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Musical Episodes

Talking Back.

TWENTY years ago a rehearsal of the Metropolitan Methodist Church Choir in Toronto was often an oddly interesting event. Passages at arms between the conductor, F. H. Torrington, and the singers were not, however, one of the regular diversions. When any singer became bold enough to challenge any statement of the leader, he either had a good cause or plenty of courage.

The choir in those days, before the present organ was built, was a double choir, a complete chorus in four parts being on each side of the organ; and an arrangement very useful for antiphonal singing. There was always a suspicion on the east side of the choir, that "F. H." favoured the west side—for he was fond of a good-natured rivalry. And in those days—as perhaps still—Torrington was considered a bad man to talk back to. He was an autocrat, much skilled in the use of descriptive language, suitable to any emergency. One evening the choir were rehearsing the then rather new anthem, "God is a Spirit," a quartette from Sterndale Bennett's "Woman of Samaria." This was a favourite anthem with Torrington, who was the first to introduce it to Canada. And he had his own peculiar ideas as to how it should be sung. He rehearsed the east-side basses on the first phrase. But they failed to please him. Each time they did so, it seemed to get worse. The number of times they did that phrase was very large; all to no purpose. In desperation the conductor turned to the west-side basses, who after three tries got it to please him.

"There!" he said, turning to the Orientals again, "that's the way to do it!"

And he glared over his spectacles in a moment of impressive silence; till a basso near the organ spoke niftily up in a very loud voice:

"All very well!" he said. "They should be able to do it—when they heard us do it forty times over."

For one doubtful moment, Torrington glowered at the speaker. Then he laughed.

"Well, well, well!" he said. "I never would have thought of that."



A Gentle Inquiry.

AT another rehearsal of the Metropolitan Choir the big piece was the aria and chorus "Hear My Prayer," by Mendelssohn, which was to be done at a big sacred concert with the marvellous boy singer Blatchford Kavanagh doing the solo. The piece is by no means easy, with a lot of awkward accidentals—which in the case of green youths from country town choirs sometimes become very accidental, indeed. On one of these "fortissimo" a youthful basso muffed a note about a semi-tone flat. He had a bucolic voice and the effect was peculiarly appalling.

The organ suddenly stopped—oh how often it did! Torrington glanced along the back row, till his eyes lit on the youth. He said very little; in fact about two words—but they were the concentrated epitome of disgust.

"... Anybody bust?"



The Pipe-Organ Wizard.

FREDERICK ARCHER was the nearest approach to a wizard that ever played a pipe organ. The "king of instruments" is not, as a rule, much of a thing to show off, as a rule, an audience. It was said of Archer that he was a genius to show off the capabilities of an organ; whereas Guilmant, the great Parisian organist, excelled in showing off himself. Which was true, at least of Archer, who never came across the rattle-trap organ that he was afraid to play on, and never discovered an organ so complicated that he couldn't make it do a few tricks missed by everybody else. He was not always careful as to the exact score. Guilmant was. So is Lemare. Generally speaking most English and Scotch organists are. And there was an unspeakable organ in the city of Guelph that the regular organist never dared to exploit beyond the same old half-a-dozen stops every Sunday, for fear something would break loose and fall

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