Billings's Introduction to
The New-England Psalm-Singer

PREFACE

ALTHO this Composition hath cost me much Time and Pains; yet I little thought of exposing it to public View: But being repeatedly importuned by my Friends, I was at last prevailed upon to commit it to the Press. And such as it is I now offer it to the Public, from whom, should it meet with a favourable Reception, it would compensate for all the Trouble I have been at, and the Time I have spent in the Prosecution of it. Perhaps there may appear in the Eyes of the Accurate much Incorrectness that I was not able to discern; therefore I would beg the Critic to be tender, and rectify those Errors which through Inexperience may happen to have escaped the Notice of a Youth, in the Course of so large a Volume.

I would here take Occasion to return my Thanks to those Gentlemen who have put so much Confidence in this Performance, as to promote and encourage it by Subscription, before they could have an Opportunity of examining it. And I would acknowledge myself in a particular Manner obligated to that Gentleman who has honored me and this book with his learned Philosophical Essay on Sound; yet at the same Time I can't but be sorry that I am not allowed to give the Public the Satisfaction of knowing his Name: For somewhat contrary to Nature, Modesty in this Gentleman, has so far gained the Ascendancy over Ambition, that the World must remain deprived of the Knowledge of him, 'till his Name shall shine on the Page of some future Work.

It would be needless in me to attempt to set forth the Usefulness and Importance of Psalm-singing, which is so universally known and acknowledged, and on which depends no inconsiderable Part of the Divine Worship of our Churches. But thus much would I say, That he who finds himself gifted with a tunable Voice, and yet neglects to cultivate it, not only hides in the Earth a Talent of the highest Valua, but robs himself of that peculiar Pleasure, of which they only are conscious who exercise that Faculty.

Authors in general, upon Subjects of this Nature, abound mostly in Tunes of common Metre; but in this Respect, I have deviated from them, endeavouring to have a Sufficiency in each Measure. In the Composition I have been as plain and simple as possible; and yet have tried to the utmost of my Power to preserve the modern Air and Manner of Singing. And should it upon Proof be found equal to the Attempt, I hope it will be as well an Inducement to the unskill'd in the Art to prosecute the Study of it, as an Entertainment to the more experienced in it.

Boston, October 7 1770
An Introduction to the Rules of Musick,

With such Directions

for Singing, as is most easy and necessary for Learners.

CONTENTS of BOOK I.

CHAP. I. Containing the Gamut, and the Explanation thereof; also the several Cliffs, and their Explanation.

CHAP. II. Containing a Scale of the four Parts, as they are set down according to the Gamut. Also the Parts separated, whereby you may see the true Distance of each Part from the Bass, as they are figur'd.

CHAP. III. Containing Rules for tuning the Voice; also an Explanation of a Concert Pitch-Pipe.

CHAP. IV. Containing some Characters us'd in Musick with their Explanation; also an Example of prick'd Notes.

CHAP. V. Containing some other Characters made Use of in Musick; and their Explanation.

CHAP. VI. Containing an Example of the several Moods of Time, and how to beat them; also the Grace of Transition.

CHAP. VII. Containing an Example of the several Keys us'd in Musick, and how to transpose B. Mi into any of them.

CHAP. VIII. Containing an Example of Conords and Discords.

CHAP. IX. Containing some thoughts upon Musick.

CHAP. X. Containing an Alphabetical Table of such Terms as are generally us'd in Musick. Also a New-England Hymn by the Rev. Dr. Byles.

CHAP. I.

Explanation of the GAMUT.

THE Gamut is founded on no more than Seven Letters, viz. ABCDEFG, all above or below these are the same repeated over again, there being but Seven distinct Sounds in Nature, every Eighth or Octave being the same.

Observe, That in the first Column of this Gamut [see Plate I] Mi is in B, in the Second
To all Musical Practitioners.

Perhaps it may be expected by some, that I should say something concerning Rules for Composition; to these I answer that *Nature is the best Dictator*, for all the hard dry studied Rules that ever was prescribed, will not enable any Person to form an Air any more than the bare Knowledge of the four and twenty Letters, and strict Grammatical Rules will qualify a Scholar for composing a Piece of Poetry, or properly adjusting a Tragedy, without a Genius. It must be Nature, Nature must lay the Foundation, Nature must inspire the Thought. But perhaps some may think I mean and intend to throw Art entirely [sic] out of the Question, I answer by no Means, for the more Art is display'd, the more Nature is decorated. And in some sorts of Composition, there is dry Study requir'd, and Art very requisite. For instance, in a Fuge, where the Parts come in after each other, with the same Notes; but even there, Art is subservient to Genius, for Fancy goes first, and strikes out the Work roughly, and Art comes after, and polishes it over. But to return to my Text; I have read several Author's [sic] Rules on Composition, and find the strictest of them make some Exceptions, as thus, they say that two Eights or two Fifths may not be taken together rising or falling, unless one be Major and the other Minor; but rather than spoil the Air, they will allow that Breach to be made, and this allowance gives great Latitude to young Composers, for they may always make that Plea, and say, if I am not allow'd to transgress the Rules of Composition, I shall certainly spoil the Air, and Cross the Strain, that fancy dictated: And indeed this is without dispute, a very just Plea, for I am sure I have often and sensibly felt the disagreeable and slavish Effects of such a restraint as is here pointed out, and so I believe has every Composer of Poetry, as well as Musick, for I presume there are as strict Rules for Poetry, as for Musick. But as I have often heard of a Poetical Licence, I don't see why with the same Priority there may not be a Musical Licence, for Poetry and Music are in close Connection, and nearly allied, besides they are often assistants to each other; and like true friends often hide each others [sic] failings: For I have known a Piece of Poetry that had neither "Rhime nor Reason" in it, pass for tolerable good Sense, because it happened to be set to an excellent Piece of Musick, and so get respect rather for its good fortune in falling into such respectable Company than for any Merit in itself; so likewise I have known and heard a very indifferent Tune often sung, and much caress'd, only because it was set to a fine Piece of Poetry, without which recommendation, perhaps it would not be sung twice over by one Person, and would be deem'd to be dearly bo't only at the expence [sic] of Breath requisite to perform it—for my own Part, as I don't think myself confin'd to any Rules for Composition laid down by any that went before me, neither should I think (were I to pretend to lay down Rules) that any who came after me were any ways obligated to adhere to them,

6. A simple Fellow bro't a Piece of Prose to Sir Thomas Moore for his Inspection; Sir Thomas told him to put it into Rhime, accordingly he did; upon which Sir Thomas said to him, now it is Rhime; but before it was neither Rhime nor Reason.