

THE NOTRE DAME ORGAN

Its Inauguration by Mr. Archer

Montreal Now Possesses One of the Largest and the Finest Organs on the American Continent—Description.

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The inauguration of the grand organ in the Church of Notre Dame extending over three days last week, is an event that will be enshrined in the musical history of Canada as one of its most notable events. This instrument is not only one of the largest in the world, but in point of merit can justly claim precedence over any other on the American continent. It occupies a conspicuous position at the western end of the immense edifice. The dimensions of the case are: Height 45 feet, width 48 feet and depth 20. Two noble towers project 4 feet beyond containing 32 feet pipes of burnished tin. The specifications were prepared with unusual care by Dr. S. Duval and Messrs. Casavant, and contain many unique features, which are of unusual interest. The builders have executed their share of the work in a manner that cannot be too highly commented. As far as tone is concerned the result is all that can be desired; the richness and sonority of the foundation stops is a realization of ideal organ tone. The thin Gamba quality of the diapasons which is so great a defect in the majority of modern instruments, is here properly subordinated and utilized to add zest to the genuine diapason tone, which thus gains in breadth and sonority. The reed stops, of which there are no less than 24, are admirably "voiced," possessing dignity and breadth when needed, and charming and piquant delicacy in the case of solo stops. The whole tonal mass blends perfectly, is of colossal power and when employed in its entirety, amply sufficient to completely fill the vast area of the church. In order to increase the artistic value of the work, certain special stops have been obtained from famous European builders, for which they are respectively pre-eminent. In the matter of workmanship the builders are also entitled to eulogy. Every detail has been carried out with the most conscientious care, and the work itself is a model of artistic finish. The mechanical features of the instrument are of special interest, and reflect the highest credit on the ingenuity and scientific ability of Dr. S. Duval—many of whose inventions, by the way, have already been appropriated without acknowledgement by certain American organ builders. In the general construction he has in this instance employed both the tubular, pneumatic and electric systems. The elasticity of "touch," perfect repetition, and prompt and silent action in every department of the mechanism are features eminently noteworthy. All the accessories are entirely free from complication, but by means of them the player can produce every conceivable effect without effort. There are twenty combination pistons properly placed beneath the keyboards they affect. They are noiseless and prompt in action, and can be used simultaneously on the various manuals without deranging the mechanism. There are also eight adjustable combinations pedals, operated by electricity instead of the usual

clumsy mechanical means. A crescendo pedal is used, affecting respectively stops situated to the right and left of the player. The system of "coupling" is entirely new and its advantages in large organs cannot be questioned. By its aid each or all of the separate divisions of the instrument can be instantly transferred to the Choir or Great Manual. For instance, if it is desired to connect the Choir stops with the Choir Manual, which in its normal state is silent, the "choir to choir" coupler produces this result. If it is the wish of the player to operate the swell organ from the choir keyboard, the "swell to choir" coupler enables him to do so. If the two manuals are required simultaneously the "choir to choir" coupler must be drawn also. This clever device renders the production of otherwise impossible effects perfectly easy of accomplishment. Many other valuable adjuncts are also introduced, all of which amply fulfill their destined purpose. The Solo and Swell Organs are enclosed in swell boxes, the Great is very properly allowed full scope. The Solo Organ is also of distinctive type, not merely a supplemental choir organ. Unlike many instruments of unusual dimensions, this is not merely a combination of several ordinary church organs contained in one case, involving a re-duplication of stops, but is "sealed," "voiced" and "winded" in conformity with its size and type. Although allotted to church purposes, and well adapted to the ornate musical ritual of the Roman Catholic service, it is a concert organ in the true sense of the term.

The following summary of its contents will give a general idea of its magnitude; It contains four manuals, each of five octaves, and Pedal Organ of two-and-a-fourth octaves. There are upwards of five thousand pipes, ninety-nine draw stops and twenty manual and pedal mechanical accessories. The keyboards are situated eighteen feet distant from the organ. The Great Organ contains twenty-two stops: the Swell, twenty-one stops; Choir, eleven stops; Solo, eleven stops, and Pedal, seventeen stops; couplers, thirteen: mechanical stops, four, making the grand total of actual speaking stops, all of which extend through the entire compass, eighty-two.

At the inaugural recitals, for which Mr. Frederic Archer, one of the most eminent of living organists, was specially engaged, and which took place on the evenings of Wednesday, Thursday and Friday last, the great church was crowded on each occasion, no less than 35,000 persons having been present during the series. Amongst the auditors were visitors from far and near, attracted alike by the organ and the player, for Mr. Archer, although frequently with us, always proves to be, here as elsewhere, a potent attraction. In order to secure the services of the famous virtuoso, the inauguration of the instrument was postponed from the dates originally named, and the result amply justified this step, for most certainly few living organists could have so thoroughly and exhaustively displayed the marvels of this organ. He seemed as much at home at it as though he had played thereon for years. Having won for himself world-wide reputation, any detailed criticism of his performance is unnecessary, but it may be said that, seemingly inspired by the resources at his command, his playing on this occasion reached even a higher plane of excellence than heretofore, both in technique and in intellectuality, although from past achievements this was apparently impossible.

To make the inauguration of this splendid instrument more complete, a large choir, made up of some of the most prominent singers from the choirs of the various city churches, rendered with excellent effect, under the direction of Prof. Couture, selections chosen and arranged for the occasion.

Dr. Duval in his report to the churchwardens of Notre Dame Church says:

Gentlemen,—A resolution of your board dated 14th Nov., 1885, authorized “the construction of an organ by Messrs. Casavant and under the direction of Dr. Duval.” The contract of the 23rd of the same month specified that this organ should be made “under the direction and supervision and according to the instructions given by S. Duval, M.D., especially appointed for that purpose by ‘*La Fabrique*’.” It is now my pleasant duty to report on the charge then entrusted me. I have day by day followed the progress of construction of this instrument, and I can certify that all the material used is of the first quality. Not only have the Messrs. Casavant completely fulfilled the requirements of the contract, as also my instructions, but in many respects they have done much more.

After completing his report, Dr. Duval handed it to Mr. Archer, asking him if he was in accord with what he had said in reference to the organ; for reply he sat down and appended the following endorsement:

I have much pleasure in endorsing all that Dr. Duval states above. I consider the instrument in all respects admirable, and in my judgment may be cited as the best and most fully equipped instrument on the American continent.

Frederic Archer

Montreal, May 23, 1891.