

**A COSTLESS CHOIR OF
"VOLUNTEERS"
AND HOW IT WAS
MADE AND KEPT; PP.6-55**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649301263

A costless choir of "volunteers" and how it was made and kept; pp.6-55 by Various

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
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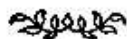
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VARIOUS

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A COSTLESS CHOIR OF
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A COSTLESS CHOIR OF
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AND HOW IT WAS MADE
AND KEPT.

"Whoso offereth ME thanks and praise, he honoureth ME."

Psalm l. 23.



LONDON:
GEORGE BELL AND SONS, YORK STREET,
COVENT GARDEN.

1877.

174. g. 61.

I do not wish to attempt to take upon myself to teach anybody how to make a Choir—far less remind them of any duty. I only earnestly desire that in every Church somebody would kindly take the burden off their minister, at least in this sweet work, and would believe that it is *quite* possible to make an almost costless Choir. For one *was* made under what would be considered impossible circumstances, and in spite of difficulties that few would have to contend with, of a peculiar nature which it would be too personal to explain here—and with the most rough, most raw material to work upon—by one who most certainly had no more skill or talent than anybody else who can play a chant or hymn-tune correctly, and who never had a lesson on the organ in her life.

It seems to me—although I feel so very diffident at giving an opinion of such little value—it seems to me that it is *impossible* to have really good singing without great expense, unless you can get a Choir of “Volunteers.” This is my little secret, which is worth its weight in gold to me; for I have never failed to find “an unpaid Volunteer” is sure to be a “ringing” little piece of metal.

It is quite true that it was never in my power to have paid singers; but when once I found the value of the

ones I had, I would not have had any others if I could. Is there any comparison between them, and those who are paid to come and sing—who, perhaps, when they come *can* sing by note, and charge accordingly? Some Clergymen pay one man £30 a-year: £10 is not at all an uncommon price. Now even if one has the power to do this, what is the inevitable result? They are too grand to sing only simple hymns and chants; it does not satisfy, it is too simple for them. They soon get restless, unless you introduce Anthems, solos, etc., that the congregation cannot join in. I do not like this in a village Church; it always gives me the idea of singing to their own glory. I never attempted this. I like it very much in a Cathedral, where it is done artistically, and is a pleasure to listen to; but it requires an education, a training, to bring this to perfection. That is scarcely possible in many country villages. I *have* heard Anthems and solos that were simply excruciating. It is a very old custom; and in out-of-the-way and old-fashioned places, where they have no idea of singing, you may still hear the old clerk give out “an Anthem;” but, as I said before, at present we don’t attempt it.

I aspire to nothing but *congregational* singing, as perfect as I can make it—to nothing but the simplest, loveliest chants and tunes I can find, sung perfectly: an easy,

simple chant sung beautifully, rather than a difficult one, imperfectly.

Somebody said to me the other day, "If you have a full body of sound coming from the Choir, no one cares to sing in the Church." Alas, that any one should think so! I have always found exactly the reverse. If the Choir, whose use is to *lead*, and *only* that—if that is thin and meagre, who dares to, cares to join? It is only fair to say that the lady who said this owned that she did not understand music.

I have always felt it most embarrassing in going to a Church where no one sings, except perhaps the Choir. A hymn is given out—"Let us sing to the praise and glory of God," and directly you begin to do what the Clergyman has just invited you all to do, and begin to sing, everybody looks round at you. It is most distressing—in fact, you find yourself singing "a solo," much to your discomfiture.

Delicious as it is to *listen* to singing or music, I cannot think that *Church* is the proper place for this; for *there* ought one not to go—not to be sung *to*, but *to sing*?

A full body of melodious sound coming from the Choir inspires the congregation (I have always found), and infuses and distils around a sort of irresistible desire to sing God's praises too; so that very soon the whole con-

gregation join in as with "one voice," and make the very roof ring with the "burst of melody"—ascending upwards, higher, higher, till it echoes in Heaven, I do believe.

No lovely Anthem sung in our beautiful Cathedral by those paid to sing well, that one listens to with such intense delight, is ever more sweet to me than an exquisite hymn sung from the heart by a whole congregation: such as "I heard the voice of Jesus say" to *Vox delecti*, or "I need Thee, precious Jesus," or "Art thou weary?" and many others, sung as if every word were *felt*. I know that sometimes I could have wept to hear them sung, they are so sweet; and yet I have heard it said, "Oh, those tunes 'don't go' in Church." Why, sometimes at home, when we have them, the dear people say, "I almost felt I was in Heaven." And I am sure I have felt the same; for are not Holy Angels present? do they not bend their ears to hear His praises sung, and can one take too much pains to give Him the best we have, when Jesus Christ is "listening?"

I do not think one could ever have this sort of singing with boys *alone*. People often quote a Cathedral, where boys sing so well, and say, "There is nothing so sweet as a boy's voice." This is quite true when each voice is cultivated, and taught, and trained *as* in a Cathedral—picked and chosen voices to sing the solos: how can one