

IN August, 1877, I was unexpectedly called to Chicago to protect business interests involved in a failure precipitated by the railway strike and riots of that year. I did not know, when I started, that I could even enter the town, and gentlemen from the country were supposed to take their lives in their hands in the mob-ridden streets of what had once been called the "Garden City."

I got there safely, however, and found as quiet a burg as ever seemed to drowse, and very hot. That evening, wandering out for a breath of air, I came upon the old Exposition Building down on the Lake Front, and from its open doors and windows floated, instead of shots and battle cries, the divinest music. Theodore Thomas was giving there his first Chicago season of summer-night concerts,

and for the first time I heard a great orchestra.

I moved to Chicago that autumn, and he came again for summer-night concerts in 1880, and every year thereafter, except 1884, until 1891, when he brought his orchestra to Chicago for good—for exceeding great good—and played there until he died, in 1904. Literally, therefore, we Chicagoans summered and wintered with Theodore Thomas for five and twenty years, and we loved him well. His work and his spirit abide with us still; and, please God, they always shall.

I became personally acquainted with Mr. Thomas in 1881, and the acquaintance ripened into intimacy. One day in 1889 I met him on Fifth Avenue, and we turned into the old Delmonico's. He looked worn and worried, and I asked him why. There

were reasons enough. There was mortal illness in his home; the American Opera Company, that short and melancholy chapter of good music and bad management, had swept away his savings; and, almost worst of all, he had been obliged to give up his own permanent orchestra. To use his own words, "I have had to stop engaging my men by the year, and now I play with scratch orchestras. In order to keep my old orchestra together I always had to travel constantly, winter and summer, the year round, and year after year. Now I am fifty-three, too old to stand the traveling. New York alone cannot support my orchestra, so it has had perforce to be disbanded. I do not mean that my *business* has gone; I can make money enough, it is not that. It is the standard! The only artistic work I am doing now is with the Philharmonic; but that is a voluntary association of musicians, whose members elect me director. They are my lifelong friends, and they, too, are growing old. Many of them can no longer do good work; but I cannot turn them out, even if I would. The standard of the Philharmonic, even, is falling. I know it now; in a year or two the critics will know it; then the public will know it, and that will be the end of Theodore Thomas."

For a moment, so bitter was his tone, I had nothing to reply; but finally I said: "Is there no one, no rich and generous man, to do here in New York as Major Higginson has done in Boston—keep your orchestra going, and pay the deficit?"

"No one," he answered. "I have told them often, those who say they are my friends, that for good work there must be a permanent orchestra; and for a permanent orchestra, which will not pay, there must be a subsidy. My work is known; I am old now, and have no ax to grind. But they do not care. They think I have always kept the body and soul together somehow, and that I always will—that I have nowhere else to go. They treat me as a music merchant, a commercial proposition, subject to the laws of supply and demand."

My thoughts went back to those ten years of summer-night concerts, and to some powerful and devoted friends of Thomas and his music at home, and I

asked, "Would you come to Chicago if we could give you a permanent orchestra?" The answer, grim and sincere, and entirely destitute of intentional humor, came back like a flash, "I would go to hell if they gave me a permanent orchestra."

Well, Chicago has always resembled the west end of the next world in this, among other things, that it is wide open to good company. And then and there were roughed out in talk the general principles of an agreement under which the Theodore Thomas Orchestra has lived, moved, and had its being in that city for eighteen years. They are very simple, and are worth noting here:

1. That Thomas should come to Chicago to create there a *permanent* orchestra, whose purpose should be to produce the greatest music in the greatest way.

2. That he should have absolute control of orchestra and programme-making, and should carry on his lifelong campaign for good art without reference to box-office receipts.

3. That ways and means should be the affair of a supporting Association, and should include a guarantee against deficits of at least \$50,000 per annum, for three years.

4. That there should be no "entangling alliances" with any piano house, theater, musical college, impresario, or newspaper—in fact, no business relations of any kind which might subject the Association to any commercial influence or limit its absolute independence.

5. That the members of the orchestra should be given contracts for at least twenty-eight weeks in each year, during which they should play under no other baton than that of the Director, except by his consent, first obtained.

6. That the principal series of concerts should be of symphonic character, and consist of a Friday *matinée* and Saturday evening performance of the same programme in each week, for not less than twenty weeks in each season. This was afterwards increased to twenty-eight weeks.

Thomas also proposed a series of "popular" concerts on Sunday afternoons for the benefit of the treasury and for educational purposes, such as he had always given "on the road;" but the



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objections of some powerful supporters of the Association to Sunday concerts have always prevented carrying out this proposal.

When I returned to Chicago after this talk, it did not take long to find support for the plan outlined above. The Orchestral Association, a "corporation not for pecuniary profit," was formed under Illinois law, consisting of five members: Messrs. N. K. Fairbank, E. B. McCagg, A. C. Bartlett, Charles D. Hamill, and myself. Mr. Fairbank, a leader in all the liberalities, was President, and I was Vice-President and factotum. Fifty gentlemen, headed by the late Marshall Field and including those named above, gave me their signatures to a guarantee of \$1,000 per annum each for three years against any deficit resulting from our operations. Mr. Thomas took a year and a half to get together a satisfactory orchestra, and commenced his first regular Chicago season in October, 1891.

Artistically, the success of our undertaking was great and cumulative. Relieved from the necessity of constant travel, exhausting both to himself and his men, and for the first time in his life free from the business cares of so large a concern; able to search the world for master musicians—young men, vigorous and enthusiastic; rehearsing four times a week and playing twice; inspiring them with artistic purpose and a proud *esprit de corps*—Thomas developed his orchestra from year to year as a gardener develops a splendid rose. After the first three or four seasons had covered the mass of the repertoire, had taught it to the men, collectively, so to speak; as the weaker of the musicians at first engaged were weeded out and replaced by stronger, and as all grew in knowledge, in tone color, quality, rhythm, phrasing, balance, Thomas constantly revised his markings of scores and parts so as to bring his demands upon the individual players up to their ability to perform. For, as he would say, "An orchestra must go the pace of the slowest member." This evolution upward of his interpretations continued to the very last, no matter how well known and oft-repeated the work. Always, but especially in his later years, the astonishing virtuosity of his orchestra, its dramatic

power and effect, the dazzling beauty and blending of its tone color, its perfection of quality and shading, well deserved Cesar Thompson's epigram, "I have seen many a man direct an orchestra, but never heard a man *play on* one before;" and Paderewski's exclamation, "I have played that concerto a hundred times, but never *heard* it before in my life!"

Such comments were not novel. Years before Anton Rubinstein had said to William Steinway, after his tour across the United States with the old Thomas Orchestra: "I little thought to find in this new country the finest orchestra in the world! Man for man, the Orchestra of the Conservatoire in Paris is perhaps equal to them, but, unfortunately, they have not Theodore Thomas to direct."

Fortunate it was that we had artistic success to buoy us up, for financially our record was melancholy enough. For fourteen successive years there was an annually recurring deficit, commencing with \$54,000 the first year, and tapering irregularly down to \$21,000 at the last, which had to be met by a constantly lessening number of determined men. Every year after the expiration of the first three years guaranteed we had to procure another for a single year—our friends being too timid to give longer pledges—and we never could secure quite enough. Every two or three years we had to pass the hat for an extra subscription to wipe out an accumulated deficit. As time went on many of our strongest supporters died, some moved away, some had financial reverses, not a few became discouraged and quit. After ten years had passed and \$350,000 had been sunk, and Mr. Thomas was nearing the allotted three-score and ten, we awoke to the dread that with his retirement or death, and the disruption of his personal following, our beloved orchestra would go out like a smoked cigar, and become a mere memory, as beautiful but as melancholy as that of the great white Court of Honor which for one brief summer stood stately in the sunsets by our Lake.

"*Il n'est que le premier pas qui coûte*" may be true in general, but not in the establishing of a great art. We had supposed it necessary merely to bring the Thomas Orchestra to Chicago and adver-



FREDERICK STOCK
Conductor of the Theodore Thomas Orchestra

tise it, to sell out our great Auditorium by season sale. Remembering the happy crowds that night after night in summer had drifted down to that old pavilion on the Lake Front, contemplating a far larger and better orchestra, with great soloists, and playing twice a week only, in winter when people are in town, we almost laughed at Thomas's insisting upon a \$50,000 guarantee. We thought we might lose \$25,000 the first year; hardly longer. But we forgot the hot summer nights, the closed theaters; we reckoned without the drawing power of that vast airy Exposition Building down by the Lake, the only cool

place in town, the palms and the little tables, the dim sequestered reaches at the sides and back of the floor, where quietly glowed the cigar and foamed the beer, where melted the ice and the glance of its fair consumer, while from afar came the refrain of the "Spring Song" or the noble melody of the "Ave Maria." We were not so musical, after all. Two hours on end of what our Philistines still call "classic music," with only fifteen minutes' intermission to stretch one's legs, proved to be caviar to the general. "Music hath charms—yes," said one honest gentleman, "but *symphonies*—"

And we had to take our symphonies, whether we liked them or not. "The old man," as Adams, our business manager, styled Thomas, was a sort of stern deity, who had to be appeased with sacrifice and burnt offerings. "What can a manager do?" groaned Adams. "Here I engage Nordica this week and think to draw a house, and along comes the old man with a Brahms symphony on the programme and knocks me out."

Yet Thomas was right, with the wisdom born of thirty years of programme-making. "Without beer and cigars," he used to say, "a long series of light or 'popular' programmes is impossible. People will not keep on coming. But without a long series of concerts a great orchestra is impossible. What then remains? Nothing but to play the *great* music. The great works of the great composers greatly performed, the best and profoundest art, these, and these alone, according to universal experience, will hold from week to week and year to year those season subscribers who are the mainstay of the box office. Bear in mind that a season ticket, bought and paid for, is better than a carriage to bring a woman to a concert on a rainy day. Play *some* light programmes? Yes. To those who cannot enjoy the great music, poor fellows, I do not grudge that they can enjoy. Music is music, and I too know how to be gay. I will play for them now and then, but it is not for Tell Overture and Händel Largo that Chicago supports my orchestra. One does not buy a Krupp cannon to shoot sparrows."

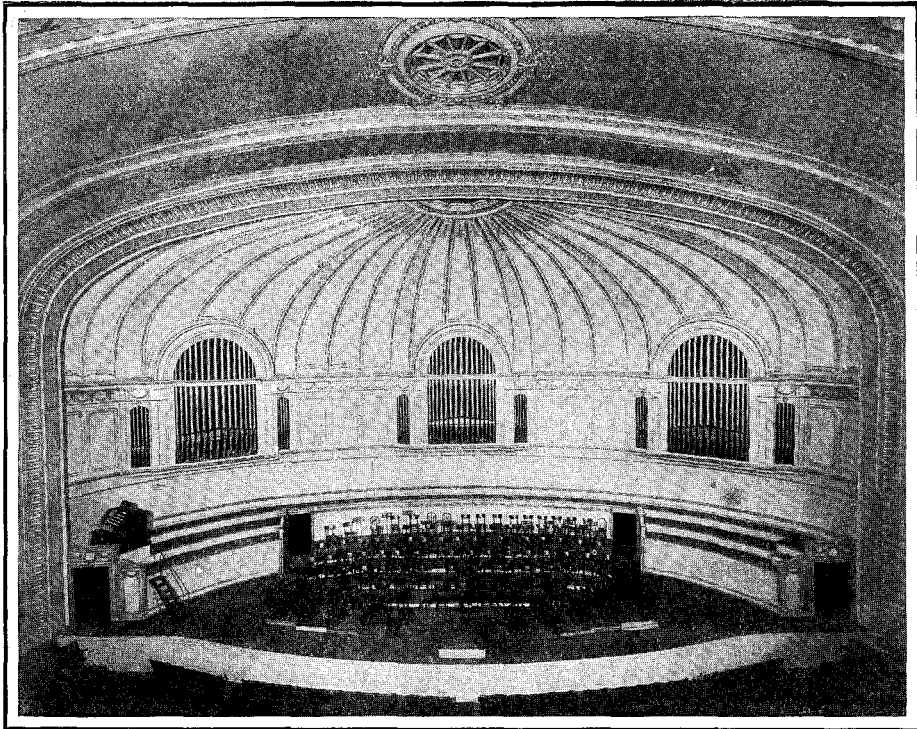
All these fragments of the eternal verities we of the ways and means committee gradually appreciated as time went on. Our season sale was indeed our sheet anchor, but it was too light, and dragged in windy weather. Unfortunately, our hall, the great and acoustically perfect Auditorium, seating 4,200, proved to be far too big for our average audience of 2,500. That fact minimized our season sale; for when you know there are sure to be twenty-eight weeks of concerts, and hundreds of empty seats at most of them, only a sense of duty, a season sense, as it were, such as grows in Boston, leads you to buy a season ticket.

So, after ten years, as I said before, we

began to lose heart. As nearly as we could judge, we had a public of ten thousand to twelve thousand persons out of Chicago's two millions or more; always the same people, who watched our advance notices, and five or six times a year would come rushing in and fill our great house for some special programme or great soloist, and for the remaining twenty-odd weeks would leave it half empty. Evidently our deficit was always to be there. Already two powerful and determined friends—Messrs. Bryan Lathrop and D. H. Burnham—had pulled us through two crises, following the bad times of 1893 and 1896, by hard work among their friends, in collecting extra subscriptions. We had created one of the most perfect musical organizations in the world; but it depended upon a mere series of subscription concerts in a hired hall, without substantial foundation or cohesive strength. A weak successor to Mr. Thomas, a change in the control and use of the Auditorium, another panic, the death of either of two or three prominent supporters, some mere pin-prick of local antagonism, might touch our lovely iridescent bubble, and it would burst and vanish forever. Alas, it does not need a sledge-hammer to shatter a Stradivarius!

We discussed uncertainly a supreme effort to raise an endowment fund of \$500,000, to be invested in bonds whose income should permanently pay our deficits; but our faithful friends showed no interest in this proposal. What guarantee had we, they asked, that the fund would be large enough, that recurring and increasing deficits would not wipe it out? And indeed we had none; quite the contrary. We were "about all in," as the fighters say.

Now, for many years Thomas had been telling us to build a Music Hall of about two thousand seats for the orchestra, which should be its property and its home. He urged this mainly for artistic reasons. He said it was impossible to go much further than he had already gone in an oversized hired-hall like the Auditorium, whose use for other purposes was not subordinated to the convenience of the orchestra. When musicians are keyed up to the pitch of virtuosity demanded by modern orchestral standards, especially



THE STAGE OF ORCHESTRA HALL



THE FOYER OF ORCHESTRA HALL

those set by Thomas himself, the least defect in the physical conditions surrounding them puts a ragged edge on their work, as if one should sharpen a razor with a grindstone. Bad air, dust, drafts, difference in temperature between stage and floor, poor light, confusion at rehearsals, properties or people moving

about the stage, noises, rehearsing in one place and playing in another, inconvenient dressing-rooms and lockers—a thousand littlenesses grow impossibly large as one approaches perfection in orchestral work. There is perhaps no art in which achievement more depends upon environment.

All this Thomas urged upon us, as well

as the prestige, dignity, and solidity of an established Institution with "a local habitation and a name"—a fit and monumental home of its own. The idea appealed to us all, but especially to our chief idealist, Mr. Burnham. His happy theory, which he certainly has sustained in many a splendid fight, is that, if you "hitch your wagon to a star," that star will pull; that if your plan be but ideal enough, it will fascinate, rouse enthusiasm, and prevail. So, like Brahms, he sang the old song, "*Ich habe gebaut ein stättliches Haus*," to his and Thomas's friend the late Arthur Orr, who took fire and started the campaign for permanent endowment of the orchestra, provided it should take the form of a hall, with a pledge of \$25,000.

Just then came into the market, at \$450,000, a piece of ground on Michigan Boulevard, opposite the Lake Front Park and the Art Institute; which last occupies the spot where once stood the old Exposition Building, Thomas's original summer-night concert stand. It was ideally situated for the purpose, and, though a little shallow, was practically the last available plot of decent size remaining vacant near the center upon which Chicago's transportation lines converge. Mr. Burnham learned of this, and invited the President of the Association, Mr. Lathrop, and

eight others of its best friends to join himself in a syndicate to buy this property and hold it, while prosecuting a campaign for a building fund; the syndicate to turn the ground over to the Association at cost if the fund was raised, otherwise to keep it as a joint personal investment. The men approached promptly assented, the ground was bought, and during the next twelvemonth a very novel and extraordinary popular movement took place "to save the Thomas Orchestra." Most of the great newspapers, all of the culture clubs and musical societies, the merchants and business men, the employees of the great department stores, the University faculty and students, the public school teachers and pupils, down to the very Kindergarten Association, agitated, formed committees, and collected subscriptions. Literally, the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick-maker were there. Perhaps the most touching contribution was a few cents each from the members of a Janitress and Scrubwomen's Association domiciled at the Chicago Commons Settlement House. The members of the Orchestra, headed by Thomas, contributed a week's salary, about \$5,000.

A stiff fight was made against the movement by interests identified with the great Auditorium, on the ground that to



DANIEL H. BURNHAM

Vice-President of the Orchestra Association of Chicago



BRYAN LATHROP

President of the Orchestra Association of Chicago



EMICO TRAMONTI
Harpist



BRUNO STEINDEL
First Cellist

play in a smaller hall would shut out the crowd, especially the poor, in favor of a rich and exclusive season audience. The poor themselves did not seem to worry; but the argument undoubtedly cost us large subscriptions from many rich and public-spirited men. We secured, however, about 8,500 subscriptions, aggregating \$650,000; yet we were obliged to borrow over \$300,000 to finance a total investment of upward of \$950,000. We are still paying interest on that loan, but hope to extinguish it in course of time out of gifts and legacies such as naturally come to established institutions of a public character. One lady, who withholds her name as yet, has commenced with \$25,000, available at her death. Another, Mrs. Thomas Nelson Page, a constant supporter of the orchestra, though a non-resident, has given

\$50,000, well invested, for the general income of the Association. Mrs. Marshall Field has started the sinking fund with \$5,000. May their examples be followed freely.

Besides the Hall and the endowment funds, the orchestra possesses Theodore Thomas's musical library, presented to the Association by his widow and children, an asset whose value can hardly be over-estimated. It was the accumulation of his lifetime, and had cost well above \$100,000. During forty years he personally provided and owned all the music, both scores and parts, which he performed, often for festival orchestras and choruses of huge dimensions; and he performed substantially the entire literature. During the first fifteen years of this period he played first violin in his then famous string



LEOPOLD KRAMER
Concert-Master

quartet. It was his habit to buy the scores of all new music as it appeared, if at all worthy of the name, whether he used them or not. Consequently all the interesting works for orchestra, great and small, the operas, oratorios, cantatas, masses, concertos, arias, transcriptions innumerable, and all the great chamber music, tons in weight, in orderly arrangement, lie upon the shelves of that library. It is rare indeed that a work called for cannot instantly be placed upon the desks of the musicians. The Year Book printed by the Association each year, containing a résumé of the eighteen years' repertoire as performed, which is in itself a liberal education in music, includes but a part of the contents of the catalogue of the library. Thomas's own scores, with his autograph markings, showing his interpretations of the greater works, and his reference library containing many rare books and interesting manuscript scores, have been committed by the Association to the custody of the Newberry Library, for safety, and for accessibility to music students.

One other most valued possession of the orchestra might almost be called a legacy of its founder—namely, his successor, Mr. Frederick Stock, for ten years one of the viola players, and during the last two years of Mr. Thomas's life his understudy and Assistant Director. One of the most extraordinary things in Thomas's long career—he was over fifty years before the public, and left over ten thousand printed programmes—was that he never missed a single performance, and never was late but twice, both times because of railway washouts. The fact speaks volumes for his physical strength and mastery of detail. Knowing that these could not last forever, for several years before his death he looked for a younger man to whom he might transmit the traditions of good art as he held them; and he was attracted by Mr. Stock's exceptional ability as a composer (in some works submitted for Thomas's criticisms) and by his charming personality and serious character. Still continuing to play the viola as a regular thing, Mr. Stock was occasionally called by Mr. Thomas to the conductor's desk at the Chicago concerts, and finally was appointed by him Assistant Director, in full charge

of the orchestra when upon the road; after which Thomas traveled no more himself. At the commencement of the season of 1903-4 the doctors warned Thomas that his heart was defective, and might fail at any time if he kept on conducting; but he decided to work through the season, if possible, in order to break in the musicians to the changed conditions sure to be found in the new Hall, then approaching completion. Two weeks after its opening, in the midst of the hard work of that breaking in, aggravated by bad weather and damp walls, illness came in the form of pneumonia, and Thomas passed away at the very height of his artistic powers. Fortunate indeed we then were that the modest and brilliant young Assistant was there to take up the Director's baton, which he has held so lightly and so firmly ever since, growing each year in his art and in the estimation of the orchestra, the public, and the critics.

As to the public and the critics, those important factors in all art life, the Thomas Orchestra has a public of ten to twelve thousand people, trained to keen discrimination by eighteen years of concert-going, which Saint-Saëns, after his recent tour of the United States, characterized as the most sympathetic he had met there. It has a considerable patronage, rather difficult to estimate, among the six to seven thousand students of the musical colleges of Chicago. It has critics—I refer to those of the daily press—whose notices of its concerts, and others, though differing as criticisms always differ, are characterized nowadays by first-hand knowledge and seriousness of purpose. How well I remember the notices which greeted our first concert in 1891, as a full-page "Society" event, with lists of names and toilettes; hardly more!

The public has paid in eighteen years about \$1,800,000 into the orchestra box office. The \$1,000,000 in addition which has been donated, over and above box-office receipts, for its support and endowment, has for the most part been provided by about one hundred modest and generous men and women. Let me here pay tribute to them. They are anonymous; no list of names and amounts has ever been made public—they have preferred to

remain unknown. From the \$75,000 of the millionairess to the ten cents of the scrubwoman, all has been given without thought of notoriety. Verily, it was a rare thing that 100—no, 8,500—givers should not “let their right hand know what their left hand doeth.”

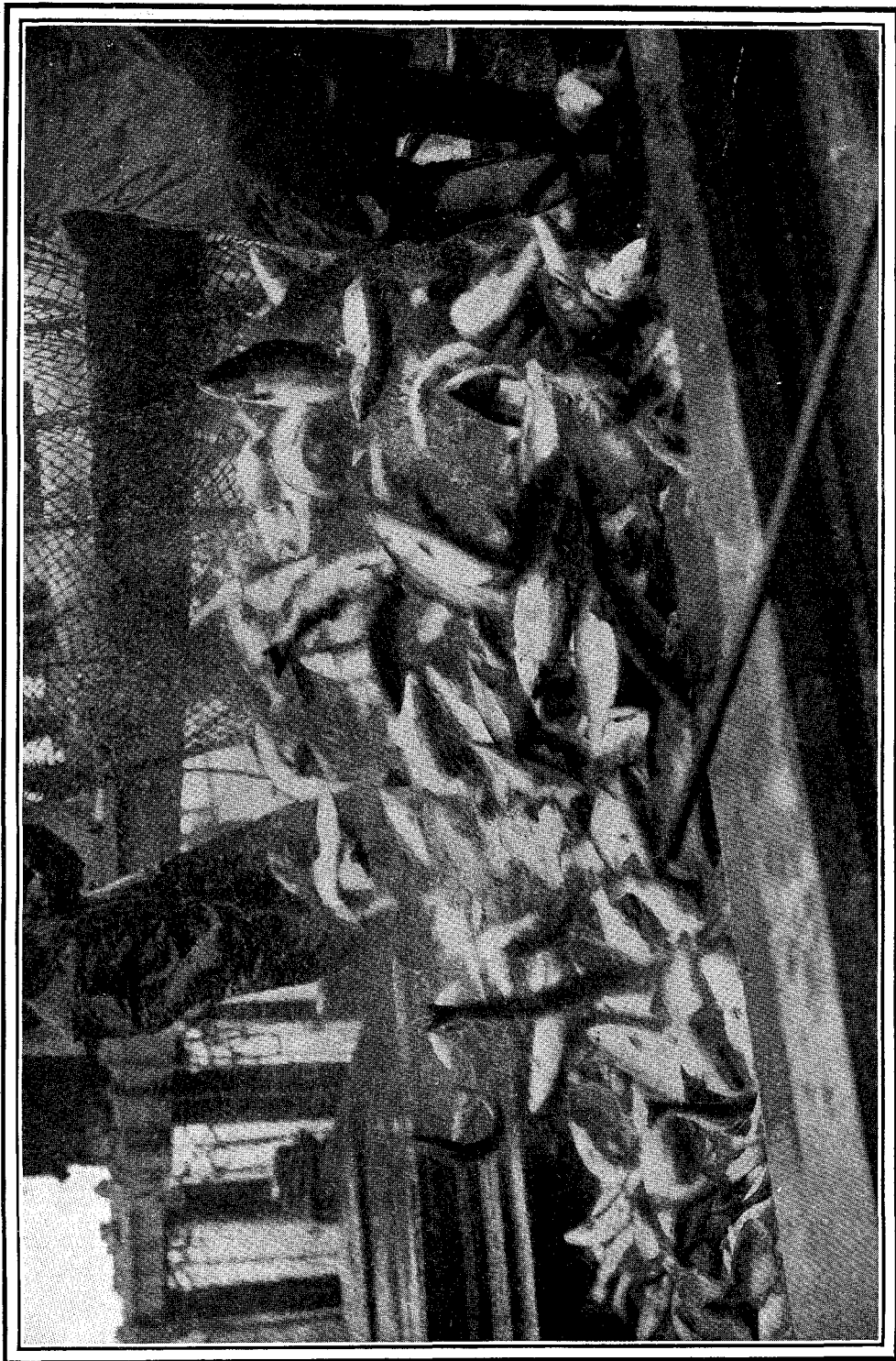
Equally rare has been the spirit of those who as trustees and members of the governing Association have given, with their money, their effort and the prestige of their names. None have posed as connoisseurs or patrons of art, or sought to direct the Director of the orchestra. They have been content quietly to do collectively for good music in Chicago what Major Higginson has done singly in Boston, and indeed they could not have had a better exemplar either in deed or in manner. Conspicuous among them, besides those already mentioned, have been the Glessners, the McCormicks, the Adamses, Messrs. Lawson, Brown, Otis, and Baird. With them should be named, as a heavy contributor from the first, Thomas himself. For his established business in and near New York yielded him about \$10,000 per annum more than he came to Chicago for. That was his yearly sacrifice for good art. Our business managers also have deserved all praise for unselfish, discriminating, and dignified work.

We are now buying some fine old violins, to equip the rank and file of our string choir withal; and we hope to lie back in peace and enjoy their mellow tone, after the strenuous years recounted above. We believe that the possession of its Hall has indeed made the Theodore Thomas Orchestra “permanent.” Never since it was occupied have we had to ask a dollar of assistance. Naturally, we shall not feel quite safe until our debt is paid off. Other halls will be built, doubtless, and take away some of our rents. Opera will be established in Chicago, with its appeal to the eye and its inevitable lowering of standards, and may cost us some of our fashionable supporters. But eighteen

years’ hearing of the great master works, given with a perfection of technique and interpretation practically impossible in opera, “the greatest music given in the greatest way,” have surely laid in the hearts of ten or twelve thousand Chicagoans, and of their children after them, a firm foundation for the immortality of our Orchestra.

For beauty means immortality in this world. Karnak and Corinth have been in ruins for centuries, but the mystery of the sphinx and the revelation of the column are our living heritage. Vikings and Skalds are legendary now, their long ships buried in the drifted sands, their very language “dead” for ages; old Omar’s empty glass has been turned down for near a thousand years; yet never, I suppose, did Nibelungenlied or Rubáiyát fly so far and wide—*vivus per ora virorum*—as in this our day. Year by year canvas and marble, casket and jewel, carpet and tapestry, quit the palaces for the museums, the changeful possession of the few for the enduring ownership of the many. The palaces themselves, the lovely parks and stately castles, the one-time cradles of luxury and fortresses of privilege, are become the holiday places of the peoples, the *transmittenda* of the world. By a sort of glorified survival of the fittest, almost all that long outlives the generations, that they seem able to transmit to the race, is that which they have contributed to beauty and tradition.

So, for Bach and Beethoven and the rest, those great poets of the universal language which will never die—those mighty architects in sound, from whose airy battlements and cloud-capped towers, rising ever fresh and glorious, time cannot throw down one glittering pinnacle—I can conceive of no century, of no race, that will reject them. He that hath ears to hear will always hear. With confidence, therefore, we can commit the Theodore Thomas Orchestra for all time to our city of Chicago, for its delight and in loving memory of the great man whose name it bears.



DUMPING A BIG SALMON CATCH FROM A TRAP INTO A SCOW