

## St. Joseph's Cathedral Choir, Dunedin

### A Dual Jubilee Celebration

#### "In the Days when the World was Wide"

It is well known to those conversant with the history of the Church in Otago that the pioneer Marist Missionary Fathers, and even Bishop Pompallier himself, extended their ministrations this far long before the era of European settlement proper. The Bishop tells us in his diary that he, accompanied by Fathers Comte and Pesant, S.M., in the Missionary schooner *Santa Maria*, visited the hapus of the Natives and the whaling stations within and in the vicinity of Port Chalmers as early as 1840. Records which have been preserved show that in 1845 Father Seon, S.M., followed in the footsteps of Bishop Pompallier, and two or three years later Fathers Petitjean, S.M., and Seon again traversed these parts, and evidently renewed their visits periodically through the 'Fifties of the last century. It is generally assumed that these intrepid shepherds of the widely scattered flock performed all their journeyings on foot, carrying their requisites for the offering of the Holy Sacrifice when a suitable opportunity occurred, and also their personal requirements; and thus they travelled the entire length of the island from Cook Strait to Foveaux Strait.

The first celebration of Holy Mass in Dunedin in the early stages of its settlement was offered in the home of Mr. Poppelwell, a small wooden house at the North-East Valley.

At the beginning of the 'Sixties Father Moreau, S.M., arrived, and with the increase in population consequent on the rush to the newly-discovered goldfields, was appointed parish priest of Dunedin, a position he occupied with wonderful zeal and far-reaching results until after the arrival of Bishop Moran. Father Moreau was assisted at various intervals by Fathers Belliard, Ecuyer, and Martin, S.M.

St. Joseph's Church (now the Cathedral Girls' Parish School) was opened by Father Moreau, assisted by Father Martin, on July 23, 1862, and from that important event St. Joseph's Choir entered upon its successful career in the musical world which won for it the high reputation it enjoyed right down the long span of years, and, in its honored prime, it now celebrates its

#### Diamond Jubilee as a Church Choir

As a musical combination the choir gave ample evidence of its rare artistic merit even in the early days.

Mrs. J. J. Connor, for many years a resident of North-East Valley, has supplied the present writer with the following brief but interesting recollections of the choir's early days:—

The members of the original choir of St. Joseph's numbered about eight, who sang to the accompaniment of a small harmonium. The choir rendered Mozart's Twelfth Mass for the Christmas of 59 years ago. The organ now in use at the Cathedral was bought by Father Moreau. Mrs. Connor alone survives among those who formed the original choir; Mr. Connor joined eighteen months after its formation. In her reminiscences of the early days, Mrs. Connor relates that to attend church they often took a short cut across country from what is now High Street, scrambling down the face of the hill where cows were depasturing, and where the Bishop's Palace and Christian Brothers' residence now stand. Coming to the foot of the hill a stream was crossed on loose and often slippery planks.

It is understood that Mrs. Woods (who later removed to Lawrence) aided the infant choir in the capacity of organist.

#### Golden Jubilee of the Cathedral Choir

"On Sunday, February 19, 1871, Bishop Moran entered upon his episcopal duties at St. Joseph's Church," so stated an old-time chronicler. Thus old St. Joseph's became the pro-Cathedral, and, as a consequence, the choir assumed the status of a Cathedral Choir. Hence as such, on its annual meeting held the other week, the choir attained its 50th year—its Golden Jubilee. Besides Fathers Coleman (who accompanied Bishop Moran to Dunedin) the

priests we find mentioned as being attached to St. Joseph's in 1873 were Revs. J. Lenihan, T. Crowley, and J. O'Connor. In July of that year Father O'Connor was appointed to the newly-established mission of Cromwell, and Father Lenihan to the newly-erected mission of Milton. All these names will be familiar to those who composed the choir at that time. Apart from the reminiscences mentioned above, there is practically nothing on record relating to the original choir's achievements. We may, however, infer from the recital of "recollections" by the old people still happily with us, that the choir of their day was unrivalled among similar musical bodies, and the class of music rendered was of a distinctly high (not to say ambitious) order. It will be of interest to many of the present time to know of the class of music rendered by the choir of 50 years ago, which may be taken as a fair indication of the standard reached in the preceding years. From its earliest days, St. Joseph's has been fortunate in possessing a fine choir, and very many of the most notable artists who have toured this Dominion have deemed it a privilege to be allowed to assist at its musical renderings. This choir held the reputation of being amongst the best in Australasia, and, apart from the always available services of the most eminent professionals, those of the best local talent were always available. As far back as January, 1872, the full strength of Signor Cagli's Italian Opera Company, including its orchestra (then on tour) gave a magnificent rendering of Gounod's "Messe Solennelle." Father Coleman, who was celebrant on the occasion, was so impressed with the excellence of the singing that he gave a special discourse on Church music, showing what the Church had done for music through succeeding generations.

The *N.Z. Tablet* of August 30, 1873, stated:—"We understand that the members of St. Joseph's Choir intend to give a grand concert in about three weeks' time. Judging from the success of their former concerts, we have no doubt this will be no exception to the rule. Selections from Mozart's First Mass in C will constitute the first part of the programme, and the second part, as usual, will be a miscellaneous selection."

A report of a concert given by the choir on Friday, May 24, 1874, said:—"The programme was a well-selected and a most varied one, embracing ballads, glees, and recitations. Mr. Sykes (organist of St. Joseph's) presided at the piano, and was ably assisted by Mr. O'Connell on the violin, who kindly volunteered his services for the occasion. Those who contributed items were Miss Hesford (upon whom the principal burden of the evening fell), Messrs. Ennis, Lennon, Loughnan, and Bunny."

Another concert was given in September of that year in aid of the school funds, after which the following appeared in the *Tablet*:—"The choir of St. Joseph's Church have kindly acceded to the request made to repeat the programme submitted at their late concert in the Masonic Hall. The object towards which they have now come forward is to aid in the erection of a church in Port Chalmers. The steamer *Golden Age* has been chartered for the conveyance of patrons from Dunedin; and with that attraction, and the additional one of the services of a brass band, which will accompany the steamer on her double trip, we have no fear but the entertainment will secure such an amount of patronage as will be a material aid to the most necessary work which it is desired to assist. According to announcement the steamer is to leave the Old Jetty on her downward trip at 6.30 p.m., accompanied by the Provincial Brass Band. . . . The entertainment is under the patronage of the Most Rev. Dr. Moran, who has signified his intention of presiding." Owing to unfavorable weather the Moonlight Excursion had to be postponed from week to week, and it was eventually held on Monday, October 26. "As had been announced" (so the report of the event read) "his Lordship the Bishop had graciously signified his intention of being present, together with Fathers Moore and Crowley; and a hope was generally entertained that the Calypso, on board which were the Rev. Fathers Walsh and O'Leary, would arrive in time to admit of their being also present on the occasion. Happily this wish has been realised, for the welcome intelligence reached town on Sunday evening that the vessel had been sighted from the Heads; and on Monday morning his Lordship, accompanied by Father Moore, repaired to

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