

A SACRED CONCERT

By Mary Tappan Wright



IN Dulwich, the summer passed sleepily. Day after day the checkered shade fell upon the purplish gray gravel of the broad middle path, that stretched a mile beneath the maples, from one end of the town to the other. The chimes on the tower of the church, after ringing softly at all the quarters, played four measures of a quaint minuet, to speed the crawling hours, and the giant oaks on the college green threw shadows, as blue as the sea, between the great Doric pillars of the portico in front of the chapel, where, for more than a hundred years, in stately dignity, the old college had held its sober commencements. In the cool of the afternoons the wives and daughters of the professors strolled forth, in their delicate muslins, or thin grenadines, to make a few languid visits; and in the evenings they sat out of doors on the wide moonlit verandas, gently fanning away the industrious gnats, and idly talking with the few young men who remained when the college term was over; and the drone of the locusts in the oak-trees gathered animation by contrast.

The faculty people seldom went away in the long vacation. They said that the beauty of Dulwich was too unique to forego, and this was so dignified a way of putting it that it sometimes carried conviction; besides, the Bishop, who was unconstrained by any other consideration than pure love of the place, came every year with his wife, and remained from June to October. In their house, just outside the village, the "Bishops"—Dulwich always spoke of them in the plural—entertained the parish in impartial, if unflattering, routine. None was omitted, and was any man at odds with his neighbor that neighbor he was sure to meet, in the interests of peace, perhaps; or, may it have been, that the good Bishop hoped that something might happen to vary the monotony? It was a forlorn hope; the unenterprising enemies tamely made friends, and the Bishop never failed to look grat-

ified when they thanked him, effusively, later on. He was a person of admirable self-control.

But to every man comes his golden opportunity.

Once, long ago, in the broiling heat of an August morning, a weary, draggled procession climbed slowly up the steep hill, upon the top of which stood the Episcopal Palace. They had come from Littleton, the next town, in the old yellow coach that made the journey between the two places twice a day — a man, two young women, and a boy. As they neared the house the man drew out a ragged pocket-handkerchief, and began to flick the dust from his seedy coat and baggy trousers.

"If I was you I'd set that stove-pipe straight," said one of the women, but the rebellious silk hat had become so accustomed to a rakish cant to one side that it successfully defied all his nervous efforts at reform.

"What has the Bishop got P. X. on that flag for?" said the other woman, as they turned the corner of the house and came in sight of a great white flag, with red lettering, that was flapping lazily on a tall pole.

"It's X. P.," said the other; "perhaps they want the express to stop."

"Oh, shut up!" said the man, irritably. "Don't you see that there is someone listening behind that door? Where's the boy? Hurry up there!" But the boy, toiling sulkily behind, continued to plod, grumbling, as he came, at the weight of a large box, which he carried by a leathern handle.

When they arrived at the front door, Brown, the Bishop's man, interviewed them suspiciously from behind the close wire netting of the screen. The day was humid, as well as warm, and Brown felt unpropitious. He went and informed his master that a parcel of beggars were out there, and, while he wasn't one to give his opinion unasked, he thought they'd better be sent packing. It was this modesty of Brown's that finally lost him his place.

But the Bishop, who knew that it was humid, even better than Brown, gave him to understand that he had exceeded his office.

"Show them in," he said, his thoughts vaguely scriptural; "and call no man beggar nor unclean."

"Although I might have, I never said nothink about dirt, sir," said Brown, firmly, though respectfully.

The Bishop waved him off imperiously, and the company were reluctantly admitted; the young man advanced, and, seizing the Bishop's hand, shook it with a high vertical motion that took the good prelate completely by surprise.

"We have come," he said, "to give you an example of our famous Sacred and Secular Exhibition of bell-ringing. There isn't any taste for music in Littleton; to try having a performance like ours there, would be throwing pearls before—you know who"—he winked, confidentially; "it's in the Bible—great book, that! And so we thought that if we could find a hall in Dulwich——"

"My good friend," began the Bishop, "I think that you must have mistaken——"

"Oh, that's all right!" said the visitor, encouragingly. "Allow me to introduce my wife, Mrs. Euphemia de la Mar, and her sister, Miss Heloise—de la Roche-Jacqueline." He used the latter name after a frightened glance about him; and, by a strange coincidence, there was a large red volume of memoirs bearing that name on the title just beyond the Bishop's head!

"A famous and beautiful patronymic," said the Bishop.

"Alas, to what base uses fallen!" said the other, turning down the corners of his wide comedian's mouth. "But to business, to business!" And, before the Bishop could remonstrate, he had whipped open the cover of the box, and aided by the boy, had set out on the study-table a long row of bells. Big bells, little bells, fat bells, thin bells, found their places as by magic, and, standing in front of them with the two women, Mr. de la Mar proceeded to tinkle, in the face of the embarrassed old gentleman, that good and familiar tune which we sing to the words:

Blest be the tie that binds

It was one of the tunes that the Bishop recognized, when he heard it in church.

In his soul the Bishop was a ritualist; this combination of piety and gymnastics appealed to him.

"Very interesting! Wait here a moment; I must call my wife. My dear!" and the little Bishop hastened from the room to meet his ponderous helpmate on the threshold, where she had been attracted by the unusual sounds. "My love, we have here a most singular and entertaining performance: these people are playing hymns, actually sacred music, on bells, common bells. Come and hear them."

He led her in, and Mr. de la Mar attempted to go through the same ceremony with which he had greeted her husband; but the Bishop's wife held her hand, graciously but immovably, at her accustomed angle, and Mr. de la Mar was compelled to come down. She afterward told the Bishop that she did not intend to countenance any "high jinks"; saying it, however, with a dignified smile, as became an Episcopal joke.

Then Mr. de la Mar, Mrs. Euphemia de la Mar, and the lovely Miss Heloise de la Roche-Jacqueline played one old-fashioned tune after another to these two dear and respectable old people—"Annie Laurie," "Ye Banks and Braes," and "Auld Lang Syne," adding to these, with most unholy insight, "Rock Me to Sleep, Mother," "Juanita," "The Days Go Swiftly By, Lorena," and other sentimental and long-forgotten songs of the sixties that the Bishops regarded with fond but unacknowledged affection. They listened, with clasped hands and glistening eyes, quite forgetful of the performers, until the three sinners gravely bowed their irreverent heads, and then, casting their eyes upward, piously twanked out the One Hundredth Psalm.

The Bishops rose, and the service was over.

"I do not see anything in your whole repertory that is not both improving and enlightening; do you not think so, Pet?" said the Bishop.

"It has given me great pleasure," said Pet, who sat very upright on the extreme edge of her chair, and held her hands clasped serenely on her ample belt.

"If I could only have a line from you, sir——" began Mr. de la Mar.

"I was about to say," proceeded the Bishop, "that I would give you a letter to the agent—who, by the way, is extremely fond of music—instructing him to allow you to hold an exhibition in the commencement hall of the chapel. It would amuse the young people of the village—do you not think so, Pet?"

The Bishop's wife nodded a dignified assent. "It is not often that they have so much gayety," she said, affably.

Astonishment and gratification lighted three of the four faces upon which Brown disapprovingly and unnecessarily slammed the screen on the big front door.

"It was 'Lorena' that did it," said Mrs. de la Mar, as they light-heartedly descended the hill.

"No, sir-ree, it was the Doxology!" said Mr. de la Mar.

"It was the damn cheek!" mumbled the boy; he came from the village and did not like to see outsiders imposing upon his bishops.

"Give me 'Old Hundred' every time with the clergy," said Mr. de la Mar. "I knew we'd got that hall before we'd played three notes of it, and so did Nellie Jackson; didn't you, Jack?"

"I never was so surprised in my life," said Miss de la Roche-Jacqueline, answering easily to this liberal translation of her famous and beautiful patronymic. "When you proposed to go up there and ask for it, I thought it was just a piece of your gall. I'd as soon think of asking for the moon, myself. Why, it's a church!"

"So much the better for the Sacred and Secular!" said Mr. de la Mar. "Nothing in your whole repertory but what is improving and enlightening," so the Bishop says! We'll have a lot of bills printed off with that at the top of them, and scatter them all over the country this afternoon; then to-morrow evening we'll enlighten 'em! Whoop!"

"There'll be a crowd," said Miss de la Roche-Jacqueline, practically.

"There won't be, Tom Smith, if you take to howling through the streets like that," said Mrs. de la Mar, morosely.

They easily found their way to the agent's office, and left that musical gentleman stupefied with rage. When they had gone he sputtered off down the mid-

dle path to the president's house, scarcely articulate.

"Wh-wh-what does the Bishop mean by giving these mountebanks permission to have a concert in the chapel? I never heard of anything so outrageous in my life. A regular set of strolling scamps in our chapel! Mr. President, you will have to go up and speak to him."

"You are the senior warden of the parish; why do you not go up yourself?" said the president.

"It is not my place," said the agent. "The chapel is a college building; you can go and tell him that you do not approve of putting it to any such use."

"The Bishop is President of the Board of Trustees, *ex-officio*; it would be very unbecoming in me to interfere with him in the disposal of one of the buildings," said the president, with a wicked twinkle in his eyes. "The matter is not in my jurisdiction."

"Then you've got to take it into your jurisdiction," said the agent. "You have no business to let him make a fool of himself."

The president's face spoke volumes in reply to this latter speech, but he made no verbal answer; the agent's phenomenal sense of humor overcame him, and he laughed quietly. "See, here," he said, persuasively, "you know that this thing ought not to be allowed."

"There may be no harm in it. Has not the Bishop investigated it?"

"Oh, yes; they gave him a private exhibition up at the palace." There was a whole world of scorn and unbelief in the agent's tone. "That fellow at the head of it, de la Mar he calls himself, is a scoundrel, if ever I saw one. Why, even Dickie Ayres was ashamed to be seen carrying their box for them."

"Dickie ought to be a good judge of a scamp, in his present chastened state of mind—he is just recovering from a visit to my melon-bed."

"Did you catch him?" asked the agent, eagerly.

"I saw him; it was broad daylight; five in the afternoon; but I did not interfere!"

"Then where—how did you find out about the chastening?" asked the agent, in bewildered tones.

"His father came the next day to remonstrate with me," said the president, "because the melons were not ripe."

"Well!" said the agent. "Well!" and stopped, apparently finding no adequate expression for his indignation; then he laughed, this time long and loud. "I must be going," he said at last, wiping his eyes; "it is my dinner-time."

He left the office, and the president watched him as he walked down the path between the flower-beds. Suddenly he turned, and came back with flying steps. "But what are we going to do about this concert?" he inquired, putting his head in at the door.

"If the concert doesn't agree with you," said the president, "I can remonstrate with the Bishop next day."

"If it doesn't agree with me," said the agent, decidedly, "there will be no waiting for the next day—or for the Bishop either, for that matter."

"Very well," said the president, "I shall not interfere."

"Humph!" said the agent, "I should like to see you try."

The two men smiled at each other, in friendly understanding, and the agent went home to his dinner, willing for the moment to let matters take their course.

So the placards of the Great Sacred and Secular Concert were distributed far and wide over the country, and toward sunset, the next evening, all the dusty roads that led to Dulwich were billowing with pink haze, as the farmers drove in from their farms. Large parties of young people, from Littleton, also took advantage of the occasion to enjoy a picnic in the college grounds, and a drive home by moonlight.

By half-past seven o'clock the chapel was filled; all the solid old black oak pews were crammed to the very doors, and the gallery, which had been reputed unsafe for fifty years, groaned under the weight of small boys from the village, and half-grown lads from the surrounding township. The chancel was denuded of its railing, and the pulpit and reading-desk had been moved back into the vestry, as was customary on commencement occasions; a long table, covered with bells, stood in the middle of the platform, which was raised two steps above the rest of the floor.

The Bishop sat in the front seat on one side of the aisle, and the president, with his family, occupied the front seat on the other. It had been embarrassing, at first, to pay on entering the church. "I did not dream of this!" whispered the Bishop to his wife, as he handed his two twenty-five cent pieces to Dickie Ayers, who sulked at the receipt of custom; and the president, who entered at the same time, put down his change with an odd smile. Being the only people in the house with reserved seats, they were the last comers, and the performance began at once.

The door of the vestry opened and the three bell-ringers entered the chancel; Mrs. de la Mar, and the charming Miss Heloise de la Roche-Jacqueline, in very short petticoats and much striped aprons, and Mr. de la Mar, in a Tyrolese hat and eagle's feather, his ordinary cutaway coat, and knee-breeches. They were received with thunders of applause, and some few cat-calls, which caused the Bishop to look over his shoulder, with an indulgent though prohibitive smile.

"Swiss, you see, my love," he said to his wife. "The real thing."

"Sh-sh-sh!" whispered my love. "They are playing 'Rock Me to Sleep, Mother!'" She sat very straight, in the high-backed pew, and kept time approvingly, though a little off the beat, as they repeated all the old tunes of the morning before, adding "What Are the Wild Waves Saying?" and "Gayly the Troubadour," while the musical agent unaccountably fidgeted and squirmed in the fourth seat back.

The next scene was announced by Mr. de la Mar: "Reuben and Cynthia, a quaint and practical portrayal of Quaker character."

The president coughed, and buried his face in his handkerchief. The agent stood up for a minute, and then, thinking better of it, sat down as Miss Heloise de la Roche-Jacqueline appeared, dressed in demure drab, followed by Mr. de la Mar in a long snuff-colored coat and high white hat, his face hastily painted in perpendicular lines, that gave him an air of impudent respectability.

Together, this precious pair, with all the old mural tablets of the venerated founders frowning down upon them, began a drawling duet in alternate verses. One

at either end of the chancel, they took up their solemn chant, and Mr. de la Mar, with his hands flapping in front of him and his back bent in the attitude of a kangaroo, minced toward Miss Heloise de la Roche-Jacqueline, who met him in about the spot where the pulpit should have been; here, after waltzing once slowly around, they changed sides, passing in opposite directions and singing, in concert, the refrain:

If the men were all transported
Far beyond the Northern Sea!

"I do not quite catch the drift," said the Bishop to his wife.

"So much the better!" was the perfectly audible response; just here the president's cough became very violent, and, apparently out of consideration for the feelings of the singers, he delicately withdrew.

"This is outrageous!" said someone in the fourth seat from the front; but all the young men and women from Littleton were in ecstasies. "Reuben and Cynthia" were applauded to the echo, and the number was repeated, until even the Bishop began to catch the drift.

"Look here," said Mrs. de la Mar, when the gratified Quakers retired to the vestry, where their stage properties, paint, wigs, and costumes were scattered about on the pulpit and reading-desk, and hanging on the hooks amidst the gowns and surplices. "Look here, you won't be able to do much more of this kind of thing. The Bishop's pretty nearly caught on, and that old tiger in the fourth seat isn't going to stand another character piece. If I were you, I'd leave out 'Tommy.'"

It was too much to ask; Mr. de la Mar, intoxicated by the ringing plaudits of the house of praise, was not to be deterred from the path of glory; still, he was willing to compromise. "Let's have some more bells first; there's that 'Evening Hymn to the Virgin.' That's soothing; try it."

"Why not give the Bishops some more Scotch?" suggested Miss Heloise de la Roche-Jacqueline.

"Fine!" cried Mr. de la Mar. "Hurry up, now, with the lightning change!"

With incredible haste they scrambled

into kilts and plaids, and hurried upon the stage again. The table, with the bells, which had been pushed back, was again drawn to the front, and after repeating "Annie Laurie" and "Bonnie Doon," each three times, they struck into the soothing "Ave Maria," which they sang as they played, and the powers on the right of the aisle seemed to be placated.

And yet Mrs. de la Mar continued to be full of forebodings. "You try that 'Tommy' and there'll be trouble!" she said, when the vestry-door finally closed on a still clamoring audience.

Mr. de la Mar seated himself on one of the rails of the dismantled chancel, and lighted a cigarette. "What you're after is a solo for yourself," he remarked, between the puffs of smoke. "Why don't you say so and be done with it?"

"Let her sing 'Waiting,' if she wants to," said Miss de la Roche-Jacqueline, generously.

"Go ahead," addressing Mrs. de la Mar. "You'll feel better if you do."

"I don't want to sing anything," said Mrs. de la Mar, in exasperation; "and you know it, too!" At the same time she was rapidly arraying herself in a long and much-soiled pink silk gown. "Come," she said, extending her hand to her husband when she had finished dressing. "Lead me on."

"No, you don't!" that gentleman announced, rudely. "You can just go it alone!"

Mrs. de la Mar flung open the door, and, sweeping to the front of the stage, commanded the stars to shine on his pathway with all the fervor of sincere malediction; Miss de la Roche-Jacqueline closed the door softly, leaving a crack through which to reconnoitre.

"It sounds like fury without an accompaniment," she said, over her shoulder.

"It sounds worse with one," he answered, disloyally. "She never can keep on the key. Hear that now?"

In the meantime an unconsecrated odor was stealing through the building. "I could wish," whispered the Bishop's wife, uneasily, "that she had worn a fichu; a fichu is always a graceful and feminine article of dress."

But the Bishop, whose lips were pursed into a shocked rosette, made no direct

answer. "I smell tobacco," he said, in an awful aside.

It is difficult to tell whether it was the pink gown, or the cigarette—the audience seemed to feel embarrassed—and Mrs. de la Mar retired, with but scanty applause.

"There, now!" said Mr. de la Mar, "I hope you're satisfied."

"So much for the legitimate," said Miss Heloise de la Roche-Jacqueline. "You haven't even had an encore."

"We've got to put on 'Tommy,' now," said Mr. de la Mar, "to warm up the house."

"All right," said Mrs. de la Mar, sulkily. "Warm away—I wish you joy of the blaze."

"I don't care; I'm going to try it."

"Then I'll pack up the things; for, as sure as you go out there in that rig, Tom Smith, it'll be the end of the evening's show."

During Mrs. de la Mar's unsuccessful performance her husband had been dressing himself, for the coveted part, in what he called the costume of a swell. He wore tight gray trousers, a gaudy brocaded vest, and a bright blue coat with brass buttons; in his hand he carried a large cane, that had an enormous crook at the end; in one eye was a big gold-rimmed glass, and on his head was a tall silk hat, with a very curly brim. In the baggy garments of his every-day wear it had not been so easy to perceive how very bow-legged Mr. de la Mar was; but now, as he pranced out into the dignified gloom of the sombre chapel, there was something startling in the revelation.

The Bishop sat up and ominously cleared his throat, but in the general flutter of the house he lost the first verse of the astonishing song that followed. With the chorus, it was different—that remained forever stamped upon his outraged and resentful memory.

"Tommy, make room for your uncle," sang Mr. de la Mar, strutting up and down the chancel, and ogling the ladies on the front seats through his one eye-glass:

Tommy, make room for your uncle,

That's a little dear!

Tommy, make room for your uncle,

I want him to sit here.

There were roars of applause from the gallery, and frantic cheers from the gild-

ed youth of Littleton; but looks of anguish marked the pale features of the learned and cultivated minority that adorned the college circle of disgraced and humiliated Dulwich. Mr. de la Mar was so much pleased with the vulgar applause of the indiscriminating populace that he sang that chorus over.

The theme of the story was peculiarly interesting to the gallery, and the silence was profound when Mr. de la Mar began his second verse; but by the end of the third the libelled musical ability of Littleton vindicated itself. Catching the simple and graceful refrain, the young people in the nave joined wildly and appreciably in the chorus. Tommy made room for his uncle to the rhythmic thunder of sticks and umbrellas, and hob-nailed shoes, on that sacred floor, which had never resounded to anything more violent than the tempered approval that greets a valedictory oration.

Before the beginning of the fourth verse there was a breathless moment of suspense; full well these outer barbarians knew the enormity of which they had been guilty—they gloated over their iniquity.

Again Mr. de la Mar's nasal tones were uplifted; but this time, with the roar of an enraged lion, the agent sprang to his feet.

"Stop that!" he shouted. "Stop that, and leave this place. Begone at once. Off with you, I say!" He rushed up to the chancel and stood between the actor and the vestry, his handsome, spirited old face glorious with indignation. In that mood the agent could have quelled an army.

De la Mar, who did not dare attempt to pass, hesitated a moment, looking foolish and undecided; then a brilliant idea dawned upon him; he was defeated, but he would retreat with all the honors of war.

Clicking his heels together, he made the agent a stiff, military salute, wheeled about face, marked time once or twice, and then, singing, marched down the aisle, his stick over his shoulder, his hat on one side, and his monocle shining in baleful triumph.

Dickie threw wide the great double doors. The outer air swept in, fresh and

clean with the odor of the woods, and the sky and trees showed deep blue, in contrast with the flaring yellow of the lamps. The man drew a quick breath when he came to the entrance, as if a dash of clear water had caught him in the face, but his song went on uninterrupted as he passed out between the pale Doric pillars, down the wide stone steps, forever away from Dulwich eyes, but not from Dulwich ears. Far up the middle path, in the serene gray of the moonlight, his raucous voice chanted, defiantly—

Tommy, make room for your uncle,
That's a little dear!

Tommy, make room for your uncle,
I want him to sit here—

until the hideous melody died in the distance.

Then, quaintly, calmly, as if in rebuke, the chimes on the church-tower broke forth in delicate, measured cadence; nine long, slow strokes followed—the audience waited spell-bound for the last reverberation. A locust droned in an oak-tree, a cricket chirped in the grass.

With softly rustling garments everyone rose and withdrew. Littleton dared not assert itself. Dulwich had resumed her normal sway.

THE POINT OF VIEW

ANY familiarity with Continental journalism and periodical literature brings the reader in these days face to face at every turn with the newly coined word “ar-rivism,” and with dissertations on the modern tendency which it represents. The word is a very ugly one, and the thing which it stands for certainly has very ugly aspects; but it is doubtful whether we can dismiss, as insignificant, either the one or the other. Doubtful whether we can do so in our quality of Americans, especially. The conservative European, who is rasped and abraded by the general rawness resulting from the doctrine that the most of the time spent in preparation for the achievement of the ends of life is time wasted, and that the wise course to pursue is simply to “get there,” and to learn by doing or enjoying instead of learning to do or enjoy, does not hesitate to say that it is the American and his Americanism that are primarily responsible for the doctrine. And he is right. We have, in effect, a new way of regarding human existence and the human career, in this particular. We are inclined to apologize for this new way at times, and at times to assert with unnecessary aggressiveness that it is the only right way. In reality, we probably ought to do neither. The matter is still on trial. Whether “ar-rivism” be humanly possible when pushed

to its logical limits, whether it will give us more out of life or less, is what we do not yet know and cannot yet tell. But it is *the* contemporaneous problem, and one surely calling for meditation and experiment.

What is the point? We are, when we come to the gist of the subject, to ascertain whether that law of nature (which is without exception) that gives the ripest and mellowest maturity only to things of the slower growth, is bound to be duplicated in the social life of man or not. There are a great many laws of social life which are not founded on natural laws, which in fact go directly counter to them. But hitherto this one in question has not appeared to belong to that class. Cramming the mind has never yet produced an intelligence or a cultivation equal to those of the man who has acquired knowledge by an organic process of leisurely, beneficent absorption; the mere fact of having money descend upon him overnight has never yet summarily equipped a man for the delicate task of spending the same with taste as perfect as if he had been born to it; there are as many people to-day as ever there were in the history of the world for whom *si jeunesse savait, si vieillesse pouvait* would sum up existence; who, in other words, have found out that no teacher can vie with experience, and that experience takes its own time and opportunity, quite refusing to be hurried.