

**MUSICAL  
LECTURES  
AND SKETCHES**

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Musical Lectures and Sketches by Joseph Proudman

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**JOSEPH PROUDMAN**

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BY  
JOSEPH PROUDMAN.



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## P R E F A C E.

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THE aim of this Book is to give information on Musical Topics in a pleasant and non-technical manner. It is dedicated to all those who, while loving music themselves, would wish to see the English become more than ever a musical nation.

These chapters are for the fireside of the Amateur, rather than for the study of the Professional Musician; and the Author hopes that useful hints may be obtained by the many who have neither time nor opportunity to make music more than a recreation or an accomplishment.

Lest some should not understand the references to the particular Choir mentioned in one or two chapters, the following quotations will sufficiently explain what it did, as an amateur choir, under the Author's direction:—

*From the "Times," October, 1867.*

"This year has been especially memorable in the history of choral music, by the fact that the Tonic Sol-fa Association achieved a most honourable success in France, and obtained a Medal of equality in the great musical competition held during the summer in connection with the Paris Exhibition."

*From the "Athenæum."*

"One of the two First Prizes, it must be recorded, was carried off by our 'Tonic Sol-fa Association,' the members of which sang the 'Hunting Song,' &c. . . . It should be added, that the Prize consisted of a Gold Exhibition Medal for the Choir, another for the Conductor, Mr. J. Proudman, and a Silver-gilt Wreath (to be borne on a banner). The 'Society of Orpheonists' also gave Mr. Proudman their Decoration of Honour, to be worn on the breast."

STOKE NEWINGTON,

April, 1869.

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## MUSICAL LECTURES & SKETCHES.

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### ON CHOIR-TRAINING, AND THE PARIS PRIZE CHOIR.

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THE aim of this lecture is, as far as possible, to place the matter of choir-training in the simplest language before the mind, so that the most modest worker in class or choir may get some practical good.

Lessons on voice-training have been given by some of our most accomplished teachers, and the subject might be considered somewhat stale but for the remembrance that the same truth, when reflected through a different mind, may, like light through a prism of different cut, appear with new force and clearness, or send a ray into a corner where darkness has heretofore dwelt. Avoiding quotations from authors, which all may read, or words which require a glossary, this lecture offers the results of old truths digested by thought, tested by experience, and illustrated by some small work accomplished. We should bear in mind that the basis of success in any undertaking is thoroughness and knowledge, enterprise and courage, patience and power; and these are indispensable in that of choir-training.



The first point to which attention may properly be called is—

“WHAT IS THE NECESSARY MATERIAL FOR A  
GOOD CHOIR?”

Unfortunately in London we have no great choice of voices. The atmosphere we breathe is a mixture of smoke and adulterated air, which muffles all our voices. Observation will show that London voices are not bad in themselves, but they have no fair opportunity for free and healthy play in this grimy town. Our singers, when in Paris, felt the benefit of the change of air, and acknowledged it freely; and especially does the impure air affect our male voices. One scarcely knows which is most rare—a pure tenor, or a real bass voice. The race of singers in London seem to be all settling down into *baritones*. How often do teachers hear the answer—“Well, I usually sing bass, but I think I am a baritone, Sir.” We have had to warn several young men against what might be called the baritone bubble. Because of the inertness of constitution, born of London smoke, we have basses who cannot reach lower A with clearness, and tenors who crack at upper E; yet some of these baritones who could “only sing bass, Sir,” can easily be led to upper A, to their own amazement and unbelief. A necessary point in selecting a choir, is the right kind of voice in the right place—no dissatisfied contralto among the sopranos, no lazy tenor among the basses, nor an ambitious bass among the tenors. This should be a law. The next point is, that the quality should be good. Have small voices if they are of proper quality. Be most cautious in the selection of “big” voices; these will often be your “big” trouble. Avoid all flat voices

with bad intonation, and all metallic and absorbing voices, which you can neither bend, polish, nor fuse. And it is well to remember, that solo-trained voices, unless *all* are such, are a dangerous element in a choir; and unless they will work equally with the rest, they will endanger its success.

The second point to be realized is—

“THE AIM OF THE TRAINER.”

First, there should be confidence—we do not mean mere self-reliance on the trainer's part, but a perfect understanding between choir and teacher. It should include undisputed authority on the one side, and cheerful, intelligent obedience and submission on the other. This may be defined as the *moral* aim of the trainer. There should be no two opinions uttered on any subject in matters of voice, of exercises, or of expression. The word of the trainer should be the law of the choir. He should think for them—think wisely and cleverly; and they, as a mirror, should reflect in bright and sunny ray the thoughts of his mind. In thus commencing his work the next point to be gained is a *pure tone*. What do we mean by this? Unfortunately there is too much need for the caution. How many singers give us sweet unadulterated tone without breathiness, and without effort? One has a guttural taint, another a rattling accompaniment in the throat; numerous are the evils which untrained singers are heir to. All these things must be stripped from the voice like husks from grain, or dross from gold, until only pure and precious tone be left. Then, we want to get perfect intonation, and, above all, the proper “splicing” and blending of the registers of the voice. All these things have to be accom-

plished in each voice. Next, we have to treat the choir as four persons, and to get oneness of tone in each part, with uniform delivery and tempered force; then, balance of power between the several parts, until the choir assumes, as nearly as possible, the fair proportions of a well-balanced quartet.

The third important thing is—

**“THE NECESSARY QUALIFICATION OF A TRAINER.”**

First, take for granted musical ability. This should be of no common kind for a successful choir-trainer. It should include a perfectly attuned ear, sensitive to the slightest error in tune, quick to detect mistakes in music, and true as a compass in matters of expression and taste. Second, we hold there should be voice. A pattern is as needful in voice-training as in elementary teaching, and pupils are more apt to believe in a thing *done* than in a thing merely described: here example is better than precept. This vocal capacity should include the ability to produce pure tone and bad tone, to specimen the voice in the various registers, to give chest and head tones, and to join the two. This latter feat is difficult to describe in words, and it is not easy to “pattern,” but the pattern is the best teacher. Scarcely a male singer in a dozen can do more than talk about the various registers of the voice; and only as the reward of wearying toil, and repeated effort, on the part of trainer and trained, can any fair success be attained. Many of us will never forget the first few lessons in this department in training the Paris Choir. What a hotch-potch of voice! How crude and rough! What a prospect of filing, cutting down, and polishing, before we could hope to get a single pillar in our choral building, polished