

## Foreword

Before You Begin to Play . . .

In *The Organist's Guide to Congregational Praise* (London: Independent Press, 1947, p. 7) Erik Routley makes two important observations: "Playing hymns is a craft, not a bore" and "I regard hymns as vehicles of the Gospel. I regard the organist's task as a ministry, not a profession." To the word "ministry" needs to be added the words "science" and "an art". Until the technique has been mastered, artistic hymn playing is impossible, and until both technique and artistry are firmly established the organist can do little ministering to the needs of the congregation.

Dr. Routley gives some brief precepts (p. 9) to guide the organist.

(1) "Never play a hymn for a congregation without reading it first." This is a reminder that the words are of prime importance, and that the music must be presented to undergird and highlight the ideas of the text. Reading will reveal the shape and development of the hymn; then the organist should try to discover why it was chosen and what its purpose is in the service. Re-reading a familiar hymn may reveal new insights.

(2) "Be able to play the hymn as it is written." Then he adds that accuracy comes before inventiveness. Correct hymn playing is difficult at the organ since the bass notes are played by the feet—not the left hand—and the alto and tenor parts sometimes shift back and forth between the right and left hands. For this reason, the first two chapters deal with the technical matters of pedaling and articulation.

(3) "Know that the first necessity, after accuracy and before inventiveness, is rhythm." Rhythmic control at the organ is dependent upon accuracy of release (articulation), and a beauty of phrasing which comes from breathing releases at the ends of musical ideas. The organ is by nature

an unrhythmic beast; the control of releases (articulation and phrasing) is the secret to rhythmic and beautiful playing.

(4) "In playing a hymn, play expressively, but do not anticipate your climaxes." Let expression grow out of the hymn, rather than superimposing your feelings. Interpretation is not pumping the swell shades or emoting with exaggerated rubatos. If you follow the words you will be better able to interpret as you play. Routley further adds (p. 12), "Present the ancient truth as a *present* truth. You are taking those words and notes out of the printed book and presenting them to the congregation as a *new*, fresh, contemporary thing. They are not only words written in 1740 by Charles Wesley or music written in 1701 by Jeremiah Clarke. They are a present experience, a new gift."

It is an unfortunate but true statement that many organists graduate who are able to play brilliant preludes and postludes but cannot play a single hymn tune. Hymn playing should be the foundation of any organist's education, for it is the most important part of one's ministry. Therefore it is highly recommended that the reader not skim through this book but study it carefully with hymnal near at hand and feet. Try out every principle and suggestion and master them so they can be applied to other material. Remember that your most awesome responsibility is that of leading a congregation in worship through the playing of hymns.

# Pedaling

## I

Pedaling is not the hard part of organ playing. The difficulty for most players is retaining the left hand not to play the bass line but to "think" tenor and to help with alto notes that are hard to reach with the right hand in certain passages. Accuracy in pedaling depends on developing correct positions and habits which become "second nature". Correct pedaling is the first step to good hymn playing, for any uncertainty—as to choice of heel or toe, or distances between notes—causes anxiety and nervousness which in turn create mistakes in fingering, tempo, and interpretation. Organ playing requires that something be automatic, since the mind can concentrate only on so many things at once. Therefore, habitually correct pedaling is basic to good hymn playing.

Organ method books recommend that the bench be a comfortable distance from the keyboard so the toes clear the black notes by about an inch or so when the legs are hanging freely. If the bench is too close there is difficulty in moving easily from white to black notes; if the bench is too far back the organist has the sensation that he is about to fall on his face on the keys. The height of the bench should also be adjusted to let the balls of the feet touch flat on the white notes.

When the organist is seated in the middle of the bench and the left foot should fall over C, second on the pedal board, and the right foot over E, two notes above. The purpose of this position is to give a point of reference to which the organist can always turn when confused about the location of notes. Most exercise books choose these notes as starting points from which all intervals are learned—by gliding the foot smoothly over one, two, three, or more notes to the correct interval of a second, third, fourth, et cetera.