

LINES IN PRAISE
OF
GOOD RINGING.

Wedmore,
Somerset.

By
E. B. BARTER.

PRICE THREEPENCE.

Deborah Hamnerford

*Ever the same, yet ever new, Changed, and yet true,
Like the pure heaven's unfailing blue,
Which varies on from hour to hour, Yet of the same high love and power
Tells always: -such may seem, Through life, or waking, or in dream,
The echoing bells.
(Keble).*

Many Ringers are familiar with the late Rev. F. E. Robinson's monumental record of notable achievements "Among the Bells" in modern times. And now comes a cousin of that grand old man in the person of Mr. E. B. Barter, to bid us 'consider the things of old.' The burden of his message may indeed be aptly summed up in the words of the Hebrew Prophet: 'Look unto the rock whence ye were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye were digged.' In homely, vigorous verse our author reminds us of the perplexing problems gradually solved, the formidable difficulties eventually overcome, by the enterprise and perseverance of our forefathers, and exhorts us, who have entered into their labours, to prove ourselves worthy of the great heritage of the past.

I trust that Mr. Barter's lines will have a wide circulation among Ringers of the present day. They are well designed to bring home to us all the immense advantages that we enjoy as the result of centuries of persistent progress both in the Bellhanger's craft and in the science of Change-ringing, and thereby to impress upon our minds the responsibility of making full use of those advantages in the furtherance of our noble art and in the service of the Church of God.

F. LLEWELLYN EDWARDS.

KINGTON MAGNA, ST. ANDREW'S DAY,
DORSET. 1922.

CHURCH BELLS, AND THE ART OF RINGING.

If you're a man who loves the bells,
The church bells of our England,
Come! read my rhyme and the tale it tells,
And my plea for the bells of England.

Our bells were hung in those glorious towers,
The church towers of old England ;
They were cast and hung, and faithfully rung
By the pious men of old England.

By " pious " I mean that they did their best,
Their absolute best for old England:
No money was spared, for they really cared,
And they wrought with a will in old England.

(Trade unions would never have prospered then
And they didn't " down tools " in old England).
They were ignorant, bigoted, cruel and rough,
Those " pious " old forbears of England ;

But they loved their work, and that was enough,
Those men who made our England ;
And with all their faults I honour those men —
Can we do as well in New England ?

They hung their bells as well as they could
With stocks and frames of seasoned wood ;
Elaborate cannons, a long thin bell,
Six inches " flight " on the clapper as well.

This meant a very strong, long, high cage
Their skill in making this you can gauge,
When you see how they did it, and weren't
Demented
By the fact that screws were not yet invented !
Just think what it means,—what they had to do,
To make frame, wheel and fittings without nut,
bolt or screw.

They had done their best: the machine was made,
And then came the job of getting it played,
And the simplest way to produce all the sounds
Was to strike in succession, and so ring " rounds."

And in earliest days when bells were few,
That was the best that men could do,
But very soon, when the number grew more,
They tried to do more than was done before,
And were not content to ring only " rounds,"
But thought out some " changes " to vary the
sounds.

Now, when there were only three bells there,
They could only change a single pair,
And six such changes brought the bells round :
No more could be done till more bells were found.
But these six changes were soon learnt by heart,
And in this humble way change-ringing did start.

Then if a tower got one bell more,
The possible changes were twenty four ;
Another bell gave them changes in plenty,
For on five bells you get a hundred and twenty.
(This is commonly known as " six score " : —
You get six times that, with one bell more).

And so, as other things forward moved,
The art of ringing also improved ;
And then in time some worthy old fellow
Found he got more music from his bells so
mellow

By each time changing a couple of pair—
And they found they could do it, if each took care.
And that's the beginning of ringers' troubles,
When those keen pioneers invented " doubles."

For herein lay the ringers' art,
They couldn't learn six-score changes by heart.
But they soon found out, if they knew what to do,
They could ring the hundred and twenty hrough,
So each man began to study and try
To find out the Method, the How and the Why.

They gave their minds to learning it up ;
'Twas before the days of the Football Cup !
For—just one moment —I'll give you a date :
Stedman published his book, 1668.

And probably then, when the art was new,
There must have been a backward few Who
couldn't get on as well as the rest,
Though even these tried, and did their best.

So they wrote some changes out on a card,
Rang them one at a time, and practised hard ;
But they couldn't get on, those men forlorn,
And that's how old Churchyard Bob was born.

Now, Churchyard Bob is what men do
Who have 'i't the grit to " smack it through " ;
The trouble of learning they lazily shirk,
And let somebody else do all the head work ;
They write down a few changes they don't understand,
Ring them one at a time — as a copy-book's
planned.

I won't say old Stoney may not have his use
(As the apple-sauce said, when it met the goose),
When the bells go bad. and one can do little better,
Than haul one's bell up, and with great pains
set her.

And truly of all monotonous sounds
There's none much worse than unlimited
" rounds,"

And a few call changes struck well and true
Give a kind of a hint what the bells can do.

But oh ! how dull for the men who ring
To go on doing the same old thing !
It's just as if the organist played
One bar of a hymn and there he stayed,
And played it again and again and again —
To spot the tune you can try in vain—
And when he had done it enough, as he reckoned,
He proceeded to do the same with the second.

If he really did this, he'd soon lose his place,
And be hounded out in deep disgrace.
And yet, in ever so many towers,
This kind of ringing pleases the powers,
Who ought to insist that the bells should be rung
As the men intended who had them hung.

But Churchyard Bob is a hardy soul, It's
impossible quite his knell to toll;
And in some towers not far away
He's made up his mind and means to stay.

I believe, in chiming, truth to tell,
One best hears every note of a bell,
But it can't be done with a " chiming board"—
A device by ringers to be abhorred.

It's a wonderful age and we're wonderful men,
So very much better than folk were then :
Those poor old chaps couldn't even spell !
Just read the inscription on many a bell.

We hang our bells with modern knowledge.
Stresses and strains worked out at college ;
Wooden frames give place to steel—
Roller bearings . . . a smaller wheel.

The bells go so easy it needs no strength
To ring a " touch " of a moderate length ;
All that is needed is use of the brains,
Some careful thought, and taking pains.
With all this in our favour, aren't we to blame
If we let those old fellows so put us to shame ?

Now, if you try you'll never regret
The trouble, spent, for the pleasure you'll get
Will far outweigh the few hours of work
Which call-change ringers so lazily shirk.

For its just like music, we can't know it all,
The best we can do is a part but small:
The work itself is a source of delight
If we're men enough to see things right.

And I can't describe the pride you'll feel
When you hear " That's all," and you've got
your peal.

I've told you six bells give six " six-score,"
Another bell gives seven times more:
Five thousand and forty's the total lot
That from seven bells can be truly got.

And five thousand changes is the lowest amount
That as a legitimate peal may count,
Any other amount not quite so much
Amongst all ringers is known as a " touch."

In much of the ringing on eight bells, you'll
find, Seven are changing, the tenor's behind;
These seven bells change three pair every time,
So that is called " Triples " (I can't make it
rhyme).

I've tried to show what a lot there is in it,
For men can ring twenty-eight changes a minute,
It needs concentration and careful thought :
The "pulling together " essential to sport.

And can you show any other game
Of which there can be said this same,
That boys can take their place with men—
Peals have been rung by boys of ten —
In which old men of eighty can share with boys,
And do as well what each enjoys ?

But as for the matter of teaching you how,
That's not my job —at least, tisn't now ;
All this time I've been trying to make you see
What a source of delight our bells should be.

Now " rounds " roll up as I give the last call, I've done
what I wanted to do : " That's all."

E. B. B.

