

GALASHIELS BRASS BAND.

THE STORY OF ITS PROGRESS.



MR. GEORGE HOGG.

It is nearly seven years since Galashiels Town Band celebrated its jubilee, but, like all healthy organisations, it has changed considerably in calibre since it was first instituted in 1846.

In these early days amateur musicians had not realised the splendid work obtainable by big combination. The grandeur of harmony had hardly more than appealed to them, and what little they knew of it was generally confined to the most elementary devices of combination. But we have made great strides since then, and the efforts of the pioneers of Gala's band (seven in number) would hardly be tolerated in the streets of their native town now, far less appreciated. The composition of the band in 1846 is not, however, without interest. It included two clarionets, a bassoon, a serpent bass, a key bugle, a French horn, and a bass drum. Mr James Mather performed the dual duties of 1st clarionet and conductor, but the present institution does not contain a single member of the original body.

The band first came under the notice of the public in 1886, when it entered the lists at a contest held in Edinburgh Exhibition, choosing as its selection an arrangement of airs from Balfe's "Bohemian Girl." It was then under the direction of Mr William Johnstone, a native of Auchtermuchty, who as an amateur musician rendered excellent service to the community during the years he resided in Gala. Unfortunately, the "Braw Lads" did not secure a place, and they were equally unsuccessful the following autumn at Galashiels. But if they failed to come off on their own ground, it cannot be said the contest there was in any respect a failure. It showed the people of the old town what had to be done before they could expect to see their favourites in the prize-list at competitions open to good bands, and paved the way for enabling the musicians to secure the services of first-class professional instruction. Indeed, the following October Mr Tom Moore, conductor of the Tanfield Lea Band, which had secured first place at that contest, was persuaded to take the Gala band in hand. Mr Moore was not long in being able to bring out the latent talent of the lads, and at his first contest at Alloa he managed to secure second place for a Scottish selection. At the Glasgow Exhibition in 1888 the band achieved still more marked success, lifting the championship of Scotland from nineteen of the best bands in the country. The enthusiasm of the people of Gala over this meritorious victory was unbounded, and a local bard introduced into a dramatic cantata a parody of a well-known song in honour of the event, the opening verses of which are as follows:—

Arrah. Listen while I sing of the strangest, quarest thing

That has happened in the town that I belong to.

Well, you must understand they've gone mad about their band,

An' the feelin' for that same is mighty strong too.

First, a little man called Moore, as a leader they'd secure,

An' he tuk in hand thim band chaps so unruly;

An' wid his little stick, faith! he brought them on so quick,

That they charmed each mother's son in Galahooly.

Whillilo-hoo-hoo! I'll tell yez what to do,

If yez want to hear good music played most truly,

Just open wide yer ears when the Champion Band appears

A-plavin' through the streets o' Galahooly!

At Alloa the following year the lads more than maintained their reputation, not only securing first place, but with it the warm encomiums of Mr Richard Stead, who acted as adjudicator. The selection was from Beethoven's works, and in making his awards Mr Stead said, "This band is head and shoulders above the rest. It stands alone in this day's magnificent performance." At something like 30 contests attended Gala netted in prize money the handsome sum of close on £200. Mr Moore, who, after ten years' service in Galashiels, removed to Musselburgh, was succeeded in 1898 by Mr Angelo Marsden, a son of Mr Richard Marsden, but this gentleman only remained six months, and his place was filled by Mr G. Hogg, the present conductor. Although Mr Hogg, as an amateur musician, has not the same time to spare to music as his predecessors, he has, nevertheless, been eminently successful in maintaining the efficiency of the band. Last year a movement was set on foot to get by voluntary assessment the necessary financial assistance to keep the institution intact, and a sum of £69 was in this way collected. This, together with a balance in hand of £54, and private subscriptions, &c., brought the band's income up to £129 7s 5d, which, after deducting the year's expenditure—£59 8s 7d—leaves them in the very comfortable position of having in the bank a balance of £69 18s 10d to face the work of another year.

The members of the present band are:—Soprano, Alfred Sutherland; cornets, J. Hogg, R. Kemp, A. Scott, A. Gray, D. Pringle, J. Wright, J. Shaw, G. Watson, and J. Ballantyne; bass, J. Wood, A. M'Donald, W. Pearson, and G. Aitken; bass trombone, J. Walker; tenor trombones, J. Lees and T. Bruce; euphonium, A. Wilkinson; baritone, D. M'Donald and J. Pryde; horns, J. Melrose, W. Davidson, and G. Grieve. The business affairs are managed by a committee, of which Mr George Burrell is chairman and Mr John Lumsden secretary.

A BAND CHARACTER.

For many years the Gala Band had no more ardent admirer and steadfast supporter than John Ballantyne, or "Auld Jock," as he was more familiarly known. Born in Darnick in 1822, his father, a handloom weaver, removed to Gala when "Jock" was only eight years of age, and for more than half a century he might have been seen in all weathers trudging behind the musicians or standing spellbound as he listened to their music. But "Jock" was as useful as well as an appreciative supporter, and was always willing to lend a hand when stands had to be carried, music collected, or any other odd job performed consequent upon a performance, and, indeed, he had become to be looked upon as one of the crowd.