

For the Belfast Monthly Magazine,

ON SACRED MUSIC.

**T**HAT there exists a God, the Supreme Governor of the universe, the Creator and Preserver of all his works, the Rewarder of good, and the Punisher of evil, no nation or people upon earth presume to deny. That we are under certain obligations to this great and powerful Being, all acknowledge. That there are certain duties incumbent on us, as inferior, dependant creatures, the performance of which He requires of us, and which it will be highly presumptuous and ungrateful on our part to refuse, all likewise acknowledge.

Of those duties, one, on account of its superior rank and importance, stands eminently distinguished. This is praise. This is a duty which every nation upon earth, Christian, Pagan, or Mahometan, barbarous or civilized, consider sacred and indispensable; and the performance of which they consider essentially necessary towards gaining them the favour and approbation of the Deity. It is a duty dictated by nature, and approved of by reason and revelation. It is a duty which all rational creatures should delight to perform. It is a duty peculiarly incumbent on man, who, gifted with the noble faculty of speech, is in some measure the constituted high-priest of nature, the voice of all creation.

From the earliest ages, the praises of our Creator have been accompanied by music, vocal, or instrumental. Music, the grand, sublime, heavenly science of music, has always been found to strangely affect our souls. It produces sensations, the most tender, refined, and delicate. Sensations, indescribable and unutterable. Sensations, strong beyond the power of expression. Sensations, of that pure, exalted, spiritual na-

ture, which, we may probably conjecture, the happy spirits will enjoy in a future state.

Music, on account of possessing these extraordinary powers, has always been considered peculiarly suitable for Divine service; and the rude, unlettered barbarian, as well as the polished Greek, has kindled the sacred flame upon the holy altar, and devoutly chaunted the hymn of praise to his favourite Deity.

The ancient Jews were peculiarly distinguished for the pomp, splendour, and magnificence of their external worship. Their temple service was most grand and awful: such as became the sincere worshippers of the most high God. Music was there, by the express command of Heaven, rendered sacred. A regular choir was established by King Solomon; all sorts of musical instruments were consecrated to the service of the Deity; and the sacred courts of God's holy temple resounded with the hymn of thanksgiving, and the anthem of praise to Israel's Almighty King.

In modern times, it is to be lamented, wretched prejudice, and bigotry, have, in too many places, operated successfully in preventing this most grand and delightful part of external worship, from becoming pleasing and interesting. In how few places of public worship in Ireland, will we hear any thing, that can, with any degree of propriety, be called sacred music. Instead of that, a dull, unmeaning sound, will be heard, the wretched remains of some old psalm-tune, harsh and grating to the feelings, insipid and disgusting to a refined taste, which will absolutely offend and shock a musical ear. This will be sung, or rather bawled, without the smallest regard being paid to the rules of music; and frequently attended with such extraordinary and frightful grimaces, by

the person who officiates as clerk, that it is with extreme difficulty a stranger can retain sufficient self command, as to compose the muscles of his face, and behave with becoming decorum and propriety. Is this a proper substitute for sacred music? Can these wild, harsh, discordant sounds, be most appropriate for accompanying sacred poetry? Most proper for exciting love, gratitude, devotion, and every tender and exquisite feeling in the human breast? Most pleasing and acceptable to the Deity? Oh! blush, ye bigots, for such monstrous, such glaring absurdities! The language of the lips can avail nothing, except the heart be tuned to devotion; and that this can be the case, whilst our ears are stunned, and our feelings disgusted by sounds so barbarous and unmusical, is morally impossible.

That a reformation in this sublime part of Divine service, is necessary, in most of our houses of public worship, must be universally acknowledged. That in this enlightened age, boasting of so many valuable improvements, in the arts, and sciences, no attempts have been made to introduce a taste for sacred music, is absolutely astonishing. That when the art of oratory is so improved, that there are few houses of public worship, but can boast of an able, eloquent, and accomplished minister, this necessary part of Divine service should be performed, in so lifeless, pitiful, and disgusting a manner, is certainly extraordinary. To what can this be owing? Has our countrymen a natural aversion to music? No! On other occasions they are as fond of music as their neighbours. Do they consider discord pleasing, and music offensive to the Deity? No! Reason and revelation afford no ground for such an absurd, irrational supposition. To what can it

then be owing? It is custom, "the plague of wise men, and the idol of fools," that has attached them to a certain form of external worship. Their forefathers sung the psalms of David, to a particular set of tunes, and in a peculiar manner; and they as dutiful children, are fully resolved to diligently tread in their steps, and do the same; and are determined to zealously oppose all reformation, as an impious and sacrilegious attempt to innovate on customs, rendered sacred, and venerable, by their age and antiquity. Oh, bigotry! to what a humiliating and degrading condition dost thou reduce human nature! In vain reason would elevate her voice, and attempt to enlighten, and rectify the mistaken judgment of thy votary; thy baneful, but powerful influence, counteracts and frustrates her benevolent exertions; he remains blinded, and enveloped in the gloomy mists of darkness and ignorance!

It is to be hoped the time is approaching, when the enlightening rays of truth will dispose men to divest themselves of prejudice and prepossession; to think, speak, and act, like reasonable, rational creatures, and to exercise those mental powers, the possession of which distinguish them from the brute creation. It is to be hoped, the happy time is approaching, when Religion will be viewed in all her native, undisguised beauty. When all the duties she requires of us, will be performed with ardour. When her reign on earth will be triumphant and glorious. When superstition, bigotry, and fanaticism, will vanish from before her refulgent presence. When every voice will be tuned to harmony, and every sweet affection of the human heart, spontaneously arise to Heaven. Then all the nations, which overspread the earth, will cordially unite in chaunting one

grand, solemn anthem of praise and thanksgiving to the great Author of their existence.

MARCELLUS.

*To the Proprietors of the Belfast Magazine.*

GENTLEMEN,

HAVING sent you some papers relative to the economy and management of Bees, which were inserted in your truly patriotic miscellany, I beg leave to add a few farther remarks on that subject, suggested by what lately occurred to my observation.

In the latter end of July, 1811, I was presented by a friend with a hive of Bees, just swarmed. It being so late in the season, I did not cherish very sanguine hopes of their doing well. However, as the weather proved favourable until near November, I had hopes, that by careful management, they might weather the winter. In this I was not disappointed; and having fed them carefully in February and March, I was pleased to find them pretty strong in April. During the summer, however, they did not exhibit in strength and numbers an appearance equal to my expectation. I saw no drones, nor any increase of numbers in the hive. And although the few which appeared, wrought very assiduously on a bed of mignonette, which I had provided on purpose, until near October; in the beginning of that month, I found all the bees dead, having left about a pint or a pound and half of honey in the hive.

Now, from these appearances, I conjecture, that the bees died of age. There never appeared to be any increase of the number of bees, which I attribute to the queen having died. That there was no queen, I conclude, from my not having been

able to observe any royal cell in the combs, for which I searched with care. And these observations appear to me to establish three facts relative to bees:—

1. That bees will inhabit a hive, and work vigorously, without a queen, or any prospect of one being produced.

2. That the working bees have not, of themselves, nor even with the aid of drones, any power of creating or producing a queen-bee.

3. That a bee's age does not extend to much beyond the period of a year.

I submit these remarks to those of your intelligent readers, who are conversant with this subject, who will set me right, if I have fallen into error.

A.Z.

*To the Proprietors of the Belfast Magazine.*

I OBSERVE in the Newry Telegraph, some discussion as to the propriety of having some alteration made in the rules of the several Bible societies, so as to favour the distribution of the Doway Bible among Roman Catholics. The rule, that the copies of the Scriptures to be distributed, shall be unaccompanied by any comment, excludes this Bible, and, of course, prevents the members of the Romish Church from enjoying any benefit from those institutions. Now, I put it to the public, and particularly to those of your readers and correspondents who are interested in the subject, if it would not be well for the Hibernian Bible Society to remodel the rule, so as to embrace the distribution of the Roman Catholic Bible. I am not one of those who, when any relaxation in favour of the Catholics is proposed, are ready with the cry, "the church is in danger,"