

## ►► The Impresario Triumphant ◀◀

By MERLE ARMITAGE

**T**wo very contradictory and seemingly irreconcilable facts seem to confront the person whose curiosity leads him to inquire into the reactions which the United States has to the arts. He first makes the discovery that an overwhelming majority of Americans have an æsthetic blind spot or are without capacity for the enjoyment of truly artistic things beyond the most banal and obvious. A silly sunset, an El Greco in the Metropolitan Museum or a Debussy tone poem all come under the general heading of one maddeningly common adjective, *pretty*.

Possibly this dullness is an inheritance from a generation which considered anything having to do with music, the dance or the artist's studio as devices of the devil. Certainly the idea that men who were interested in anything of an artistic or æsthetic nature were looked upon with suspicion has been current for years; the idea leading to the conclusion that music, painting, etc., were parlor accomplishments for young ladies. A great many young men who may have had a flair for some fine art have been sidetracked by so-called hundred per cent American fathers, who laughed the idea to scorn as an effeminate occupation unfit for any man, particularly a son.

Undoubtedly an unknown number of men have missed some of the finest contacts possible to make in this life by this vicious doctrine. In this manner only can I account for the feebleness of our creative artists, generally speaking. Our best minds and our best blood have been directed into other channels. Where are our composers, for instance, who can compare with our engineers and so on down the line of professions and occupations?

Contrasted sharply with this almost universal state of mind is the worship of spectacular artists, the presence in America of more first-class symphony orchestras than in all of Europe, the colossal fees which successful and popular musicians receive in these United States and the amounts paid for paintings by old European masters, to name a few of our enthusiasms. No situation could be more bizarre and none is so puzzling to both the enlightened American and European mind.

Barnum was one of the first men to evaluate the American gullibility. He counted upon it with as much certainty as a captain of a sailing vessel counts upon the winds, and during his career

he was seldom disappointed.

Upon such crude, inefficient, wasteful and ignorant principles as were laid down by Barnum has been built the whole and entire structure of the present day gigantic business of promoting and selling art to the free and independent American citizen. Polished to a point where they would not be recognized by Barnum himself, adroit, soft and insidious, these methods are nevertheless just as certain in their results as they were in Barnum's time—and more profitable.

Take, as an almost perfect example, the success of the dealers in masterpieces. By a clever system of politely insulting clients, of aloofness, of precociousness, of ultra-exclusiveness, and of taking advantage of the inferiority complexes of the no longer rare *avis*, the American millionaire, he has sold by the dozen paintings of the Gainsborough, Romney, Lawrence, Raeburn and other English schools, paintings whose real æsthetic qualities are open to question, for sums which in other times would provide a shrewd collector with a complete and handsome group of old masters. The result is that some of the greatest masterpieces of European painting of other centuries now permanently reside in public and private American collections. Furthermore, the dealer has made the average rich collector masterpiece-conscious and a slave to the authentication artists. No American wants anything in his collection but masterpieces. A fine painting of a certain school, in good condition, has little interest for the check-book collector for the reason that a signature is missing, or that its pedigree is somewhat vague.

It is very doubtful if one collector in one hundred will back his own judgment about any work of art. This has

led to one of the most vicious practices which has grown up, with other weeds, in the American art buying scene. I refer to the activities of the expert who, for a price, will provide impressive and learned authentications to accompany paintings of all kinds and of all schools. Some of our most respected authorities, directors of museums and institutions have come under suspicion and there is the widest variance in the positive views of these infallible professors. Many of them are undoubtedly working hand in hand with dealers and taking a split of the ample profits. The success of the method, generally speaking, has been complete. There have been some startling sums paid for pictures in the last few years by American purchasers.

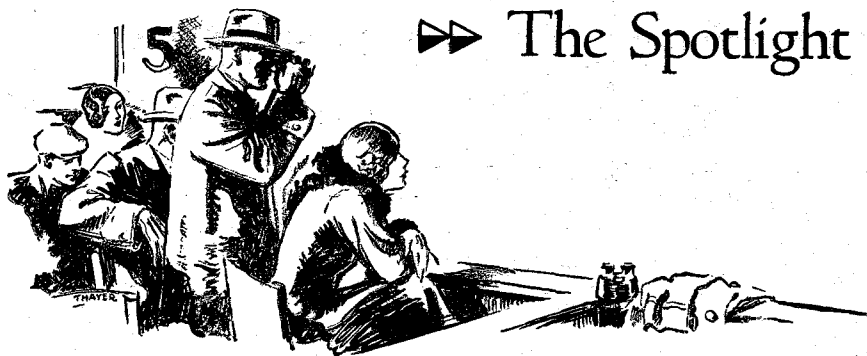
**A**ND how has the modern school fared? Except to a few perspicacious persons, modern art means French art. There is a great deal of justification for this attitude, as we have produced but a handful of painters in this country who compare more than favorably with a number of the lesser Frenchmen as creative artists, but who are on no such financial footing in their own country as are the imported men.

Again are we confronted with the astute impresario of art, that shrewd fellow who knows us as do few individuals. Dealers in modern art are, as a rule, more sympathetic and more intelligent than their brothers, the dealers in old masters. Time has settled the position of the painters of other generations. The dealer is handling a known quantity. But the dealer in the works of contemporary men is taking a chance and he is adventurous. Let us see how this system works.

Back in 1913 America, or at least New York, got its first good look, at the famous Armory show, at the modern paintings it had been hearing vaguely about. There could be no straddling of the fence. Either these things were an affront to the intelligence or they were epoch-making masterpieces, and both sides had ardent champions. The momentum was never allowed to die. Dealers in the works of Picasso, Matisse, Cezanne, Renoir and the entire group have prospered and now these painters are accepted as masters of the most vital period of art development in a hundred years. But only a few dealers had access to the Cezannes and the Matisses. Therefore, others were forced into the

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## ➤➤ The Spotlight on Sports ◀◀

### ➤➤ Wanted—Ice and Snow

**W**HAT, NO ICE? The question thundered ominously by the lord of ye manor when friend wife has forgotten to fill the refrigerator cube tray on the very night the brother Elks chance to drop in is being echoed, as I write these lines, from Lake Placid, N. Y., where America is playing host in the third winter Olympiad.

The warmest winter the Atlantic seaboard has known since the weather department started keeping records brought a late January thaw in the Adirondacks—an unprecedented phenomenon. To find anything approximating this untimely mildness one must go back to 1735—"the snowless winter" mentioned in several Colonial diaries.

The elimination trials for the places on the American ski, skating and bobsled teams had to be called off because Lake Placid's normal quota of ice and hard crusted snow had turned to slush. Our representatives in these events were chosen on past performances. Foreign competitors were handicapped in their practice workouts. The frost-hardened Scandinavians marvelled at patches of greenish grass along the ski-trail and bob run.

Spring played a snide trick on the citizens of Lake Placid and the Olympic Committee when she climbed so brazenly into old man Winter's lap. The local residents and visiting patrons of that charming little town, which snuggles in the shadow of White Face, have contributed heavily to the Olympic war chest. The bob run cost around \$300,000. The total investment including covered ice arena, hockey rink, ski jump and various race courses approximates a million dollars.

Those who put up the money were sure that the publicity accruing from the Jack Frost Olympiad would help boost Lake Placid as an American St. Moritz. Unhappily, the reporters have thus far only featured "the big thaw."

Lake Placid's plight reminds me of the embarrassing predicament in which

Bear Mountain (near West Point on Hudson) found itself some years ago when only one ingredient needed to make a winter carnival complete was lacking—it had neglected to snow! Yankee enterprise quickly supplied this deficiency. A train of freight cars—loaded to the gunwales with nice, clean snow—arrived from Quebec in the nick of time. That emergency measure wouldn't work this winter, with lower Canada boasting a Palm Beach climate.

### ➤➤ Bob Run

UNQUESTIONABLY the two most thrilling events on the winter Olympic program—from the standpoint of competitor and spectator—are the bobsleigh races and the ski-jumping contest. America, incongruously enough, has a fine chance to win the Olympic bobsled titles. I say "incongruously" because the sport was virtually unknown in the United States until last winter when the Mt. Van Hoevenberg slide was opened. It is the only bobsled course on the North American continent.

Nevertheless American citizens wintering in Switzerland organized a bobsled team four years ago and won the Olympic championship at St. Moritz from the pick of the Swiss and German pilots. This surprising victory stirred American interest in the most ecstatic of all speed sensations and, now that Lake Placid has a championship bobsled run, thrill hunters need not make the long journey to Switzerland.

The tricky nature of the terrifying Mt. Van Hoevenberg run, with its twenty-six dipping turns banked precipitously and contoured scientifically, was described some months ago for OUTLOOK readers by Oscar Geier of the Swiss team. The average down grade is ten per cent—a dizzy drop for a course measuring a mile and a half. Twenty thousand gallons of water are poured on the slide each morning to insure an ice-packed track six feet wide on the straightaways and twenty feet broad on the curves.

The winner will average close to fifty miles an hour and hit seventy at the finish line after negotiating the breath-taking S-turn known as "Zigzag." Four-place bobsleds weigh 485 pounds, without the crew, measure eleven and a half feet, and cost about \$500. Quite an expensive, not to say dangerous, toy for father to play with!

Austria, Germany, Canada, Italy, England, Switzerland, France, Rumania and the United States will be represented in the bobsled races. Each nation is allowed two entries. The contest will be run off in heats, the best average time of a crew for all heats deciding the winner. And here's a tip for thrifty competitors. The loss of a glove, headguard or other equipment during the course of a run may entail a fine of from five to fifty dollars at the discretion of the judges! "Braking" on a curve is an unpardonable offense, subject to heavy penalty. It mars the surface of the track.

### ➤➤ Ski Jump

WHILE our Lake Saranac team, piloted by Harry Homberger, is one of the bobsled favorites, America has no chance in the ski jumps. We are tyros at that gull-swooping art. Your Scandanavian, reared on skis, is naturally proficient at racing and leaping with these bizarre-looking contraptions strapped to his feet. He pronounces it "sheeing"—the Norse tongue balking at the harsh letter K. At present the Norwegians hold most of the ski records. They are favored to win the Olympic jumps, with keen competition from the Swedes, Finns and Canadians.

The Ruud brothers of Norway have cleared over 250 feet. They won't equal this mark at Lake Placid for the good reason that the Olympic jumping hill is designed for leaps not exceeding 200 feet in length. There is really no such thing as a world's record ski jump because so much depends on the character of the hill. Any top-notch jumper, for example, might cover 230 feet on the long, exceedingly steep hill at Revelstoke, British Columbia, which offers extraordinary facilities for distance getting. A common yardstick for ski jumpers is lacking.

Length, in itself, is not sufficient to win an Olympic title. Form is an even more important factor in the eyes of the judges. The ski equivalent of a three-point landing in aviation will earn more points for the chap who leaps a paltry 150 feet than would a soaring jump of 230 feet for the competitor who mis-