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WILLIAM SMITH OF DURHAM

BY JOHN BUTTREY

THE Preces and Responses by William Smith of Durham¹ have become well known and widely used since Ivor Atkins and E. H. Fellowes included them in 'Six Settings of the Preces and Responses by Tudor Composers', which appeared in 1932. Jebb, who had already published them in his collection of 1846, stated that the composer was organist of Durham Cathedral from 1588 to 1598. Atkins and Fellowes repeated this in their preface, while the fifth edition of Grove's 'Dictionary of Music and Musicians' (1954) has the following:

Smyth (Smith) William: (*b.?* *d.* Durham ?) English 16th-century organist and composer. He was the organist of Durham Cathedral from 1588 to 1598, and in 1589 petitioned the Vice-Dean and Chapter for remuneration for mending the organs, receiving the sum of 30 shillings. He was a minor canon of the same Cathedral from 1594 to 1599... Smyth's son Edward afterwards occupied the Durham Cathedral organist's post, but for two years only (1609-11).

The recent supplementary volume of Grove has a note by Wyn K. Ford which casts a little doubt on the above information, but Jeffrey Mark (who wrote his article for the third edition of the Dictionary—it was copied almost without alteration into the fourth and fifth editions), as well as Atkins and Fellowes, obviously followed Jebb in ascribing the music to the sixteenth-century organist of Durham Cathedral. Why they did so is difficult to tell, since Smith's Responses themselves contain a clue suggesting that this may be incorrect. If we examine settings of the Preces and Responses from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries respectively, we find that Tallis, Byrd and Morley placed the plainsong in the tenor, but Gibbons, Tomkins and Smith did not. Consequently, Smith would seem to belong in the later century rather than the earlier.

His compositions fall also into definite groups:

Preces and proper psalms for Christmas, Easter and Whitsun;
Four settings of collects from the 1552 Prayer Book (for the Purification of the Virgin, the Conversion of St. Paul, the First Sunday in

¹ I wish to acknowledge the kindness of the Dean and Chapter of Durham Cathedral in permitting their manuscripts to be used for the preparation of this article, and the reproduction of Smith's signature.

Lent, and Ascension Day);
 Three verse anthems;
 Two settings of the Kyrie and Nicene Creed;
 One set of ten Kyries and one set of Responses.

This is unusual, since there are no settings of the canticles for Morning or Evening Prayer and only three anthems, one of which is marked 'Christmas Day', another 'The Communion Day', while the third is part of Sternhold and Hopkins's metrical version of Psalm 57—one of the proper psalms for Easter Day. Except for the Responses, Kyries and Creeds, all the rest is clearly occasional music.

Smith's compositions are found only in the Durham and Peterhouse part-books, the latter being associated with John Cosin, Prebendary of Durham Cathedral, 1624-34, Master of Peterhouse, 1635-40, and Bishop of Durham, 1661-72. Cosin had also been involved in the law-suit brought by his fellow-Prebendary, Peter Smart, against the Dean and Chapter of Durham, the reports of which contain some interesting facts about music in the cathedral between 1620 and 1630, as well as evidence concerning Smith, the composer. On 27 July 1628 Smart preached a vituperative sermon in the Cathedral, attacking practices sanctioned by the Dean and Chapter which he maintained were 'Popish' and bewildering to the congregation. The Dean and Chapter promptly suspended him, whereupon he took them to court. 'Bishop Cosin's Correspondence' (published by the Surtees Society, 1868) includes the following letter which Cosin wrote to Bishop Laud on 19 August 1628:

Since the copy of Mr. Smart's sermon was sent to your Lordship, he has . . . preferred four indictments against us at these last Assizes here in Durham: one, that we place our Communion Table the wrong way; another, that we stand up and sing the Creed after the Gospel; a third, that we use wax lights and tapers; and a fourth, that Mr. Burgoyne has set up an altar in his church at Warmouth. All which were by him supposed and urged to be superstitions and unlawful ceremonies, and contrary to the Act of Uniformity.

These indictments however were rejected, the judge stating that he had been to the cathedral services himself, and was a witness "that all things were done in decency and in order". Smart, far from being put off by this, again preferred the same charges the next year; this time the jury found the indictments against the Chapter, but after further thought the judge declared he saw "no such direct law whereon to ground them".

Smart had also sent to Archbishop Harsnett 'Articles or Instructions for Articles to be exhibited by His Majesty's High Commis-

sioners against Mr. John Cosin', from which the following are taken:

Article 7: He has divided the morning service into two parts; the six o'clock service which used to be read only and not sung, he chants with organs, sackbuts and cornetts, which yield a hideous noise . . . The Second Service at ten o'clock he calls Mass, which consists of Epistles and Gospels, the Ten Commandments and the Nicene Creed . . .

Article 8: He enjoins all the people to stand up at the Nicene Creed . . . which he commands to be sung with organs, sackbuts and cornetts . . .; he has not only banished the singing of the psalms in the vulgar tunes . . . but so changed the liturgy by reason of the confusedness of voices of so many singers with a multitude of melodious instruments, the greatest part of the service is no better understood than if it were in Hebrew or Irish.²

Article 9: On the fast day after Easter last, he commanded the last prayer at the end of the Communion to be sung with organ as an anthem, so that no man could understand one word.

All references to musical settings in these articles may be condensed to three items: (a) choral settings of the psalms, in place of metrical versions for congregational use; (b) settings of the Kyrie and Nicene Creed; and (c) settings of collects as anthems. All Smith's compositions, with the exception of his Responses and verse anthems, fall entirely within these categories.

A further letter from Cosin's later correspondence throws light on the composer's identity. Smart had been sent to prison after his trial in 1629, and no doubt the Prebendaries had hoped this would put an end to the matter. However, the following letter, written by Cosin and Prebendary Lindsell to their colleague Eleazor Dunkon, shows that music was still capable of causing trouble at Durham:

January 16th, 1630.

That which we related at Farnham concerning the reading of the Nicene Creed, and the common singing of the psalms by all the people together instead of the Choir anthems, was no more than we heard with our ears and saw with our eyes . . . For better satisfaction wherein, you shall tell my Lord . . . that this both was and is still the truth. You shall have all:

The Bishop was here three Sundays before anything was altered, more than that both the services were put together, which were before divided. Upon the fourth Sunday, he sent a messenger to the Chantor commanding him to so order the service that the Nicene Creed after the Gospel and the 'Lord have mercy upon us' after

² The Cathedral Treasurer's Book for 1632-3 mentions six lay-clerks, one lay-clerk leader, two sackbut-players and two cornett-players, as well as the organist and assistant organist.

each Commandment might be read and not sung. And further, that after the Creed so read, he should begin a psalm for all the people to sing before the Sermon, and after the Sermon sing another, as they do in parish churches. This was all done accordingly . . .

So we found it at our coming home and so has it hitherto continued, saving that upon the last Communion Day (the first Sunday in January) according to the usual custom, they sang, after the Sermon was done, an anthem proper for the sacred action; but whereat Mr. Dean was so highly offended that, sitting in his choir-stall, he called him a saucy, proud, presumptuous, daring fellow that began it, and afterwards rated William Smith, the Sacrist, all to nought for it; nor would he be pacified till he had proved it to be his Worship's own direction . . .

And if our testimony be not enough, forasmuch as concerns the reading of the Creed, and the people singing of the psalms as before, you shall have the subscription of,

Will. James

Will. Smith, Sacristan.

Richard Hutcheson, Organist.

Here, then, is a William Smith at Durham Cathedral during the very period when elaborate music—especially the type which the composer Smith wrote—was causing such controversy.

Further, 'The Acts of the High Commission Court at Durham' (Surtees Society, Vol. 34) record a case against one John Richardson, "for divers irreligious passages and behaviour in church" after a disturbance during the Communion service at St. Mary-le-Bow Church, Durham, on Palm Sunday 1634. One of the witnesses called was the Rector, "William Smith of the city of Durham, aged 31, clerk" (i.e. priest). Lastly, the Durham part-books add further evidence. For example, the first 41 pages of the Organ Book A.1 contain the accompaniments to all but two of Smith's compositions; these are in a single hand, in the following order:

First Kyrie and Creed.

Second Kyrie and Creed.

Preces and psalm for Christmas Day at Matins.

Preces and psalm for Christmas Day at Evensong.

Preces and psalm for Easter Day at Matins.

Preces and psalm for Easter Day at Evensong.

Preces and psalm for Whitsunday at Matins.

Collect for the First Sunday in Lent ('O God which for our sake').

Collect for Candlemas Day ('Almighty and Everlasting God').

Anthem, 'My heart is set to laud the Lord'.

Anthem 'I will preach thy law'.

Collect for Ascension Day ('Grant we beseech thee').

Anthem, 'I will wash my hands in innocency'.

The neat arrangement alone suggests it may be holograph; in

addition, however, each piece has the signature 'Will: Smith' at the end, and this signature also appears in the Cathedral Treasurer's Books for the years 1632-36 (the only ones extant for this period) where "William Smith, clerk" signed for his quarterly stipend. The Act Book of the Dean and Chapter, used in conjunction with the Registers of the churches of St. Mary-le-Bow and St. Mary the Less, Durham (published by the Durham and Northumberland Parish Register Society), can thus provide most of the following biographical details about this priest-musician.

William Smith was baptized on 3 April 1603, the second son of 'Sr.' (i.e. priest) Christopher Smith and his wife Elizabeth. They had been married on 24 April 1599, and their first son, baptized William on 25 January 1600, had died on 10 February 1602. Both parents also died before the boy was two years old, his father on 13 August 1603, and his mother on 14 November of the following year; the infant was presumably cared for by relatives—his father had five brothers, and there were also other families of Smiths living in Durham at this time. At the age of nine he was at Durham School, where he is mentioned in the list of King's Scholars for the years 1612-13 and 1614-15. A William Smith is also recorded as matriculating at Cambridge in 1618, though without sufficient evidence to identify him further.

On 30 October 1625 Smith was married to Grace Hodgeson in St. Mary the Less, Durham. The Dean and Chapter's Act Book has the following entries in 1627:

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| 8 April: | To William Smith, forty shillings for his painstaking in the time Mr. Hutcheson, organist, was in the gaol. |
| 20 July: | William Smith elected and sworn one of the Minor Canons. |
| 20 November: | Precentor Mr. Mark Leonard
Sacrist Mr. William Smith. |

This is his first appearance in the cathedral records, but his abilities were evidently well-known in his native city by the time he was no more than 24. In 1628 he was allowed a stipend of £10 per annum "until a benefice fall void and upon the bestowing of that living upon him then, they to be freed from that payment". In the following year we read

- 13 May: William Smith—the Curateship of Witton Gilbert with the apurtances granted by the Prebendaries . . . in the regard of the good services that he has already performed and is willing and likely to continue and perform more hereafter unto the Cathedral Church of Durham during his life.

He was also Rector of the church of St. Mary-le-Bow from 1631 until its partial destruction in 1637. As the church is only a stone's throw from the cathedral he presumably managed to combine the duties of both.

Smith was listed as Sacrist of the Cathedral from 1627 till 1634, and thereafter as Precentor, while in 1643 we read:

15 August: The gospellor's place granted to Mr. William Smith at May Day next, and St. Magdalene Curateship in Gilligate at midsummer next.

The Journal of the House of Lords, 1641, mentions him twice as a witness at Cosin's trial before the House, which was brought about when Smart sent a petition to the Lords regarding the 'Popish' practices at the Cathedral. Grace Smith died on 23 April 1640, but within a year or two the composer had married again, for the following baptism is recorded in 1644:

26 August: William, son of William Smith, clerk, and Dorothy his wife.

But the baby lived only six months, and the composer's death was recorded on 19 April 1645.

Here then is a fairly clear outline of Smith's career; taken in conjunction with what we learn from Smart, it helps us to understand why his music was written. Smart's 'Articles' to Archbishop Harsnett show that it was Cosin who encouraged the use of choral music in the services; it was probably he who had helped Smith establish himself at the cathedral, where he was soon made a member of the staff. After Smart's outburst a year later the musical contribution to the cathedral services must have been severely curtailed, and Cosin's departure for Cambridge in 1635 probably marked its end.

At this point, I should like to discuss the setting of 'Awake up my glory', the psalm for Easter Day at Evensong, included in Tudor Church Music, Vol. IV, as a work by Orlando Gibbons. The parts of this piece at Peterhouse are Medius Decani, Medius Cantoris, 1st Countertenor Decani, 1st Countertenor Cantoris, and Bass Decani, all in the First Set of Caroline Books. All save the Bass part are entitled 'Mr. Orlando Gibbons' Psalm for Easter Day at Evensong'. Dom Anselm Hughes has the following note in his 'Catalogue of the Musical Manuscripts at Peterhouse, Cambridge' (Cambridge University Press, 1953) regarding the Bass Decani ascription:

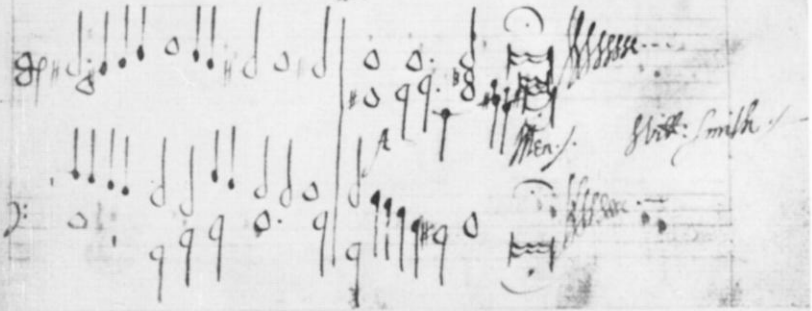
Wrongly entered to William Smith in the Peterhouse MS. Jebb

did not notice this error, and it escaped the expert eyes of the editors of *Tudor Church Music*, only attracting the notice of the present compiler through its lonely appearance among the works of William Smith, which are otherwise present very completely. The item is of great value as it gives us the missing parts (or one of them) for 'Awake up my glory'. In the meantime, nine years after the publication of *Tudor Church Music IV* in 1925, Dr. E. H. Fellowes found a similar part from Durham (see *Tudor Church Music: Appendix* (1948) pp. 11, 38).

However, the organ part of this psalm, which the editors of *Tudor Church Music IV* did not find, is in *Durham Organ Book, A.1*, pp. 21-4, in Smith's handwriting, with the title 'Psalm for Easter Day at Evensong—Will: Smith' and with Smith's signature at the end (see the illustration opposite). Why the Durham choirbooks and some of the Peterhouse choirbooks ascribe the work in error to Orlando Gibbons it is impossible to say at this stage, but the existence of the accompaniment in Smith's holograph establishes that the composition is his own.

The mistaken acceptance of this work as a composition by Orlando Gibbons will give a general idea of the standard of Smith's music. All three anthems and the settings of the collects are of the 'verse' type, including solos for all voices, in as many as five parts. The length and complexity of the anthem 'My heart is set to laud the Lord' show that it must have been written for a special occasion. The concluding choral section has four alto and two tenor parts. It was probably performed during the visit of Charles I to the cathedral on his trip to Scotland in 1633, when singers from the Chapel Royal would have augmented the Durham choir. The pun on the name of William Laud, then Bishop of London and a member of this Royal Progress, lends weight to this theory. Smith must have been a well-trained musician to produce music of such quality. Had he worked in London, or been a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal, he might not have suffered such long neglect, even in his own cathedral.³

³ My grateful thanks are due to Dr. P. G. le Huray and Mr. Thurston Dart for benefiting this work with their kind help and experience. After the article had been set-up by the printer, Dr. le Huray and I discovered evidence that Smith was at Peterhouse in 1635, helping with the establishment of the musical services there.



Wm. Smith - sol. No. 24 1020 4r - 100
 Wm. Smith - sol. Jan. 23 to 30 in 1002
 Wm. Smith - sol. Mar. 24 to 30 in 1002
 Wm. Smith - sol. April 12 to 20 in 1002
 Wm. Smith - sol. Octob. 2 1000 1000 - 1000
 Wm. Smith