

James Douglas

This account was written in 1901 and is handwritten, residing in a notebook that was retained by his daughter, Elizabeth Ellen (Bessie, 1864 - 1937) and passed down to her son, Kenneth Douglas Wilkinson (1886 - 1951). It was then retained, with other family archives, by his widow (Agnes Wilkinson 1915 - 2005). After her death it passed to their daughter Jean Harding, along with other family records. When re-discovered in 2006, during a review of family materials, it was decided that it should be transcribed. Jean took on this task, which was completed early in 2007.

Mentioned are the following family members:

***Author:** James Douglas (1837 - 1920), who became a tobacconist in Torquay*

Father - James Douglas (1806 - 1879), a watchmaker of Egham, Surrey

Mother - Martha Ann Douglas nee Boyce (1813 - 1880)

Grandfather - George Boyce a baker of Egham (1776 - 1854)

Grandmother - Martha Boyce nee Pierce (1775 - 1851)

brother Archie - Archibald Douglas b 1844- attended St George's Chapel School as a supernumary (1844 - 1924)

Em or Emma - James Douglas's wife Emily Ann nee Harris (1838 - 1911)

Son Will - William Boyce Douglas (1867 - 1929)

Son Bertie - Charles Herbert Douglas (1870 - 1911)

Dedicated to my dear Bessie being written at her request. Jan^y 1901.

I was born on Xmas Day 1837 & on looking at my most useful Dictionary I see that day fell on a Monday. I have no recollection of being born my memory not carrying me back so far. I was my Mother's second Child & her first Boy & as I was born on the anniversary of her Wedding day I expect there were sundry rejoicings when I made my first appearance in life. Neither do I remember much about the first few years of my life. I was always sent out spick & span with hair curled by my dear Mother to whom I was always most devoted all her life. I had a good & kind Grandfather, Grandmother and Aunts who were very good to me and granted me many indulgences. I was only once whipped & that was by my Father for putting a dead mouse down my dear Mother's back, which I intended for a little joke, but which very much frightened her. I commenced my education at a very select young Ladies seminary, presided over by Miss Sarah and Miss Mary Shirley - I remember being decorated with a fool's cap, holding a blackboard at the back of my shoulders while my feet were firmly fixed in a piece of board in one position. Still those were happy days & especially the breaking up days when the Boarders had

Private Theatricals & I did enjoy kissing the girls. I sang in the Church when I was about seven, which very much improved my voice. My dear Mother had a splendid voice & so had my eldest sister, but my Father tho' having a good knowledge of music & possessing a good ear for it had only a moderate voice tho' in duets with my Mother it sounded very well. In 1847 my Father got me a nomination for the London Bluecoat Boys School but he & my Mother ultimately decided that they would rather have me try & get in S.Georges Chapel Windsor as they did not like my going so far from home as London, tho' only 18 miles but in those days the journey had to be made by Coach there being no Rail, then again I was not very strong & my Mother said as my head would be always uncovered I should be constantly getting cold. My Father voted for the Blue Coat School, my Mother voted for Windsor. She cried & then like most women had her way. I was admitted as a super numerary at S. Georges, & after remaining as such for a few weeks was elected a full blown Chorister on July 14th 1847 & it is to relate some of the incidents which occurred while I was there that I am writing these few pages at the repeated requests of my eldest Daughter. I was placed under the care of a Miss Mitchell at Eton who bestowed on me the loving care of a Mother during the years I was with her. Her Father who lived with her had been Coachman to the Provost of Eton & her brother was one of the Lay Clerks at S.Georges & also organist at Eton College. The days spent at Windsor were the happiest I think of my life. Our organist was Dr Elvey afterwards Sir George Elvey who was very kind to me & who for many years after I left Windsor kept up a correspondence with me. Our schoolmaster during the first part of the time I was at School was Mr Josiah French & during the latter part the Rev^d George Pearson. Our remuneration at S Georges was 18/- per Month & our schooling, with certain other little perquisites. From Eton where we had very little to do we received per day a 1^{lb} loaf of bread called a Bantam, 1^{lb} of meat, & one quart of beer. Mr Mitchell with whom I lodged had a joint weekly from the College & a Cask of beer but the bread was delivered daily. When leaving the Choir S.Georges gave £10 & Eton College £15 towards our apprenticeship.

As soon as a Boy was elected it was expected he would produce a large currant cake & a bottle of Orange Wine in the Schoolroom which was handed to the Head Boy to divide between the others. He then went thro' the ceremony of seeing the Golden Calves which he was told were kept in a cupboard in the Schoolroom. I went thro' this ceremony. The Boys turned up the leg of their right trouser to the knee. I had to turn up both legs of my trousers to my knees, I was then blindfolded, and a

procession was formed & I was marched into the cupboard but no "Golden" Calves were there. The Boys went for my calves with might & main pinching them hard as they could and I was glad enough when the Head Boy announced that the ceremony was over.

Our two vergers were named Tucker & Winter. The first an old man with snowy white hair was always considered by visitors to the Chapel as being most rude & disagreeable, & one night someone broke into the poor old fellows house & tried to murder him. Mr Winter was a much younger man & very much liked. Although Tucker was over 90 years of age when the burglars broke into his house he captured one of them. His successor was named Wise, a man with a great flow of language (tho' not grammar I recall) & who had been Butler to the Dean. He used to tell us that his favorite Paper was the *Ulcerated News*, & he was once heard to say "Look at the Dean a propogating up & down them steps".

Our Schoolmaster Mr Josiah French was a Lay Clerk & possessed a good Bass voice - he was a very popular man & and the rooms in his house were covered with pictures, so closely hung together that you could scarcely put your little finger between them, he had also a very fine collection of autographs of which he was very proud. Not only were his rooms hung with pictures but the passages & stairs even up to the garret. His birthday was on Sept. 14th when we always had a holiday & a very rich cake, also for some years had Amateur Theatricals. At the one I remember best we performed *St George & the Dragon* followed by the *Maid & the Magpie*. I was a Noble in the first in an elaborate dress of purple glaze calico made for me by my grandmother, & a rich crown. In the 2nd piece I was the Maid & I remember that I found the most awkward part of it in running across the stage & falling into the arms of William my lover as he returned home from the war. Many many a time I practised this but was most awkward even when the night came. Mr French was a very kind hearted man tho' strict. I don't remember ever have been punished by him but I have seen him use the birch frequently on a boy named Woodward, who would not learn his lessons & was always getting into trouble. Mr French died suddenly from heart disease as he was returning rather hastily into Chapel for something he had left behind. This was a great blow to us all. I had been a favourite with him & was allowed to see him in his coffin, when his sister gave me a small card with a seal & autograph on of David Garrick the actor in remembrance of Mr French & which I still have.

After the death of Mr French we had the Revd George Pearson for our Master, he was a young man, very bumptious, & not at all liked by any of the Boys altho' he gave us a much better education & longer hours. We went to School under him 7 am to 8, 9 till 10.15, 11.30 till 1, & 2 till 3. Chapel was from 10.15 till about 11 & 4.15 till about 5. The rest of the day was spent in practising & learning to sing & I think on three days a week the schooling was dispensed with & we were drilled in singing. In learning to do a shake I remember Sir George used to keep our tongues down with a paper knife & if we would not open our mouths well, when singing, our punishment was having an ordinary cotton reel put in our mouth. Sir George very rarely punished us & we all very much liked him. The principal cause for being punished was our singing carelessly or out of tune in Chapel which generally seemed to happen at the afternoon service. I don't remember it ever happening at the morning service. After service we were summoned to his house in the Horseshoe Cloisters, told to stand in a row & he then walked in front of the row boxing one ear of each Boy & as he returned he boxed the other ear. He had rather a large hand tho' beautifully soft but those were smacks & left an unpleasant singing sensation in my ears.

One day a boy who borrowed my watch broke the glass & I told him he must get it mended. He took it to a Watch Maker but wouldn't fetch it back. So I gave him 1/- to pay for it. He spent the money so a row ensued & I called him a cheat. This reached the ears of Mr Pearson who called me in the Schoolroom & would not hear of any explanation but gave me a thorough good caning, the only one I ever had at School. I was cut about & bruised a good deal. Someone (I never learned who) tho' I always thought it was Mr Mitchell, informed my father of it that afternoon & after service he appeared in the Schoolroom with a cane, took the Revd George by the collar saying "You little whipper snapper I'll thrash you as hard as you've thrashed my poor boy" but he yelled for mercy so only had a few cuts. My father threatening to summons him but it ended in his being reprimanded by the Dean & Chapter. I never got on thoroughly well with him after that, tho' I was never beaten again, but it resulted in my Brother Archie who was then a super numerary going home. Talking of him I often think of the extraordinary hat he wore while he was at Windsor & of which my mother was so proud. It was a large white Beaver, something the shape of a straw but with a very wide rim, & tied under the chin with a purple ribbon. That was a hat. After being done with, it was kept in a wardrobe for years & I can even fancy I see it now.

I forget how old I was when I had my first watch but I did anticipate that watch and wondered for days and days if I should have it on my coming birthday & tried all sorts of ways to prophesy if it would come. Tossed up a halfpenny, if the weather was fine on a certain day it would come, or if service was over by such a time on a certain day, I was to have it, sometimes favourable & sometimes the reverse. I tried walking a chalk line, or winning so many marbles but the final test was the day before my birthday (Xmas Day). We were all very fond of $\frac{1}{2}$ d sausage rolls, which in those days were very good at $\frac{1}{2}$ d. at least we all thought so. Sometimes we were too late to get any, sometimes they weren't baked in time. On that morning I decided about 11.30 that if on going to the shop for one, I found they were ready I should get my watch the next day. They were done, I bought two & I did enjoy them & was happy all that day. Xmas morning my father and mother came over to see me, none of us could ever get leave on Xmas day. I had all good wishes and a scarf pin for a birthday present, but not a word about the watch. I almost vowed I'd never touch a sausage roll again. I walked with them to the New Inn where they had put up the horse & then while my father was seeing the horse harnessed my mother took me into a little room to affectionately wish me goodbye when she produced a silver geneva watch hanging to a hair guard & which she told me was made from her own hair & placed it round my neck. That was a pleasure to me, & now after about 50 years I always think of that morning when I see that little room at the New Inn at Windsor, & I always put faith in the sausage rolls after that.

We had in those days several perquisites which were divided between us. Whenever a new Knight of the Garter was made & his banner hung in the Chapel we had a guinea. If anyone attended divine service wearing spurs he was expected to pay a fine of a guinea which we call spur money but this we did not always get. Then again wax candles were used in the Chapel & after service we went round & blew them out, the drippings or gutterings as we called them being ours for perquisites & we broke them off the candles & saved them in paper bags till there was enough to sell for old wax. I'm afraid we often watched the candles more than thinking of the service that was going on & we revelled in a windy draughty night, & occasionally some of us put small pieces of paper under the candles to tilt them on one side.

At Eton we were called by the Etonians "Canaries" & some of us received considerable kindness & many presents from them. I remember one of them named Watson a very handsome fellow who was very kind to me.

Lord Edward Pelham Clinton, afterwards Duke of Newcastle was also very kind & I remember he once took me to a confectioners & gave me what was then called "Strawberry mess" viz strawberries beaten up with sugar & cream. I had a bowl full & after that I had a large tumbler of iced lemonade & after that - I was - well ill. His sister Lady Susan was very fond of Bluett the best singer & the best looking boy in the school. She wrote him many little love letters & sent him very handsome presents. I never heard a boy with such a lovely voice but I am afraid his voice & his "good looks" helped to his ruin. He had no father and was adopted by an old Naval Knight named Jewers who spent a lot of money on him & got him a good berth in the navy but he was most ungrateful to him & nearly broke the poor old fellow's heart. Soon after I went to Windsor Bluett asked me to go for a drive in a cab with him which I thought a grand thing to do as he was Head boy & I was the lowest. We went to an Inn & had cold beef cheese & biscuits & pickled onions. I forget what we had to drink but think it was beer and gingerbeer. Alas it turned out that he had stolen the money which paid for that grand outing. Every quarter we collected subscriptions from the "Poor Kinghts" of Windsor which we called quarterage. Bluett had collected some of this but had not divided this as he should have done with the other boys. Capt Jewers was also a very good friend to me while I was in the Choir & after I left, frequently give me 10/- or more when I went to tea with him. He was an old gentleman, very kind hearted & over 90 when he died. Another friend was Mr Sterry who lived in London and took an interest in Cathedral boys. He corresponded regularly with me & was very lavish in his presents. He gave each of the boys a copy of a book called The Devout Choristers. I also had Paint Boxes etc. his last present to me being a very handsome Steadman's Chemical Cabinet with which I used to make countless experiments. Then again we had a good friend in the Rev Lord Wriothesley Russell one of the Canons of Windsor. When he was in residence we always went on Sundays to tea with him, & saw models of the tabernacle etc etc. He was brother of the celebrated Lord John Russell. Lady Russell was also a very nice woman but very nervous & wore a thick veil always. Her nervousness was caused I believe by her father having been murdered by his valet. The first Xmas tree I ever saw was given by Lord Russell. It stood very high & laden with large useful presents. Sometimes we found Lord Russell in Court Dress he having been summoned to the Castle. He was a low churchman but we all thought him the most religious & most Christian man we had ever known, at least I know I did. After I left the Choir he corresponded with me & his living being at Chenies in Buckinghamshire & not far from Amersham where I

was apprenticed he & Lady Russell used often to invite me out there on Sundays to spend the day with them. He wrote me a very kind testimonial which altho' I valued more than any one I ever had, is the only one I have lost. The Rev George Anson another Canon was very good to the boys and entertained us at dinner when he was in residence. On "Stir up" Sunday we always called at the Dean's & were given a large mincepie each about the size of a large cheeseplate & I always think of it every time Stir up Sunday comes round. There was one of the biggest men I ever saw in the Choir while I was there named Salmon & a joke went the round once that Mr Mitchell organist of Eton, made a rather heavy bet when talking of fishing & bet that he would go down to the river & in half an hour catch the biggest salmon that had ever been taken. He induced Mr Salmon to go & bathe & in due course landed him & won the bet. Mr Salmon had a powerful bass voice, & was rather a lazy man I thought, as he used to give me 6d a month to hang his hat on its peg & hand him his surplice. Then we had also a very small man in the Choir named Turner possessing a very sweet alto voice & I remember when he used to sing the verse in the Psalms "I am small & of no reputation" we used to look slyly at him as did also several of the men, & he always looked most uncomfortable as did also another named Hart when we sang the verse "He maketh my feet like Hart's feet".

We had no cricket ground so spent most of our spare time at marbles etc and I most of my time fishing. I usually caught Bleak in the summer using for a bait "caddis" a sort of Chrysalis which we found in little hollow pieces of wood in the water. One day I caught my hook in my eye lid & had it cut out by a Doctor. I with some of the others sang at the opening of the Crystal Palace in 1851 & it was one of the grandest sights I have ever seen. It was opened by the Queen & the Prince Consort & I can fancy I see them walking up the transept as I am writing this. Dr Elvey went with us but the music was conducted by Sir Geo. Smart, the organist of the Chapel Royal who was dressed in the gorgeous uniform as worn at that Chapel. I also saw Dr John Goss organist of St Pauls & Dr Turle of Westminster Abbey there.

We had several musical outings. Once a year a selected number of us sang at the festival of the Sons of the Clergy at St Pauls & also at the Charity Childrens anniversary at the same place. The latter was a very imposing sight. All the Charity children of London came in marshalled by their respective Beadles, in showy costumes & cocked hats, & were arranged tier after tier in the dome. They sang the old 100th God Save

the Queen, the Coronation Anthem "Zadok the Priest & Nathan the Prophet" in which they sang the Chorus "God save the King, Long live the King" with thrilling & marvellous effect. Several of the girls dressed in high muslin caps used to be carried down fainting. We also sang at a grand evening Concert at Exeter Hall one of Mr Surman's, when Dr Elvey's Anthem "In that Day" was sung, the tenor solo being taken by Mr Lockey of St Pauls, & we also sang at a Concert given by Mr John Hullah at Exeter Hall. He was one of the originators I think of the tonic - sol-fa system. But the outing to which we all most looked forward was the Bristol Glee & Madrigal Society's Concert which was held in the Victoria Rooms in Clifton. This I think generally took place early in January & for weeks before we began wondering who would be chosen to go down as only 4 out of the 12 were selected. I had the good luck to go three times. We arrived at Bristol late in the afternoon & stayed at the principal Hotel in Clifton & there we met boys from Hereford & Gloucester Cathedrals & had very jolly times. At night a rehearsal took place for the concert. I think Pearsall was the conductor & we sang "Oh who will o'er the Downs with me" which was composed by him. We also sang "Oh hills, oh vales" & others of Mendelsohn's. The following morning we took part in the service at the Bristol Cathedral Church & the last time I went I sang in the duet of Boyce's Anthem "Oh where shall wisdom be found" Then in the evening we sang at the Concert. We were taken to the Victoria Rooms in Cabs & it was the finest Concert room I ever sang in. Next day we returned to Windsor. I forget how many of the men went with us but I think about 4.

We always took part in the concerts given by the Windsor & Eton Choral Society of which Sir George was the Conductor. He taught playing & singing at several Ladies' Schools & at one near Slough they occasionally performed sacred plays at which we sang. One I remember especially when we were all dressed as girls in white muslin singing in the choruses. Every time I had the chance I made some excuse to go to "Queen Esther" for a kiss & once narrowly escaped setting my muslin dress on fire. The girl who took the part of the Queen was very dark & was one of the prettiest girls I have ever seen. The drums used at the Choral Society's Concerts were very loud & Sir George used to say that "they covered a multitude of sins."

The Prince of Wales was Xtened (=christened) at S.Georges in 1842, 5 years before I went. The head boy then was my cousin John Foster who was said to have had a finer voice than any Boy who had ever been at

Windsor. The Prince was Xtened in water brought from the river Jordan & after the service was over Foster is said to have got near the font and 'accidentally' ? dropped his handkerchief in, & he squeezed it into a small bottle & kept the water as a curiosity. While I was at Windsor the Prince used frequently to walk thro the Cloisters while we were playing there, & was then a pale & delicate looking lad. On the Queen's birthdays we used to go & serenade her under her bedroom window & one occasion (a wet morning) we sang the glee "Hail smiling mother" which seemed rather out of place as it was raining. In 1850 we all sang in a Cantata composed by Dr Elvey before the Queen & Prince Consort. I remember that the Queen sent for the Dr after it was over & congratulated him & the Prince Consort came & bowed to us all, & after that we all had supper at the Castle & among other things there was a Baron of beef, a joint I had never seen before. Besides the Royal Family who sat in their private box, several notabilities attended service & I well remember seeing the Duchess of Kent, the Duke of Cambridge, Baroness Burdett Coutts, & Duke of Wellington, with his roman nose, & many others there.

We had a regular attendant who never missed one service. He was a poor man named Leggett, an imbecile & was always called "Silly Billy" tho' of course when speaking to him we always called him William. He was terribly teased by the Boys & Cabmen in the street who had only to say "The Devil's coming" & he ran away as fast as he could. Rather dirty in his habits & really an idiot yet if you asked him to repeat any verse in the Bible or in the Psalms he would do so correctly. He always sat in the same seat & once or twice I remember he commenced to sing but was promptly stopped, tho' you could always hear his voice in the Confession, Lord's prayer etc etc. It was said that he regularly attended every Service for nearly 50 years. He always spoke of his great hatred for the devil who he never called by his name but said "Him" he always talked to himself while walking about & if he was in his seat before service began (which he generally was) would make frightful grimaces & muttering to himself & often frightened strangers who were at Service. He could neither read or write but if the Dean or Canons read the wrong collect or lesson or made any mistake in them he would say loud enough for them to hear him "you're wrong". The Dean once omitted the Magnificat & was going on with the Nunc Dimittis on a day when the Choir were absent & Billy rushed to his stall & shouted in a loud whisper "My soul doth magnify -" He used to turn his mother's mangle for her but nothing would keep him there after the bell began tolling. In the life of Sir Geo. Elvey it is stated that when Billy's mother was ill the Dean sent her some jelly &

that at her death Billy went to the Dean & said "Please Sir, Mother's died, may I eat the jelly?"

The Honourable Revd Neville Grenville was Dean during the time I was there & both he & his wife Lady Charlotte were very kind to us. The lectern was a brass eagle with a Bible each side of it for the first & second lesson the place being found before Service by one of the Boys. This revolved & in turning it round one day after the first lesson the poor old Dean slipped partly round with it & fell to the ground & he was never thoroughly well again.

Strange to say my memory is at fault as to what Royal funerals I sang at. I saw the Princess Sophia's which was a very grand one & took place at night but I was not in the Choir then. I think I sang at 2 or 3 one of them being Queen Adelaide's but I forget whether it was at night or in the day & I believe that Prince Edward of Saxe Weimar was Chief Mourner. The Royal vault was opened & I remember going down into it & seeing the Coffins of Kings & Queens in their purple and scarlet velvet covered coffins, the heart of Princess Charlotte being in an urn either at the head or the foot of her Coffin. And now I think I must close my reminiscences of S. Georges' - It seems to me that I have written very little, and there must be a lot more which I ought to remember.

One day we went up on the Round Tower & the keeper was able to wrap us all in the Royal Standard. I had one great fright soon after I went to Windsor but I deserved it. On winter nights coming out of the Chapel I & one or two of the other boys amused ourselves by ringing the bell of a private house at the bottom of the 100 steps. They watched for us, and one night I was caught - they threatened to send for a Policeman but satisfied themselves by locking me in a dark room for what seemed to me an hour, but I expect it was only about 10 minutes, but it was a warning to me. On Founder's day at Eton we all, Men & Boys, dined in the "Great Hall" and I remember how very beautiful the Latin Graces "Non Nobis Domine used to sound as we sang it. Our Schoolmaster Mr French presented a wooden model of S George & the Dragon to the Chapel & it was placed on the Organ Screen & is still there. In a drawer at the bottom of it was placed the names of the Men & Boys who were in the Choir at that time.

While I was a boy at Windsor I always made a wish when I tasted any particular kind of fruit or vegetable for the first time in the season, as I

believe people do now, I always wished the same wish & I never told it anyone in order that it might come true but it didn't. My wish was that my voice might be good enough when a man to again get in a Cathedral Choir. I only tried once & that was for Gloucester Cathedral but the compass of my voice has always been a note short of what it should be to enable me to take the usual tenor solos as sung generally in Cathedrals. The quality of my voice was considered very good but the inability to reach A with any certainty prevented my being eligible for Cathedral service altho' Sir George Elvey in his testimonial of me said "He possesses a very pleasing tenor voice & is fit to take the place of Lay Clerk in any Cathedral" but I don't think he knew of my inability to reach that (to me) unfortunate A. One thing I never could do well either as a boy or man. My voice was never flexible in a run, tho' I've often sung "Every valley" Messiah, yet have never satisfied myself & I was never able to make a good and true shake. After I left St George's Sir George Elvey corresponded with me for years & after I left Amersham it was entirely thro' his influence that I obtained a situation on the Gt Northern Railway. And now I must end my experiences of Windsor, happy, very happy days, such days as few boys are privileged to have, and tho' my life has not been at all what it should have been, yet the influence of those days has I think often helped me to strive against evil.

To write my life from the time I left Windsor is a task I dare not attempt, but I will add a few more lines, recording what my musical life has been since I left Windsor. After I had been apprenticed two or three years at Amersham my voice developed into a tenor. I was apprenticed for 7 years but I think I barely served 6 years. I sang tenor in the services at the Parish Church the organist being Mr W H Birch who was a good musician & Choirmaster. I always received a hearty welcome at this House & assisted him in preparing two large Manuals of Psalms & Hymns & which he Edited as the Standard psalmist & which had a very large sale. I was always in request at all the Concerts in the neighbourhood principally singing Ballads such as "My Pretty Jane", "Madoline" "The Mulberry Tree" "Pilgrim of Love" "Bay of Biscay" etc and occasionally serio-comic ones such as "The low backed car" "Barney O'Hea" "How to ask & have". While at Amersham I also wrote & delivered a lecture on Music which tried me pretty much as the reading matter took over an hour & I also sang 13 songs to illustrate it. I belonged to the Choral Society there & we gave several good Concerts but never aspired to Oratorios. During my stay at Amersham I frequently sang at Egham Concerts which were held at the Egham

Institute & I remember being encored three times in one night there in "My Pretty Jane". It was at one of these Concerts that I first heard "The blind girl & her harp" sung, it having been composed just about that time. Some of my mischievous propensities followed me to Amersham & I was "locked up" for about half an hour one night for taking off the Village Beadle's hat & firing a sky rocket by putting the stick in the crown of it, but influence with the Magistrate's Clerk prevented me from being locked up for the night & I heard nothing more of it.

The first Choir I joined after leaving Amersham was that of Holy Trinity Church Manchester a thoroughly good voluntary Choir the men all being very nice fellows and quite a superior class of them the organist being Mr H Stevens a talented man but rather of a lazy nature. He & his wife were very kind to me & I was always welcome at their House & I also made some good friends in the Choir. I sang many Solos while in the Choir my best I think being "Oh come let us sing " Handel, & "Luther's Hymn". In the latter I thoroughly satisfied myself, which is saying a great deal.

I left the Trinity Choir having been elected a member of the Parish Church of Sale Moor, a place a few miles out of Manchester. This was a paid Choir & consisted of female Sopranos & Altos, & tenors and Basses all professionals from Manchester. I forget who was Organist but we sang from the gallery & besides the organ (which was a small one) we had violin & cello accompaniments. Sale Moor was a sort of suburb of Manchester where many of the merchants lived. I used to enjoy my Sundays there as I got on very well with the members of the Choir, we all dined together at the Hotel, spending the afternoons in the garden etc and it was nice hearing the birds sing & enjoying the fresh air of the country after being shut up in an office all the week.

I left Sale Moor to join St Peter's Choir Manchester. This was the best Choir in Manchester, all Professionals, female Sopranos & Altos & 4 tenors & Basses. The Organist Mr St John the Baptist Joule was a Magistrate & a man of means, giving his services gratuitously also himself paid the salaries of the Choir & gave £1000 towards the Organ. My trial solo for admission was "If with all your hearts". I don't know how many candidates there were but I know there were several & my heart beat with joy when I heard I was elected. I filled the position of 2nd tenor, the first tenor being a Mr Wilson who possessed a fine tenor voice & who was also a teacher of singing. I took lessons from him for some time, which greatly improved my style of singing. One song which I always

thought a very namby-pamby one viz: "I'm leaving thee in sorrow Annie" he strongly advised me to sing at a Concert, which after I had had several lessons in, I thought sounded quite a different song & I was twice encored in it. I have forgotten to mention that after leaving Amersham & while I was at Egham, I for sometime went to Windsor & took lessons of Mr Henry Barnby, a brother of Sir Joseph Barnby which also much improved my voice. During the time I was in Manchester I sang at many Concerts & I was a member of Mr Chas. Halle's Choir who gave very grand Concerts at the Free Trade Hall. I was also engaged to sing at the meetings of the Manchester Glee & Madrigal Society which were held at the Albion Hotel. Those were pleasant evenings. "Oh Memory" was about my greatest favourite in singing. At these gatherings besides receiving our fees, we had a very good supper, & coupons for two glasses of grog afterwards. I also sang at Several Concerts in the neighbourhood, at a private one at Lord Wilton's residence & at one at Ashton Under Lyne, the principals being Mrs Sunderland, a famous oratorio singer, known as the Yorkshire Nightingale, Miss Palmer Contralto, myself tenor, & Mr Henri Wharton Bass. I left Manchester to take an appointment in Oswestry & I was deeply pained at having to give up so many pleasant musical associations & I shall never forget how I felt when I sang my last "Amen" at the end of the evening service at St Peter's.

Oswestry was a small town with two Churches, the Parish & another. I joined the "Another" but to my surprise I forget the name of it, also the name of the Vicar & of the Organist who was a Lady. I had a pleasant time here, frequently dining with the Vicar who was a most genial & hospitable man, he was an Irishman, very popular in the Town, as I write this I can see his face & tho' I have tried for days to remember his name I cannot do so (margin note: the Rev. Cashell) & I am in precisely the same fit as to the Lady Organist (margin note: Miss Mary Lee) who was also most kind to me. I can see her face & her Sisters' & Fathers' & the carriage they drove to Church in but can't remember their names. Nothing of any particular nature took place in the musical way while I was at Oswestry. I sang at a few Concerts etc & when I left, my Lady friend the Organist gave me nice Hymn Book & a copy of my then favourite Hymn "Sometimes a light surprises" now sung to "Jerusalem the Golden" copied and beautifully illuminated by herself. While in Oswestry I made friends & shared lodgings with a young fellow named Whitcombe whose Father was Vicar of the Abbey & St Nicholas Shrewsbury & where I went to his home on Sundays. I generally sang in the Abbey Choir.

After leaving Oswestry I returned to Manchester for a short time & again joined Holy Trinity Choir & I also sang occasionally in the Sunday Choir at the Cathedral. After leaving Manchester I finally settled in Torquay, where I have now been nearly 38 years. I have not taken part in anything very much outside my business except in the Musical way, tho' I was the first Secretary of the Torquay Athletic Club also of the Postmen's boot & shoe Club, auditor of the Cemetery Co: 35 years, connected with the Rowing Club for many years. It has just occurred to me that I have omitted to mention that in 1859 while I was in Manchester I went to London to sing in the Handel Festival for which I have a medal. It was held at the Crystal Palace & was an enjoyable holiday & an inexpensive one as being on the R'way I had a first class Pass altho' my travelling expenses etc were paid. I greatly enjoyed the Solos, but the Choruses!! Ugh! It seemed to me as if I was surrounded by the Bulls of Bashan, the noise & shouting being deafening. I could not hear myself & did not trouble to sing very much. It was very different to my previous singing there 7 years before at the opening as a Boy.

Soon after coming to Torquay I joined the Choir of St Luke's where I remained about 10 or 11 years. The Vicar, the Rev Geo. Harris was a good & true friend to me. Mr W Vinning was Organist. I sang a great many Solos during the time I was there, the two most trying being "I know that my Redeemer liveth" generally taken by a Soprano, and "Comfort ye" & "Every valley", my favourites being "In splendour bright" & "Luther's Hymn". I repeated my Lecture on Music which I had given during my apprenticeship, for the benefit of the restoration of S Luke's Organ & cleared £12 by it, but again it tried me pretty much & just after I had finished it my voice left me. Mr Harris brought me down a couple of bottles of Port the next day but I did not recover my voice for two or three days. Two of the men, Allen & Carter who were in the Choir with me are still there (1901). I sang about a great deal in those days, my voice then being about at its best, Concerts, Penny Readings got up by the vicarage. Concerts at Newton & other places.. "My Pretty Jane" always took & I invariably received a double encore for it at Newton, where "Dreaming of Angels" was also very popular. In those days there was no Bath Saloon & the old Theatre was a barn of a place & most of the Concerts took place in a large room at the Union Hotel. Messrs Fowler & Rice started fortnightly Concerts there at which I frequently sang. I also went to Dartington Hall & other places in the neighbourhood of Torquay. The Penny Readings were discontinued & after a time I started some myself which I called Popular Readings. I decided to bear the loss

(if any) myself & to give the profits to the Infirmary. I held them principally at the Athenaeum, generally having a last "Grand night" at the Bath Saloon. They took up a great deal of time & caused me considerable anxiety, thro' the difficulty of getting people to sing or read & as was often the case getting a note the day before, or even on the day itself, pleading some excuse for absence. M Garcia, Capt Mullings, C Rodway, & Major Skurray & J Symons were my best helpers, also R.R.Hall & H Rice. On the whole they were successful & I handed over to the infirmary over £200. I used to get very aristocratic attendances at the Bath Saloons & my list of Patrons etc often included the Baroness Burdett Coutts & many titled people. For a few times I gave them for the benefit of the Convalescent Home at Moretonhampstead for which I cleared I think about £50.

I often think of the very great pleasure it gave me when singing with my dear Will at these Entertainments, my hand on his shoulder & my eyes quietly watching his dear little mouth as he seemed to sing from his very heart. Oh for those happy times again! I fancy even as I write these lines that I can see his face & hear his sweet voice when singin "Far away" with me. Thro' the kindness of Mr Kelly (Curate) I got all my 4 Boys in S Luke's Choir & I well remember dear Bertie & Will in their amateur Theatricals & Songs. I think Will's singing as a Boy with me & Em's "Annie Laurie" sung before we were married, carry me back to old times more than anything else.

After many years, about 11, the Choir was changed from a voluntary to a Paid Choir, and strict rules made as to attendance & imposition of fines etc and I found it impossible to conform to them especially as to attendance at Festivals. The Choir went to Mr Harris & asked him to make an exception in my favour but to the surprise of myself & all the others he declined to do so, saying that everyone must be treated alike. I had therefore no alternative but to resign, and it was with very much regret that I did so, and it was after much consideration and thought. I think he afterwards regretted the course he had taken & at his request when on his deathbed some time after Mrs Harris sent me a most kind letter & said it would give him much pleasure to know that I would have my two youngest children Xtened at St Lukes & this I had done at once.

Towards the latter part of the time that I had the Readings going on I started a Negro Minstrel Troupe calling it the Torquay Snowdrops which was a decided success but after a few years it came to grief. In the

course of a year or two I tried another which I walled the White Swallows. This had a much longer run than the other & was very successful. In addition to Men I introduced about a dozen Boys, also Altos principally from the Church Choirs which rendered the Choruses especially effective. We gave Entertainments not only in Torquay but also at Paignton, Brixham, & Chudleigh, sometimes giving the proceeds to one object & sometimes to another. One night I cleared £14 for the Rowing Club who had their boats damaged by a storm. I gave the proceeds of several to the Hospital. The best we held at the Bath Saloon and at the end of the Concert dancing commenced and lasted till the early hours of the morning, all classes of Society taking part in it, but there was one which I shall never forget. I arranged it for the benefit of Mrs Lee whose husband, a Boatman, was drowned in the Bay. We cleared a little more than £30 by it. I was centre Man as usual and had just sung the song "Close the Shutters Willie's dead" & was going to respond to the encore when a message came to me that my dear Reg (who was lying ill with typhoid) was dying. I hurriedly got someone to take my place and rushed home & into the sick room where I found him very ill & delirious, but I'm thankful to say he was spared to me, tho' his brother who was then not so ill was taken. That was a night never to be forgotten. I had no time even to remove the black from my face. I never ventured on that Song again. After a time the White Swallows came to an end but I was centre man in several troupes afterwards for the benefit of the Rowing Club, the last I think was in 1898 & I think for 50 years of age I got thro' the part very well.

After I had resigned from S Luke's a short time Mr W H Kitson & Mr Lutxmoore (The Upton Ch-wardens) called on me & asked me to join the Upton Choir which was a paid one & eventually I did so. At that time the Choir consisted of male & female members, the principal Sopranos being Mrs Labdon & the Misses Jenkins. Mr Charles Fowler was Organist & we did some very good services & Anthems. I don't remember anything specially taking place during the time I was in the Choir. I still sang at Concerts & my own Entertainments & in the Upton School room sang the first Song in Character that I ever did viz "Over the Garden Wall" & it took so well that I repeated it at S Matthias' Schoolroom, but Comic Songs were never in my line & I never sang one after.

In time the character of the Upton Choir was changed, Boys being substituted for females & for some time I acted as Choirmaster to the Boys & they came for their singing lessons to the Strand. Among them I

remember Tom Oliver, G Iredale, Sidney Ingram etc etc. Mr J Craddock succeeded Mr Fowler as Organist & he was a good one & was by far the best Choirmaster I have ever been under in any church & it really was a pleasure to attend the Upton weekly practice as everything went pleasantly and smoothly. After being in the Choir about 10 years, the men in the choir, (to my great surprise as I always thought I was most popular with them) protested to the Rector against my receiving a higher salary than they did & requested not that their salaries should be raised to mine but that mine should be lowered to theirs, & in the event of this not being done that they should all resign. The Rector & C/wardens called on me, wishing me to stay on, to agree to having my salary reduced, & that they would privately make up the difference, but seeing what was the feeling of the Choir towards me I determined in spite of much persuasion to resign at once from the Choir & I did so. A short time after leaving I joined S John's voluntary Choir, the Rev Hitchcock being Vicar & Mr Ditton Newman Organist. The latter died very soon after & was succeeded by Mr Luard Selby, who in turn was followed by Mr T H Webb after whom came Mr T W Noble. Mr Hitchcock was also succeeded by the Rev B R Airy.

A few years since (tho' I forget how many) I took part in a Burlesque called "Aladdin" at the Theatre, taking the character of the Emperor, & also that of the "Counsel for the Plaintiff" in Trial by Jury. The Entertainment was given for 6 nights & in every respect except financially a thorough success. It was as well staged as any Burlesque I have ever seen, well acted, very pretty music & altogether a most taking piece but I think it was in the wrong hands, viz. the "Splatts" who I don't think were very popular at that time. One incident I shall never forget in connection with that Entertainment, it took place at the Matinee in Trial by Jury when I suddenly forgot my part. I heard no prompter, sat perfectly still, felt as I never felt before "scratching my head" & then after what seemed to me an hour's pause I suddenly remembered my part.

While in S John's Choir I have found the Vicar most kind & genial, I have thoroughly enjoyed the Annual Choir trips which have been far above the average Church Choir trips as they have extended over two days. At one of these I nearly came to grief in having a fall & soiling & cutting my trousers, so as to render them unwearable, but the Vicar came to the rescue, lending me a pair of his, which after being turned up about a foot & a half did not look so bad, except that they wanted a quartern loaf to fill them out.

As before stated I have written these few lines at the request of my dear Bessie. I fear that they will come very far short of her expectation, & really there is very little about Windsor. I have written them in the Shop amid all kinds of interruptions which may account for many imperfections. I commenced this by relating how in 1850 we sang at the Castle before the Queen & also whenever she came to S.Georges, & that I also was one of those who used to serenade her on her birthday mornings & this year I have had the privilege of being present on the Saturday & Monday at her funeral & on the Monday especially, visions of my happy School days rose before me.

And now I am an old man & in my 64th year & yet, except for aches & pains, I do not feel old. I am still in S.John's Choir where I am looked upon, as I have been for several years past, by the Organist as a "Nonentity" - what a change from the early pages in this book - "Such is life" Sometimes even now I am vain enough to think I can sing a song or take a part fairly respectably & for my age my voice has lasted wonderfully well. But what an utter state of failure & regret - When I think of the thousands of Services I have been permitted to attend, the little use I have made of them, the many, many thousands of wandering thoughts that I have had. I feel that nothing but "failure" can describe the past. I am very thankful for all the mercies of the past & trust to make the best use of the short future that remains.

J.D March 11th 1901



James Douglas
(1837 - 1920)