

BUNYAN'S PROGRESS

(Special to "The Listener")

August 11

WHEN the present season of Promenade Concerts (the fifty-fourth) opened a few weeks ago in the Albert Hall, sounds of satisfaction came from the nether regions of the building—the proprietor of the catering establishment there told one of the newspapers that he had full table bookings for weeks ahead. He may well have been pleased (in spite of the order that restricts the price he may charge for his meals), for catering to full tables is profitable—though he may have been thinking rather of the profits that are permitted by the clause "exclusive of beverages."

It was a different story when a stage version of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* was put on in Covent Garden Opera House, sponsored by the *Daily Telegraph* to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, and timed happily to coincide with the Lambeth Confer-

ence. Reporters spoke to the catering people there, down among the red carpets and crimson wallpapers that have seen such uninhibited splendour in their day, and came away with the news that the bar takings were the lowest anyone could remember. Many of the audience were clergymen and their families (200 bishops were present at the first night), and according to the catering people they drank "mostly coffee or soft drinks."

The production was the first in London since 52 years ago when someone put the allegory on the stage as a pantomime with Christian as the principal boy. The text had been prepared by Hugh Ross Williamson, and the music chosen and directed by Sir Malcolm Sargent, who arranged for Christian to enter the Celestial City accompanied by the sounds of a piece cut from the Sanctus of the B Minor Mass joined to a piece cut from the Amen fugue in *Messiah*. Robert Speaight (Jesus, in "The Man Born to be King") took the part of Christian.

There were some snares, traps, gins and pitfalls, of course. As W. McNaught



"Two hundred bishops were present at the first night"

said in the *Manchester Guardian*, "If the stage is to be peopled by furies, incarnate vanities and delectable spirits, one must needs call in a ballet company. But a ballet company, at short notice, can draw upon its stock conventions, and these may have been viewed by

many of the 200 bishops present as an improbable feature of Bunyan's world."

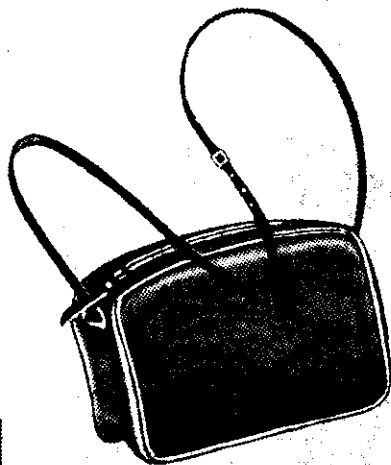
Yet the text upon which the masque was based need not always have been out of place in Covent Garden, and the cuts which Hugh Ross Williamson had to make could have been judicious. Four consecutive words, for instance, are all that needed to be taken from the following:

"Here are to be seen too, and that for nothing, thefts, murders, adulteries, false swearers, and that of a blood-red colour."

NOT for nothing. Opera is an expensive luxury and must either be supported by some form of patronage, or lower its costs by lowering its standards. The Government has decided that opera is not a luxury which the rich can do without, but one which the ordinary citizen has a right to—at any rate, the ordinary citizen of the metropolis, subsidised by the taxpayer outside it.

Its decision to acquire the building by compulsory purchase under last year's Town and Country Planning Act means that Britain will have a national opera house before it has a national theatre. When the present lease (held by Boosey and Hawkes, the music publishing and instrument firm) expires, the Ministry of Works will own the building, and will present a long-term lease to the Arts Council. The Arts Council (the Government-subsidised organisation which was

FOR THE "OUT-DOOR GIRL"



Made of high-grade, smooth finish calf-skin, available in brown only.

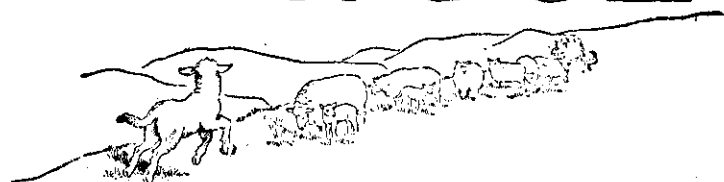
Fitted with adjustable shoulder straps with a ten-inch slide fastener along the top ensuring security.

Wonderful value at 22/6, from any of Lands' Bag Shops.

Lands for Bags

For the best of health—

WOOL



For the best of wool—

BRUCE



*King of
Woollens!*

The Bruce Woollen Manufacturing Co. Ltd., Milton, Otago.

93

NEW ZEALAND LISTENER, SEPTEMBER 17,