

J. Spencer Curwen *The Boy's Voice* (1891)

The following questions were proposed:

(1) It is a common practice in country choirs for boys and tenors to force the lower register to sing notes which should be taken in the higher or head register. The notes thus forced are harsh and unmusical in tone, and generally flat in pitch. How would you correct this fault in boys?

(2) What method is employed in —— Cathedral for developing and strengthening the higher (head) register in boys' voices?

Rev. W. Mann, M.A., Precentor of Bristol:

(1.) I think it almost impossible to remedy the evil you complain of after the boys have been accustomed to sing upper notes from the chest for some time—say one or two years. Our practice here is to secure boys between the ages of 9 and 11, before they have been singing elsewhere, or certainly before they have acquired any faulty tricks of forcing the voice.

(2.) In training boys' voices never allow them to shout. If they commence singing when young they may be taught by scale practice (always singing quietly) to bridge over the break which exists between the chest and head voice. This is an art, and requires experience.

(3.) Speaking generally, I should say that judicious scale practice is the remedy likely to be of most service in the case specified, teaching boys, by singing quietly, to glide the chest voice into the upper register. I recommend the syllable "la" as generally best for the purpose all through the scale. Boys should keep their tongues down, open mouths well, sing not through teeth, &c. &c. I find that boys acquire the cathedral style of singing (with the well-known flute or bell-like tone) chiefly by example. In singing with boys who have already acquired it the younger ones catch the style, just as birds are taught to sing by trained songsters. The untrained rustic can never naturally produce this tone, but much may be done by (1) careful scale practice; (2) strict enforcement of a quiet easy style, and rigid prohibition of shouting, or forcing the voice; (3) the occasional example of trained singers.