

tion. When the choir,—though they may strike the notes correctly,—is loud and strong, each one singing without much harmony or minding the other, the natural effect of producing silence in the people is modified to some extent, and congregations join in to some degree. Having seen and thought over this long, and having heard even members of choirs themselves express wonder at it, I have arrived at an explanation, which, however, I state with diffidence, hoping that the fact in question may attract the attention of those interested in church music. It seems to indicate that choirs are wrong in principle, and the error lies here. A choir is a good thing in itself and for itself. It produces the best of all music—better than a fine organ. The greatest mercies are common to all, and two or three poor people can have finer music than is produced by the organ in St. Paul's. But a choir is an instrument the worst adapted in the whole world to *lead others*. When it seeks to lead others, it spoils itself; and when it pursues its proper object—its own harmony, not only does it lose sight of others, but it discourages them. In a private house, or in a place of public amusement, it occupies an appropriate place; but as a *leader*, it is out of its place. The work it has been put there to do, is incompatible with its very nature. What it requires is not followers, but listeners. As a proof of this, I believe that if any choir were to sing, at a suitable pitch, the air alone, the people would join in as well as with a precentor. They would in this way, however, be a choir only in name. This incompatibility between their nature and their professed office as *leaders*, must be very discouraging to pious choir-leaders, who find that the better the choir sings the more silent becomes the congregation.

Moreover, the creation and maintenance of a good choir cost an amount of patience and trouble, of which ignorant people have not the least idea, and for which choir leaders, who work with an honest faith in their system, often receive very poor thanks. Ignorant people are very apt to say, in reference to the improvement of psalmody: "Cultivate and improve our choirs; that's all we need." But, besides that they are a mistake in principle—that they have two duties to perform incompatible with each other, to be in choral harmony and to lead an uncultured mass of voice,—the difficulty of forming and keeping up a choir is great. The leader may be a very capable man; but, as a captain of volunteers, and some of them ladies, his authority is very limited. They *ought* to take the time from him, but they often, thinking they know as much as he, take their own time. Leaders of choirs have often harder work than precentors of large congregations. Again, on the Sabbath morning, when the choir take their seats, the leader is often chagrined to find that one is sick, another has a cold,

another is detained by domestic affairs, and another has taken offence and doesn't mean to come back at all. Then, after they have learned to sing, it is an endless labor; for changes by marriage, death and removal render it necessary to admit new members, who require fresh drill. They often become a school for a few learning to sing, but with great trouble and at the expense of true congregational praise. Let no choral singer suppose, from these remarks, that his labors are not appreciated. There is room in the church for every good singer, and music owes everything to the church. We are now dealing with general principles, and endeavoring to find the rationale of a very common fact, while we fully appreciate the self-denying labors of our choirs.

The other method of conducting the service of song is the employment of a precentor. This plan may be considered antiquated, but it is in many respects preferable to the other. It is peculiarly Presbyterian, and is employed almost universally in the Scotch Church. The truth is, the general prevalence of choirs in Presbyterian Churches in countries not so Presbyterian as Scotland, arises from contact with other bodies who need choirs to lead their responses. A qualified precentor, who understands his business, experiences no great difficulty in leading the people's song in very respectable time and tune. It is done not by loudness and strength of lungs, but by art. When the congregation is too slow, his art consists in *anticipating* them a little on the accented notes; and when they are too fast, *detaining* them a little on the unaccented notes. He has the advantage of a choir leader, in having his sovereignty undisputed. Being alone, he is induced to sing tunes which the people know. Where there is a paid precentor, it is part of his office to hold congregational practisings for so many months of the year. With a precentor alone, however, it is not to be expected that large congregations will sing in perfect time. In triple time this is impossible. Yet it is wonderful how well it is often done. I have heard very sublime singing, the singing of thousands, led by one man. Then it is singular how one leader produces congregational singing. I know congregations that sing very feebly under the guidance of a choir, and yet, in the same church, on the same day, will sing the same tunes unitedly and powerfully under a precentor. Our Gaelic congregations, which have a precentor in the forenoon, and a choir, in some cases, in the afternoon, afford illustrations of this. The method of leading by a precentor has antiquity in its favor. John Knox, in the First Book of Discipline, directs the appointment of a reader, who had the duty of leading the singing.

Excellent, however, as this method is in principle, practice and prescription, it labors under certain obvious defects. It requires a sound, strong man. He must also be in per-