

***FREDERICK JAMES
CROWEST***



***ADVICE
TO SINGERS***

Frederick James Crowest

Advice to Singers

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PREFACE.

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SINGING cannot be learnt from a book, and so far from attempting any such impossible feat as writing a book which might be called "*Singing without a Master*," the author's object—frequently insisted upon herein—is to point out the impossibility of overcoming the difficulties of singing without a teacher. At the same time, there are points upon which a master would not feel called upon to speak; nor would he (except, perhaps, in the course of a very long period of training) be likely to touch on many matters which, though closely connected with the life or business of an accomplished singer, yet lie rather outside the province of the voice-trainer.

In a work consisting of detached paragraphs, and not being a continuous essay, it is not always possible to enter into full explanations of the reasons for certain statements; and (for the want of such explanation) one paragraph may *appear* to contradict another. However, I can assure the reader that such paragraphs are only *apparent* contradictions; and if he will take the trouble to think such points out for himself, he will find that they are easily reconcilable.

There is no subject, perhaps, on which opinions are so divided, and prejudices run so high, as the proper method of training and using the voice; nor is there perhaps one more

wrapped in mystery than is the art of singing. This is probably the result of that readiness with which almost every music teacher has hitherto undertaken to teach Singing. This book will not, I am sure, add to the mystery. A careful perusal of its contents should clear away many misconceptions, and place the student on the right road to that end which he or she has in view.

PREFACE TO THE FOURTH EDITION.

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That another large edition of this little Manual should be called for in so comparatively short a time is sufficiently encouraging testimony of the worth of the book and the favour it has found at the hands of students of singing and others—a result the more gratifying to the publishers since hitherto it has been issued with an anonymous title-page. Often has the authorship of the little volume been industriously defended and disputed—not by myself—both in this country and America; but, on the whole, the identity of its originator has been well maintained. For my part matters might have remained so, especially as I am not insensible to the fact that there is much "preaching" herein—as indeed there must be in such a work, and some of the advice is of such a nature that its giver runs the risk of being placed upon an exceeding high pinnacle of moral excellence, or of being accounted the personification of all the virtues—both of which distinctions might scarcely be merited. The appearance of my name upon the title-sheet is the result of no wish of mine, and I have consented to it only out of deference to the pressing request of the publishers.

A chapter on the Physiological Surroundings of the Voice has been added to this edition.

FREDERICK J. CROWEST.

PREFACE TO THE SEVENTH EDITION.

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Once again my publishers have informed me of the necessity for reprinting this Manual, which has been so successful both here, in America, and in the Colonies. I have nothing to alter in the work, but I must express my thanks for the marked support that has been given to this straightforward advice. Did space permit, much might be said relative to that growing complaint, "Teachers' (or Board School) Laryngitis" as it is called. For some time past I have been authorized to make observations at the chief Throat Hospitals in connection with this constantly increasing mischief, arising from an injurious use of the voice in Teaching, and which only proper Voice Production will remedy. While I cannot give advice here, I shall be happy to answer any communications of sufferers from this complaint.

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PRELIMINARY REMARKS.

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WHATEVER be the actual difference between the professional and the amateur singer, if a person is worthy of the name of singer at all, there should be no difference in their views of Art, and in their devotion to practice. Singing is an art, and one of the most difficult of the arts to master; and any one who attempts to learn it must be prepared to give the same devotion to it as is demanded by the sister arts of painting and sculpture. I do not mean exactly devotion of the whole time and energy of life to it; because, however necessary that may be for the professional, who has to make his living by it, such entire devotion to an accomplishment or an amusement (for such singing is to the amateur) would, for a non-professional, be frequently impossible, and very often wrong, as it would lead to a neglect of the duties of life. But, while the entire devotion of time and energy of a professional singer is demanded to master the various styles, and the immense mass of music, with which he or she will have to deal in the exercise of the profession, the amateur should bear in mind that such time and energy as he can devote to singing must be firmly restricted to doing what he undertakes thoroughly well—as well, in fact, as a professional. The amateur's position, which forbids him to make singing the work of his life, limits the range of his work, not the quality of it. He cannot, even if he have the voice of a Rubini or a Braham, master the difficulties of opera, oratorio, and ballad alike. Circumstances forbid him to conquer the world, but there is no reason why he should not be a king in his own special

realm. To be that he will have to follow the same rules as though he were able to attack the whole universe of vocal music; for he should feel that the only difference between him and the professional singer lies in the sphere of their work.

The same remarks apply to many professionals. *Very* few can excel in all styles, and few in more than one. To attempt all is a great mistake, and will probably lead to failure, or at least mediocrity in all.

But the first point that I would insist upon is the necessity for earnest devotion and regular work, both in professional and amateur, so that the term *Artist* may apply to both. I shall be at no great pains to avoid occasional repetitions of incidental remarks. In a book intended for constant reference rather than for one perusal, and one divided, as this is, into short paragraphs, words may attract attention in one place, while in another they may have been overlooked. If, therefore, I err in this respect, I shall do so deliberately, my sole aim being to help and impress the student as much as possible.

Remember that the human voice is the most delicate of all instruments, susceptible to more and more varied influence than any other. The singer has to combine in himself the instrument and the performer; and while all the artistic and intellectual qualities necessary for the instrumentalist are required by him, he is compelled beyond that to realize that he is a living instrument, and to exercise over himself all the care—and indeed far more than all—that players exercise over their most cherished "weapons." He has not only to learn how to sing, but how to be and to

remain fit for singing. He, more than any other musical artist, will find that he is affected by moral as well as physical and intellectual causes, and he must face this fact boldly.

In writing down the brief hints which this little work offers to singers, I shall therefore take in a range of subjects and enter into many details which may seem to have little to do with the practice of *Do, Re, Mi*. I do this advisedly, and I believe that such hints as those on general culture and habits of living are by no means the least important part of my work. I do not profess to teach my readers how to sing—(any singer knows, and I should like the public to know too, that singing cannot be taught by a book)—but to give "hints to singers," and many of those hints are on such subjects as it would be an impertinence on the part of a singing master to allude to. If the student takes offence at the *book*, it happily does not reach the author.

Following out the previous thought, I shall try to turn the intending singer's attention to several other subjects, before I touch upon that of strictly musical interest. And if I here seem to "preach" occasionally, I shall never do so without cause, and never, I trust, in any spirit but that of the warmest sympathy with the aspirations and the peculiar trials and difficulties of those who are still in full vigour of youth and health.

Remember that I give *hints*, not *rules*. It is quite impossible to lay down rules of living which shall apply alike to male and female, or to variously constituted natures. But I hope I may trust to the common sense of every individual to draw sound conclusions, and to form his or her own rules,

by the help of these hints, and, the rules once formed, to adhere to them resolutely. If singing is to be done at all, it is worth while to do it well, and to spare no pains to that end.

There is a good deal to be done by the student of singing before he attacks the strictly musical part of his difficulties. General education, if deficient, must be attended to; habits of living must be formed and followed out; faults of character, such as laziness, ill temper, slovenliness, impatience, and want of perseverance, must be bravely fought; for the study of singing, perhaps more than of any other art, will test the character severely in these respects.

The student must be prepared to exercise a good deal of self-denial; to put aside all notions of self-merit for a long time to come; and to be humble, and ready to take a hint from any source. Whatever merits he may have at starting are certainly not due to his own skill; they are simply natural gifts, and the better they are, the more is there for him to learn in doing justice to them. Let him not waste time in admiring what he is, or has done; but let him keep all his energy for what he may yet be and for what he yet has to accomplish.

ON HABITS, DIET, &c.

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The following paragraphs contain hints on various matters apparently little connected with singing, yet all of more or less importance to the singer. The voice, and the power of using it, depend so greatly upon general health, and health is so easily affected by habits of living, that I

offer no apology for entering into some details which, though easy enough to write down, and read when written, would be difficult for a singing master to allude to or suggest without giving offence.

Early Rising.—Practise early rising, and, if possible, take a short walk before breakfast. This tends to keep the circulation of the blood in a good condition, and that is, of course, of great importance to the lungs, and all the organs which singing requires to tax somewhat severely.

Cleanliness.—Strict cleanliness is of the greatest importance. Take a cold bath every morning directly you get out of bed. Do not stand "pottering about," or you may catch cold, but go to your bath while the skin is moist with the perspiration which the warmth of bed has drawn out. If you let the perspiration dry, and then plunge into cold water, you run a great risk of giving yourself a severe chill. Sponge yourself well, and rapidly, all over, especially the chest, throat, back of the neck, and all round the loins; and dry the body thoroughly and briskly with a rough towel. Let no fear of damaging the complexion deter young ladies from this most healthy and necessary operation.

In winter, if the circulation is naturally sluggish, it is as well not to take the bath perfectly cold, but merely add enough hot water just to remove the extreme chill. The bath ought to feel cold to you, even though it be not the coldest possible.

It is well to take a warm bath once a week—if possible, just before going to bed. Do not have it hot, but simply warm, and, of course, use soap with it. Do not dawdle over it, but "have it and have done with it," and then get to bed

at once. If you find the effect of it to be enervating or relaxing, take it less warm in future. The object of it is simply to open and cleanse the pores of the skin—a matter of great importance.

The Hair.—The same rule of extreme cleanliness applies to the hair, and for the same reason, viz., its intimate connection with the circulation of the blood and the pores of the skin. Keep the hair well brushed, and have it frequently cut and shampooed. Avoid "pomatums," washes, and greasy messes of every kind: their smell is objectionable and their effect is generally to dirty the head. Moreover, the public have the good taste to object to the appearance of an artist before them who is evidently "got up" with pains for the occasion. A person who is habitually as clean as he can be, need never fear to appear in public, and may spare himself the disgusting application of "grease" to his head to make himself fit to be seen.

If a moustache is worn, let it be kept within bounds, and not allowed to fall over the mouth, where it would affect the tone of the voice. Do not cut it straight along the lip, but train it right and left, allowing it to grow naturally and uncut. The advantages of the moustache are two: it acts to a certain extent as a respirator, and protects the mouth and throat as the eyelash does the eye, and it helps to conceal any slight distortion of the mouth in singing. This, I confess, is a doubtful advantage:—there ought to be no distortion, and if any were seen, it might, perhaps, be corrected. However, I give the opinion for what it is worth.

The Teeth.—The teeth play such an important part in the production of the voice that every care should be taken

to preserve them sound and in good condition—to say nothing of the part which they play in facial expression, a point to which every singer should attend. A bad state of the teeth at once affects the stomach, and that again the voice, so that no apology is needed for drawing the student's attention to this matter. Clean the teeth the first thing in the morning, and the last thing at night. Use a moderately hard brush, better too soft than too hard, with cold water, or better still, just lukewarm. Avoid all "dentifrices" and advertised nastinesses in the way of powders and "fragrant" washes. A mixture of powdered (not "prepared") chalk and orris-root, in the proportion of about three to two, is the best thing to use, and any chemist will make that up for you. Remember to brush the teeth inside and along the top, as well as outside; and if you find this difficult with the ordinary-shaped brush, get one of those which are sold for the purpose. If you find, in spite of your care, that your teeth become discoloured, the cause is probably that your stomach is out of order. In that case, go straight to a doctor, for the consequence of such derangement is that "tartar" is formed on the teeth, and this grows, and pushes back the gums, altering the form of the cavity of the mouth, and so affecting the tone of the voice.

Exercise.—Be as much as you can in the open air. Take moderate walking exercise, but of course do not tire yourself before singing or practising. For male singers, rowing, riding, football and cricket (but without the shouting so often incidental to these games), racquets or tennis, and above all an hour or two weekly in a gymnasium, are excellent things; while for ladies, walking, riding, lawn-

tennis, "la grace," and calisthenics are equally useful. If you live in a town, always walk in preference to taking a conveyance, when time and weather permit it.

Never breathe through your mouth in walking, especially at night, or on coming out into the open air after singing. Keep the lips closed, and inhale the air through the nostrils. This is easily acquired, and to be able to do this will be found of great service in taking breath for singing; but out of doors it is most important, for the immediate rush of cold or damp air to the delicate organs of the throat, especially when the latter have been excited by the exertion of singing, is dangerous. It is a good plan, and a profitable use of the time, to practise breathing when walking, by filling the lungs, and utilizing each inspiration for as long a distance as possible.

Dress.—Nothing can be said in favour of our climate for singing. With proper precautions, however, a great deal of trouble arising from this cause may be averted. In summer, as well as in winter, for instance, the writer would strongly urge the wearing of moderately thick-soled boots or shoes. Then, again, the neck and chest should never be exposed alike to a June sun and a December frost; but, instead, it should be moderately and reasonably covered. Great care should be taken never to get wet, especially wet or damp feet.

In going out of hot rooms into the open air much pains should be exercised to keep the chest and throat covered up with an overcoat or cloak—however warm the weather may be. In *very severe* winter weather the singer will derive much comfort by wearing a flannel chest-protector. Sitting

about in gardens, and on lawns, in the evenings on even the warmest days, is not a safe indulgence for the student who is in earnest in the pursuit of his art.

One caution is necessary as to "wrapping up," however. Do not over-do it. The constant use of a "comforter" renders the throat delicate and susceptible. All you have to fear is damp, not cold, in the atmosphere. A comforter, closely wound round the throat, promotes perspiration, and the risk of chill in removing it is greater than in not wearing it at all. Common sense must guide every one. It is impossible to make a rule for all.

Diet.—As to diet: avoid everything that is at all indigestible. Live well, and take plenty of varied nourishment. The singer's system *must* be well nourished. Chocolate and coffee are better than tea; the latter is too astringent, and affects the nerves too much, if taken in abundance. Sugar, in moderation, should always be used with those beverages, and they should never be taken very hot. Bread is better than toast, but avoid hot or very new bread. Eggs and butter are good. Meat should be plainly cooked and not too well done. Pork tries the digestion too severely to be a desirable food for a singer, and the same may be said of veal. Fish is good for the singer, and he should if possible let it form a part of his daily *menu*. Creams and pastry are simply poison, and cheese should only be taken in great moderation. Fruit is an excellent thing if judiciously used. But here, again, hard and fast rules are impossible, because constitutions vary. Only remember the old proverb, "We must eat to live, and not live to eat."