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The Church Soprano

Trials and Tribulations, Friends and Foes, Ambitions and Possible Future in the World of Song—A Study of Much Interest.

Fifty years or so ago short analytical sketches of certain familiar species of humanity were in fashion. Thus Albert Smith wrote "The Natural History of the Gent," "The Natural History of the Bachelorette," "The Natural History of the Flirt," "The Physiology of the Medical Student," etc. And in Paris there were many "Petites Physiologies," as the "Physiologie du Musicien," by Arthur Cler; "Physiologie du Tailleur," by Louis Huart; "Physiologie de l'Employé," by Balzac. These little books, both English and French, were illustrated by well-known men; at Paris, Gavarni and Daumier did not disdain to aid in the satire or in the tragedy. For these sketches were never so satirical as when they were pathetic and tragic.

Let us to-day consider the physiologist of the church soprano. The soprano rather than the tenor or bass, because she is the centre of the yearly musical programme in the church.

THE TROUBLESOME DAYS OF MARCH.

The almanac of singers may be printed against the days of "About this time expect some church choirs." These days of trouble and distress, days of sadness and desolation, days of sickness and gloominess, like unto the day prophesied by Zephaniah, the son of Ushai. The little pleasure or the absurd caprice of the music committee is too often a death sentence to the singer.

Comparatively few women, young or old, sing for hire in church because they enjoy the labor or look upon it as an educational advantage. They sing in church because they need the money, however small the salary may be. We are speaking now of women who devote their talents, knowledge, energy and health to singing as a profession, not an amusement. We do not refer to the parlor singer, who in comfortable circumstances uses her voice, which has been trained without personal sacrifice, as a means of social advancement, or to gratify self-interest. The long and tragic history of music establishes the fact that the great majority of famous singers were obliged to fight for success as with the beasts of Ephesus; they sprang from the plain people; they knew poverty; their life of preparation was a daily sacrifice; their courage was more heroic than that of the soldier on the battlefield, for it was without intoxication, and it was solitary, not courageous.

WHAT IS REQUIRED OF HER?

The church soprano is expected to be in vocal condition every Sunday, whatever be the state of the weather, or her own general health. She is obliged to sing at a morning hour, when the voice naturally rebels at the task. She is expected to be emotional suddenly, as at the voice of command; to entertain, to express hope or resignation to be jubilant in praise, or to be mystical in adoration.

The truly emotional singer needs some external stimulant; the sight of the footlights, the smile of the theatre, the waiting audience, the roar of applause, the rivalry of colleagues, the dramatic situation. How seldom does a great operatic singer move or thrill in the concert hall! The impassioned one is generally cold and ill at ease in church, even when the music has some dramatic significance. The bodily or the cerebrally temperamental singer is only at home in the opera house. The successful church singer is first of all a singer of routine. She is what is known as a "reliable singer," which being interpreted, means that she sings the tunes accurately and keeps strict

time. This species of singing is popular with her church companions of doubtful proficiency and with organists who take rehearsals easily.

There are often two services on Sunday; there is the rehearsal, and there are often outside calls. There is a church sociable once a month, or there is some other chapel meeting at which the soprano is expected to entertain the company without recompense. She seldom lives near the church; and in sunshine and in blizzard she is expected to make her way to the service. For her work she receives in Toronto \$250 to \$600 a year. We are speaking of the average soprano; it is not probable that, if the salaries of all church sopranos here were averaged, the rate would be over \$300 a head; the salary of \$250 a head is no doubt nearer the exact sum.

HER FRIENDS, THE COMMITTEEMEN.

The church soprano is at the mercy of the music committee and the congregation.

The music committee, with the hypothetical assistance of the organist, chooses the singers. Perhaps there is a competition, and each soprano enters the lot with "Fear Ye Not, O Israel," or some other battle piece. The personal appearance of the singer has much to do with the decision, for music committees are, after all, human, and the story of Phryne before the judges is of eternal application. Even the clergyman delights in looking on a comely face. The tenor and the bass are at once prejudiced in favor of beauty; and the alto, the traditional foe of the soprano, is reconciled to the possibility of an engagement if she discovers that the handsome applicant is a vocally inferior to her.

One of the committee prefers "a powerful voice, one that can lead"; another is in favor of "a sweet voice." This applicant is too "operatic"; that one does not appreciate at once the fatherly interest shown in her by the chairman, who has been called a man of distinguished bearing; another applicant has influential friends in the church, who sit on the doorsteps of the committee. It is seldom that the best singer, considered as only a singer, receives the appointment.

For how should the committee be able to judge concerning vocal art? Mr. X has a daughter who plays glibly selections from comic operas, in her more adventurous moods; the waltz in A flat Moszkowski, therefore he is a competent critic. Mr. Y has a "fine baritone voice, which should have been trained, but he never had the time to study." Mr. Z is a "safe man" on any committee, and he is not afraid of music. Occasionally a committee, especially when it is represented by one man, has knowledge and taste; but such committees are almost as rare as the phoenix.

THE CONGREGATION AS A CRITIC.

A church congregation is the severest of critics. Its criticism includes examination of the soprano's dress—especially her hats—deportment in and out of church, as well as opinions concerning voice and vocal art. One member blames the soprano for the music she sings, although the organist selected. A woman objects to her method, because they have not the same teacher. One finds fault with her high notes, another with her lower register. The soprano is too operatic; or she is too lethargic; she screams, or she cannot be heard. If all the members like her for a time, they wish a change at the end of the year; they would like

to see a new face, another voice. Restless, curious, capricious, they assert as a pretext that another voice might blend better with the other singers. They let a soprano go, and are surprised to learn that she at once secured another position at a higher salary. There are churches which change sopranos every year and are never suited. And some of the discarded, let go without due warning, are long idle.

A CLERGYMAN'S SOLEMN DUTY.

In Episcopal churches, the rector, with a few skilled in music, is supposed to have charge of the music, in other Protestant churches the clergyman, if he be a prudent man, who would fain move along the line of the least resistance, does not interfere with the workings of the music committee, nor does he take any special interest in the life of the soprano. It is natural that a sincere clergyman should wish the choir singers to be communicants, but when their behavior is respectable, should he appeal to them to join the church? He may make this appeal in the pursuit of his duty, but there is not in this an implied threat of discharge!

Let us suppose a case. A soprano of irreproachable life, a life helpful to her family, which she assists out of her small earnings, is not a member of any church. Her singing is devotional in that it comforts many by the expression of hope and consolation. The singer is the gentlest, the purest of women—And all her body was more virtuous Than souls of women fashioned otherwise.

say a word of vexation; she should thank the committee for the experience, for the pleasure of singing in "such a beautiful church and for such pleasant people."

Nor should she complain when the organist puts before her music written for boy sopranos and with the stress on the naturally inexpressive tones of her voice; or music written by another organist for the phenomenally high-voiced soprano of his choir; or music written by a radically modern composer who takes no account of the capabilities of a voice and despises its limitations.

HER LIFE OF MODERN HEROISMS.

There is something pathetic in this annual uneasiness of choir singers. The salary means so much to many of them! And clergymen, music committees and congregations speak so lightly, so capriciously of these changes! Think for a moment of the life of a young soprano. She is often far from home and obliged to live by herself in one room, of which she wears as though it were a prison cell. She supports herself by her voice. She earns with it the money for board and lodging, lessons and dress. She must be most economical, sometimes at the expense of health as well as reasonable comfort. Sickness, even a cold, means to her a loss of income. She has her church position; she sings now and then for small sums, from \$10 to \$25, and she exposes herself to storm and risk of throat trouble. Her life is full of petty annoyances and disappointments. Living alone, she is exposed, if she be personally attractive, to contemptible gossip. She



The picture shows a model developed in satin-finished cloth—black. The trimming consists of strips of panne velvet stitched upon the coat of yoke effect, below which are panel-shaped designs of the same velvet. The cuffs are of the same material, bound with cloth and stitched several times. Loops of black braid are draped around the shoulders and finished with ornaments to match.

Nobly ambitious, she works bravely to reach the goal, but she rejoices in the success of others. She knows not of selfishness or envy; she is incapable of meanness even in thought. But she is not a member of the church, and the clergyman practically insists that she should make a public confession of faith if she wishes to retain her position. Such a confession is to her a most solemn act, one for which she is not yet prepared. Is not this appeal a temptation to hypocrisy? For the singer cannot afford to be without a position. The injustice of it all! For this same singer may be more alive with the essential spirit of Christianity than is the clergyman who lays a snare for her.

HER TRIALS IN CHURCH SERVICE.

Nervous and self-confident, the church soprano should ever be tactful. She should support the organist in his belief that he is always right. If he make a mistake in accompaniment, she should blush prettily and ask pardon for her carelessness. If he, in solo playing, make strange wild noises on manuals and pedals, she should ask if the voluntary is not of the ultra-modern school. She should be ready with a compliment for the alto's wonderful lower tones and for her new costumes, and she should lend a sympathetic ear to the tenor's tale of woe—how the Toronto climate affects his throat, how he is not appreciated and the reasons why he is not engaged for all the leading concerts. She should not start as one about to say "Sir-er!" when a gentleman puts her encouragingly on the shoulder or shows an inclination to whisper his interest. Her smile should be of the hair-trigger order and her eyes should show thankfulness for such favors.

Even when the church "hears applicants" for three months so as to save the expense of paying a regularly engaged soprano, she should not

sees singers of unbounded assurance and little art do unworthy things to gain a hearing. One coaches with a person of authority and pays a large sum, not for helpful instruction, but for the sake of an engagement which is in the power of this man to give! Another, wholly unfit, without voice or art, plays the parasite and works the social graft. Yet, undisturbed, indomitable of purpose, the singer keeps on her way, sustained by sublime confidence in her voice, in her musical intelligence, in her dramatic instinct. She at last triumphs, but in a foreign town; her name blazes in the operatic firmament, and the city in which she was merely the plaything of music committees or petty managers, plumes herself on the fact that she was once a sojourner within its gates. Or she dies, worn out with the struggle, prematurely old, with the bitterness of the thought that she, too, might have been famous if her path had been made only a little smoother, if her genius had been recognized by those whose duty it was to recognize and help.

TRIUMPHANT EVEN IN DEFEAT.

Yet such a failure is more to be envied in the endless procession of transfers and promotions than the cheap, easy ephemeral success gained by foolish means for the gratification of vanity; more to be envied than success.

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Barnum & Baileys' circus will have a chaplain this season. He is Rev. Wm. H. Sheak, an Ohio evangelist, who will hold services in the big tent every Sunday, and who will deliver lectures on natural history in the morning during the week's performance. Barnum & Bailey are the first circus to have a chaplain. There are 1,100 employees with the show.

The Days of Auld Lang Syne

Interesting Events of Ye Olden Times Gathered from The Planet's Issues of Half a Century Ago.

From Planet files, June 9, 1859, to July 7, 1859.

The Caledonia Inn is being managed in North Chatham by Peter E. McKerrall.

John Sparks, watchmaker and jeweller, advertises his business on King street.

Thomas Stone has just received a splendid lot of ladies' dress goods, teas, tobaccos and sugars.

Geo. Winter is a dealer in men's hats, caps, etc.

Tissiman & Baxter are proprietors of the carpet and house furnishing establishment.

The artesian well at St. Catharines is advertised as producing mineral water.

Division Courts were held by Judge Wells at Chatham, Morpeth, Dawn Mills, Harwich, Oungah and Bothwell.

At the County Council meeting it was decided to build a bridge over the River Thames at Thamesville.

Married—On the 4th inst., by Rev. A. Campbell, at Mr. T. Larke's Hotel, Mr. Mark Chase to Miss Sarah E. Harkens, both of Howard.

A Council meeting was held Friday, June 10th, 1859, at which the Mayor and Councillors Evans, Dolson, Burns, Northwood, McIntosh, Smith, Holmes and Duff were present.

John McCoig, a farmer of Harwich, committed suicide because the heavy frosts destroyed his entire crops, the unfortunate man having become very despondent.

The quarter session of the High Court opened with the following gentlemen of the Grand Jury:—Messrs. Daniel S. Dolson, foreman; Walter Andrew, Henry Bartlett, John Baxter, James Cleave, Patrick Flynn, Peter Gray, John Jackson, Isaac Mills, Miles Miller, Alex. McLachlan, Edward Nathan, John Weldon, Geo. S. Orr, David Simpson, John Scane, Jno. Sinclair, Jacob Shepley, Charles Sifton, Wm. C. Taylor, Francis Thomas, John Teetzel, Henry Toll and Chas. H. Wood. Judge Wells presided.

On Monday last the Municipal Council of the County of Kent met at the Council room at the Court House, and there were present James Smith, Esq., Warden; Councillors Munroe, of Zone; White and Ronalds, Raleigh; McKerracher and Ogilvie, of Howard; Ridley, of Orford; Young and McMichael, of Harwich; Houston, of Chatham; Foot, of Dover; Robinson, of Romney; Russell, of Tilbury, and Burns and Smith, of Chatham town.

The following piece of poetry on the steamer Swan, which plies between Chatham and Detroit, written by N. Harmon, of Baptist Creek:—

Go by the Swan, she is safe and sound
As ever was built on Yankee ground;
Go by the Swan, her fare is low,
Much cheaper than the cars, you know.

Go by the Swan whenever you can,
They are all accommodating men;
Your freight they will with care deliver
At any point along the river.

And that is very kind, you know;
So, by the Swan be sure to go.

Harmon has plenty boats always on hand.

Ready at anyone's command;
No matter where they do belong,
If they will patronize the Swan.

They will always find someone on hand
To take them where the Swan does land;
To come and go whenever they will,
Please patronize the swift Swan still.

Mons. Blondin repeated his daring feat—of walking across Niagara on a rope—on Wednesday last, to the utter astonishment of everyone. After walking safely across to the Canadian side he returned with a thick sack thrown over him, thus making the perilous journey in total darkness.

The Excelsior Fire Company, No. 1, elected the following officers:—
Foreman—Wm. N. Smith, re-elected.

First Asst.—Wm. L. Wilson.
Second Asst.—Edward Fountain.
Third Asst.—John Rheemers.
Secretary—John Dickson, re-elected.
Asst. Sec'y—W. H. Thompson, re-elected.
Treas.—Frances Martin, re-elected.

Fire Co. No. 2, elected the following officers:—

Capt.—George Orr.
Lieut.—Patrick Beardon.
First Branchman—Chas. Bigley.
Second Branchman—Geo. Merriam.
Secretary—R. Stephenson, re-elected.
Asst. Sec'y—D. W. Mowatt, re-elected.
Treas.—John McKerrall.

THE DIFFERENCE.

On many an eve too quickly spent
In mirth and song and wailing
Beneath the stars that peeped aslant
The distant church-bells' dying chime,
The night, the stars, with love
'Tis past forevermore!

Since those same bells rang out in
glee;
I do not leave her at the door—
The door is mine, and so is she!

HOME.

Does pure religion charm thee,
Far more than aught below?
Wouldst thou that she should arm
thee
Against the hour of woe?
Think not she dwelleth only
In temples built for prayer,
For home itself is lonely,
Unless her smiles be there;

The devotee may falter,
The bigot blindly roam,
If worshiper's her altar
At home, dear home.

Love over it pr. sedeth
With meek and modest awe,
Its daily service guideth,
And shows its perfect law—
If there thy faith shall fail thee
If there no shrine be found,
What can thy prayers avail thee
With kneeling crowds around?

Go, leave thy gifts unoffered,
Beneath religion's dome,
And be her first fruits proffered
At home, dear home.

—Bernard Barton.



At the end of the season when one's hats show signs of service, one, some ready-to-hand shapes are offered at a very low price which tide over to the next season nicely, as are invariably bright in color as before appearing spring, of some rough material, a white underlin.



Dark blue panne velvet shadings to delicate green, is used for this stunning hat. A novel feature of the design is a low flat crown of white silk beaver. The white feathers sweeping over the brim are tipped with blue and green.