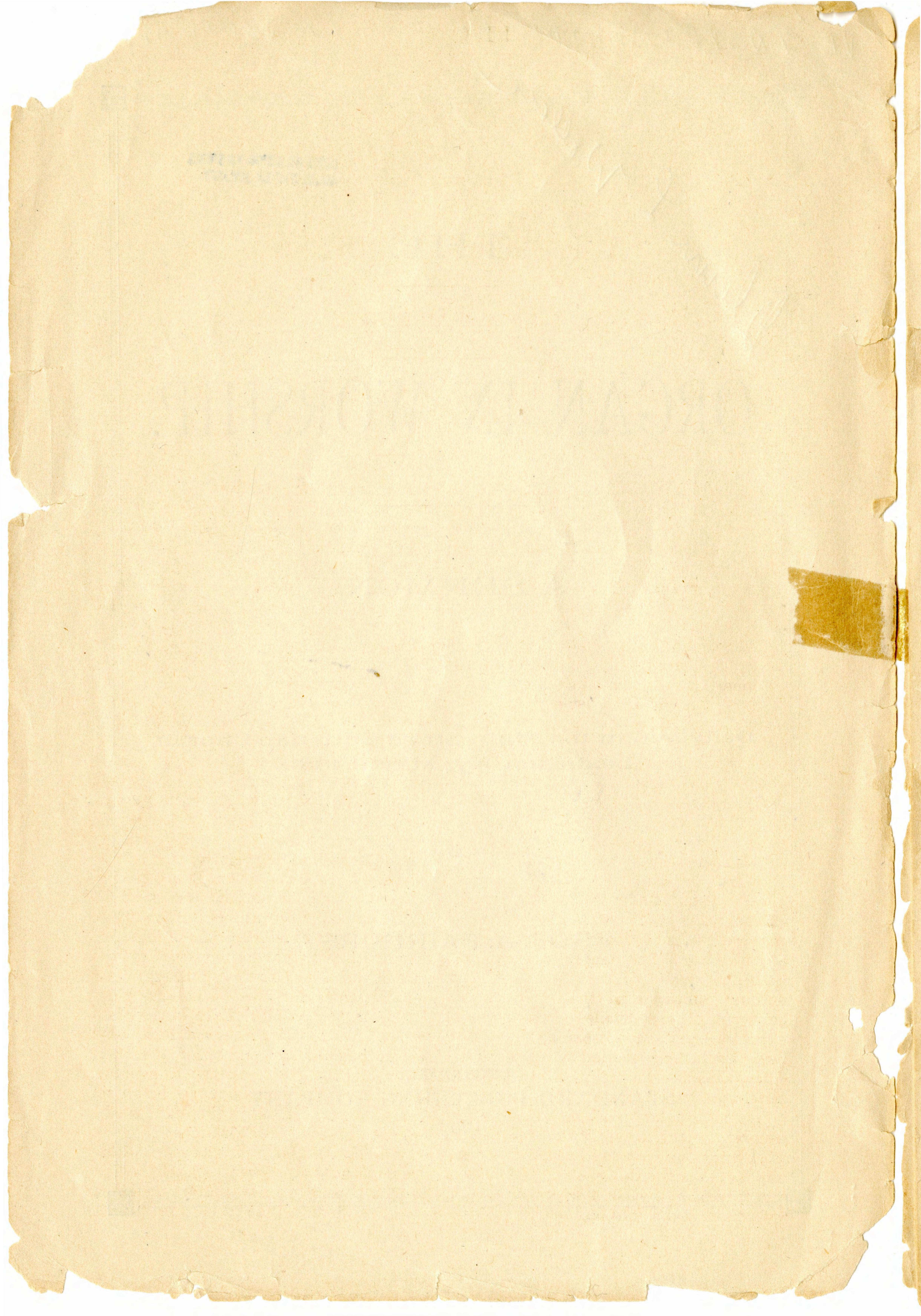
This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Stone-Campbell Resources at Digital Commons @ ACU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Stone-Campbell Books by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ ACU. For more information, please contact dc@acu.edu.



Delivered in the Main Street Christian Church, Lexington, Ky., May 11, 1889.

PROF. A. FAIRHURST.





BY A. FAIRHURST.

THE ORGAN IN WORSHIP.

[A Sermon, delivered in the Main Street Christian Church, Lexington, Ky., May 11, 1889.]

"Let all things be done unto edifying," is Man grows spiritually by the full the great law of worship laid down repeat- exercise of this privilege under the edly in the New Testament. How much general direction of the Word of God. latitude is left to the human mind in wor- The great duty of the minister of the gosship? Prayer, and the singing of "spiritual pel is to preach Christ. In doing this, howsongs" are universally recognized by us as ever, no two of the thousands of preachers parts of Christian worship, and preaching among us ever proceed in detail alike, and the same preacher in different communities as a Christian work. God might have prescribed certain adapts his sermons to their different wants. prayers to be repeated by man, but he has The minister of the gospel does not feel not done this. In this most solemn service, himself restricted to the language of the in which the worshiper comes face to face New Testament in presenting Christ to the with God and talks to him as a child to a world. He feels under obligation to tax to father, no words are put into his mouth, no the utmost his reason and his imagination one external form adhered to, no prescribed in order to induce men to obey the gospel, tone of voice required. The details as to and that the church may be edified. Among prayer, praise and thanksgiving are left to us he is expected to speak extemporanethe mind and heart of the individual wor- ously, thus giving the greatest freedom to shiper, that his spiritual powers may be the exercise of his powers. He does not confine himself to the figures of the New exercised and developed thereby. It may be asked, is there not danger Testament, but gathers from his own imhere? Yes. Many foolish prayers are agination such figures and scenes as he offered, many petitions are made which, if | thinks will edify his hearers, and he brings answered, would prove to be a curse instead from his own experience the things that of a blessing. The danger in leaving the throb with life, that he may stir up the individual soul free in this matter is as pure minds of his Christian auditors. Is it nothing compared to that which would not dangerous for man to exercise these grow out of the detailed prescription of powers in the pulpit? Exceedingly danword, tone and action, whereby the human gerous. The foolish things that have been being would be converted into a mere ma- said in the pulpit by authorized preachers chine, capable only of plodding through are beyond the power of man to number. Would it not therefore be much better for certain prescribed forms. It is not to inform God of our needs that man to confine himself in preaching to the we pray, for our heavenly Father knoweth | language of the New Testament? To rewhat things we have need of before we ask journe this would be to put the seal of death him, but it is for the good of the human upon his noblest powers. Better is it to soul to pray, although it is certain that it use the powers we have, make mistakes, will often make mistakes while praying. and grow thereby, than to sit like parrots,

of words.

The infant learns to walk only after upon the mind and heart. many efforts and many hard falls. The We travel up and down the ages, and soul of man walking toward God will often | through all nations, to obtain the songs for stumble and sometimes fall, but, if honest, the Church of Christ. Wherever a true it will arise with renewed strength and con- poet has sung something pure and good and tinue its upward march. Our mistakes, as holy, we marshal his song under the banwell as our successes, become our teachers. ner of Christ and label it "a spiritual song." The minister of the gospel in the exer- We, as a church, have used these songs cise of the highest calling known to almost exclusively, leaving out for the most man, traverses heaven and earth and part the singing of psalms and hymns, if by ocean's depths that he may gather treasures hymns is meant something found in the to lay at the feet of the Master. This is Bible. Thus, in laying the foundation for done at the expense of many mistakes, yet our church music, in selecting the very as a whole, the results are most fruitful in | body and soul of which music itself is to be edifying the church. A thousand details upon which the suc- widest possible liberty. We have not concessful preaching of the gospel largely de- fined ourselves to the Bible, nor to any one pends are left to be determined by the wis- nation, nor creed, and much less to poets of dom of man, and this, with the certainty like faith with us. We have gladly accepted that in so doing he will make many mis- the songs written under every creed, and of takes. "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and and characters we can never know, and all hymns and spiritual songs, singing and this to the edification of the saints. If making melody in your heart to the Lord" there is one place where, more than anoth-(Eph. v. 19). The spiritual songs here er, we have been liberal in our interpreta. spoken of are not to be found in the Bible. tion of Scripture, it is in the selection of We, as a people, believe that modern poets spiritual songs.

forever repeating certain prescribed forms | worship, which, more than any other, leaves a definite and ineffaceable impression

> but the garment, we have exercised the unknown authors by the score, whose lives

have written many spiritual songs, for we | The mind of the church has been left free have gathered them together and bound to determine for itself what songs are spirthem in the form of hymn books, and we itual and what songs will edify. Is this not have used them from week to week in our a dangerous power for men to exercise, and worship. The makers of these books have would it not be better, especially in these gathered songs from saints and sometimes latter days, when men are no longer infrom sinners, and from people of the spired, if the church would confine herself most diverse religious views, from whom to the singing of psalms? We must acwe, as a people, differ in very important knowledge that very often a poor song is doctrines. Yet we sing these songs, the found in our hymn-books, and frequently a products of a multitude of diversified song is sung that is far from edifying. Who minds and hearts, sing them unto the edifi- can record the mistakes that the people of cation of the church, and ask no questions | God have made in these respects? In what as to the soundness of the faith of their manner can the spiritual songs be presented so as to make the best impression upon the authors. To us they are truly spiritual songs, minds of the hearers? "Let all things be wrought out of the truest and deepest ex- done to edifying." The song is not preperience of their authors' hearts, full of the sented for its own sake, nor to edify God. life with which they have inspired them. but to edify the hearers. The essential thing It has been said that the writers of a in music is to impress, as much as possible. nation's songs do most to form a nation's the sentiment of the song upon the mind character. So the writers of songs for the and heart of the worshiper. church do most for the life of the church. To present the gospel of Christ so as to The very words of these songs, to old and convert the sinner and edify the saint, is the young alike, become common household work of the preacher, yet in doing this his property. They enter into that branch of elocution (the sounds of his voice) may be a

most important element. Give the same edification, while the elocution of the mindiscourse to two men. From the lips of ister and the music are the means by which the one with a magnificent voice, well cul- the sermon and the song are impressed tivated, it will fall like magic; while from upon the minds of the worshiper. If it is the lips of him who stammers and is slow | safe for the church to create and select the of speech it will fall like lead. The differ- songs that she sings, it is also safe for her ence is simply in the sounds they make. to select the music by which these songs In the one case it is most edifying; while shall be made effective in worship. If it is in the other it is wearisome. Yet God has safe for her to create the song, the very soul ordained no particular style of elocution. of that which is to be clothed by music, it The rule is, "let all things be done unto is also safe for her to select the music which edifying." If there should be a congrega- is to clothe the song. tion some place which would prefer to hear [The objector to the organ may take either the one who stammers and is slow of of several positions: speech, then his speech will be edifying to First, he may say that the use of the orthat congregation and it ought to select gan is not edifying, and it is therefore unhim. There are certain regions where it is scriptural. demanded of the preacher that he shall use | Second, that it is unscriptural, and therethe so-called "holy tones" in delivering his fore it is not edifying. discourses. To these congregations such | Third, that it is edifying, but at the same tones are edifying, and, consequently, scrip- | time it is unscriptural, and therefore ought not to be used in worship. tural. God has ordained no particular tunes nor | The first objection is well taken, if it can styles of singing. Singing which edifies be sustained. How shall a congregation one congregation may be repulsive to determine whether the organ aids the vocal another. To the first it is scriptural, but to music unto edification or not? "Let all the second the same music is unscriptural. things be done unto edifying." This rule Edification is the scriptural end to be throws upon the worshiper himself the regained. Here is a spiritual song. In what sponsibility of determining whether the garb shall it be clothed in presenting it to different branches of the worship are edithe ears of the hearers so as to make it fying or not. God does not tell us that brother A preaches good sermons, nor that most edifying? We have seen that in praying, preaching | brother B sings well. We must determine and in the selection of spiritual songs we, these things for ourselves as individuals. If as a people, have allowed the widest and some members say that the organ is edifyfreest use of the human faculties. Matters ing to them, then we must accept their deof the highest interest have been left to be cision so far as they are concerned. If othdetermined solely by human wisdom. God ers say that the organ is not edifying to has trusted man in the amplest way, has them, then we must accept their decision required him to exercise his highest facul- as to themselves. There is no other method ties to the utmost in matters that pertain to whereby it is possible to tell what is most his soul's highest interests. If he can trust edifying. With regard to the votes cast in man in the above things, can he not also favor of the organ in worship, it will gentrust him in the less important matter of erally be found, I think, that the great mapresenting the songs so as to make them jority of those who understand music most edifying? Here is the song. Uttered are in favor of the organ. This with certain sounds it will edify, uttered fact goes to show that the orwith others it will not edify. The only gan will improve the quality of the question is, What sounds shall be used to music, for it must be admitted that those accomplish the end? Does God care more who understand music can best judge of its for one sound than for another? I insist quality. The objection stated above is upon it that edification is the end to doubtless valid as to some congregations, be gained by preaching and music, and but invalid as to others. Since each conby all worship. The matter of the sermon gregation must judge for itself as to what and the spiritual song are the materials for particular kind of music is edifying, and

organ is edifying, while others decide that sang as it were a new song before the it is not edifying; to the first its use is scrip- throne" (Rev. xiv. 2, 3). tural, but to the second it would be un- If instrumental music in worship is a sin scriptural.

ing the worship. man has no right to choose the sounds that be made to praise God. come through the reason, the imagination, are scriptural only by inference. the memory, the conscience, the eye and Modern sermons are not in details scriptthe ear. Let the human ear, so often greeted | ural either by precept or example. They by discordant sounds in daily strife, when are preached in languages which have origit comes into the house of God, be greeted inated since Christ and his apostles were on by the grandest and sweetest harmonies the earth. As a rule, they contain but few that human genius can produce, that the quotations of Scripture. There is so large soul may be lifted up in anticipation of the a human element in sermons, that we can celestial harmonies of the heavenly hosts safely say that if they are scriptural at all, around the throne. they are only so by inference. As to the

since some congregations decide that the harpers harping with their harps, and they

on earth, is it not a sin in heaven? John, The second objection is that the use of the beloved, in his old age, when his the organ in worship is unscriptural, and spiritual vision, free from all earthly dross, therefore it can not edify. God might have | could pierce through the pearly gates, saw selected certain tunes to be used in the repeatedly the harpers harping upon their church, but he did not, although tunes are harps, and with an ear that could catch the of the greatest importance. He has left spiritual sounds of heaven, he heard the man to make spiritual songs and to make music around the throne of God. How do the tunes adapted to these songs. The gen- you know that this language is figurative? eral plan of all worship seems to be to give | May there not be spiritual harps in heaven? man as much to do as possible, to give his | Are spirits deaf and dumb, and are there faculties the widest possible range in creat- no divine sounds above? Is heaven an asylum for the deaf and dumb? God is not Why is it that this matter of determin- deaf. He who made the ear, can he not ing the quality of sounds by which a song hear? But if it is a figure, would not of human origin, and a tune of human the apostle have been very careful in that origin, shall be brought to the ears of the connection to have used a pure and apworshipers, should be made an exception propriate figure? If it only edifies man, to this general rule, and that we should be- God is glorified thereby. It is man's sallieve that man has no authority to decide vation that God seeks. Repress not the the question? Is it because sound is more human facilities in their growth, for this sacred than the song itself, or than the is not edification, but let every power of tune by which it is to be rendered, that both body and mind in its most perfect form he thinks will best edify? Is it because the I repeat that the great idea with God, so human ear is more likely to err in this far as worship is concerned, is to develop than it is in deciding what style of delivery | man, to edify him, which means to save him. it prefers in a sermon? Or is it because In doing this he compels man to do all God would be especially arbitrary in this that it is possible for him to do. The very matter and lay down a rule without refer- | language which he uses in worship is a huence to the highest wants of man? | man invention, and when God speaks to I can not believe that God in this man he speaks to him in human language. subordinate matter makes an exception The most of the prayers that are offered are to his general rule. His idea ever not "thus saith the Lord," are not quotaseems to be to develop through exercise tions of Scripture, but they are formed by and to the utmost every good faculty the mind of the worshiper. So far as their which man possesses. Open every avenue form is concerned, they are human, and the of the soul and let God come in. Let him best that can be said of them is that they

"And I heard a voice from heaven as the spiritual songs which Christians sing, they voice of many waters, and as the voice of a are of human origin. Not a single one of great thunder, and I heard the voice of them is found in the Scriptures. If they

are scriptural at all, it is not by precept or of singers, both in public and in private, to example, but only by inference. use musical instruments for this purpose. The tunes which Christians use are purely | We are sometimes told that the organ is a human, and have been invented by musi- human invention. This is strictly true. cians of the most diversified views and So were the last sermon and prayer which characters. If they are scriptural, they are you heard largely human inventions, and so only by inference. We are not familiar the song and the tune wholly human inwith a single tune that the early Christians ventions. If we drop the human invention used, nor do we know that they sang any element out of worship, then music of any tune correctly. In preaching and praying, kind becomes totally impossible, and we see how great is the human element, prayer and preaching will be confined to while spiritual songs and tunes are wholly repeating certain passages of Scripture. human. Yet we believe that God adopts We are told that it is a dangerous these purely human songs and tunes as his thing to use the organ in worship. own, and they constitute one of the most, This is strictly true, but it is no more danif not actually the most efficient part of gerous than for men to pray and preach and worship. May we not be in danger of un- compose songs and tunes. Mistakes are frederestimating the value of the human quent in all of these matters. But Godreelement in matters of worship? God | quires us to act in these things in spite of the has formulated for the human race certainty that we will make mistakes. I know neither prayer, nor sermon, nor song, of no redemption for us unless his mercy nor tune. The reasons for this are appar- and love are sufficient. He who can make ent. God adapts himself to human nature. | the wrath of man to praise him can also en-While man's general wants in all ages and able us to rise on our mistakes as "stepping in all places are the same, yet in detail they stones . . . to higher things." They are most varied, and in nothing is this more are a necessary element in the education strikingly seen than in music. The music of a finite creature. which edified those early Christians may A third position which the objector might take is, that the organ may make the not have been the music which will best music more edifying, but it is unscriptural, edify Christians to-day. The music which and therefore ought not to be used. This edifies one congregation to-day may not position is so out of harmony with God's edify another. usual method of dealing with man, that it God has ever trusted each succeeding hardly seems probable that any person generation in every land to frame its own would assume it. That God would prohibit prayers as dictated by the general spirit of that which edifies seems incredible. To the Scriptures; to prepare and deliver its cast the good out of the kingdom would be own sermons by human wisdom, in the to divide the kingdom of truth against light of the gospel; and to compose its own itself. That this would be done where songs and the tunes by which they are to every good influence is so much needed in be rendered. redeeming the world, I can not believe. If he has thus trusted man in these large and most important things, may he not also It will be noticed that I have viewed trust that man will be able to render these this subject in its relation to edification. songs and tunes by the aid of sounds that He who simply asserts that the use of the will make them edifying to himself? It is organ is unscriptural, and stops short with for man's edification that all these things this assertion, without considering its relaare intended. It seems evident to me that tion to edification, is in grave error. God the general spirit of the Scriptures accord- in all of his dealings with man, acts not aring to the method of our interpretation as bitrarily, but acts strictly with regard to a people justifies the use of the organ as an man's highest needs. He would lift man aid to the human voice in worship. up and redeem him through the exercise It should be borne in mind that it is the of every good faculty with which he has general opinion of those who understand endowed him. music that an instrument aids the voice in The deepest human reason, the loftiest singing. We all know that it is the habit flights of the imagination, the eloquence of

the minister, the genius of the poet, the of the organ among us in worship. That it divine instinct of the composer of music, has been steadily growing in favor with us the voices of God's people and of the as a people is, I think, beyond question. I musical instrument which helps to cement | can see no reason why it should cease to bethe music into grander harmony, are all come more and more popular in worship. God's means of redeeming the human soul. The root of this matter lies not in the Let us cast out no good thing from the church, but in Christian homes where sons kingdom of God. Whatever will help to and daughters, through long years of toil, redeem man is God's, and wherever it will are taught instrumental music, and the best accomplish its purpose of helping to value of an instrument as an aid in singing. redeem man, there it belongs. God has The consequences of this are inevitable. given to his people great and glorious lib- Better music at home means better music erty-not liberty in name simply, but lib- in the church. Music is not an arbitrary erty in fact. He has, by failing to formulate thing, but it has a definite mathematical the different acts of worship, thrown man as basis, which those who do not understand, much as possible upon his own resources, fail fully to appreciate. Many ears are so thus calling into exercise all of his highest | constructed that to them a certain amount powers, and lifting him up to a higher and of discord may not be unpleasant, while to closer communion with himself. We, as a the more sensitive and cultivated ear the people, have taken liberal views with regard same discord is very disagreeable. to worship. As to details, we recognize no | The difficulty of creating good church formulated methods of worship. Each con- music is very great, and if a large majority gregation is free to determine these matters of those who best understand music, and for itself. The great danger which lies be- upon whom rests the responsibility of creatfore us as a people is not that we will abuse ing it, desire an organ as an aid to the voice, our liberty in the matter of church music, it seems to me that their desire should have but that we may fail to avail ourselves of great weight in determining the matter. the means which God has provided and is "Let all things be done unto edifying." For ever providing for the spread of the gospel. | hundreds of men, women and children, all The Scriptures ought not to be so inter- differing from each other in intelligence, preted as to prevent us from laying hold of taste and education, to live together in a and using any good thing that will help to congregation so that the highest spiritual advance the kingdom of God. "But go ye interests of each individual shall be adand learn what this meaneth, I desire mercy | vanced and the desires of each properly reand not sacrifice" is a text that needs to be spected, is a great problem. pondered long and well. God's word ought In every human organization it becomes not to be interpreted so as to prevent us necessary to sacrifice, to a certain extent, from doing good. Infidelity, the great foe individual desires to the general good. of Christianity in the present age, thirsty | Without concession of individual preference for the blood of souls, stands knocking at in some measure, organized effort of every the gates of Zion. They who are within kind becomes impossible. "Bear ye one the gates do greatly err if, in the presence another's burdens and so fulfill the law of of this gigantic enemy, they waste their en- Christ." "But the hour cometh, and now

ergies in civil strife. It may not be inappropriate to add a word as to what I think is to be the future of the future of the future of the seeketh such to worship him."