

A HIVE OF SINGING BEES

TWO thousand children from Auckland primary schools sang together in the Auckland Town Hall on the afternoon of Tuesday, November 6, the occasion of the fourth Music Festival to be held under the auspices of the Auckland Headmasters' Association.

When we walked in the door ("Please be seated by 1.10 p.m." our tickets said) to attend this concert for *The Listener*, our companion with an expression of bright delight on his face said "Good heavens! It sounds like a hive of bees,



PROF. H. HOLLINRAKE
He took his coat off

three hives of bees." And we spent the next few minutes trying to think of some better likeness, deciding at last that what we were listening to sounded like nothing so much as 2,500 children chattering in subdued excitement before their concert began. They filled the whole of the Town Hall except for a small section of seats reserved for wives of headmasters, officials, and us. The girls were all in white blouses and navy blue gym tunics, the boys in white shirts, navy blue shorts, and clean faces. There were 500 banked in tiers behind the stage in the grouped choirs conducted by H. C. Luscombe; the remaining 2000 were in the body of the hall and in the circle for the massed singing conducted by Professor H. Hollinrake. On the stage were members of the NBS String Orchestra (conducted by Harry Ellwood) to accompany the children in their singing and to give three items themselves.

Professor Hollinrake took the stage, raised his hands, and the murmuring bees were silent. A rustle of bright yellow programmes, a stirring through the whole hall and 2,500 children were on their feet bursting at once into Handel's "Come See Where Golden Hearted Spring" with Professor Hollinrake urging on this section, hushing that, or calling forth the joyful small power of all that singing.

"What is it," said my companion, "about children's voices?" The applause

from the tiny audience was long and eager as the children took their seats again to listen to the "few words" spoken by officials and by a resplendent Deputy-Mayor with golden chain and scarlet robes.

We sat forward again in our seat to watch and hear this most sweet concert, the loudness and energy of our applause growing instead of diminishing with each item. "Rhythmic Movement" the programme said, and there on the stage, the members of the NBS String Orchestra having stepped off to share a leaning place against the wall with Professor Hollinrake and Mr. Luscombe, were boys and girls weaving in patterned rhythm in a Swedish Dance. If the general excellence and attractiveness of the programme had left us free to enjoy one item better than another we could have said that we enjoyed the Swedish Dance best; as it is we have to say that we enjoyed it one of seven or eight best. If this is the kind of free and graceful movement being encouraged in the schools we foresee a happier future for deportment.

That Tuesday was almost the first day of summer in Auckland, with brilliant sunshine in the windows to greet the Handelian felicity of the first song. The doors of the hall were open on the Grey's Avenue side and throughout the afternoon those doors were filled with an unofficial audience. Those who know Auckland know that the loungers in Grey's Avenue on a sunny afternoon do not look the concert-going type. Yet there they were, several of them, leaning against the doorways during an item, moving off between items, leaning back again when officials ceased to move and the next singing began. We regret that our own enthusiasm prevented us from taking notice to see if this unofficial audience applauded from the street.

Mr. Luscombe's grouped choirs sang most sweetly in unison or in part songs or in songs with the massed groups taking part also. We watched them in their rows behind the stage and after a time we found that we were gently rocking too—the rows were swaying gently with the rhythm of the singing, now to the right, now to the left. Here was something that the radio audience had to miss. We had as clear an impression of shared pleasure from watching this gentle movement as from listening to the livelier parts of any of the songs—for instance, the vigorous and startling whistle in "Here Comes the Train."

Professor Hollinrake took off his coat. It was a hot afternoon, as we have said, and Professor Hollinrake conducted with vigour and with an enthusiasm equalled only by the children's and by ours.

—J.

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