

CALL HIM SIR HENRY ("ALWAYS") WOOD

Fifty-nine years ago a small boy, aged 10, sat at the organ of a London church, balancing his small body on about two inches of seat in order that his feet could touch the pedals. The small boy's uncle, a watch and clock maker, regarded the small boy nervously because, even in this precarious attitude, the little chap could only touch certain pedals by balancing from one leg to the other.

If one had to sum up his characteristic of doing what he wanted, one might say: "Sir Henry ('Always') Wood."

IT WAS the small boy's first professional engagement, undertaken to fill a gap left by the absence of the regular church organist.

The small boy received no payment. But afterwards his uncle slipped him half a crown. The small boy saved it to purchase organ music.

Those days he spent all his odd pence in buying music and in buying candles so that he could study the music in his bedroom late at night. His father and mother thought he was asleep.

But Henry V. Wood, even in those days, was preparing himself for his famous destiny... the destiny that was to make him honoured all over the British Empire at his jubilee concert in 1938, after his years of service to music.

For Henry Wood, more than any other man, brought the music of the masters to the people. He was the founder of the famous "Proms."

Sung To Sleep

HE wanted people to love music as he loved it. As a child he had fitted up a speaking tube between his parents' bedroom and his own. Before he went to sleep he whistled up his father through the tube and got him to sing his favourite aria.

Then his mother's voice would come through the tube: "Henry, dear, it is past eleven. You must go to sleep or you will be fit for nothing in the morning."

THEY NEVER GUESSED HOW MANY NIGHTS HE THEN BLOCKED THE SPEAKING TUBE WITH A TIGHTLY-FITTING CORK AND GOT TO WORK PRACTISING ON HIS SMALL PIANO.

This is revealed in "Sir Henry Wood Looks Back," the engrossing autobiography of this Londoner born and bred, just published by Victor Gollancz.

Musical Father

BY trade an optician, the father of Henry Wood had a flair for making model steam engines, which sold better than spectacles, and (more important from the boy's point of view) a passion for playing the cello.

In the room above the shop every Monday evening the father and his friends played

chamber music to the accompaniment of young Henry on the piano.

They began at eight and rarely finished before midnight.

And his father took him to everything of importance in London—comedy, farce, drama, Shakespeare, concerts or opera. They went always in the pit or the gallery.

YOUNG HENRY LEARNED TO HEAR THINGS FROM THE PEOPLE'S POINT OF VIEW.

The Thirsty Organist

ORGAN lessons began under Dr. Edwin Lott, but, at the time for lessons, Dr. Lott was to be found in the saloon bar of the Viaduct Tavern.

Young Henry stood at the door, mustered up his courage and said in as penetrating a voice as possible:

"Dr. Lott! Your organ pupil wants you."

The doctor turned round sharply, upsetting his whisky.

parents he saw a new building. Its name was Queen's Hall.

YOUNG Henry Wood found a message waiting for him on his return to London from Robert Newman, a musical entrepreneur. They fixed a meeting in the Queen's Hall.

"What do you think of the idea of having Promenade concerts here?" asked Newman.

IN THIS WAY, TWENTY-FIVE-YEAR-OLD HENRY WOOD FOUND THE LINE OF HIS DESTINY.

"Hell Of A Time"

IN spite of his youth he kept a firm hand on his musicians, many of them old hands who had played while he was in the cradle. One day he overheard two of them in conversation.

"We seem to be having a hell of a time, 'Teddy,'" said one.

"Aye. I wonder where Newman picked up this brat Wood?" said the other.

SIR HENRY AND THE HUNGRY SEA LION

Not only London had the benefit of Sir Henry Wood's great service to music. He would conduct in provinces, too, wherever music was needed and loved. Once he conducted at Exeter and noticed an appalling smell of fish. He made inquiries from the manager of the theatre.

"Oh, yes," said the manager cheerfully. "That's the sea-lion?"

"Sea-lion? What sea-lion? Where is it?" asked Sir Henry.

"In a tank under the stage," said the manager. "But he doesn't smell. It's the fish we feed him on. Unless we keep feeding him he will bark and spoil your music."

"Coming, my boy! Coming!" Nothing more was said, but it cured him. He never left his pupil at lessons again.

Young Henry, determined that nothing should interfere with his music, saw to that.

MORE study, and then the boy persuaded his father to let him attend the Royal Academy of Music as a full-time student. He had as fellow pupils Edward German, composer of Merrie England, and the singer Julia Neilson, a girl of "almost angelic beauty."

Young Henry left the Academy, taught singing, became a church organist, became accompanist for first rehearsals at the Savoy Theatre for the "Yeoman of the Guard," went on tour with a crazy opera company as conductor, then returned to teach in London.

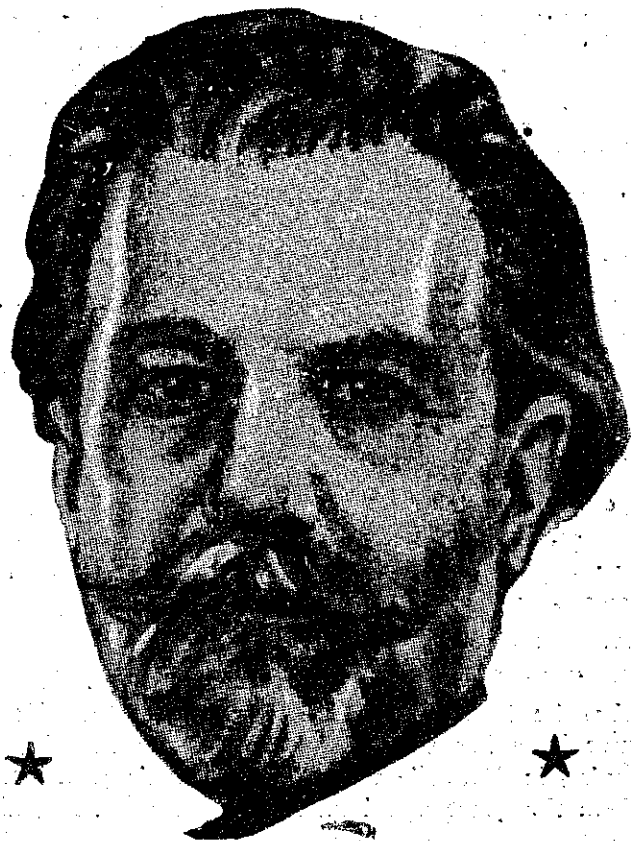
Close by the flat in which he set up house with his

"You remember, Teddy," said the other, "how we used to stroll in at half-past ten. But this chap is on that rostrum with his big watch in his hand, and his stick—ready at ten."

"I know," said the other. "If only half of us is there he begins. 'No good creeping in quietly, either, with him stopping and saying: 'Good morning! Another cab horse down?' in that nasty voice of his.'"

"What annoys me," said the other, "is that he starts the piece again. He does the same blasted trick with everyone who comes in late. I suppose there's nothing for it, Teddy; we shall have to get there by ten."

They got there by ten; young Henry saw to that, just as he saw to it that he got his organ lessons from Dr. Lott.



VITALITY UNLIMITED.—With his bushy beard and wiry hair, Sir Henry Wood has often been taken for a foreigner, though English-born and bred. Even Queen Victoria said: "Tell me, Mr. Wood, are you quite English? Your appearance is—er—rather un-English."

THE first Promenade season began in 1895. Henry Wood was setting out to prove the lie in the statement that England was the Land Without Music.

Rape of the Lock

And two years later Paderewski was giving a recital to the accompaniment of the Queen's

In one season alone he conducted 130 concerts and gave 500 lessons.

In 1904 he was invited to conduct in America. His concerts in Carnegie Hall were indeed a success and there were tempting offers for his services if he would come over every year.

He declined; his heart was in the Queen's Hall, London.

In 1909 Henry Wood's wife died in hospital. "So ended the happiest, the dearest years of my life..." But music saved his sanity. He worked on through the years alone.

The Future

RADIO came into being, and his audience grew into millions. He broadcast for the first time through the BBC in 1927.

In the year just gone he celebrated his sixty-ninth birthday and the 44th season of the "Proms."

It was characteristic of the man that when his friends and colleagues gathered around and wanted to do him honour to celebrate the fact that he had been conducting for fifty years, he suggested a concert in the Albert Hall, the proceeds to go to endow beds in London hospitals for orchestral musicians.

His sixty-ninth birthday finds him still looking forward.

"I still do not feel a day over fifty and am good for... well, you never know! After all, did not Verdi write Falstaff at eighty? Goethe completed Faust at eighty; Cato began to learn Greek at the same age; Tennyson wrote Crossing the Bar at eighty-three; Gladstone became Prime Minister of Britain for the third time at seventy-seven; and Titian painted the wonderful historic canvas 'The Battle of Lepanto' at ninety-eight. So what is a mere sixty-nine?"

His Happy Years

FROM now on, Henry Wood began to enter upon the happiest phase of his long career. He married one of his pupils, Princess Olga Ourossoff; he gave a command performance with his orchestra before Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle; the world's greatest artists came to perform their works under his baton.