

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MUSIC IN AMERICA.

I APPRECIATE the delicacy of the task before me when I attempt to discuss publicly the subject of musical culture in America. For several years I have been identified with German music, and I fear that I shall consequently be considered a German partisan. But at the outset of this article I wish to state that it is my purpose to make a plea, not for German music, but for the interpretation of the best music and the encouragement of the best musical culture in this country.

America may now be said to be in a state of transition with regard to music. It would be a platitude to say that musical taste has always existed in this country, for a love of music is characteristic of nearly all people. But music has not been scientifically encouraged here to any great extent until within the past few seasons. New York has had for many years productions of opera of more or less merit. It is only within the past half-dozen years, however, that these have been on a scale to compare with the productions of the best opera-houses in Europe. For several seasons we have had German opera presented in a manner that was elaborate in every particular; but through a strange combination of circumstances, though the public gave every sign of satisfaction with it, it was discontinued, and the old school of opera, which many of those who had the interest of music at heart hoped had been superseded by the higher forms of music developed within the last half-century, was substituted in its place. It is maintained by the advocates of the old style that this change was due to the lack of popularity and support of German opera by the New York public. This theory, however, can find no support from the facts.

Any one who has closely studied the music-loving public of America cannot fail to have been struck by the intense enthusiasm with which German music in nearly all of its forms has been received here. If opera in this country were given for the benefit of the public, such a change of policy as we have witnessed recently at the Metropolitan Opera-House, in New York, from German to Italian opera, would be a reasonable sign of a change in the popular taste; but as the conditions are different here, the same fact is not indicative of a similar circumstance. Opera in America does not

mean artistic entertainment given for the people and supported by the people; it means simply a diversion on a large scale, established not for the instruction of the many, but merely for the amusement of the rich, who are the few, and supported by the rich. Consequently the change of policy simply demonstrates that the half-dozen wealthy men and women who have done most to maintain opera in New York have become weary of German opera as an amusement, and chosen to establish Italian and French opera in its place. This is not surprising, for German opera can hardly be called a mere amusement.

If it were a mere amusement I should have no desire to write this article, and indeed the subject of opera would be altogether too trivial for public discussion. But believing as I do that music is one of the highest and most ennobling of the arts, I cannot but regret the course which it is taking in this country. The millionaires of the Opera-House probably do not realize that the methods which they have chosen to afford themselves musical diversion are the most effective methods which could possibly have been chosen to obstruct the progress in musical culture of their fellow-citizens. Their action practically retards the musical development of New York, and, through New York, that of the whole country. For just as New York has for many years influenced the whole commerce of America, so it is now influencing the art development of America. If it could be said of these persons that their action was directed by any real love of music or by a desire to contribute to its advancement, the condition of affairs would not be so pitiable as it is; but few, if any, of them have any scientific knowledge of music, and only a small proportion of these have even the slightest appreciation of the pleasure which may be derived from it.

For the benefit of those who do not recognize the distinction between the old and the new form of opera, let me indicate what I regard as the fundamental differences between them. The old-fashioned opera doubtless had in its origin some resemblance to nature, but it certainly has grown away from nature and become *sui generis*. It is in no sense what the highest form of art should be—an expression of human emotions. Its music is of a melodious character which bears a relation to the best music somewhat similar to the relation that exists between nursery rhymes and an epic poem. German opera, on the other hand, may be defined as a musical drama. By its action and language it portrays the most profound emotions of humanity, which find an adequate expression in music of an appropriate exaltation. However, it is absurd to compare Italian and German opera;

one might as reasonably compare the prettiness of a landscape and the grandeur of a majestic mountain. It is unnecessary for me to dwell at length upon the difference in effect upon the musical education of the public between the old and the new opera; the one entertains, the other elevates and instructs. Is not this enough to suggest the distinction which makes them foreign to each other?

If it were the office of art merely to amuse, something might be said in favor of the old form of opera, though it is hard to believe that one could really be amused by it. There are, however, other evils in connection with the production of old-fashioned opera besides those which are inherent to its nature. It has become thoroughly identified with the so-called "star system," one of the most pernicious evils from which musical art has ever suffered. The star system subordinates music to the musician, not, as should be the case, the musician to music; consequently people, instead of going, as they should, to hear the work of the composer, flock in crowds to hear or to see some interpreter who has won a reputation for the beauty of his voice or for some purely personal attraction which has no connection whatever with art. The consequences of this evil are disastrous; they tend to make the production of an opera as such a secondary thing, to subordinate everything to the leading artist, and to cause the *ensemble*, on which the artistic excellence of an opera rests, to be neglected. A few years ago this system was immensely popular in America. No fair-minded person, however, can deny that it received a permanent blow by the establishment here of German opera. The German school of music certainly may be said to have done this if it has done no more: it has taught people that the opera is the thing, not the opera-singer, and that an imperfect performance, that is, a performance with one or two admirable artists supported by several inferior ones, is an intolerable breach of art. This fact makes me look with more or less satisfaction upon the three years of Franco-Italian opera which are before us, for I believe that in this period the American public will learn by contrast to appreciate the virtues of the German system of music. It seems to me that those people who take a sincere interest in the musical welfare of this country need feel no alarm at the present state of affairs. If one studies the evolution of opera, he will, I think, be convinced that the chances of its establishment as a permanent institution are decidedly in favor of the German rather than of the Italian and French opera—perhaps I ought rather to say in favor of opera produced after the German manner.

A glance at the history of music in this country will make clear my reason for holding this view. The first ventures into the field of German opera were on the most modest scale, and were made, moreover, at a time when the beautiful voices and admirable singing of Mesdames Alboni, Jenny Lind, and Henrietta Sontag were delighting the public. The work which was done by the German singing societies of New York produced the most splendid results and prepared the way for the production of opera of the German school and in the German method. We have heard some admirable singers during the past season, but we should remember that a quarter of a century ago there were even greater vocalists of the sort of which Adelina Patti is now almost the only surviving specimen. A decade ago New York held a magnificent array of artists—Patti, Gerster, Trebelli, Nils-son, Sembrich, Scalchi, Campanini, and many others of almost as great excellence. Such an assemblage is not available nowadays. Nevertheless, in spite of their merits, the public tired of them and the pabulum of sweetness which they offered it. Consequently there was such a reaction against the old forms of music that German opera was established on an apparently firm footing, and was given the following winter with almost unprecedented enthusiasm. The splendid support and the interest with which it was received and its growth in the appreciation of the audiences for the next half-dozen years are now matters of history. It is pathetic to think that the education in public taste which was then begun has been so suddenly stopped.

Those who have attended the operatic performances in New York for the past few seasons cannot have failed to be struck by the difference in bearing between the audiences at the German and those at the Italian opera. The German opera attracted audiences which showed by the close and respectful attention they paid to the performances that they were profoundly interested in them. Indeed, they were so serious, so attentive, and so respectful that it was a pleasure, instead of a burden, for an artist to undergo the severe hardship which his work imposed upon him in order to win their approval. During the past winter, on the contrary, the lack of interest among those who attended the opera was so conspicuous that it could not fail to be noticed by the most superficial observer. The spectacle of fashionable people arriving in large numbers long after the performance has begun can hardly gratify those who look upon an opera as a unity which can be appreciated only in its entirety, and nothing can be more absurd or display a greater contempt for the musical art

than the flocking to the opera-house of large crowds, not for the purpose of enjoying a great operatic work, but to hear one singer whose abilities so far outstrip those of his companions as to take him altogether out of the dramatic picture. The scenes which are enacted at the performances of Adelina Patti, for example, are the most disheartening to any real lover of the musical art that could be imagined. It is hard to believe, when one witnesses such scenes as these in New York, that the people who create them are in many instances the very ones who supported German opera here and conducted themselves with as much discrimination as the music-loving audiences of Europe do.

I cannot find any reason for the assertion which has been made on all sides of late that a change in musical taste has taken place in New York. It is true that there is in every large city a small contingent who care far more for artists than for art; these people, however, should not be taken seriously, for they know nothing whatever about art. It is worth noting, by the way, that they form the most capricious and the most treacherous of patrons, and their support is sure to be of the most unstable character. Their pitiable ignorance causes them to encourage artistic inaccuracies and perversions which the critical spirit of real music lovers would speedily eradicate. The absence of scientific criticism is an injury to any art. This fact was borne in upon me strongly when I witnessed the performance of "Faust" as given at the Opera-House during the past season. "Faust" is undoubtedly one of the best of modern operatic works, and it is often cited by the lovers of the old school as an ideal example of their favorite form of opera. But these enthusiasts are apt to ignore a fact which, by the way, is often forgotten, that Goethe had something to do with the creation of "Faust," in spite of the annihilating genius of Messieurs Barbier and Carré. I have no desire to criticise an artist of such really remarkable aptitude as Mlle. Eames, but I could not help wondering how she could offend the artistic sense of every intelligent spectator with her fine dressing and her high-bred air. Her performance of "Marguerite" has been called ideal, but I could find nothing ideal in such a distortion of one of the best-known characters in literature. Whether the character is called "Marguerite" or "Gretchen," she remains a simple rustic maiden, not the *châtelaine* that Mlle. Eames makes her.

Then, too, in the formation of the chorus the absence of healthful criticism this winter was very noticeable. But we must remember that the art *dilettante* such as we find in the opera boxes at the Metropolitan Opera-House has no interest in the chorus and not the

faintest realization of its importance; on the contrary, he would be gratified if it could be eliminated altogether from operatic productions. Possibly this explains his stoical indifference to the offences committed by the chorus with which the people of New York have been afflicted during the past winter. On the whole, this season, brilliant though it may have been in places and in the brilliancy of the work done by a few of its artists, has yielded no artistic results whatever. The operas have been so hurriedly pitchforked on the stage that even the artists have suffered. This, however, is the Italian way of doing things, and may possibly be pardoned on that account. One must not expect too much when he finds in the cast one or two of the greatest singers in the world. If it is true that the French and the Italians are better singers than the Germans, it is equally true that the Germans are infinitely greater artists than the French and Italians. German singers, however great they may be, realize the importance of subjecting themselves to the same discipline as that to which the most unimportant character is subjected. They are, besides, more serious, more musical, and more conscientious than those trained in the slipshod Italian school which panders to their vanity and thus warps their artistic sense.

I have been accused of being a blind devotee of German opera, but I believe that this charge is undeserved. It is true that I adhere to the new school of music as opposed to the old, and I support any good music written after the new forms, whether it come from a German, French, an Italian, or an English composer. The Germans are not the only composers who follow the new school of musical composition, though inasmuch as this school was founded by a German, they naturally have become identified with it on account of the enthusiastic support which they have given it. It is a mistake, however, to say that the new forms of music are due wholly to Wagner. Wagner created them, but he was himself the creation of his time. We had grown away from the old methods, and the conditions were ripe for a new and higher development. Wagner saw in the opera the possibilities which it afforded for the expression of the profoundest emotions and the noblest sentiments of man, and he developed them as no one before or no one since has done. He saw clearly the folly of attempting to foster incompleteness in art, and maintained that no art deserved the name of art unless it was perfectly rounded; so he made opera the vehicle not merely for pretty voices, but for the highest forms of music. Wagner is to music what Shakespeare is to

the drama. His theories have now been widely accepted, his example followed by many imitators, and there is no doubt that the future development of music will be on the lines he has laid down.

The Americans, notwithstanding all that has been said to the contrary, are a musical people. Their taste is still unformed, but it is naturally a good one and is sure to grow in the right direction. But in order to grow in the right direction it must be properly cultivated. It has thus far been sufficiently developed to enable them to appreciate the superiority of the new methods in music over the old. What has already been achieved is remarkable when one considers the disadvantages which retard the progress of music in this country. Whenever operas have been given, they have been almost invariably sung in an alien tongue. This is of course a great obstacle to their appreciation. No satisfactory artistic results can be achieved here, nor can America produce any national music, until opera is given in English. I look forward to the time when American composers shall produce great operatic works of a distinctly original character written in the vernacular; but until that time comes I believe that such foreign works as are performed here should be translated into English. The achievements of such American composers as Professor J. K. Paine, who has done admirable work, of E. A. McDowell, whose compositions seem to me to be superior to those of Brahms, of G. W. Chadwick, Templeton Strong, and others augur well for the future productions of American composers. The unsatisfactory condition of our musical culture is due chiefly to the intermittent opportunities which are given here for musical education. It would be folly to expect people to form a healthy musical taste simply by hearing operas occasionally produced and almost always in an inadequate manner. Besides, such operas as we hear are generally given under alien conditions, which make them foreign to the American mind. The singers whom America imports in such large numbers from abroad do undoubtedly a great deal of good, but they also do harm, for they bring influences which are essentially un-American.

What we need is American opera given under American influences. This can be brought about only by an elaborate and well-organized system of musical education. We have plenty of good material for the making of musicians, but this material is buried beneath the army of foreign artists who come annually to our shores, and whom Americans have formed the habit of encouraging—often simply because they are foreigners. In order to bring out this latent material, a school for

opera should be established here. If conducted on the best principles, it would be of inestimable advantage. It would keep at home those young musicians who annually go abroad to study, sometimes under the greatest disadvantages, and would encourage those to undertake a musical education who are deterred from it by the expense which they would incur by European training. The school should not only train singers, but also young men ambitious to become orchestra-players and orchestra-leaders. There should be in connection with it a theatre in which operas might be produced. The institution would thus be a practical school for opera. The first year after its establishment should be spent in fundamental training. Private performances of opera should be given, but no public ones until the artists had been thoroughly disciplined. As soon as this was accomplished, three or four operas might be publicly produced each year. Native singers would thus have the advantage of being heard under the most favorable conditions, and native instrumentalists would display their talent in the orchestra; we need, especially, a better training in this country for orchestra-leaders. American composers, too, would be greatly helped, for the school should endeavor to encourage them, not by ignoring works written by foreigners, but by giving preference to operas written by Americans. If it were possible to raise a guarantee fund for such an establishment, splendid results might be obtained in a very short time.

Such a plan as I have suggested may seem impracticable; but I am convinced that if it were carried out under the best auspices, that is, controlled by persons who had the interest of music at heart, it would surely be a success. But if it were controlled simply by the rich who regarded music as a mere diversion, it would surely be a failure. America is a great country, but it has as yet done very little in the arts. Nevertheless, there is no reason why it should not develop an individual musical art which should compare favorably with that of Germany or France or Italy. Such an institution would be of immense benefit if it only taught us to cease aping the French and Italian peculiarities and to work on individual lines. Let us, by all means, assimilate what is best in German, French, and Italian art, but we can do this without being enslaved by any one of them; and let us endeavor to express our own natures, which is, after all, the only means of attaining that highest and best of qualities, originality.

ANTON SEIDL.

THE WOMAN'S EXCHANGE: CHARITY OR BUSINESS?

FEW persons whose attention is attracted by the modest sign of the Woman's Exchange, now found in nearly all our large cities, realize that a new competitor has appeared in the industrial market. Few even of those who have assisted in organizing and carrying on such Exchanges know that they have been instrumental in introducing a new factor into economic problems. Yet in spite of unpretentious rooms and unconcern as to economic questions, the Woman's Exchange has already had an appreciable effect on economic conditions, and must in future play a still more important part.

The history of these organizations belongs, however, to a history of philanthropic work rather than to that of economics. The first Exchange, the "Ladies' Depository Association" of Philadelphia, established in 1833, was founded by persons "who labored earnestly to arouse in the community an interest in the hard and often bitter struggle to which educated, refined women are so frequently exposed when financial reverses compel them to rely upon their own exertions for a support." In its foundation and in its management it was controlled entirely by philanthropic motives; it was to enable women "who had seen better days" and suffered more from the prejudices of society in regard to woman's work than from actual poverty, "to dispose of their work without being exposed to the often rough handling of shopkeepers, or to the then mortifying admission of their fancied humiliating condition." The second Exchange, the "New Brunswick, New Jersey, Ladies' Depository," founded in 1856, also was purely charitable in its motives, and it restricted its privileges to those who had been in affluent circumstances but were suddenly forced to become self-supporting. The first two Exchanges were the product of a generation in which charities of every kind were largely regulated by sympathy alone, and it was twenty years before similar organizations were formed elsewhere. In 1878 the "New York Woman's Exchange" was begun, and it added a new idea. Its aim was "beneficence, rather than charity," and it undertook "to train women unaccustomed to work to compete with skilled laborers and those