



Church News

Heytesbury

FESTIVAL OF PARISH CHOIRS AT HEYTESBURY

A festival of parish choirs in the Warminster district was held on Tuesday, at the fine old collegiate church of Heytesbury, which has recently undergone a most judicious restoration, under the superintendence of Mr Butterfield, the eminent architect. The gathering was a large one, and the entire proceedings passed off with great success, the festival being the very best which we have attended during this season. The weather was very fine, and there was a large attendance of visitors from the surrounding district. The following choirs took part in the festival:-

Heytesbury	18
Codford St. peter	22
Imber	19
Fisherton	25
Upton Lovell	15
Sutton Veney	21
Boyton	4
Horningsham	27
Longbridge Deverell	17
Brixton Deverell	14
Crockerton	18
Maiden Bradley	11
Hill Deverell	6
Westbury	34
Westbury Leigh	18

Upton Scudmore	11
St. Dennis, Warminster	20
St. Lawrence, ditto	24
St. John's, ditto	21
Dilton Marsh	24
Chapmanslade	14
Total	383

The three last named choirs were surplices. Of the trebles and altos, 103 were females. The programme was as follows:-

Processional Hymn, "Sweet place," from "Hymns for the Church of England"

The Preccs. Tallis.

Psalms for the day, 136th, Russell; 137th, Croft; and 138th, Russell.

Cantate Domino, Rev. Sir F. A. G. Ousley.

Deus Miscreatur, Goodson.

Anthem, "O taste and see," John Goss.

Hymn before the Sermon, "Endless Alleluia," J. Barnby.

"The Hallelujah Chorus," Handel.

Processional Hymn, "O God of Hosts," Walter Leigh.

The unsurpliced choirs having taken their seat shortly after three o'clock, the surplice choirs and the clergy entered the church in procession, singing "Sweet place, sweet place alone." The clergy and the choirs then took their places, and the service commenced. The prayers were intoned in a most effective manner by the Rev. H. C. de St. Croix, of Crockerton, the district secretary, the first lesson being read by the Rev. J. Knight, the vicar, and the second lesson by the Rev. J. H. Plowman, the curate. Among the clergy present were the Rev. H. Grantham, the Rev. E. Slater Browne, Rev. W. B. Humphrey, Rev. W. Burbidge, Rev. C. F. Hyde, Rev. J. Pilditch, Rev. J. Jacob, Rev. G. Noel Freeling, &c. Lord and Lady Heytesbury and family, and Sir Francis D. Astley and family, were also present.

The choral service throughout was admirably rendered, and great credit is due to the respective choirmasters for the excellent manner in which the choirs have been trained. The psalms for the day to chants by Russell and Dr. Croft, were admirably rendered. The anthem, "O taste and see how gracious the Lord is," by John Goss, organists of St. Paul's Cathedral, was sung with much effect, and in a manner that deserves great praise. The hymn before the sermon, "Endless Alleluia," was given with much spirit. The words are a translation by the Rev. John Ellerton, of Worcester, of a noble hymn, supposed, to be as old as the eighth century, and the music is by Mr Joseph Barnby. Mr Hector Jones, organist of Westbury, presided with much ability as the organ.

The sermon was preached by the Rev. E. Slater Brown, incumbent of St. Katherine's, Savernake, from Psalm cxxxvii.4, "How shall we sing the Lord's song." The preacher said that the absorbing question for some weeks past of many a man and many a boy among those choristers who led the services in the churches of that neighbourhood had been, "How shall we sing the Lord's song." And first, he would ask them to think in what spirit during the past week had they been asking

that question. Did the question merely mean this: "How shall we best make people say when the choral festival is over, 'What a fine service! How well that hymn went? How richly such an one's voice sounded in the anthem!' " The rev. gentleman then went on to observe that prayers and praise are worthless unless proceeding from the heart. He next remarked that in many churches scarcely one-half of the congregation took their appointed part in the service. The other half were mere lookers on. And yet, for whom were the Amens at the end of almost every prayer but for the congregation? For whom the general confession? the our Father? the creeds? The responses at the end of the Litany? Much had been done during the last thirty years to improve the manner of public worship. The laity no longer suffered parish priests to conduct worship according to their own private whims and fancies. They were beginning to claim their rights, and to insist upon the obedience of the clergy to the rubrics, so that the worship might be brought more into accordance with the scriptural mind and the evangelical teaching of the Catholic Church. He thanked God for what had been done in that respect; but there was many a farmer's son who could sing a good song at a social gathering, buy who never thought of learning to sing and helping others to sing the Lord's song in the Lord's house. In country parishes they had hardly yet come to see that the church choir should be composed of the gentlemen, the educated men of the parish and their sons, as well as men of lower rank and their sons. In town choirs they did find men of all ranks taking their places together; but he believed it was a rare thing to find a gentleman – except he happened to be one of the priest's family – seeking admission to the village choir.

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The preacher having left the pulpit the "Hallelujah Chorus," from Handel's "Messiah," was sung with considerable effect by the assembled choirs, the fugue parts being exceedingly well rendered. A collection was then made towards defraying the expenses of the festival, and the chorale, "Wake, awake, for night is flying," the air by Philippe Nicolai, was sung. The Benediction was then given from the chancel by the Vicar, and the choirs left the church singing the processional hymn, "O God of hosts, the mighty Lord," the melody by Walter Leigh.

The singers then proceeded to a tent in Lord Heytesbury's park, where a meat tea was provided. Upwards of 500 persons partook of an excellent repast, the company being presided over by Lord Heytesbury, several of the members whose family were present. The grace, "Give thanks to God, for He is good," was sung to a tune of the "Supplemental Hymn and Tune Book," by R. Brown.

Lord Heytesbury said that, before the company separated, he was anxious to express his heartfelt and most sincere thanks for the manner in which the beautiful and most impressive service had been that day performed in Heytesbury Church. He could assure them that he experienced much pleasure in finding that they had not employed their time and talents in vain, that their efforts had been appreciated, and that the proceedings of that day had been a complete success. He sincerely congratulated them upon the improvement which had lately taken place in the performance of the choral services in churches, because he could recollect well how dry and formal and even discordant, those services formerly were. He believed that music was a most important part of the service of the Church, and that it tended to assist and to elevate the tone of the devotional feeling. In properly carrying out the musical service of the Church, he believed that the members of the local choral societies were doing much good; more, probably than they were aware of. He considered that good which had been accomplished by the Diocesan Choral Society was beyond all praise. He then alluded to the efforts of the Rev. H. C. de St. Croix, who had labored hard in the district, and to whose exertions they were mainly indebted for the great success which had attended the festival that day. (Cheers) He begged them to thank that gentleman for what he had done; he trusted the society would receive the hearty support of the public; and for his own part he (Lord Heytesbury) could only say that he should be glad to have the opportunity of meeting them at that place at a future time. (Loud cheers.)

The Rev. H. De St. Croix, who was received with great applause, said that he felt very happy to see them all present, and was thankful for the kind way in which they had received the mention of his name. He could assure them that it was a source of great satisfaction and pleasure to him to find that everything had passed off so well that day. He sincerely hoped that they had enjoyed their tea, and he could assure them that the work in which he was engaged was quite a labour of love. (Cheers.) He believed that the Choral Association was doing a good work in that diocese. It was said that singers

were not always the most harmonious people, and that they were sometimes rather cantankerous. (Laughter.) Now, he believed that these festivals and the meetings together for practice helped to rub off these cantankerous knobs, and tended to improve the character as well as the singing of the members of the various choirs. He sincerely hoped that that would not be the last occasion on which they would meet together. The festival had been a large one for the district, and the time of meeting was fixed early in the year. The rev. gentleman concluded by alluding to the admirable sermon which they had heard that day, and proposed a vote of thanks to the Rev. E. Slater Browne, the preacher on that occasion. He said that the Rev. Canon Woodford had promised to preach the sermon, but he was prevented from attending, in consequence of his having accepted a living in the North of England. Mr de St. Croix concluded by congratulating all present on the great success which had attended the proceedings in connection with the festival that day. (Cheers).

The Rev. E. Slater Browne briefly acknowledged the compliment which had been paid to him, and proposed the health of the Vicar and the Churchwardens, thanking them for their zealous co-operation and for what they had done that day. (Cheers).

The Rev. J. Knight returned thanks on behalf of himself and the churchwardens; and expressed his great satisfaction at the success which had attended the festival that day. He also spoke highly of the labours of Mr Wilce and Mr Snelgrove, the churchwardens, who were ever ready to promote any undertaking in connection with the church. (Cheers). He also thanked Lord Heytesbury for the very liberal manner in which he had assisted to restore the fine old church, and proposed three cheers for his lordship, which were given most heartily.

Lord Heytesbury briefly returned thanks, and expressed the pleasure which he felt in meeting them in his park on that occasion. (Cheers).

The Rev. H. C. de St. Croix proposed the health of the general and local committees, and thanked them kindly for their exertions.

Three groans were given for the Great Western Railway, whose want of punctuality had delayed several of the choirs, and thereby prevented the service from being held at the hour appointed.

After giving three cheers for "Church and Queen," the company separated, and the proceedings were brought to a close.

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