A Church Choir in Mesopotamia

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- Mr. W. Wolstenholme, All Hallows', Gospel Oak—Intermezzo in D flat, *Hollins*; Rhapsodie sur des cantiques Bretons, *Saint-Saëns*; Carillon in A flat, *J. A. Sowerbutts*; Toccata in B flat and Fantasia in E, *Wolstenholme*.
- Mr. F. J. Buckle, Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford—Sonata in D minor, *Rheinberger*; Slow movement from Sonata in D, Op. 10, *Beethoven*; Rhapsody, *Grace*; Prelude and Fugue in E flat, *Bach*.
- Mr. Percy Colley, St. Cleopas's, Toxteth, Liverpool—Sonata No. 1, *Mendelssohn*; Carillon, *Wolstenholme*; Nuptial Song, *Faulkes*; Offertoire No. 6, *Léfebvre-Wély*.
- Mr. William Dawes, Æolian Hall—Cantilena, *Goss Custard*; En forme d'Ouverture, *Hollins*; Andante with Variations, *Mendelssohn*; Postlude, Alla Marcia, *Ernest Halsey*.
- Mr. James M. Preston, St. Nicholas', Newcastle-on-Tyne—Fantasia in F minor, *Mozart*; Fantasia and Fugue in G minor, *Bach*; Toccata di Concerto, *Lemare*; Rhapsody on Catalonian Melodies, *Gigout*.
- Dr. R. Walker Robson, Christ Church, Crouch End—Fantasia and Toccata in D minor, *Stanford*; Arabesque in E, *Debussy*; Carillon, *Vierne*; Rhapsody, *Grace*; Pièce Héroïque, *Franck*.
- Mr. W. W. Starmer, St. John's Free Church, Tunbridge Wells—Evening Song, *Bairstow*; Toccata, *John Stanley*; Festival March, *Best*; Allegretto, *Wolstenholme*; 'A Song of Joy' and Fantasia in D minor, *Starmer*.
- Mr. Herbert Hodge, St. Nicholas', Cole Abbey (four recitals)—Cornelius March, *Mendelssohn*; Sonata in E flat, *Bach*; Andante in G minor, *Boëly*; Solemn Melody, *Walford Davies*; Finale from Sonata in F sharp minor, *Rheinberger*; Canzona in D minor, *Bach*; Sonata No. 4, *Mendelssohn*.
- Mr. J. A. Meale, Wesleyan Church, Stratford, E.—Symphony in E minor, *Holloway*; Concert Studies, 'The Meeting of the Waters' and 'The Minstrel Boy,' *Meale*, The Bee's Wedding, *Mendelssohn*; In the Springtime, *Hollins*; Overture, 'Poet and Peasant,' *Suppé*. At Central Hall, Westminster (four recitals)—March Pontificale, *Faulkes*; 'Tipperary' Variations, *Goodhart*; Cantilene, *Ireland*; Concert March 'The Tritone,' *Wolstenholme*.
- Mr. Matthew Kingston, St. Mary's, Woolwich—Madrigal, *Lemare*; Contrasts (A.D. 1700-1900), *Elgar*; Capriccio, *Faulkes*; Marche Militaire, *Gounod*.
- Mr. George Pritchard, St. George's, Altrincham—Festal Toccata, *Baynon*; Fugue in D, *Bach*; Introduction and Allegro Agitato (Symphony in C minor), *Holloway*; Lyric Pieces (Op. 43), *Grieg*; Toccata in C minor, *Halsey*; Scherzo (Sonata No. 5), *Guilmant*; Con moto moderato, *Smart*.
- Mr. Harold M. Dawber, St. George's, Stockport—Introduction and Allegro, *John Keeble*; Finale in B flat, *Franck*; Prelude on the 'Old 104th,' *Parry*; Berceuse, *Vierne*; Pomp and Circumstance No. 4, *Elgar*; First Movement from Second Concerto, *Handel*; Paraphrase on Handel's 'See the Conquering hero,' *Guilmant*.
- Mr. S. Wallbank, Hexham Abbey (two recitals)—Toccata, Adagio, and Fugue, in C, *Bach*; Le Cygne, *Saint-Saëns*; Evening Rest, *Hollins*; Coronation March, *Tchaikowsky*; Fugue à la Gigue, *Bach*; Chant de Bonheur, *Lemare*.
- Mr. Herbert F. Ellingford, St. George's Hall, Liverpool (six recitals)—Pæan, *Harwood*; Scherzo in B minor, *Stevens*; Sonata No. 1, *Mendelssohn*; Fantasia in E flat, *Saint-Saëns*; Prelude and Fugue on BACH, *Liszt*; Funeral March and Hymn of Seraphs, *Guilmant*; Festival March, *Faulkes*; Toccata in F, *Bach*; Carillon, *Elgar*; First Suite for Organ, *Lyon*; Sonata No. 6, *Mendelssohn*; Variations on an original Theme, *Stuart Archer*; Sonata No. 1, *Harwood*.
- Dr. George Grace, St. John's, Red Lion Square—Fantasia on 'Kyrie, Gott heiliger Geist,' *Bach*; Idyll No. 1, *Alan Gray*; Cortège and Berceuse, *Vierne*; Toccata, *Gigout*.

APPOINTMENTS.

- Mr. William G. James to be organist and choirmaster of St. Peter, Muswell Hill.
- Mr. W. H. Steward, acting-organist of St. Matthew's, Westminster, to be organist and choirmaster of the Church of the Ascension, Lavender Hill.
- Mr. H. M. G. Turnbull, to be organist and choirmaster of the Parish Church, Great Stambridge, Essex.

A CHURCH CHOIR IN MESOPOTAMIA.

[We think that choristers in England may like to know the conditions under which some of their fellow-singers 'carry on' in the Far East, so we gladly print the following, with a picture of the choir concerned.—Ed., *M.T.*]

It may be of interest to many readers to hear of the growth and advance of Anglican Church music in Mesopotamia. I shall speak only from knowledge of what I know was and is going on at the Base. First of all, allow me to draw in your imagination an idea, or a picture of our old Church. The majority of you are fully aware of the fact that when on 'Field Service' it is with great difficulty that a suitable place can be found wherein to hold Divine worship, such places as 'dug-outs,' barns, and even open fields being utilised for this purpose. In our case 'our Church' was at one time a disused building, or perhaps a more appropriate term would be warehouse, built in the same fashion as the majority of buildings in this country, with walls of mud-brick and flat roof. The whole of the roof was made of wood poles latticed together, upon which were laid reed mats and a covering of thick mud. This may be a good substitute for a slate roof in the dry season, but I will let you draw your own conclusions as to what happens in the wet season. To add to this discouraging aspect of the place, it abounded in rats, crickets, chameleons, and mosquitoes, flies, and other (to us) familiar insects, which are so numerous in the tropics. At one end a part was partitioned off and used as a store and canteen. To make this building comfortable and light (for the only light that penetrated the fabric was by way of the door and three small openings in one wall at the side), the walls were lime-washed, the interior lighted by oil lamps, and in place of fans, large 'punkahs' were fixed and swung to keep the place, or rather the worshippers, cool, when possible during the hot season, that is, when the temperature inside hovered between 115 and 125 degrees. I hope from this you will be able to gather some idea of this temporary Church, and how vastly different it is from that in which we are accustomed to worship, back in the old land. Our new Church, in which we are now established, I will deal with later.

It was at the end of last September, after many weeks of bad congregational singing, that the Chaplain then in charge called a meeting of old choristers, and others who were interested in choral work, to discuss the possibilities of forming a choir. On the following Friday fourteen officers and men attended this meeting, and during a discussion, various obstacles presented themselves. The chief difficulty with which we were faced was the absence of sopranos. Further, we had no hymnals, psalters, or music of any kind, and to buy them here, in a Mohammedan country, was an impossibility. But we were not to be daunted in our determination to form a choir, so the following Friday we met together for rehearsal, a happy band of choristers, to practise hymns which in the old days we had partly memorised. In this way we 'carried on' for a number of weeks, until the arrival of music from India. At intervals we welcomed new members, who filled the gaps caused through some being transferred to other stations, falling sick, or going into hospital, to be eventually invalided out of the country. Here lies a great obstacle which must make a conductor's task hard and difficult in a tropical country. For example, he may practise certain music for a special service, but (owing usually to sickness) he can never rely on those members who attended rehearsals being present at that special service. I may take this opportunity to make a passing remark about the instrument used for accompanying the singing: it was a three-reed harmonium, its full volume of tone not being heard above the choir and congregation. During January of this year, when the music arrived from India, we at once turned to and started practising in earnest, eventually singing the Psalms and Responses at each service.

Since Easter we have left the old Church for the new one which has been erected. In a few words I will give a description of this sanctuary, to enable you to contrast it with the former improvised building. In the first place, it is about six times the size—lofty, spacious, well-lighted by day and night, and more important still, well-ventilated. The main building is extended from the Chancel, in which are choir stalls capable of holding forty choristers. The Chancel is

Numbers to be counted from top row—left-hand corner.

1. LANCE-CORPL. LABAND, *St. Luke's, Leicester.*
2. PTE. R. WILSON, *St. John, Londonborough, Grantham.*
3. CORPL. ANTILL, *Clapham Junction, S.W.*
4. SAPPER W. W. CRICK, *St. Thomas, Stotsley, Luton.*
5. PTE. F. DAWE, *St. Osmond's, Parkstone, Dorset.*
6. PTE. R. H. WILMER, *St. Mary's, Bognor, Sussex.*
7. PTE. P. J. I. POWELL, *St. Stephen's, Clapham Park, S.W.*
8. R.S.M. W. V. PRINCE, *St. Stephen's, Ootacamund, India.*
9. CORPL. W. M. LEWINGTON, *St. Jude's, South Kensington, S.W.*
10. PTE. A. E. WILLIAMS, *St. Maryan, near Helston, Cornwall.*
11. SERGT. S. A. GOUCH, *St. Mary, Steple Ashton, Wilts.*
12. CORPL. H. J. F. SIMS, *St. Mary Magdalene, Addiscombe, Surrey*
13. LIEUT. A. C. L. SMITH, *All Saints, Barry, near Cardiff.*
14. LIEUT.-COL. H. SPONE, *S. C. F. (C. of E.), M. E. F.*
15. 2nd-LIEUT. F. A. CURTIS, *L.R.A.M., Streusbury School, Bngm.*
16. CAPT. E. G. ELLIOTT, *Senior-Curate, Parish Church, Bngm.*
17. LIEUT. P. ANDREWS, *Plaxtol, Sevenoaks, Kent.*
18. LIEUT. J. SHEPHERD, *Ripon Wesleyan Church.*
19. SAPPER R. F. GOODFELLOW, *St. Mary, Lambeth, S.E.*
20. PTE. A. W. PERKINS, *Christ Church, Chelsea, S.W.*
21. PTE. W. VAUGHAN, *All Saints, Barry, near Cardiff.*
22. SAPPER G. EXTWISTLE, *St. John's, East Dulwich, S.E.*
23. PTE. G. BROWN, *St. James, Glossop.*

well-lighted by means of hidden rows of electric lights along the beams of the roof, which gives an exquisite effect to the eye from the far end of the Church. This system of lighting can in my opinion be recommended to enhance the beautiful architecture of our Cathedrals and Churches at home. The floor of the Chancel is tiled in coloured squares, while the Nave is laid with a semi-concrete substance. The walls are built of mud-brick, made on the spot and baked hard by the sun. Both inside and outside are pleasing to the eye, and reflect great credit on the architect. To sum up briefly, it is to us like passing from a Mission Hall (the old Church) into a Cathedral (the new Church). A powerful reed-organ has also been installed. The whole of the improvements stimulate us, as a choir, to render a more efficient service than in the old days of 1917. The average attendance of the choir at evensong is nineteen out of twenty-nine on the roll. This we consider good, taking into account the trying heat of the day, temporary sickness, and various military duties.

Great credit is due to the members of the choir (who represent so many Churches in England and also India) for their enthusiasm manifested since its formation. We are fortunate, too, in being helped by a capable organist from Shrewsbury College, and a deputy-organist who is a member of the Royal Choral Society and the Croydon Harmonic Society. The various Chaplains have all done their best to raise the standard of Church music in Mesopotamia. How long it will continue after our departure remains to be seen, but we as members esteem it a privilege to be among the first to form an Anglican Church choir in this historic land.

I was rather astonished the other night when returning to my billet to hear the strains of a well-known hymn, 'Nearer, my God, to Thee' (tune, 'Bethel') being sung by a party of Arabs or Armenians in a house in the main street. There can be no doubt that we shall leave behind us many melodies and other traces of our all-British music, which, I need hardly say, still has scarcely anything in common with that of the natives.

H. J. F. S.

THE THREE CHOIRS FESTIVALS.

Discussion as to the continuance of these Festivals is no new thing. In the *Musical Times* of May, 1870, appeared an article by Mr. H. C. Lunn, from which we make a few extracts. Some of them are as apposite as if written to-day:

The subject of the continuance of these time-honoured musical gatherings having lately been brought prominently before the public, it becomes impossible for those who earnestly believe that they are beneficial, in the purest sense of the word, both to religion and charity, to remain silent. In ranking ourselves amongst the many who would desire to uphold these performances, we would wish it, however, distinctly to be understood that we by no means underrate the sincerity of the few who think that they should be abolished.

We are told that the performance of the grandest and most sacred works in musical art before a large assemblage of listeners in a cathedral is a 'desecration' of the building. Now, unless we are to accept this as a fact without any further inquiry, it will be necessary to understand whether it is believed that this 'desecration' arises from the nature of the compositions performed, the executants who are engaged in their interpretation, or the persons who come to hear them. Let us consider the first point. The wonderful creations of those great masters who have so glorified the words of scripture that they have sunk more deeply into the hearts of millions than they could have ever done when spoken by the most eloquent divines in a pulpit, can never, we believe, so effectually fulfil their mission as when heard within those buildings in which the massive grandeur of the architecture so perfectly harmonises with the spirit of the music.

If it be urged that the setting of the words of scripture to music is in itself objectionable, then of course the anthem sung in the daily cathedral service must be a 'desecration' to a religious edifice; indeed, if we

logically trace this argument to its root, it will be found that it aims at the abolition of music altogether as an aid to religion; for if it be once allowed that the commonplace anthems constantly sung before a congregation are not only admissible, but calculated to impress the hearers with a feeling of solemnity, how much must that feeling be deepened by the performance of those immortal works usually selected for a musical Festival. But perhaps after all we are fighting shadows; for, as we have already said, the words used by the attacking party are rarely defined; and it may be, therefore, that the 'desecration' arises not so much from the compositions executed as from the presence of those who execute them. This is a subject difficult to handle; but we have no right to refuse to examine it. In the first place, then, the engagement of competent persons for the performance of an oratorio is only an extension of the system pursued in the daily routine of cathedral management. The clergy are paid, the organist is paid, the members of the choir are paid—everybody, indeed, who fulfils any office within the sacred building receives remuneration for the services he performs; and why, therefore, the mere assemblage of a larger number of professional persons for the purpose of interpreting a larger work, should be considered an innovation to be deprecated, it would puzzle us to say.

We have heard it stated that between the parts of the performance at a Festival, the cathedral is often converted into a temporary refreshment-room: viands of various kinds are produced, bottles have been seen raised to the mouth, and some of the marble monuments within reach have even been used as sideboards. Here, then, is the first real 'desecration' of the building that we have been able to arrive at. But why, we ask, should such unseemly conduct ever be permitted? Surely officers might be appointed to see that offences of this kind are not committed; and if, in spite of being cautioned, any person persisted in violating the law, he should be at once ejected from the building, as any refractory member of a congregation would certainly be from a church.

With respect to the third point—the sale of tickets—does it ever occur to those who are shocked at this that the cathedral is daily made a show of; and that a somewhat more direct method of remuneration is enforced (which benefits neither religion nor charity), for, instead of purchasing tickets, the money is paid in the building. Do we not see crowds of tourists, in travelling costume, with knapsacks on their backs, 'doing' the cathedral, under the guidance of a sanctimonious official, who, in spite of the religious fervour with which he goes through his well-studied lesson, never forgets to hold out his hand for the coin when he bows his visitors out, and never forgets to look additionally sombre when the amount of the coin does not reach his expectations. If it be wrong to sell tickets, so that well-dressed persons may enter the cathedral and quietly take their seats to hear the finest sacred music, how much worse must it be to admit throngs of people to pace about the building, in muddy boots, on the mere understanding that they are prepared to pay for the sight on leaving.

A very important point remains to be considered—the charitable object for which these Festivals were instituted. For many years the funds for the widows and orphans of the poorer clergy have been largely benefited by the sum realised by the meetings. How is this sum to be replaced? Can anybody imagine that if the Festivals were abolished, persons would come up from all parts of the country merely to hear an ordinary service somewhat better performed than usual; or that, if they were not sufficiently attracted by the music, they would send large donations to the charity, from an innate conviction that funds were needed?