

KEPT FOR THE MASTER'S USE

by

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CHAPTER FIVE

OUR VOICES KEPT FOR JESUS

“Keep my voice, and let me sing
Always, only, for my King.”

I HAVE wondered a little at being told by an experienced worker, that in many cases the voice seems the last and hardest thing to yield entirely to the King; and that many who think and say they have consecrated all to the Lord and His service, revolt when it comes to be a question whether they shall sing “always, only,” for their King. They do not mind singing a few general sacred songs, but they do not see their way to really singing always and only unto and for Him. They want to bargain a little. They question and argue about what proportion they may keep for self-pleasing and company-pleasing, and how much they must give up; and who will and who won't like it; and what they “really *must* sing,” and what they “really *must not* sing” at certain times and places; and what “won't do,” and what they “can't very well help,” and so on, and so when the question, “How much owest thou unto my Lord?” is applied to this particular pleasing gift, it is not met with the loyal, free-hearted, happy response, “All! Yes, *all* for Jesus!”

I know there are special temptations around this matter.

Vain and selfish temptations, whispering, “How much better a certain song suits your voice, how and much more likely to be admired!”

- Faithless ones, suggesting doubts whether you can make the holy song “go.”
- Specious ones, asking whether you ought not to please your neighbors, and hushing up the rest of the precept, “**Let every one of you please his neighbor for his good to edification**” (Romans 15: 2).
- Cowardly ones, telling you that it is just a little too much to expect of you, and that you are not called upon to wave your banner in people's very faces, and provoke surprise and remark, as this might do.

And so the banner is kept furled, the witness for Jesus is not borne, and you sing for others and not for your King.

The words had passed your lips, "Take my voice!" And yet you will not let Him have it. You will not let Him have that which costs you something, just because it costs you something! And yet He lent you that pleasant voice, that you might use it for Him. And yet He, in the sureness of His perpetual presence, was beside you all the while, and heard every note as you sang the songs which were, as your inmost heart knew, not for Him.

Where is your faith? Where is the consecration you have talked about? The voice has not been kept for Him, because it has not been truly and unreservedly given to Him. Will you not now say:

"Take my voice, for I had not given it to Thee; keep my voice, for I cannot keep it for Thee"?

And He will keep it! You cannot tell, till you have tried, how surely all the temptations flee When it is no longer your battle, but the Lord's; nor how completely and curiously all the difficulties vanish, when you simply and trustfully go forward in the path of full consecration in this matter. You will find that the keeping is most wonderfully real.

Do not expect to lay down rules and provide for every sort of contingency. If you could, you would miss the sweetness of the continual guidance in the "kept" course. Have only one rule about it—just to look up to your Master about every single song you are asked or feel inclined to sing. If you are willing and obedient, you will always meet His guiding eye He will always keep the voice that is His wholly at His disposal. Soon you will have such experience of His immediate guidance that you will be utterly satisfied with it, and only sorrowfully wonder you did not sooner thus simply lean on it.

I have just received a letter from one who has laid her special gift at the feet of the Giver, yielding her voice to Him with hearty desire that it might be kept for His use. She writes:

"I had two lessons on singing, while in Germany, from our Master. One was very sweet. A young girl wrote to me, that when she had heard me sing, 'O come, every one that thirsteth,' she went away and prayed that she might come, and she did come, too. Is not He good? The other was: I had been tempted to join the *Gesang Verein* in N____. I prayed to be shown whether I was right in so doing or not. I did not see my way clear, so I went. The singing was all secular. The very first night I went I caught a bad cold on my chest which prevented me from singing again at all till Christmas. Those were better than any lessons from a singing-master!"

Does not this illustrate both the keeping from and the keeping for?

In the latter case I believe she honestly wished to know her Lord's will— whether the training and practice were needed for His better service with her music, and that, therefore, she might take them for His sake; or whether the concomitants and influence would be such as to hinder the close communion with Him which she had found so precious, and that, therefore, she was to trust Him to give her "**much more than this.**" And so, at once, He showed her unmistakably what He would have her not do, and gave her the sweet consciousness that He Himself was teaching her and taking her at her word.

And then, as to the former of these two lessons, the song she names was one substituted when she said, "Take my voice," for some which were far more effective for her voice. But having freely chosen to sing what might glorify the Master rather than the singer, see how, almost immediately, He gave her a reward infinitely outweighing all the drawing-room compliments of concert-room applause!

That one consecrated song found echoes in heaven, bringing, by its blessed result, joy to the angels and glory to God. And the memory of that song is immortal. It will live through ages to come, never lost, never dying away, when the vocal triumphs of the world's greatest singers are past and forgotten forever. Now you who have been taking a half-and-half course, do you get such rewards as this? You may well envy them! But why not take the same decided course, and share the same blessed keeping and its fulness of hidden reward?

If you only knew, dear hesitating friends, what strength and gladness the Master gives when we loyally sing forth the honor of His name, you would not forego it! Oh, if you only knew the difficulties it saves! For when you sing "always and only for your King," you will not get much entangled by the King's enemies.

Singing an out-and-out sacred song often clears one's path at a stroke as to many other things. If you only knew the rewards He gives, very often then and there; the recognition that you are one of the King's friends by some lonely and timid one; the openings which you quite naturally gain of speaking a word for Jesus to hearts which, without the song, would never have given you the chance of the word!

- If you only knew the joy of believing that His sure promise, "**My Word shall not return unto Me void,**" will be fulfilled as you sing that word for Him!
- If you only tasted the solemn happiness of knowing that you have indeed a royal audience, that the King Himself is listening as you sing!
- If you only knew—and why should you not know?

Shall not the time past of your life suffice you for the miserable, double-hearted, calculating service? Let Him have the whole use of your voice at any cost, and see if He does not put many a totally unexpected new song into your mouth!

I am not writing all this to great and finished singers, but to everybody who can sing at all. Those who think they have only a very small talent, are often most tempted not to trade with it for their Lord. Whether you have much or little natural voice, there is reason for its cultivation and room for its use. Place it at your Lord's disposal, and He will show you how to make the most of it for Him; for not seldom His multiplying power is brought to bear on a consecrated voice.

A puzzled singing-master, very famous in his profession, said to one who tried to sing for Jesus:

"Well, you have not much voice; but, mark my words, you will always beat anybody with four times your voice!"

He was right, though he did not in the least know why.

A great many so-called sacred songs are so plaintive and pathetic that they help to give a gloomy idea of religion. Now don't sing these. Come out boldly, and sing definitely and unmistakably for your King, and of your King, and to your King. You will soon find, and even outsiders will have to own, that it is a good thing thus to show forth His loving kindness and His faithfulness (see Psalm 92:1-3).

Here I am usually met by the query, "But what would you advise me to sing?"

I can only say that I never got any practical help from asking anyone but the Master Himself, and so I would advise you to do the same! He knows exactly what will best suit your voice and enable you to sing best for Him; for He made it, and gave it just the pitch and tone He pleased, so of course He is the best counsellor about it. Refer your question in simplest faith to Him, and I am perfectly sure you will find it Answered. He will direct you, and in some way or other the Lord will provide the right songs for you to sing.

Only one thing I would add: I believe there is nothing like singing His own words.

The preacher claims the promise, "**My Word shall not return unto Me void,**" and why should not the singer equally claim it? Why should we use His own inspired words, with faith in their power, when speaking or writing, and content ourselves with human words put into rhyme for our singing?

What a vista of happy work opens out here! What is there to prevent our using this mightiest of all agencies committed to human agents, the Word, which is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, whenever we are asked to sing? By this means, even a young girl may be privileged to make that word sound in the ears of many who would not listen to it otherwise. By this the incorruptible seed may be sown in otherwise unreachable ground.

It is a remarkable fact that it is actually the easiest way thus to take the very highest ground. You will find that singing Bible words does not excite the prejudice or contempt that any other words, sufficiently decided to be worth singing, are almost sure to do. For very decency's sake, a Bible song will be listened to respectfully; and for very shame's sake, no adverse whisper will be ventured against the words in ordinary homes. The singer is placed on a vantage-ground, certain that at least the words of the song will be outwardly respected, and the possible ground of unfriendly criticism thus narrowed to begin with.

But there is much more than this.

One feels the power of His words for oneself as one sings. One loves them and rejoices in them, and what can be greater help to any singer than that? And one knows they are true, and that they cannot really return void; and what can give greater confidence than that? God may bless the singing of any words, but He must bless the singing of His own Word, if that promise means what it says.

The only real difficulty in the matter is that Scripture songs, as a rule, require a little more practice than others. Then practice them a little more!

You think nothing of the trouble of learning (for instance) a sonata, which takes you many a good hour's practice before you can render it perfectly and expressively. But you shrink from a song, the accompaniment of which you cannot read off without any trouble at all. And you never think of such a thing as taking one-tenth the pains to learn that accompaniment that you took to learn that sonata!

Very likely, too, you take the additional pains to learn the sonata off by heart, so that you may play it more effectively. But you do not take pains to learn your accompaniment by heart, so that you may throw all your power into the expression of the words, undistracted by reading the notes and turning over the leaves. It is far more useful to have half a dozen Scripture songs thoroughly learnt and made your own, than to have in your portfolio several dozen easy settings of sacred poetry which you get through with your eyes fixed on the notes. And every one thus thoroughly mastered makes it easier to master others. You will say that all this refers only to drawing-room singing. So it does, primarily, but then it is the drawing-room singing which has been so little for Jesus and so much for self and society; and so much less has been said about it, and so much less done.

There would not be half the complaints of the difficulty of witnessing for Christ in even professedly Christian homes and circles, if every converted singer were also a consecrated one, for nothing raises or lowers the tone of a whole evening so much as the character of the music. There are few things which show more clearly that, as a rule, a very definite step in advance is needed beyond being a believer or even a worker for Christ. Over how many grand or cottage pianos could the motto, "For Jesus' sake *only*" be hung, without being either a frequent reproach or altogether inappropriate?

But what is learnt will naturally be sung. And oh! How many Christian parents give their daughters the advantage of singing lessons without troubling themselves in the least about what songs are learnt, provided they are not exceptionally foolish! Still more pressingly I would say, how many Christian principals, to whom young lives are entrusted at the most important time of all for training, do not give themselves the least concern about this matter?

As I write, I turn aside to refer to a list of songs learnt last term by a fresh young voice which would willingly be trained for higher work. There is just one sacred song in the whole long list, and even that hardly such a one as the writer of the letter above quoted would care to sing in her fervent-spirited service of Christ. All the rest are harmless and pleasing, but only suggestive of the things of earth, the things of the world that is passing away. Not one that might lead upward and onward, not one that might touch a careless heart to seek first the kingdom of God, not one that might show forth the glory and praise of our King, not one that tells out His grace and love, not one that carries His comfort to His weary ones or His joy to His loving ones! She is left to find and learn such songs as best she may; those which she will sing with all the ease and force gained by good teaching of them are no help at all, but rather hindrance in anything like wish or attempt to sing *for Jesus*.

There is not the excuse that the songs of God's kingdom, songs which waft His own words to the souls around, would not have answered the teacher's purpose as well. God has taken care of that. He has not left Himself without witness in this direction. He has given the most perfect melodies and the richest harmonies to be linked with His own words, and no singer can be trained beyond His wonderful provision in this way.

I pray that even these poor words of mine may reach the consciences of some of those who have this responsibility, and lead them to be no longer unfaithful in this important matter, no longer giving this strangely divided service—training, as they profess to desire, the souls for God, and yet allowing the voices to be trained only for the world.

But we must not run away with the idea that singing sacred songs and singing for Jesus are convertible terms. I know by sorrowful personal experience that it is very possible to sing a sacred song and not sing it for Jesus. It is easier to have one's portfolio all right than one's heart, and the repertory is more easily arranged than the motives. When we have taken our side, and the difficulties of indecision are consequently swept away, we have a new set of more subtle temptations to encounter. And although the Master will keep, the servant must watch and pray; and it is through the watching and the praying that the keeping will be effectual.

We have, however, rather less excuse here than even elsewhere.

For we never have to sing so very suddenly that we need to be taken unawares. We have to think what to sing, and perhaps find the music, and the prelude has to be played, and all this gives quite enough time for us to recollect whose we are and whom we serve, and to arouse to the watch; quite enough, too, for quick, trustful prayer that our singing may be kept free from that wretched self-seeking or even self-consciousness, and kept entirely for Jesus. Our best and happiest singing will flow when there is a sweet, silent undercurrent of prayerful or praiseful communion with our Master all through the song. As for nervousness, I am quite sure this is the best antidote to that.

On the other hand, it is quite possible to sing for Jesus without singing a sacred song. Do not take an ell for the inch this seems to give, and run off with the idea that it does not matter after all what you sing, so that you sing in a good frame of mind! No such thing! And the admission needs very careful guarding, and must not be wrested into an excuse for looking back to the world's songs. But cases may and do arise in which it may be right to gratify a weary father, or win a wayward brother, by trying to please them with music to which they will listen when they would not listen to the songs you would father sing. There are cases in which this may be done most truly for the Lord's sake, and clearly under His guidance.

Sometimes cases arise in which we can only say, "**Neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon Thee.**" And when we honestly say that, depend upon it we shall find the promise true, "**I will guide thee with Mine eye.**" For "**God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will, with the temptation, also make a way** (Gr. *the way*) **to escape, that ye may be able to bear it**"

Now, my friends, you who have or may have far greater opportunities of displaying that banner than we women-kind, why should you be less brave and loyal than your sisters? We are weak And you are strong naturally, but recollect that want of decision always involves want of power, And compromising Christians are always weak Christians.

- You will never be mighty to the pulling down of strongholds while you have one foot in the enemy's camp, or on the supposed neutral ground, if such can exist (which I doubt), between the camps.
- You will never be a terror to the Devil till you have enlisted every gift and faculty on the Lord's side. Here is a thing in which you may practically carry out the splendid motto, "All for Jesus."
- You cannot be all for Him as long as your voice is not for Him. Which shall it be? *All* for Him, or *partly* for Him? Answer that to Him whom you call Master and Lord.

When once this drawing-room question is settled, there is not much need to expatiate about other forms of singing for Jesus. As we have opportunity we shall be willing to do good with our pleasant gift in any way or place, and it is wonderful what nice opportunities He makes for us. Whether to one little sick child, or to a thousand listeners, according to the powers and openings granted, we shall take our happy position among those who minister with singing (I Chronicles 6:32).

And in so far as we really do this unto the Lord, I am quite sure He gives the hundredfold now in this present time more than all the showy songs or self-gratifying performances we may have left for His sake.

As we steadily tread this part of the path of consecration, we shall find the difficulties left behind, and the real pleasantness of the way reached, and it will be a delight to say to oneself, "I cannot sing the old songs"; and though you have thought it quite enough to say, "With my song will I please my friends," especially if they happened to be pleased with a mildly sacred song or two, you will strike a higher and happier, a richer and purer note, and say with David, "**With my song will I praise Him.**"

David said also, "**My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto Thee, and my soul, which Thou hast redeemed.**"

And you will find that this comes true.

Singing for Jesus, our Saviour and King,
Singing for Jesus, the Lord whom we love!
All adoration we joyously bring,
Longing to praise as they praise Him above

Singing for Jesus, our Master and Friend,
Telling His love and His marvellous grace,—
Love from eternity, love to the end,
Love for the loveless, the sinful, and base.

Singing for Jesus, and trying to win
Many to love Him, and join in the song,
Calling the weary and wandering in,
Rolling the chorus of gladness along.

Singing for Jesus, our Life and our Light;
Singing for Him as we press to the mark;
Singing for Him when the morning is bright;
Singing, still singing, for Him in the dark

Singing for Jesus, our Shepherd and Guide;
Singing for gladness of heart that He gives
Singing for wonder and praise that He died;
Singing for blessing and joy that He lives?

Singing for Jesus, oh, singing with joy;
Thus will we praise Him, and tell out His love
Till He shall call us to brighter employ
Singing for Jesus forever above.

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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