The Sheffield Festival Choir. A Talk with Dr. Henry Coward

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pursuits, and mutual respect and affection constitute friendship, then I may claim to be one of the oldest among John Thomas's numerous friends, and claim also the right to speak of him as I have known him. Although in early days I did not enjoy very intimate acquaintance with the future Pencerdd Gwalia, yet I have a distinct recollection of his manner of speaking and personal appearance, and I marvel at the slight change which is apparent between the John Thomas of to-day and in the days when we were 'school and form-fellows.' My friend presents the same erect and dignified form and lithe figure, the same unclouded brow, and speaks in the same voice with which he conversed with me upwards of fifty years ago. His character has been equally consistent with his personal appearance. An admirable student, he developed into an equally admirable professor; the most modest of boys, he is now the most modest of men; his yearning for every sort of knowledge has made him an accomplished scholar and linguist; and last, but not least, being born one of nature's gentlemen, he remains one of the most gentle of men.

"I am afraid that I have already occupied too much space, but I must be permitted to add a few words respecting my friend's proficiency on his instrument, and having heard all the great harpists of modern times—to wit, Parish Alvars, Felix Godefroid, T. H. Wright, and the two Chattertons—I have no hesitation in saying that none of them approached John Thomas in the technical skill, beauty of phrasing, and refinement of style which have raised him to the very head of his branch of the musical profession in this country."

THE SHEFFIELD FESTIVAL CHOIR.

A TALK WITH DR. HENRY COWARD.

THE London and Provincial musical critics raised a chorus of praise—nay, verily, a pæan—in recording the mighty achievements of the chorus at the recent Sheffield Musical Festival. "I have not returned to hear the second part of 'The Messiah' at a Festival for fifteen years," an eminent veteran of the fraternity was heard to remark. But not only was he present for Part II. in the Albert Hall, but, like his colleagues, he remained until the last note of that glorious Amen chorus resounded in its exultant tones. In order to obtain for the benefit of our readers some of the secrets of the extraordinary success attending the efforts of the choir, Dr. Henry Coward, a master chorus-master, kindly furnished "Our Special Correspondent" at the Festival with an opportunity for a quiet chat upon some matters choralistic.

First, however, honour to whom honour is due. And that is to Dr. Coward himself, not only as the chorus-master of the Festival, but as the life-giver to that splendid choral force. Although he was born in Liverpool, Henry

Coward is a Yorkshireman by family and descent, and since he was seven years old he has been an inhabitant of Sheffield. On the 26th of this month he will attain his jubilee. As a boy Dr. Coward was apprenticed to one of those industries for which Sheffield is famous. In due time he won prizes for dexterous handicraft at Sheffield Exhibitions, and thus he was looked upon as one of the most skilful artisans of the town. But greater things were in store for him. When he was fifteen years of age he attended a Tonic Sol-fa singing-class. He not only made remarkable progress in his Doh-me-soh studies, but he soon began to teach the method to others. Success

DR. HENRY COWARD.

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY MR. DICKINSON, GLOSSOP ROAD, SHEFFIELD.

attended him, and not a few of his present-day attainments are due to the fact that he has had to surmount difficulties with no other aid than that of self-help. He showed so much aptitude for teaching that he determined to become a schoolmaster. Upon leaving the workshop he passed through the pupil-teacher stage, and in twelve months found himself headmaster of a British school. Music, however, occupied much of his time. He conducted several choirs, the Sheffield Amateur Orchestral Society, edited a tune-book, became musical critic of the *Sheffield Independent*, composed a cantata, and, moreover, he studied continuously. Thus he led a busy life, not only in the direction of self-improvement, but in the beneficent work of popularising music in Sheffield, where he is held in the greatest respect by all classes of the community. It is no wonder that music

became the all-absorbing passion of his life, and that therefore ten years ago he entered the musical profession.

In 1889 he took the degree of Bachelor in Music at the University of Oxford, and the Doctorate followed in 1894. He is also a Graduate of the Tonic Sol-fa College. It is impossible within the limits of these preliminary remarks to adequately record Dr. Coward's labours on behalf of the cause of music in Sheffield. One event must, however, be mentioned. On the occasion of the visit of the Queen to Sheffield, May 21, 1897, Dr. Coward conducted, from an improvised watch-tower, a choir of 50,000 school children gathered together in Norfolk Park. The manner in which he led this Gargantuan array of singers on that memorable occasion called forth expressions of the highest praise. It is no wonder that so masterly a piece of vocal generalship should have had its fitting complement in his being presented to Her Majesty on that eventful day in the history of Sheffield.

But it is time to refer to the Festival Choir which has so greatly distinguished itself during the past month. It numbers 322 voices, distributed thus :—

Sopranos, 87.	Altos, 76.
Tenors, 72.	Basses, 87.

Every singer has to pass through the ordeal of a severe test before gaining admittance into the choir. This test is of a threefold nature: (1) the singing of one of the runs in "For unto us," (2) reading from sight, and (3) an exercise in time. The sight-reading and time tests were specially written by Dr. W. G. McNaught. The entrance examination is conducted by a Committee and thus no favour is shown to any candidate; even the members of Dr. Coward's own choir have to pass the examination which is very properly insisted upon. After the Festival the choir is disbanded.

The rehearsals for the Festival commenced in the second week in January. Fifty choral rehearsals were held for the seven works duly performed. "The rule," says Dr. Coward, "was that the singers *must* attend at least seventy-five per cent. of the rehearsals: if not, out they go. All the choir are Sheffield people, except some fifteen or twenty who live within a radius of twenty miles. One enthusiastic member has travelled no less than 1,500 miles to my rehearsals! Another, who has had to train it twelve miles in and out every time, has not missed a single rehearsal. A batch of six have had to stay the night with friends in the city on every occasion, as there was no means whereby they could return to their homes. We know of no social distinctions. A manufacturer will stand side by side with one of his workmen; a manufacturer's daughter next to one of her father's work-girls; a lady of high degree beside a dressmaker, and yet there has never been the slightest jar—everyone has been animated with a pure love of the art."

The choir is a purely voluntary one. The only payment is that known as "expenses," which in the case of "the 1,500 miles traveller" must have knocked the word "nominal" into a cocked-hat! Each lady-singer received the sum of twenty-five shillings, out of which she had to disburse the cost of all her music, travelling expenses, and the regulation "garment of praise," which at Sheffield was embodied in the technical term—blouse. Our lady readers may be interested in knowing that the blouses worn by the sopranos were of a greenish hue, and that those of the altos reflected the tone-colour of their lovely voices—"the pink of perfection." The men received five shillings less—that is, a sovereign—an amount which had to cover the cost of music, travelling expenses, refreshments, &c. The Festival, it should be noted, is unusually strong on its administrative as well as on its musical side—the business men are musical, and the musical men are businesslike. Happy Sheffield!

"Then as to your methods, Dr. Coward." "Well, I pattern *everything*. English people are very imitative, and I find that I get the best results by showing them with my own voice *how* to do it. I pay great attention to the elocutionary side of chorus-singing, to phrasing, tone production, and poetic interpretation. I have every confidence in my singers, and they, on their part, possess the knowledge and have the enthusiasm to respond to my teaching, with what results you have heard to-day. Perhaps you could get some better idea of the plan I pursue if I borrow for you from one of the choir a copy of one of the works we have performed." This Dr. Coward was kind enough to arrange—the work in question being Sullivan's "Golden Legend."

Here are some specimens of the marks—sometimes in blue pencil, sometimes in red, now and then in red *and* blue—that were made by that good bass singer, Mr. Harry Traviss, at the various rehearsals. The references are to Novello's octavo score :—

- P. 3, l. 1. The word "cannot" is underlined.
 " 4 (and elsewhere). An English translation is written under the Latin words. The change of rhythm (l. 3) is bluely encircled.
 " 7, l. 2. The following to guard against any faltering in taking the G flat (enharmonic change): it is not only spoken about at the rehearsal, but the singer has to mark it in his copy. Similar warnings are to be found in other places.

The image shows a musical score snippet from Sullivan's "Golden Legend". It features two staves. The top staff is for the Bass (BASS-A) and the bottom staff is for the Soprano (Soprano). The lyrics are in Latin: "De - funct - os" and "be - wa - re the dead!". The English translation "the dead!" is written below the Latin. The score includes performance markings such as "power...", "pp", "mf", and "&c.". There are also some annotations in red and blue ink, including a circled "8" at the bottom.

- P. 9, l. 4, bar 2. "One of the keenest dissonances in the work."
 ,, 21, l. 3, bar 3. "Don't take the sibilant too soon."
 ,, 34, l. 3. "Crystallize words and rather thin tone. Listen to the accompaniment."
 ,, 35. The words "woe" and "fear" are underlined.
 ,, 40, l. 2. ("Alas!") "Not *ah-loss*."
 ,, 46, last bar. There is a significant warning—"WORDS."
 ,, 47 ("O gladsome light"). There are many dynamic indications and underlinings throughout. For instance, under such phrases as those in the *tenor*: p. 47, l. 1, bar 3, l. 2, bars 5 and 6; *bass*: p. 48, l. 3, bar 4, p. 51, l. 1, bar 2 (first *bass*), which has the direction, "slightly accented." Under the reiterated low F's (second *bass*) appears the word "soundless."
 ,, 67, l. 3 (sopranos and altos). "Disappear into eternity."
 ,, 74, l. 4. "Penetration and softness needed here."
 ,, 92. ("The night is calm"). "The old madrigal style."
 ,, 101. The word "pure" doubly underlined throughout.
 ,, 107. The word "Murderer" very much blue-marked.
 ,, 108. Against "Unbar the door"—"an explosive."
 ,, 129, l. 2, bars 1 and 2. "Triplet rhythm and dotted quaver after."
 ,, 130. At the entry of the fugue subject—"One breath." At letter E, "let each part enter prominently and then taper off."
 ,, 135, bar 1. "Not too" *ff*—thus indicating a reserve of strength for the final chords, which is indicated by a tremendous on the unison E at the word "shine"—and the note did shine!

Such are a few examples of the thoughtful care, the commendable thoroughness, and the minute attention to detail which characterise Dr. Coward's choir-training. No wonder that such wonderful results were attained at Sheffield. It must, of course, be admitted that he has splendid material to work upon and mould into shape. His singers have magnificent voices and an innate love of music. But in addition they possess enthusiasm, alertness, intelligence, and unlimited capacity for taking pains. Moreover, they have a thorough belief in their conductor, they would do almost anything at his command. In proof thereof a gentleman of some local importance and a member of the choir remarked: "I don't know how it is, but at rehearsals the Doctor makes me feel like a child. I am forced to do his bidding. "Aye!" observed a fellow chorister, "if he told us to stand on our heads we should be inclined to do it." No wonder then that their leader's strong magnetic personality, his soul-deep love of music, no less than his boundless energy, and his white-heat enthusiasm permeated every member of that superb choral force which gave distinction to the Sheffield Musical Festival of 1899.

As a special tribute to the excellence of the Sheffield Chorus, we adopt the unusual course of giving the name of every member of the Festival Choir.

SHEFFIELD MUSICAL FESTIVAL, 1899.

THE CHORUS.

SOPRANOS.

Abbott, Miss M. L.	Brown, Miss Lottie E.
Alderson, Miss	Burton, Miss Pattie
Barker, Miss H.	Cantrell, Miss F. M.
Baum, Miss Rose	Carter, Miss G. E.
Beard, Miss Beatrice M.	Charlesworth, Miss J.
Bickerstaff, Miss M.	Clarke, Miss C.
Bird, Miss E. E.	Clark, Miss Emma
Brailsford, Mrs.	Coldwell, Miss B. M.
Bramwell, Miss M. J.	Cole, Mrs. T. S.
Bright, Mrs. Joseph	Cooke, Mrs.

SOPRANOS (continued).

Cooper, Mrs.	Parker, Miss Maria
Cross, Miss Annie	Parkes, Miss E. B.
Davies, Miss E.	Perkinton, Miss F.
Dixon, Miss D. M. W.	Pexton, Mrs.
Dixon, Miss Edith	Reuss, Miss B. E.
Ellis, Mrs. E. A.	Rich, Mrs.
Elshaw, Mrs.	Rich, Miss Eva
Favell, Miss Dora	Ripper, Mrs.
Frankish, Miss Kathleen	Ripper, Miss Eva M.
Gadsby, Miss A. M.	Robertshaw, Miss F. L.
Gaunt, Mrs.	Robertson, Mrs.
Gibson, Miss M. H.	Robinson, Mrs. W. H.
Greaves, Miss Ethel M.	Robinson, Miss F. C.
Gray, Miss Amy	Sanders, Miss E.
Hahn, Miss Carlsheim	Sanderson, Miss E.
Harrop, Mrs.	Seager, Miss E.
Hawksworth, Miss F.	Senior, Mrs. Charles
Hookins, Miss E. G.	Senior, Miss E. K.
Horton, Miss M. C.]	Shera, Mrs.
Husband, Mrs.	Short, Mrs.
Hutchinson, Miss E. S.	Simpson, Miss E. J.
Ibbotson, Miss R. M.	Slater, Mrs. (née Miss Annie
Johnson, Miss H. A.	Webster)
Keat, Miss B.	Tasker, Miss S. E.
Kershaw, Miss B.	Tedman, Mrs.
Kingdon, Miss Marion	Tunncliffe, Mrs.
Knowles, Miss E.	Tutin, Miss Lizzie
Longden, Miss S. E.	Wall, Miss E.
Maitland, Mrs.	Ward, Mrs. A. J.
Makin, Mrs.	Waterfall, Miss
Marsh, Mrs. H. P.	White, Miss L.
Marsh, Miss Ada	Widdowson, Miss F.
Murrowood, Miss	Winder, Miss M. E.
North, Miss C. M.	Wynn, Miss Blanche

CONTRALTOS.

Andrew, Miss A. G.	Horsfall, Miss M. A.
Andrew, Miss Bertha	Howell, Miss Zoé
Aston, Miss A.	Inkley, Mrs.
Bee, Miss Annie	Jessop, Miss L.
Biggin, Miss E. A.	Kirk, Mrs.
Birtles, Miss Agnes	Lawson, Mrs. J. H.
Bivens, Miss Ellen	Neave, Mrs. Alvenia
Blackshaw, Miss E.	Padget, Miss
Booth, Miss Myra	Paliser, Mrs. F. A.
Brook, Miss P.	Pearson, Mrs. H. M.
Brown, Miss Alice	Pennington, Miss C. S.
Brown, Miss A. E.	Pennington, Miss N.
Cauwood, Miss Kate	Pollard, Miss E.
Charge, Mrs. E. H.	Popple, Miss Nellie
Chisholm, Miss Nellie	Robinson, Miss M. A.
Cocker, Mrs. J. G.	Scott, Mrs.
Cowlshaw, Miss A. A.	Shimeld, Miss A. M.
Cowlshaw, Miss M.	Sidebottom, Miss
Craven, Mrs.	Skerritt, Miss Amy
Dewe, Mrs.	Skerritt, Miss Bertha
Dickenson, Miss Ada	Styring, Mrs.
Dyson, Miss	Thexton, Miss H. M.
Eaton, Mrs. J. B.	Thompson, Mrs. J. H.
Fenton, Mrs.	Tucker, Miss H. M.
Flannery, Miss M.	Tutin, Miss Clara
Foster, Miss Kate	Uttley, Miss L.
Freeman, Miss A.	Varley, Miss L.
Gadsby, Mrs.	Vazson, Mrs.
Glossop, Mrs. E. B.	Ward, Miss C.
Grice, Mrs.	Ward, Mrs. N. Leng
Hack, Mrs.	Whitehead, Miss A.
Hatfield, Miss Annie	Whitehead, Miss M.
Hall, Miss Elinor	Widdowson, Miss E. F.
Hall, Miss Jessie	Wilkinson, Miss F.
Hancox, Miss Jennie	Wilkinson, Miss R.
Hepworth, Miss Lucy	Wills, Miss A. H.
Hoole, Miss Florence	Woodcock, Miss E.
Horsfall, Mrs. T.	Wynn, Mrs. W. F.

TENORS.

Barton, S. H.	Green, T. William
Bassett, F.	Gregory, Ben
Beardshaw, A.	Gregory, J. Francis
Biggin, A. E.	Hague, A. Thomas
Bingham, Nettleship	Harris, W.
Bingley, F.	Harrop, George
Bivens, G. E.	Hatfield, William Charles
Bright, Joseph	Hill, R. J.
Bryars, Harry F.	Hobson, Albert Edward
Budds, J. Arthur	Hunt, Arthur E.
Burrell, Herbert	Ibbotson, J.
Burrows, A. S.	Jessop, Charles
Burrows, W. H.	Jones, A. E.
Cartledge, F. W.	Kaye, J. jun.
Cooper, J.	Kenning, J. C.
Cousins, Frederick	Kitching, G. E.
Coward, H. S.	Maclaurin, James
Cowley, Joseph	Maclaurin, Fred.
Crossley, C.	Maclaurin, W. H.
Eccles, T. Arnold	Mason, H. W.
Elliott, T. G.	Mitchell, Rev. F. G.
Fieldhouse, Harry	Neale, Edward
Froggatt, J. William	Pearson, J. William
Furness, William Thomas	Pickering, William
Gibbs, Elisha	Ridge, Walter
Godber, Isaac	Robinson, William Henry
Granger, J. J.	Senior, T. F.

TENORS (*continued*).

Shimeld, Maurice
Sladen, Charles
Swinburn, Charles
Talford, Samuel, jun.
Todd, T. Wilkinson
Tomlinson, Maurice
Turner, Joseph
Tye, W. H.
Unwin, E. J.

Uttley, Ernest
Vazson, Joseph
Wagstaff, W.
Walton, J. E.
Walton, T.
Ward, Arthur J.
Watson, P. R.
Wilson, W. H.
Wragg, William

BASSES.

Booker, G. F.
Brown, R. J.
Cawthorne, G. F.
Crappier, H. W.
Darbyshire, William
Eaton, J. B.
Fagg, T. C.
Fenton, R. W.
Finnemore, Rev. J.
Flannery, M. J.
Glossop, E. B.
Gray, Joseph
Greenwood, J.
Guest, George
Hague, H.
Hall, Frederick
Hall, H.
Hallam, J. H.
Hamer, W. A.
Harrison, J. C.
Harrop, F. G.
Haslam, Wilfred
Hearnshaw, E. P.
Holling, G. B.
Hudson, John
Innocent, A. E.
Jervis, Walter
Johnson, J. J.
Johnson, Samuel
Laister, Frank
Langwell, W. W.
Lawson, J. H.
Leah, H. W.
Lycett, Joseph
Mangan, J.
Marrison, J. B.
Marsden, J. R.
Maxfield, Joshua
Memmott, J.
Milnes, Thomas
Moss, Robert
Needham, E. G.
Nicholl, Charles
Nichols, William

Phillips, Louis
Plowright, J. W.
Reynolds, Horace
Richardson, A. Frank
Richardson, J. G.
Riden, Albert
Rudd, William
Sanderson, William Henry
Seed, George A.
Senior, Charles Randall
Shimeld, Frank
Skelton, William S.
Slack, John
Slater, Arthur
Smith, F. A.
Southey, G. William
Stagg, Herbert
Stancer, H.
Stevenson, W. R.
Stones, John
Stray, William
Swann, G. H.
Swinburn, Albert
Tattersall, John William
Taylor, J.
Thompson, J. H.
Tomline, William
Traviss, Harry
Turton, J. H.
Walkland, George
Ward, F.
Ward, Harry Percy
Waterson, H.
Watson, J. T.
Watson, T. H.
Wilde, W. H. E.
Wilkinson, Ambrose
Winkley, J. Luther
Wood, W. W.
Wooding, Jonah
Wragg, Joseph
Wright, A. H.
Wrigley, Francis

CHORUS-MASTER—HENRY COWARD (Mus. Doc., Oxon.).

SIR GEORGE MARTIN ON THE
TRAINING OF CHOIRMASTERS.

A PAPER READ AT THE CHURCH CONGRESS.

THERE is an ever increasing demand for good choirmasters. In nineteen out of twenty cases when I am asked to recommend an organist and choirmaster, the qualification for choir-training is placed foremost. Of course a good player is always desired, but the capacity for choir-training is more urgently insisted upon. Let us then examine for a few moments the methods of training young men to meet this important requirement.

Under favourable circumstances the best school is the Cathedral. A boy enters a choir at the age of eight or nine, and for five or six years his voice is being trained, and his musical education is being built upon the soundest foundations. If he should happen to be apt and clever he probably makes himself useful to the organist, and eventually becomes articulated to him, very frequently being intrusted with the elementary training of the younger boys in theory, &c. At the age of eighteen or nineteen he is quite qualified to undertake the duties of a choirmaster.

We will now deal with those who are not

trained in this manner. Let us take the case of a young man beginning his musical education, and we will give him the advantage of ample means (not too frequently the case), so that he may have the very best training possible. He will enter one of the great musical institutions, and, if he be wise, he will for the first two years take the pianoforte as his principal study, while the organ will be his second study. He then purchases a pedal pianoforte, or procures regular practice on an organ. In this way, if he be very diligent, he practises, say, five hours, the rest of his day being occupied with classes which he is compelled to attend, and his harmony and counter-point studies fill up any spare time.

All this is very necessary and good, but what is he doing towards becoming an efficient choirmaster? Absolutely nothing, excepting in one instance. There exists at the Royal College of Music a choir-training class, under an experienced and able professor. A choir, more or less professional, is engaged to sing, and standard works are regularly performed, while hints are given as to pace and other matters. But the student finds, when he has secured his first appointment as organist and choirmaster, that the conditions are utterly different. Instead of a professional choir, he probably has the rawest of material to work upon, and before even the simplest chant can be sung he has to set to work to get the voices correctly produced.

But how has he been prepared to face and overcome this difficulty? The natural course, one would think, would be that every organist, knowing the importance of being able to train voices, would show some desire to train his own voice. He would, one would think, as a means of gaining experience, take lessons in singing or voice production as a secondary study. But it is quite the exception to find this course taken, and everything has to be learnt after being appointed to a post as organist. This may account for the condition of the music in some of our churches. It is not overstating the case to say that such singing as is frequently heard in church would not be tolerated anywhere outside a sacred building; and to musical people, the choral service, instead of being a help to devotion, is in some cases an almost unendurable hindrance.

My experience has taught me that the worst singing is frequently found where the clerical authority is possessed of "a little knowledge" of music. The constant interference of faddists has a depressing and irritating effect on the young organist, and tends towards damping the enthusiasm of the choir, while undermining the responsibility of the choirmaster. Wherever good work of any kind is done, it may be taken for granted that the chief authority is a good organiser. A good organiser does not engage his co-workers at considerable expense, and then try to do all the work himself—he lays down certain lines