

How a Homesteader Became a Musical Leader

NO form of art does so much for social enjoyment as choral singing and costs so little. An English homesteader in Saskatchewan became the organist and leader of a choir that won two shields and a special cup at three Provincial Festivals. And that is the story of how a small band of men and women, all English but one, devoted their talents to the development of music for the sake of their fellow-citizens, without costing the community a copper. There are other people doing a similar work in many parts of the West.

THE illustrated story of St. John's Church Choir, in Lloydminster, Sask., is not chosen merely because it is St. John's Choir, Lloydminster. It is a type of many such interesting stories of how music has been developed in the West, as Emil Paur once said to an Arts Club in Toronto, "out of de middle of de people."

This particular little choir of less than twenty voices won very high honours at the sixth Alberta Festival, held in Edmonton this year; and it did so by presenting choral art in a remarkably high form, even for a Western Provincial Festival, which is saying a great deal.

Three years ago this choir attended its first Festival, in Saskatoon, winning the shield for small choirs and entering in the open class as well. The adjudicators from Winnipeg described the performance of the choir as "an object lesson in choral singing to the whole Festival." For this also, after much difficulty in making the award, they were given a special cup. Next year the choir went to the Alberta Festival. This is a peculiarity of Lloydminster; its main street being part of the boundary line between the provinces, the choirs of that town may send competitors to both Provincial Festivals. So, in 1911, the St. John's Choir came next to the top in the small choir competition, beaten one point only by the Robertson Presbyterian Choir, of Edmonton. In 1912 they were too busy raising money for a new organ to attend any festival. In 1913 the Festival Committee at Edmonton offered the St. John's Choir a rebate on railway fares to compete. They went—and won.

The choir are all English, except one lady. Many of them are Barr colonists who founded Lloydminster under such discouraging auspices about eleven years ago. They live on farms, some of them six miles from town; but distance and bad roads and cold weather make no difference to their enthusiasm for attending rehearsals and services. Mr. H. B. Haines, for some time manager of the Bank of Commerce in Lloydminster, really started the choir attending festivals. He was then organist of the church and had produced the whole of Stainer's "Crucifixion" in a church service. The present organist and conductor, Mr. Francis Stevenson, an Englishman, was a homesteader. He acted as choirmaster and came regularly to town to attend rehearsals and services. In 1911 Mr. Stevenson moved to town, where at present he is engaged in the business of real estate, lending money, insurance and ticket agencies. He is now both organist and choirmaster. Every Good Friday his little choir gives Stainer's "Crucifixion" with special services during Lent.

THIS is one of many such stories of good choirs developing choral art by sheer enthusiasm and love of music in the towns and cities of the West. And it is one of the best signs of the times in that country that so many people, both Canadians and British-born, are working with such interest to further the cause of art in a country that has so much to contend with in the real estate booster and the land gambler.

Six years ago the writer of this article came across a similar case in Calgary. In the school-

writer asked to see the conductor, who was an enthusiastic Englishman.

"What are you doing this for?" he was asked.

"Well," he said, "we intend to give a concert of good music in this church in about four weeks. These young people have talent. I had some experience as a conductor in England. We agreed that we might as well do something worth while, both for ourselves and the community. Because in this country we are a long way from music centres."

Seven years before that in Edmonton another ambitious Englishman had a small choir that developed a repertoire of two hundred best things in music, anthems, motets, glees and part songs. That choir traveled many miles to prairie school-houses, giving good concerts in places that never had a chance to hear a concert company.

Wherever you find the English you find a love of music for its own sake. And the West has thousands of English people, just as it has thousands of Canadians and other nationalities, who can't altogether live without good music.

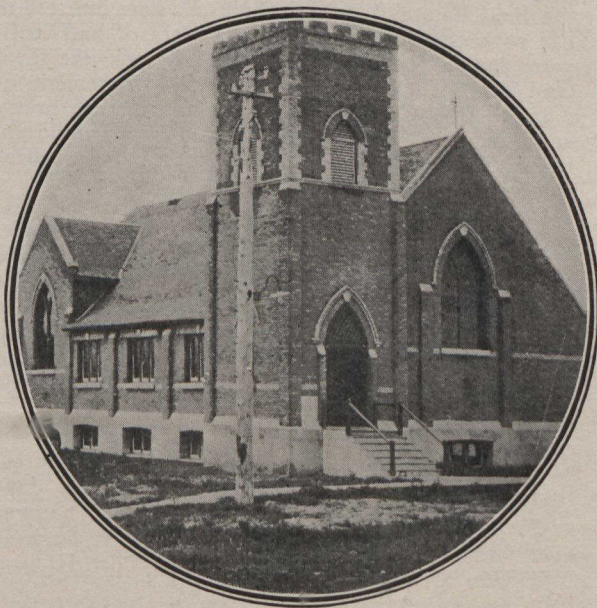
Different From the East

THIS is all very different from the case of Ontario towns. Most of the musical activity in the East has gravitated to the big centres. It follows the conservatory and the college. There was a time when towns of the 10,000 population class in the East had choral societies and good citizens' bands and local concerts of oratorio. Most of these are now matters of history. There are still a few choral societies in Ontario, outside of Toronto—but not many. There are more choral organizations in the West than in Ontario or Quebec, except in the big centres. Even Montreal, which used to have oratorio and unaccompanied singing, has dispensed with nearly all of it in favour of opera. The church choir, of course, still remains in Montreal and Quebec. In the Maritime Provinces there has been a decadence in native music.

But considering its advantages, Ontario has lapsed most of all. Brantford, Hamilton, London and St. Thomas still have choral societies. Chatham has a small one. Windsor and Walkerville, up till a few years ago, had one. But in most other towns in Ontario the art of choral singing has gone into a decline. One reason is the exodus of musical talent to the West. A greater cause is—Toronto, which has managed to consolidate itself into a big music centre. There was a time when Hamilton was more of a music centre than Toronto. Now, except for one fairly prosperous conservatory and one choral society, it is content to take what Toronto leaves. There may be a reaction when such places as Hamilton and London and Ottawa and Brantford will develop a real impulse in native music. But it will not be until eastern towns get the same enthusiasm for music that is found in scores of towns and cities in the West; places that were scarcely or not at all on the map when musically decadent Ontario towns were flourishing. As a matter of fact, though we spend in this country millions of dollars annually on music, we are far from a truly musical people, simply because we measure progress by the big tone and the big check.



The Choir of St. John's Church, Lloydminster, Sask., which in Three Years has won Two Shields and One Special Cup. The Conductor, Mr. Francis Stevenson, is holding the Shield won by the Choir at the Alberta Festival This Year.



St. John's Church, Lloydminster, Well Known for its Good Music.

room of a big Methodist church thirty or forty young people worked for two hours on a hot summer evening with fiddles and 'cellos and wind instruments rehearsing a work of Beethoven. The