

CONCERTS

We sang a great deal, in our early days, in model lodging houses; interesting work, and well worth while. Many a wet eye I have seen amongst those weary down-and-outs. But the concerts were often marred by the moralising of well-meaning smug people whose idea of manners was to speak down to the men. I am not in favour of capital punishment, but, if we must have it, why persist in hanging the wrong people?

By this time, we were giving many complete concerts, and were in ever-increasing demand by churches and charitable agencies of one kind and another. We had also become prime favourites at the Corporation Saturday Afternoon Recitals (fee, three guineas).

The first of these recitals at which we appeared was given in the Camlachie Institute. It was a snowy day, and there was a big football match on at Celtic Park. The Gallowgate was chock-a-block. At the hour when the Recital should have started, I was on the hall doorstep looking for missing singers. One by one they came, agitated, perspiring, some on foot, others alighting from crowded tramcars. One batch arrived in an old growler (licensed cab). How many constituted the batch I cannot recall, but, as they emerged, the remark was made that it was "like a kirk scalin' on Communion Sunday." On to the platform we went, opening with "Strike the Lyre." I then discovered that I was wearing a large pair of goloshes. (Many years afterwards I was to cap this by conducting the "Messiah" arrayed in evening dress, plus, of all things, a pair of light fawn spats.)

Things were going well, and Glasgow had actually become too small for us. We started going places,

amongst our earliest excursions being Balmore, Bowling, Alexandria, and Ardrossan. At Bowling, the plaster roof of the hall seemed to resent our *fortes*. As we sang, the roof began to scale, and the more we sang the more it scaled, coming down on our heads and shoulders in little white showers. But we sang on.

At ordinary concerts we wore ordinary dress. Not so at the annual concerts in Glasgow. There the women insisted on evening dress. And so it was. 1901-05 was a period of chiffon and bows and all sorts of falderals. A dress was simply a casing on which things were plastered. Recollecting those weird *creations* is like recalling a bad dream. Later, we tried to get some sort of uniformity by recommending that *white* dresses should be worn. One would have thought that white admitted of little or no variation. A mistake. There are apparently as many shades of white as there are colours in a rainbow. We fought that battle right up to the introduction of robes in 1924, and the women won every time. From what dark days comes this feminine impulse to be just a little bit different?

SUCCESS

Now all this time we had been working up to something. M'Dougall, of that ilk, had ambitions. Him you will remember as the little man who, after the first rehearsal in 1901, kept saying: "This is going to be a great choir."

One of his ambitions was to hold our Annual Concert in the City Hall. The City Hall! We all laughed; for the "City" was the second largest hall in Glasgow, and had a concert tradition both long and honourable. But it happened, and it was a brilliant success. It ought to be explained that, in the running of this particular concert, we had the assistance of a committee of West-end supporters of the Toynbee movement. Practically all the main balcony and front area seats were disposed of by that committee. For what remained, we were responsible.

Highly successful as the concert was, it had one defect: it was much too long-drawn out. Young choirs are given to this sort of thing. Many years were to pass before we ourselves learned that lesson. To-day, we keep our concerts well within two hours. Better to leave an audience hungry than satiated.

Another defect shown up by that City Hall concert was the looseness of our organisation. Painful memories. On the afternoon of the concert, I went to the hall to make sure that the platform arrangements were in order. To my consternation I discovered that the reserved area seats carried no numbers. No one had given a thought to the matter. A rush to the Candleriggs to get numbered tickets and drawing pins, then back to the hall to spend the best part of the afternoon pinning the tickets on! Returning in the evening for the concert I was

confronted with another muddle. The unreserved ticket-holders, arriving early, had swarmed into the reserved seats, and there they sat, nor could they be got to move. Walter Freer, the hall curator, was called in. I can still see the bustling little man coaxing and wheedling, and then, at his wits' end, threatening to call in the police. Eventually he succeeded in restoring order. Not a propitious start for a concert.

This looseness of organisation arose primarily from the casual way in which office-bearers were elected. The question of fitness for a post did not enter the minds of those good people. If *Mac* was a pal, he would be proposed, and in he would go, square peg or round peg, or no peg at all. And this unbalanced state of matters lasted for many years—a choir highly organised on the musical side and with little or no organisation on the business side. Administration, we were to learn from bitter experience, calls for more than a "he's a jolly good fellow" attitude of mind. The jolly good fellows must be in their appropriate places, you in your small corner, and I in mine; and the jolly good fellows, moreover, must be capable of coping with the jolly good jobs assigned to them.

Evangeline Florence, a noted singer of the time, was solo artist at the concert. The City Hall (and other large halls as well) called for such a feature or *draw*, for, in those days, star-gazing occupied much of the time and attention of concert goers. To what degree Miss Florence scintillated, I cannot now recall: but scintillate she did, I am sure.

That City Hall concert was in 1905. In the following season, 1905-06, the change over took place, when, on a question of self-determination, we walked out of Toynbee House and became the Glasgow Orpheus Choir.