

(January 29th, 1906.)

# The Place and Power of Music.

BY CHAS. W. ALEXANDER.

In the absence of the President the chair was occupied by Vice-President Turnbull. At the chairman's table, in addition to the guest of the day, Mr. Alexander, there were present Messrs. Butler, Harkness and Davis of the Torrey-Alexander Mission, and Rev. Melvin Trotter, of Grand Rapids, Mich., and Rev. T. B. Hyde, of the Northern Congregational Church and Secretary Pratt, of the Central Y.M.C.A., Toronto.

Mr. Butler first sang the "Pilot Song," in which he was accompanied on the piano by Mr. Harkness, the composer of the music. Mr. Butler was heartily applauded at the close.

In introducing the guest of the day Mr. Turnbull said: During the past four years, throughout the English-speaking world, our guest, Mr. Alexander, has been demonstrating to a critical public the power and influence of song upon vast audiences. His leadership of the song service in connection with the Torrey-Alexander Mission in Massey Hall during this month can only be described as magnificent. He is an expert on the subject in which he is going to address us, and I have therefore much pleasure in introducing Mr. Alexander, who will speak to us on "The Place and Power of Music."

Mr. Alexander in rising to speak was loudly applauded. He said: I have asked your chairman to allow me to stand on a chair, for I want to see you all. I heard of a man who got on one of the old fashioned stage coaches one day and he had but one solitary occupant for a companion. It was a cold, drizzly day on the outside and he started in to talk to this old man for company, but all he could get out of him was "yes" and "no." He tried every subject that he knew anything about with the same result, and finally he sank back exhausted in the corner of the coach. Then the old man, his companion said, "Suppose you try me on leather," and the old man started in and the traveller said he never heard a man talk on leather the way that man did. Well, you don't have to ask me. I am right in the kind of work I love, and you have asked me about the kind of work I know best. I had my subject chosen before I knew what the title was going to be, but as Artemus Ward said about the subject of one of his lectures, "The most remarkable thing about the subject is that it has nothing to do with the lecture."

Mr. Alexander here changed his situation to a chair at the end of the hall so that he could get rid of a disturbing echo and continued: Away down in the hills of Tennessee, I was born in a log house, and one of the first things I ever remember was hearing the old gospel songs sung without any instrument, and I'm mighty glad of that recollection. They sent me to school with Webster's blue-backed spelling book and a little New Testament to learn out of. After I got away from that school and heard that other boys in the towns were taught from handsome books with pictures, I felt I had been badly used, I thought my education had been neglected because I had to use the New Testament for reader, but later I found out I was mistaken; for somehow the truths of that little testament got into me, got hold of me, and I have not had cause to regret that.

My father used to teach me to sing Sankey's hymns, without any instrument, for we could not afford it, and later I went to country singing schools and learned to sing there without an instrument too. I have always been glad of that because it don't matter how Harkness plays, I can always keep on singing.

Mr. Harkness—Don't mind him, he doesn't mean any harm. (Laughter.)

Mr. Alexander continued: When I saw the worth of a human soul, and wanted to get men started in the direction I thought was right, I began to look around to see how I could help the most men in the strongest way. Somehow I did not think there was much preacher in me and I have never thought so since, but I wanted something to start men's hearts going and I found that when you got a sermon set to music it was like a sermon on wheels. It was like going down hill. I haven't much voice for singing, but there is this about it, they can always hear me no matter how big the building is. I thought I have got to do something to reach the people and I turned about and taught them to sing. I never would have done it if I had had a fine voice like Butler, because I would have been always thinking of saving my voice.

When we got to London in Albert Hall that was the greatest work of music I ever heard of. When you get London started, and get its people talking and singing, you have got something going. There was the Glory Song. I believe there is scarcely anybody in London that has not heard it. One night some men were looking up men for a free breakfast, looking for them in the park, on the benches, under arches, wherever they could find them, to take them down to a free breakfast. It was two or three o'clock in the morning, and when these workers had a crowd of men all around them one said, "Jim, let's have an open air meeting right here." He said, "What can we do?" "Start the Glory Song" said the other, and they did, and every one of those tramps and bums sang it. This was how they knew it. It was printed three times in the *Daily Mail* with the words and music and everyone had a *Daily Mail*, however they got it. I don't suppose they were ever in a mission, and they would not go to Albert Hall. On the other hand, to see how titled people would listen to that music was wonderful to me. I find people like music if it's got point, if it's going somewhere, and when men who are not Christians come to our meetings I find that the stronger a song is the more it will be called for. That Pilot Song has been called for more than any other by men who were not Christians. There is a way to get hold of men, and it is through the power of music. It was a great discovery for me when I found out that busy men like you, who do not sing, who do not take time to sing, though you ought to—that when you get together you are just like a crowd of boys and like to sing just as well. I used to wonder at this, but I do not now, because down in every man's heart there is a love of song, and even the men who have been against us, like these Gospel Songs. I could tell you wonderful stories of how one of these simple songs, with a hook in it, will follow a man day and night and get hold of him, so that he cannot get away from it. Night before last I heard a crowd of young fellows going home singing the Pilot Song. They had been to hear Butler.

The power of song! Why, I can go to a crowded meeting and put in ten or eleven hours and feel fresh. The music is different than it used

to be, because it has point to it. I feel when I sing that it is going to get hold of some men and change their homes. That's what you men want to see done. I know of homes right here in this town that have been changed. Some of you say you don't believe in these methods, but there's a fact you cannot get away from, and in a little while I will ask Mr. Trotter to illustrate it. I have seen people come to Albert Hall at two o'clock and stay till six o'clock. Dr. Torrey would take up three-quarters of an hour, but all the rest of the time men and women in the galleries and boxes and from the floor of the hall would be calling for some simple gospel songs, and then we would go back after supper and sing them till nearly eleven o'clock. I have never seen any kind of music that would get hold of people like this. Men just as smart looking as you are would stay there and ask for these songs. I have a stack of letters that high (indicating it with his hands) from all classes of people telling me that these songs just suited their case.

One time in Chicago I was teaching a choir of little girls to sing, little street girls, whose clothes were scarcely good enough for them to come to Church, and we had them away up in the back of the gallery in Mr. Moody's Church. It was a time of great financial disaster in Chicago, and a business man who had lost all his money was walking along the street wondering what would become of him, when he heard the singing from the Church, "God Will Take Care of You." Nothing had touched him like those little voices. He came into the church and heard them sing it again. He had not thought of that, but he said to himself, of course God will take care of me and went away happy. I like to fool with a thing like that. Long ago I found that when I got people worked up by a concert or something of that kind that it stopped there. It would be all exhausted and to no purpose. I would ask myself, Where did I take those people, where did I land them anyway. There must be something more in this world than this. Now yesterday I was at work from 10 o'clock in the morning until nearly midnight, and when I got home I was satisfied that I had been doing the best work in the world.

Musicians come to me and ask me why I don't use other kinds of music. If oratorio would have the same effect in the hearts of men like you, I would have oratorio every time I got a chance. But you fellows know if you try a thing and it doesn't do the business you quit it, don't you? I get the songs that do the business, and if I find one that won't I cut it right out. There is a song, "Tell Mother I'll be There," which I hesitated a long time before I used. I have been criticised all over the world for using it, but you would not say so if you knew what it has done and what testimonies and letters I have received. A friend cut it out of a scrapbook and sent it to me and I carried it for a year before I used it. One night there was a crowd of railway men and I said to myself, 'I wonder what would get under the vests of those men,' I used it and when it was over a great, big, burly, engine driver came up to me and said,

"Mr. Alexander, I promised my mother on her death bed that I would become a Christian, but instead of that I have been going to the devil faster than ever. Preaching never touched me, but that little song did, and if you'll sing it to-morrow night I'll bring the boys." He did bring them for many nights and he used to say, "Don't forget to sing 'Tell Mother'." I used that song every time and I have used it many times since. Newspapers have used half a column at a time to say what doggerel it was, but at the end they had to admit the effect it had on those men. Argue against everything but a fact.

There's Harkness, a Bendigo boy, still under the British flag, though a long way from home. He wrote some of those songs, that Pilot Song for instance, and I would rather have written that song than anything else I know of. It's like a snowball, it keeps on growing as it rolls along. I am going to give each of you a copy as you go out. If you don't want it yourself put it in a letter and send it to your aunt or your sweetheart or somebody. You have all heard of the man who said, "Let me make the songs of a nation and I care not who makes the laws," and the point I make to-day is the power of gospel music over every other kind of music, in making-over families. It has a power that no other music has. Now there's Trotter. Shall we have him tell about a song he heard. (Cries of "Yes," "Yes.")

Mr. Trotter thus called upon mounted his chair and said: One night in the Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago there was a lot of bums gathered together. Hardly any of them had clothes enough on to flag a handcar. They were sitting in the back part of the old mission, a place with about 500 chairs and in the front part there were some saved bums whose clothes were slightly better. They always use the songs that catch. Up at the front they sing, "Throw Out the Life Line," but down at the back the bums sing, "T'row Out the Life Line." They don't use very much tune to it, but it's a song those people like to hear. The Pacific Garden Mission stands at Custom House Place and Van Buren Street. That's a pretty tough place, but not so bad now as it was at the time I am speaking of. It is on the edge of the tough district which as we say is bounded on the north by Van Buren Street, on the south by Twelfth Steet, on the west by the river, and on the east by the Lake and Dr. Dowie. The lake's there yet, but Dr. Dowie's gone. One night as I have said they were singing that old song. It was not very good music, but Mr. Monroe, the big-hearted Irishman in charge of the Mission, was up on the platform waving his hands and trying to keep them together as well as he could. On the other side of the street an old fellow was standing in a doorway to keep out of the wind, thinking about his wife that he had promised to love and protect, and of his baby and home which he had shamefully neglected, and he decided that there was nothing else to do but to take his life. That winter many people in Chicago were taking what they called the "Viaduct Route." The

railway was filling in a viaduct along the water front. It is now a fine property, but the railway stole it from the Government and it was a word in all the beer houses "to take the viaduct route." I think 2,300 men took that route that winter and threw themselves into the lake—men who did not have a place to turn, college men, men that had got into trouble at home and had tried to lose themselves out in the west and had failed. This man under the doorway started up Van Buren Street for the viaduct with his heart broke. No underclothing, no socks on his feet, hardly any boots, and his clothing it was simply terrible. You cannot picture a human being so miserable, so bad in appearance in every way as he was. Some other bums going into the mission left the door open a little way and he caught the words of the song, "Throw Out the Life Line." Now outside of all missions, those that are good ones, there are "boosters," and when he stopped to listen to the song they boosted him in. It was a fatal stop for the devil when he stopped to listen. He was very tired and after the singing he went to sleep. When the preaching was over they began to sing again and, in his half drunken way on the verge of delirium tremens, he tried to join in. Then there were testimonies and he saw other men who had been bums like himself testify how Christ had saved them from the power of sin. And that night that poor, nervous, trembling bum went forward and gave his heart to God and Jesus saved him and has kept him ever since. That was nine years ago last Friday night, and that man was me.

Mr. Alexander said: My work at this meeting is over. I have a warm place in my heart for every man in this room. I thank you for allowing my friend Trotter to talk. If you ever saw a monument of God's power and love that's the man. Don't forget us. We love you more than ever. We are going to pray for you. Good-bye.

By request the meeting was closed by the singing of the "Glory Song," Mr. Butler singing the last verse and the audience joining in the chorus.