

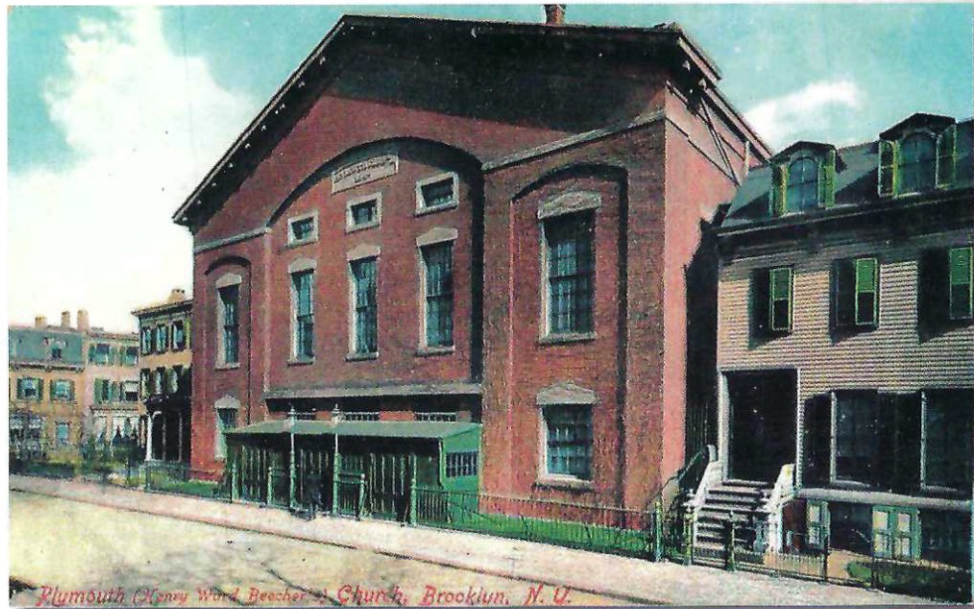
Henry Ward Beecher's *Organs*

I look upon the history and development of the organ for Christian uses as a sublime instance of the guiding hand of God. And I thank God a thousand times a year, when, seeing how many things taste and the social elements have stolen from religion, I turn around to this one solitary exception, and know that religion at any rate has left, as peculiarly its own, the organ, the grandest thing that ever was thought of or combined in human ingenuity.

HENRY WARD BEECHER

By Rollin Smith

Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, New York, was an offshoot of the Church of the Pilgrims, a Congregational church organized in 1844. In June 1847, members seeking liberal doctrines separated and formed Plymouth Church. A month later, Henry Ward Beecher (1813–1887) was called from Second Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis (where he had been minister for nine years) to be its pastor. For the next 40 years, “the Shakespeare of the Pulpit” shepherded one of the largest congregations in America. Beecher was, as the title of his most recent biography puts it, *The Most Famous Man in America*. He promoted women’s suffrage, abolition, Chinese immigration, temperance, and Darwin’s theory of evolution. A strong advocate of congregational participation in worship, especially singing, Beecher—along with his



Plymouth Church, Orange Street
between Henry and Hicks
Streets, Brooklyn Heights

brother Charles (1815–1900) and the organist John Zundel (1815–1882)—edited the first hymnal in America to include music along with hymn texts. He also wrote about the organ frequently and was exceptionally supportive of his organists.

Plymouth Church bought the old First Presbyterian Church's building when its congregation moved to new quarters. The Presbyterians left a two-manual, 17-stop organ built by Stevens & Gayetty in 1836, but judging from the ads placed by the Hall & Labagh firm in the *Christian Intelligencer* in September 1846, it was probably sold. The new First Presbyterian Church had an 1846 Hall & Labagh organ, and it is probable that Plymouth Church rented its instrument from the same firm. When the building burned, it was noted that "the organ belonged to Mr. Labagh, of New York, and was fully insured."¹ The new congregation worshiped in this building for a year and a half, until it burned in December 1848. Damage was primarily from smoke, but the organ, upholstery, and interior furnishings were completely soaked with water. It was also noted that the flames, which shot through the floor above the furnace, "extended to the organ gallery and melted off some of the front pipes of the instrument."²

Mr. Beecher and his congregation lost little time in planning a new building, and the cornerstone was laid on May 29, 1849. The new Plymouth Church auditorium was plain, with seating for 2,350, not counting space for aisle and wall chairs. The room was 95 feet long, 80 feet wide, and 40 feet high; in all, some 3,000 persons could be accommodated. Such numbers flocked to the church every Sunday morning and evening to hear Beecher. With the carpeting and pew cushions, the room must have been less than ideal for music, but it was perhaps this lack of reverberation that caused the great author Charles Dickens, after giving a reading there, to tell Beecher that he should never build a new hall, because the one he had was perfect. A unique feature of the space was the absence of a pulpit. Instead, a platform about five feet high stood at the center of the front of the church. Its only furniture was an ornate chair for Mr. Beecher, and a mahogany table (later replaced by one made of wood from the Mount of Olives) from which he preached.³

The new organ was built by Simmons & McIntire of Boston. The choice of builder was no doubt influenced by the fact that Beecher's brother Edward (1803–1895) had a three-year-old organ built by the same firm in his Salem Street Congregational Church, where he had been pastor since 1844.⁴ Plymouth's 36-rank organ was similar to the Boston instrument, but with a 16' stop and a Second Diapason on the Great, and the 4' Clarion on the Swell instead of the Great.

Simmons & McIntire (1849)

Plymouth Church • Brooklyn, New York

Compass

Manuals, 54 notes, C–f³

Swell, all ranks 42 pipes, c–f³

Pedale, 25 notes, C–c¹

II. GREAT

16 Aeolina (TC, 42 pipes)

8 First Open Diapason

8 Second Open Diapason

8 Stopped Diapason, treble (30 pipes)

8 Stopped Diapason, bass (24 pipes)

8 Clarabella (from c¹, 30 pipes)

4 Principal

4 Flute d'Amour

3 Twelfth

2 Fifteenth (from G, 47 pipes)

Sesquialtera II (108 pipes)

Mixture III (162 pipes)

8 Trumpet, treble (30 pipes)

8 Trumpet, bass (24 pipes)

I. CHOIR

8 Open Diapason

8 Stopped Diapason, treble (42 pipes)

8 Stopped Diapason, bass (12 pipes)

8 Dulciana

4 Principal

4 Flute

2 Fifteenth

8 Cremona (TF, 37 pipes)

III. SWELL (expressive)

16 Dbl. Stopped Diapason, treble (30 pipes)

16 Dbl. Stopped Diapason, bass (12 pipes)

8 Open Diapason

8 Stopped Diapason

8 Viol di Gamba

4 Principal

4 Flute

2 [Piccolo, TF]

Cornet II (84 pipes)

8 Trumpet

8 Hautboy

4 Clarion

PEDALE

16 Double Open Diapason

16 Double Dulciana

MECHANICALS

1. Pedale and manuals

2. Pedale and manuals, octaves

3. Pedale and Choir

4. Great and Choir

5. Great and Swell

6. Choir and Swell

7. Tremulant (on Swell)

8. Bellows signal

9. Pedale check

The stoplist of the Simmons & McIntire organ appears in two sources that date from the time the instrument was sold to a New Jersey church: the *(Jersey City) Daily Evening Times* (Sept. 7, 1869) and the *New York Weekly Review* (Nov. 13, 1869). Typical of organ stoplists published in newspapers, neither is entirely correct. The *Weekly Review* lists a Piccolo (TF) on the Great, in addition to the Fifteenth, which would have been uncommon at the time. The *Daily Evening Times* lists a 2' Cornet on the Swell, an obvious error. More than likely, the Piccolo would have appeared in the Swell, as it did in Edward Beecher's Boston organ.⁵ The *Evening Times* also omits the 4' Clarion on the Swell, and the treble and bass split of the Great Trumpet. The eight stops of the Choir are identical to Edward Beecher's Choir division. Although the Swell manual was 54 notes, all stops extended only to tenor C, "the lower octave and a half [sic] acting by coupling on the Choir."⁶

The instrument was behind the minister's platform. In a traditional Congregational arrangement, there was room for a small choir or quartet, but a larger ensemble had to sit beyond the "loft" to the right and left.

The organ—17½ feet wide by 15 feet deep by 28 feet high—was dedicated on January 31, 1850, before "some 2,000 people who sat quietly while the keys were touched by several of the most skillful organists in this and the neighboring city."⁷ The first organist of the new Plymouth Church was probably a Mr. Messinger (who may have owned a piano showroom on Fulton Street). He was followed by Sigismund Lasar (1822–1895), organist from 1847 to January 1849,⁸ who later played the piano at the 25th anniversary of the church.

Soon after the instrument's inauguration, John Zundel was appointed organist. He was a native of Württemberg, Germany, and had been an organ student of Johann Christian

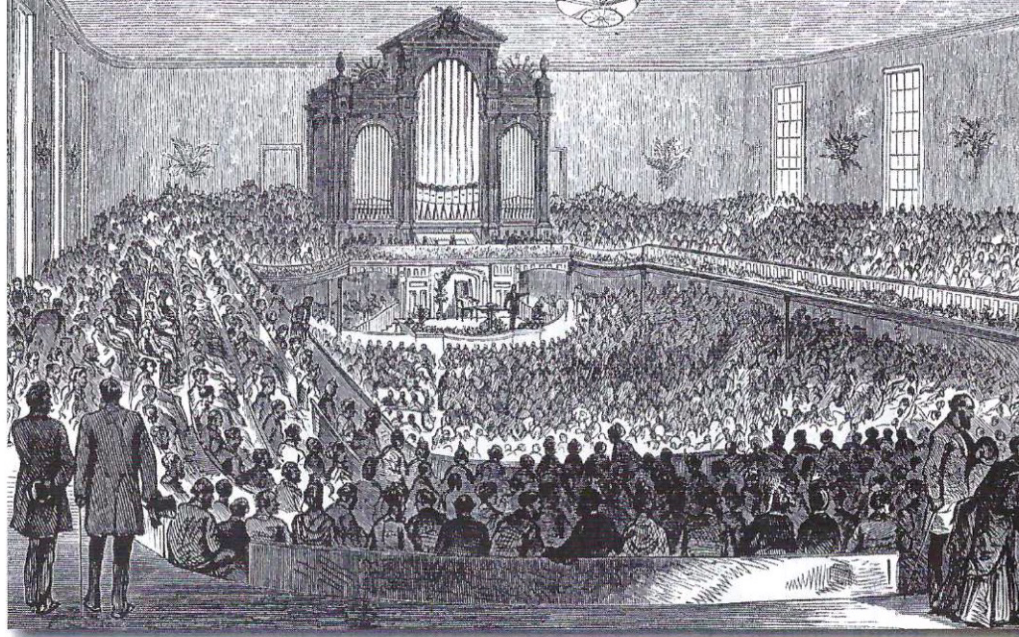
Heinrich Rinck. In 1840 he went to St. Petersburg, Russia, to inaugurate the new E.F. Walcker organ at the Lutheran Church of St. Peter and St. Paul—the first documented organ recital played in Russia. He soon was appointed organist of St. Anne’s Lutheran Church in St. Petersburg. He immigrated to New York in 1847 and became organist of Central Methodist Church. In February 1848 he succeeded John Greenwood as organist of Brooklyn’s Unitarian Church of the Saviour, where he played a two-manual, 20-stop E. & G.G. Hook (No. 57, 1844).

Zundel was an ideal service player, and Horatio King, a member of the Plymouth Church music committee, noted that “his improvisations were masterpieces and filled Mr. Beecher and every other musical soul with delight. With him music was religion and religion was music.”⁹

Zundel, however, was difficult to get along with: “more or less crotchety,” remembered the chairman of the music committee; “nervous, irritable, with genius” wrote the minister.¹⁰ In 1855 he was “retired” and went to Toledo, Ohio, where he established a music publishing house, Zundel & Brand, that was active into the 1870s.¹¹ In 1856 Zundel was back in New York as organist of St. George’s Church, Stuyvesant Square, and the next year as organist of Brooklyn’s Church of the Saviour for a second time. “But Mr. Beecher missed him so greatly that he begged to have him back, and Zundel was reappointed” three years later.¹²

The Sunday morning service at Plymouth Church was at 10:30, and people began arriving at 9:00. On a mid-February morning in 1867, Mark Twain arrived “early” at 10:00 and was sent “upstairs and crowded in and captured a little stool from an usher and jammed it into a vacancy among the multitude, about large enough to accommodate a spittoon, and had the satisfaction of knowing I was the last individual that got a seat in Mr. Beecher’s Church that day.”¹³

Beecher conducted the entire service by himself—from the invocation, “very brief and simple, but exceedingly touching and profound,” to the benediction—including the announcements, when he “sometimes talks

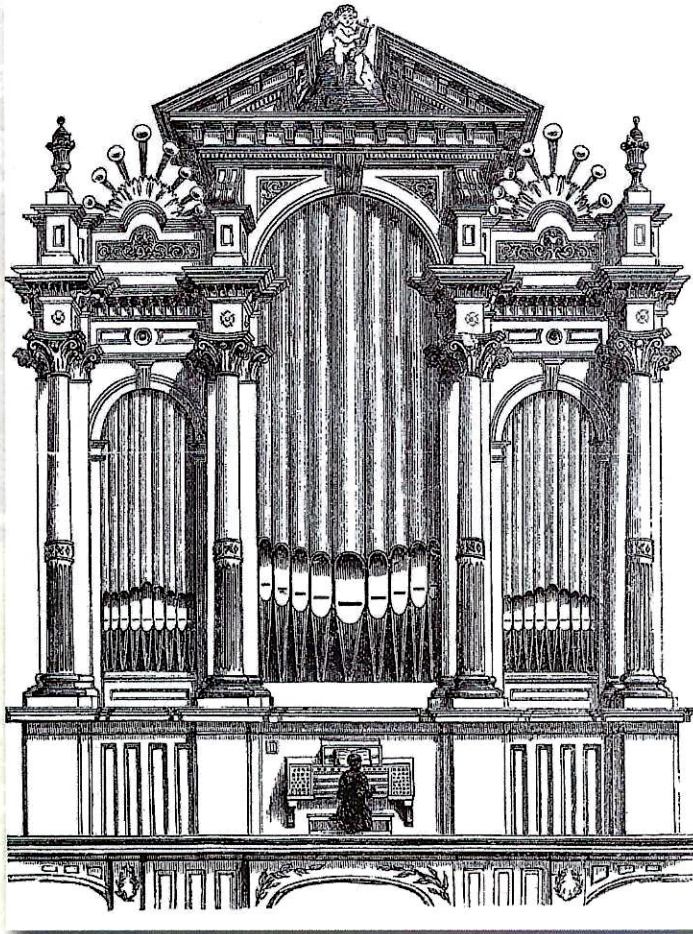


half-an-hour before the sermon, commenting in a humorous and instructive style upon the different subjects mentioned or suggested in the various notices,” and of course the sermon, “which ordinarily lasts an hour, and occasionally, an hour and a half.”¹⁴ There was a similar service every Sunday evening, and a Friday evening prayer meeting held at 7:30 in the lecture hall adjoining the church.

The musicians at Plymouth Church were fortunate to have a minister who felt that “music comes, I think, in its capacity of doing good, next to preaching,” and that “music is itself an agent in affecting, not so much the understanding, as that part of man’s nature which the sermon usually leaves comparatively barren.”¹⁵ He believed that “the only thing that should regulate church music is the idea that it must have a relation to the production of religious feeling.”¹⁶

Beecher considered the organ, as the instrument of the church, to have three functions: the opening (prelude), the hymn accompaniment, and the closing voluntary (postlude). The prelude should act as a curtain behind which “all the world should disappear and be forgotten, and so that care should fall behind, and dullness and weariness and sorrow, and all doubts and all fears should vanish.” The organ “should disperse all secular and worldly impressions, associations, thoughts, and feelings” in order to produce “that state of mind out of which comes more easily than from any other, the next stage of positive religious feeling.”¹⁷ John Zundel’s preludes were “rarely boisterous or noisy. At times, the day suggested an exultant opening, but usually his purpose seemed to invoke a fervent religious spirit

An engraving by Theodore R. Davis of the auditorium from the back gallery at the time of Beecher’s 20th anniversary as pastor of Plymouth Church, from *Harper’s Weekly*, Oct. 12, 1871



The case of E. & G.G. Hook
No. 360

to calm the storms of the busy week just closed and prepare the minds of all for a consideration of the better life and the 'peace which passeth all understanding.'¹⁸

Henry Ward Beecher's passion was congregational singing. He announced the hymns himself,¹⁹ and "instead of resting a pale forehead on a pallid hand and closing his eyes as if in silent prayer while his people sang, Mr. Beecher held his book in his red fist and sang with all his might."²⁰ Lyman Abbott, for ten years Beecher's successor, wrote: "The effect of a melody sung by two thousand out of the three thousand of the congregation . . . might not have been musical, but to any one sensitive to human feeling it was intensely devotional."²¹

With such an inspiration, Beecher's congregation would have raised the roof with their singing, and the dissatisfaction with the Simmons & McIntire organ may have had more to do with the volume of tone it produced than anything else. It was probably mildly voiced and not up to leading a lustily singing crowd of 3,000. The organ was revoiced in 1860, yet it was variously described as "an old rattle-box;"²² the "rickety organ, upon which for many years Mr. John Zundel played with wonderful success;"²³ "a wretched affair, and its vagaries almost made poor John Zundel, the former organist, mad;"²⁴ "so utterly useless that [Zundel] could not do justice to his reputation as an organist;"²⁵ and "for ten years Mr.

Zundel turned the crank of Mr. Beecher's wheezing organ, and finally resigned his position when patience had ceased to be an evidence of peculiar virtue."²⁶ Thus, after just 15 years, in January 1865—shortly before the end of the Civil War—Plymouth Church signed a contract with E. & G.G. Hook of Boston for a new organ. It was designed by John H. Willcox, who supervised its construction and installation.²⁷ The original price was \$19,150, but in June it was decided to add a Solo division, so the price was increased to \$21,150.

Shortly after the organ contract was signed, Zundel again left Plymouth Church to return to Germany, for the improvement of his wife's health.²⁸ His temporary successor was Henry N. Whitney, "a young and very clever artist,"²⁹ but by September 1, Frederick Ferdinand Müller, formerly of Albany, New York, had been permanently engaged.³⁰ A choir director was also hired—a Mr. Hutchinson—and 24 new singers added to the choir. While the congregational singing in the prominent church was "such as is rarely heard this side of the pearly gates,"³¹ the elderly choir that sat in the most conspicuous position in the church—just behind Mr. Beecher—could not be heard, and there was hope that better voices might be recruited from the burgeoning congregation. After the Simmons & McIntire was removed, Müller played a "feeble piping melodeon while the new instrument was being put in place."³²

The organ was completed in April 1866, and Beecher wanted it kept at the factory so that it could be installed during the summer vacation (like most churches, Plymouth was closed from the middle of July until the middle of September). "But he was over-ruled, and the consequence has been dirt and confusion, and no organ music until now, and just now the vacation begins, when the church is in order and the organ in tune."³³

The new instrument was installed in July 1866, with John Willcox on site to superintend the work. The pipes of the wood 32' Open Diapason were laid out on the floor of the sanctuary: "Rev. H.W. Beecher crawled through a thirty-four [sic] foot pipe of his new church organ the other day, on a challenge of one of his flock. He came out puffing and covered with dust and sweat, and exclaimed, as he touched the floor: 'I want no man to tell me any thing about this organ. I know all about it. I have been through it.'"³⁴ The incident was remembered years later: "Mr. Beecher took off his coat and waistcoat and crawled through it. He was followed by George A. Bell and Henry N. Whitney, and they were well covered with dust when they emerged. Mr. Beecher at that time was not so portly as he afterward became."³⁵

E. & G.G. Hook No. 360 (1866)

Compass

Manuals, 58 notes, C-a³

Pedal, 30 notes, C-f¹

I. GREAT

16 Open Diapason
 8 Open Diapason
 8 Clarabella (wood)
 8 Viola da Gamba
 8 Doppel Flöte
 4 Flute Harmonique
 4 Octave
 2½ Twelfth
 2 Fifteenth
 8 Grand Cornet V (216 pipes)
 2 Mixture III (174 pipes)
 1½ Scharff III (174 pipes)
 16 Trumpet
 8 Trumpet
 4 Clarion

II. SWELL (expressive)

16 Bourdon (wood)
 8 Open Diapason
 8 Salicional
 8 Stopped Diapason (wood)
 4 Octave
 4 Flute Harmonique
 4 Viol d'Amour
 2½ Twelfth
 2 Fifteenth
 1½ Mixture V (290 pipes)
 16 Euphone (free reed)
 8 Cornopean
 8 Oboe
 8 Vox Humana
 4 Clarion
 Tremulant

III. CHOIR

16 Still Gedackt (wood)
 8 Open Diapason
 8 Dulciana
 8 Melodia (wood)
 8 Stopped Diapason (wood)
 4 Octave
 4 Flauto Traverso (wood)
 2 Piccolo
 8 Clarionet
 Tremulant

IV. SOLO

8 Keraulophon
 8 Philomela (wood)
 8 Vox Angelica (free reed)
 4 Hohl Pfeife (wood)
 8 Tuba Mirabilis
 4 Tuba Octave

PEDAL

32 Open Diapason (wood)
 16 Open Diapason (wood)
 16 Violone
 16 Bourdon (wood)
 8 Violoncello
 8 Octave
 16 Trombone

COUPLERS

Swell to Great
 Choir to Great
 Solo to Great
 Swell to Choir
 Great to Pedal
 Swell to Pedal
 Choir to Pedal
 Solo to Pedal

Engine

Tuba Engine

COLLECTIVE PEDALS

1. Great to Pedal coupler
2. Full Organ
3. Great Unison Flue Stops
4. Great 16' Open through 2' stops
5. Full Great
6. Full Swell
7. Solo Tubas
8. Forte and Piano Pedale, double acting
9. Grand Crescendo pedal
10. Balanced swell pedal

The organ stood behind the speaker's platform, and the pipe chamber extended from the cellar floor to the ceiling of the church. It had been necessary "to lower the floor of the organ gallery, and also to cut out the ceiling above somewhat."³⁶ The black walnut Romanesque case, filled with pipes of English tin, giving the appearance of silver, rose 31½ feet from the floor of the gallery. It consisted of three flats of nine pipes each, separated by carved columns. Surmounting the ends were carved urns, and on the center broken pediment was a carved figure of a cherub playing a lyre. Seven pipes of the Tuba Mirabilis radiated from either side. With a width of nearly 23½ feet, the case was only eight feet short of being square, and it gave a dowdy impression. A visitor commented that "the roof of that church must go up sooner or later; until it does, the organ is to it as a full-grown elephant is to a baby-house."³⁷

A feature rare in American organs at the time was that there were no half stops: "Every stop runs throughout the whole register of the manual which plays it, a fact of itself worth all the bother of getting a new organ."³⁸ A pneumatic assist was applied to the Great keyboard, the couplers, the stop action, the combination pedals, and the Grand Crescendo, "so that the moving of any number of Registers is effected with as much ease as a single one."³⁹ No more pressure was required to depress the Great keys than those of a piano. The combination pedals operated without moving the stop knobs "or interfering with any previous combination of them."⁴⁰

The Swell was the only enclosed division, operated by a centrally located balanced expression pedal. A Grand Crescendo pedal was provided that operated in a novel way:

Along the base of the panel beneath the keyboard runs an iron bar, bearing at intervals of about six inches from each other a series of iron knobs. This bar, by means of the knobs, the foot of the organist slides to right or left, as he wishes to increase or diminish the volume of sound. The bar works two rollers inside the panel, each furnished with cams. These operate successively from left to right, the couplings of one stop after another, through one manual after another, and roll forth in gradually increasing accumulations of sound, and with growing combinations and complexities of tone, the gathering powers of all the multitudinous voices, pouring sound after sound into the rising flood, until from lowest thundering bass up through the steady harmonies of the central organs, the great choral swells in majestic fullness and with magnificence of power. Then by the action of another pedal, the weird and wondrous tone of all the Solo Tubas are superadded to the mass of sound, giving a marvelous brilliance such as we have never heard equaled.

An engraved metallic dial over the key-board shows the organist precisely how far he has gone in the use of this pedal. It can be operated to any extent within the range of the instrument, and with the greatest rapidity or gentlest gliding. The diminuendo effect is quite as perfect as the crescendo, so that this is readily seen to be a vast addition to the effective resources of the organ.⁴¹

The description in the *New York Times* stated that the organ "is worked by an application of hydraulic power hitherto unused in this country,"⁴² apparently the invention of an English organbuilder named Cox, "and has been patented in this country by Messrs. Hook, who have purchased its exclusive right."⁴³ There were four hydraulic engines in the basement "consisting each of an upright cylinder, into which the water is admitted by a double-acting valve, which throws the jet alternately above and below the piston." The air was pumped into the reservoirs that were installed in the little room behind the pulpit and under the organ loft.⁴⁴ A water gauge indicated "the pressure to the square inch," and the organist had a crank "to turn on, cut off, or regulate the supply of water at will." There were also four bellows indicators. "Every arrangement is so perfect that failure in the supply of air hardly seems possible, but if anything should happen, the bellows can be operated by hand. The idea of working organ bellows by water appears to be a good one, especially as the rather unreliable services of a playful boy or thoughtless man are dispensed with."⁴⁵ This hydraulic arrangement was in place until 1891, when an electric motor was installed.⁴⁶

Eugene Thayer wrote that the organ's chief characteristic was brilliance. "It has much power, although we think it lacks in solidity for a work of this size."⁴⁷ The *New York Tribune*, quoted in *Dwight's Journal*, found that "for the just support of a large choir more weight is wanted in the middle and lower portions of the organ."

Inauguration program, *New York Times*, July 31, 1866, 4. Notice the lack of no. 3, due either to omission or incorrect numbering.

More diapason power is wanted to the Great Organ, and at least three or four more power stops in the Pedals. The 32-foot pipes, which should be felt, are not, probably for want of sufficient pressure, while the Tuba Mirabilis, a magnificent stop, from over-pressure speaks so peremptorily that it is impossible to introduce it harmoniously or blendingly, as it stands out immediately alone. It is not only bright and brilliant, but somewhat blatant. If this were moderated and the necessary strength added, the Hooks' Plymouth Church organ would stand the test of the severest criticism, and might challenge the whole country to match it.⁴⁸

Earlier, a New York writer found the diapasons "rich and sonorous, and singularly pure and fine in quality"

We are, however, inclined to think that the character of the organ is rather brilliant than choral; that the foundation is scarcely sufficient for the superstructure, more especially when in conjunction with the *Tuba Mirabilis*, which we think a little too brilliantly voiced. The size of the church is not favorable for the development of the graver power of the organ, while the brighter stops strike the ear at once. With the ample space at the command of the congregation, it would have been easy to extend the church twenty or thirty feet in the rear, which would have afforded fair space for the development of the powers of this magnificent organ. As it is, it is manifestly too large for the building.⁴⁹

Both writers, though knowledgeable, seem unfamiliar with the concept of a solo Tuba; they considered this stop poorly voiced to blend with the ensemble. Because of the mild voicing of the Simmons & McIntire, it is apparent that power was a major requisite of the Hook.

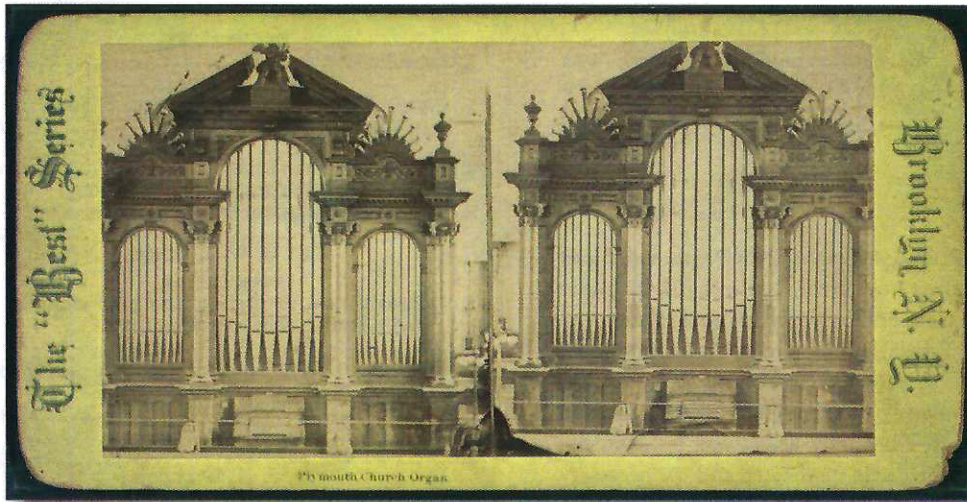
Another account attributes "a certain weird and supernatural effect" to the free-reed Vox Angelica and describes the Vox Humana (which "certainly surpasses that in the organ in the Boston Music Hall")⁵⁰ as "similar, but . . . intended to represent a chorus of human voices."

Its effect is distant and most delicious, the peculiar voicing giving a strange sound of articulation, as if the words could be distinguished, though of a foreign tongue. It most resembles, perhaps, the unnaturally sweet and spirit-like chorals [*sic*] of the Pope's singers, which, sounding from some remote chapel, sometimes greet the listening ears of loiterers along the vast nave of St. Peter's in Rome.⁵¹

John H. Willcox played a private recital for the press and invited guests on the evening of Friday, July 27, 1866. The official inauguration was to be played by George Washbourne Morgan, who was then the greatest and most famous organist in America. A furor erupted when Morgan, realizing that admission was being charged—tickets were being sold for 50 cents apiece—demanded to be paid \$100 (the equivalent of \$1,900 in today's currency). "There seems to have been no objection to Morgan *per se*, but a *purse* consideration stands in the way."⁵² The *Times* journalist wrote that "the exhibition of the finest organ on the continent, without the services of Mr. Morgan, would be quite parallel to the play of *Hamlet* with *Hamlet* left out."⁵³ In the end, Beecher yielded to pressure and engaged Morgan at his own expense.⁵⁴ The official inauguration took place on Tuesday evening, July 31.

The published critique of the concert demonstrates the pride of the community, the popular attraction of an inaugural recital, and the behavior of the audience:

PROGRAMME.	
1. Introductory Prelude.....	BACH Mr. F. F. MULLER.
2. Grand Fugue and Chorus, from "Israel in Egypt".....	HANDEL Mr. G. W. MORGAN.
4. Fantasia for four hands.....	HESSE MESSRS. MULLER and WILLCOX.
5. Fantasia, concluding with a National Anthem.....	MORGAN Mr. G. W. MORGAN.
INTERMISSION.	
6. Improvisation, displaying the new stops and peculiar effects of the organ.	M. J. H. WILLCOX.
7. Overture to "William Tell".....	ROSSINI Mr. G. W. MORGAN.
8. Fantasia.....	MULLER Mr. F. F. MULLER.
9. Overture to "Zanetta".....	AUBER M. J. H. WILLCOX.
10. Finale.	Mr. G. W. MORGAN.



A stereoscope card of the E. & G.G. Hook organ

Great is the new organ in Mr. Beecher's church, and great was the crowd that went thither last evening. Before the time for commencing, hundreds who had not tickets were turned away, all the tickets having been sold at an early hour. Police were stationed on the sidewalk, and were vigorous in their efforts to keep back those not having the requisite card. Once inside the church, those who could secure a good seat and a programme were fortunate. Programmes were scarce indeed, rather suggesting that either the committee or the printer had not done their duty. A tall, elderly pew-giver [usher], having a number of programmes in his hand, was applied to by a gentleman wishing one for reference, and received an answer about like this: "No, can't give you one, maybe you can borrow one of somebody," delivered in not a pleasant tone. Thereupon, the individual in search of a programme subsided, evidently thinking the pew-giver had his programme reserved, like seats on Sundays for wealthy pew-owners.

During the evening a continued talking was kept up by a majority of the crowded audience, much to the annoyance of persons desiring to hear the music. Some very talkative individuals did not cease this annoying practice during the entire evening. . . . Then there were a number of laughably inclined persons, who could not repress their desire to laugh at the rather vigorous motions of one of the performers.

The performers consisted of Messrs. J.H. Willcox, G.E. [sic] Morgan, and F.F. Müller, who went through a programme that lasted until half-past ten o'clock, by which time nearly one half the audience had left, creating in the meantime some disturbance in the order of their going. The organ sustained the good opinion heretofore expressed in regard to it. It sounded rather better when the church was filled than when played before almost

empty pews. Mr. Morgan's rendition of the overture from *William Tell* was exceedingly fine, and altogether unsurpassed by anything of the kind ever heard before in this city. The organ is excellently adapted for imitations of an orchestra. Mr. Willcox's improvisation drew forth deserved applause and an encore, two of which had been bestowed upon Mr. Morgan. While displaying the tone and power of the organ in a masterly and easy manner, Mr. Willcox introduced some of the sweetest sounds imaginable. Mr. Müller did well, but will probably improve when better acquainted with the peculiarities of the instrument. So far as the programme and performers were concerned, the concert was excellent, and exhibited to advantage the "largest organ ever built in America."⁵⁵

Plymouth Church was closed until the middle of September, and after a few weeks, Mr. Müller—whose "playing did not suit the musical taste of the congregation"—was "retired." The music committee hoped to hire the well-known and respected John M. Loretz Jr. away from St. Peter's Catholic Church. This plan did not work out, and for a few weeks the congregation "had to endure some most excruciating performances, until Mr. John Zundel, without any flourish, or intimation from the committee, again assumed control of the organ."⁵⁶ In January 1867 Zundel began a series of organ concerts, at which he was assisted by other organists, a violinist, and a singer.

In 1877 there was a movement to force Zundel to retire. Although only 62, he was "prematurely aged, one eye was useless and the other weakened, and his fingers had lost much of their activity."⁵⁷ When parishioners heard of the plan, they circulated a petition that was signed by a large number of members and sent to the music



A 1934 photo of the interior of Plymouth Church, showing the E.M. Skinner console sideways in the gallery

committee. This delayed the inevitable until January, when at the annual meeting Zundel was voted organist emeritus and at Beecher's insistence granted a pension, described variously as \$200 or \$1,200 (\$31,600 in today's currency).⁵⁸ Zundel returned to Cannstatt, the largest city district of Stuttgart, Germany, where he remained active until his death in 1882.

Over the next ten years, John Zundel was succeeded by five organists whose tenures were remarkably brief: Henry Eyre Browne (1877–81), Frederic Archer (1881–82), Henry Carter (1882–84), Walter Damrosch (1884–85), and Harry Rowe Shelley (1885–87). Shelley replaced the volunteer choir that Damrosch had organized (augmented by members of the New York Oratorio Society).⁵⁹ The experiment lasted less than two years, and by February 1887 the music committee was seeking a way to reduce the annual \$5,500 expended on the quartet (Mrs. Shelley was the soprano) and organist. A member of the committee was quoted as saying that “we do not think that the present choir is worth what we are

paying them,” and that they could “get as good a choir for less money.”⁶⁰ Fate intervened when Henry Ward Beecher died in March 1887, and Shelley quickly returned to the Church of the Pilgrims. After Beecher's death, five organists played at Plymouth Church, culminating in the one-year tenure of Dudley Buck from 1902 to 1903.

In 1892 the first complete renovation of the organ was undertaken for \$3,500, and the console was moved forward so that then-organist (and AGO founder) Charles H. Morse could “conduct the singing to better advantage while playing the organ.”⁶¹ Twelve years later, Ernest M. Skinner replaced the organ, retaining the case and fewer than 30 of the original ranks. The organ case was moved back several feet, and new electropneumatic chests were built. In 1937 Aeolian-Skinner built an entirely new instrument, No. 964, designed by G. Donald Harrison. This organ, retaining only four Hook ranks, was tonally altered in the 1970s and rebuilt in 1994.

NOTES

Epigraph: Henry Ward Beecher, "Relations of Music to Worship," ch. 5 in *Lectures on Preaching, Second Series* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1874), 134.

1. "City News & Gossip: The Fire at Rev. Mr. Beecher's Church," *Brooklyn Eagle*, Jan. 15, 1849, 3.
2. *Ibid.*
3. "City News & Gossip: Plymouth Church," *Brooklyn Eagle*, Jan. 7, 1859, 3.
4. "An organ has been built for the Rev. Dr. Beecher's Church in Boston, containing thirty-five stops, one thousand eight hundred and eighteen pipes, and five coupling stops. The compass of the pedale is CCC to G. It was built by Simmons & McIntyre [*sic*] and its tone is spoken of very highly by the *Bost. Transcript*." See "Great Organ," *Hartford (Conn.) Courant*, Feb. 18, 1846, 2.
5. "Churches in Boston," *Boston Musical Gazette*, Feb. 15, 1847, 13. Thanks to Stephen Pinel for providing this article.
6. *New York Weekly Review*, Nov. 13, 1869.
7. *Brooklyn Eagle*, Feb. 1, 1850, 3.
8. A native of Hamburg, Germany, Lasar immigrated to the United States at the age of 17 and for several years taught piano and worked as a clerk in music stores in Albany and Schenectady, N.Y. In addition to Plymouth Church, he was organist of Strong Place Baptist (1875–78), Westminster Presbyterian (before 1879), Christ Church, St. Luke's, and Emmanuel Episcopal (in 1884). In 1875 he became professor of music at the Packer Institute. Lasar was editor of *The New Hymnary: A Collection of Hymns and Tunes for Sunday Schools* (1876) and, with Charles Cuthbert Hall, of *The Evangelical Hymnal*. See "Passed Away," (*Brooklyn Standard Union*, Sept. 14, 1895, 5.
9. "Gen King's Reminiscences," *Brooklyn Eagle*, Oct. 21, 1901, 9.
10. Lyman Abbott, *Henry Ward Beecher* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1903), 88.
11. An obtuse element of Zundel's legacy is that his 1855 hymn tune LEBANON, sung to a text by Horatius Bonar ("I was a wand'ring sheep, I did not love the fold; I did not love my Shepherd's voice, I would not be controlled"), is heard throughout Charles Ives's Piano Sonata No. 1.
12. "Plymouth's Old Organ: General King and S.V. White Give Some Reminiscences of Musical People Connected with the Church," *Brooklyn Eagle*, July 16, 1899, 23.
13. Mark Twain, "Henry Ward Beecher," (*San Francisco*) *Alta California*, Mar. 30, 1867.
14. J.T. Lloyd, *Henry Ward Beecher: His Life and Work* (London: Walter Scott, 1887), 69.
15. Henry Ward Beecher, "Relations of Music to Worship," 130–31.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Beecher, *Lectures on Preaching*, 137–38.
18. "Gen King's Reminiscences: Henry Ward Beecher's Fondness for Zundel's Music—Some of His Compositions," *Brooklyn Eagle*, Oct. 21, 1901, 9.
19. Lloyd, *Henry Ward Beecher*, 73.
20. W.C. Griswold, *Griswold's Life of Henry Ward Beecher* (Centerbrook, Conn.: W.C. Griswold & Co., 1887), 25.
21. Abbott, *Henry Ward Beecher*, 89.
22. "Amusements," *New York Times*, July 31, 1866, 4.
23. "New Organist," *New York Times*, Oct. 2, 1865, 4.
24. "Beecher's New Organ: The Largest Organ Built in America," *New York Times*, July 28, 1866, 4.
25. "Plymouth Church Music" (letter to the editor), *Brooklyn Eagle*, Nov. 30, 1868, 2.
26. "Zundel's Organ Concert," *New York Times*, Jan. 9, 1867, 4.
27. "The New Organ at Plymouth Church," *Dwight's Journal of Music*, Apr. 28, 1866, 227 (reprinted from the *New York Tribune*, July 30, 1866). In 1863 John Henry Willcox (1827–1875) had been appointed organist of Boston's Church of the Immaculate Conception, which had a brand-new 55-stop E. & G.G. Hook organ.
28. *Brainard's Biographies of American Musicians*, ed. E. Douglas Bomberger (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999), 306.
29. "New Organist," *New York Times*, Oct. 2, 1865, 4.
30. "Notes," *New York Times*, Aug. 24, 1865, 4.
31. "New Organist," *New York Times*, Oct. 2, 1865, 4.

32. "Amusements," *New York Times*, July 31, 1866, 4. The Simmons & McIntire was sold for \$2,800 to the Roman Catholic Church of the Immaculata in Jersey City, N.J., and later moved to Memorial Baptist Church on Oakwood Blvd. in Chicago. See "Plymouth's Old Organ," *Brooklyn Eagle*, July 16, 1899, 23.
33. "Beecher's New Organ," *New York Times*, July 28, 1866, 4.
34. *New York Musical Pioneer and Chorister's Budget*, Aug. 1866, 87, quoted in Ann Marie Rigler, "John Zundel as Pedagogue" (DMA thesis, Graduate College of the University of Iowa, 1993).
35. "Plymouth Church Music: Repairs for the Big Organ; Arrangements for the Choir," *New York Tribune*, Aug. 14, 1892, 19. Thanks to Michael Friesen for providing this article.
36. "Plymouth Church Organ. Completion of the Instrument. The Largest One Ever Built in the Country," *Brooklyn Eagle*, July 27, 1866, 3.
37. "Amusements," *New York Times*, Nov. 14, 1866, 4.
38. "Beecher's New Organ," *New York Times*, July 28, 1866, 4.
39. "The Plymouth Church Organ (Somerset Club, April 5)," *Dwight's Journal of Music*, Apr. 28, 1866, 291.
40. *Ibid.*
41. "Beecher's New Organ," *New York Times*, July 28, 1866, 4.
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*
44. *Ibid.*
45. "Plymouth Church Organ," *Brooklyn Eagle*, July 27, 1866, 3.
46. "Plymouth Church Music," *New York Tribune*, Aug. 14, 1892, 19.
47. Eugene Thayer, "The Plymouth Church Organ, Brooklyn, N.Y.," *Organist's Quarterly Journal and Review*, Jan. 1875, 68.
48. "From the *Tribune*, Aug. 2," *Dwight's Journal of Music*, Aug. 18, 1866, 291.
49. "The Plymouth Church Organ," *Dwight's Journal of Music*, Apr. 28, 1866, 291.
50. *New York Tribune*, July 30, 1855 (reprinted in *Dwight's Journal of Music*, Aug. 18, 1866, 291).
51. "Beecher's New Organ," *New York Times*, July 28, 1866, 4.
52. "Gossip about the Organ," *Brooklyn Eagle*, July 28, 1866, 2.
53. "Beecher's New Organ," *New York Times*, July 28, 1866, 4.
54. "The New Organ at Plymouth Church," *Dwight's Journal of Music*, Apr. 28, 1866, 227.
55. "Plymouth Church Organ—The Concert Last Night," *Brooklyn Eagle*, Aug. 1, 1866, 2.
56. "Plymouth Church Music" (letter to the editor), *Brooklyn Eagle*, Nov. 30, 1868, 2.
57. "Gen King's Reminiscences," *Brooklyn Eagle*, Oct. 21, 1901, 9.
58. "John Zundel: A Sketch of the Life of an Organist and Composer Long and Familiarly Known in Brooklyn," *Brooklyn Eagle*, May 28, 1882, 1.
59. "New Music for Plymouth Church," *New York Times*, Feb. 14, 1885, 5.
60. "A New Choir to Replace the Present One in Plymouth Church," *Brooklyn Eagle*, Feb. 15, 1887, 4.
61. "Plymouth Church Music: Repairs for the Big Organ; Arrangements for the Choir," *New York Tribune*, Aug. 14, 1892, 10. Morse had a quartet, as well as a chorus of 30.

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