

# HEARING THINGS

CALIFORNIA, HERE I COME . . .

THE City of Los Angeles is building an opera house. This is indeed welcome news for the music-loving public, and bears out many other manifestations emanating from California of a lively awareness of the importance of music in our life. Remarkable progress has been made in all branches of music in the Golden State. Her colleges have developed, within the last few years, first-class music departments where a great deal of original work is done in music education, composition, and musicology. Several of our eminent composers are residing there and, together with a number of distinguished foreign-born colleagues, form a group which when coalesced will undoubtedly lead to a regional school of great distinction.

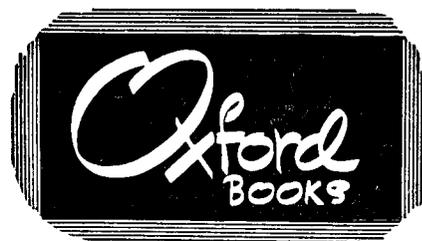
The musical scholars are busy bringing forth publications, some of which are hailed both here and abroad, the libraries are rapidly building up their collections and are making the West less dependent on the great Eastern collections. California, more precisely, San Francisco, has a music critic or two not afraid to go their own way instead of echoing the platitudes expected from their trade. And then there is a rich fare of music; first-class orchestras with first-class conductors—they have no platform Romeos or magicians of the baton—they are just excellent musicians who know the orchestra inside out, know what is in the scores without anyone's telling them, and know how to communicate the contents of these scores without hocus-pocus and theatricals. Why, one of these gentlemen is an American who not only makes his orchestra play like nobody's business, but makes the orchestra's business nobody's plaything; the orchestra is self-supporting, even though it insists on great variety in its programs, and plays a good many modern works. Recitals are numerous and are as varied as people can make them within our system of planned musical economy.

Californians are valiantly trying to break through the concert racket dominated by a few New York entrepreneurs, as the great success of the New York Friends of Music demonstrates is not impossible. To mention one interesting attempt, there is an organization in Los Angeles known as "Evenings on the Roof," now in its

ninth year of existence, which gives chamber concerts at a price not far from admission fees of second-run movie theatres, with programs that reflect as much artistic integrity as they do intelligence, courage, and foresight. The performances, mainly by able local artists—a system which is the keystone of a true musical culture—have a faithful and growing public. And now this dynamic musical life is about to be enriched by a magnificent institution around which it can rally its forces.

Opera used to be the focal point of musical life for centuries and, as we have so often said, it is opera that has always played the role of mother earth to all music since the seventeenth century. It is a pleasure to speculate on how the energetic Californians might go about organizing their new permanent opera house. Surely they will not make the mistake of turning their theatre into a social club. We can imagine them appointing a staff of able and progressive managers, recruiting a company in which everyone will be required to command a repertory encompassing all types of opera, dispensing with the specialist who sings in one language only and only certain parts in certain operas. (There is more than one famous Wagnerian tenor who does not know the third act of "Die Walküre" because the tenor part ends in the second act with the death of the hero.) They will want to have singers who can sing in several languages, but who first of all will have an impeccable English enunciation.

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requirements of an opera singer, and they will demand the same of their conductors and stage directors. The latter will know that an operatic stage is not an *ersatz* playhouse where people, slowed down by music, deport themselves as embarrassed actors. The performances will be mostly in English. They will probably consult Professor Dent of Cambridge University and his fine and musicianly translations and make sure that other translations will be made by equally competent people. They realize, of course, that opera in translation is a compromise, and that there are operas—"Cosi fan Tutte," to mention one—that virtually defy any attempt at translation, but they also realize that opera is theatre and that it is of the first importance to understand what goes on, even at the risk of losing some of the fine points of music that are lost anyway. They will insist on a well balanced ensemble rather than on stars of unequal magnitude, will have a chorus composed of singers who are still eligible for life insurance, and an orchestra good enough to stand on its own legs if necessary. If they carry out such simple, obvious, and commonsense ideas, have a nicely balanced repertory, sung by fresh voices, well rehearsed, well staged, they will have done something for American musical culture that cannot be evaluated in any currency. And I am sure that a new, original, free, and progressive Los Angeles Opera House would give the signal for other cities to follow suit.

Well, what is actually about to happen? The new Los Angeles Opera House is intended to become the New York Metropolitan Opera House's "second" or "Western" home, whither it will repair after the strenuous few

weeks' season in New York. And what seems almost incredible, this scheme was not thought up by the Met, but is reported to have originated in Los Angeles. There is no earthly reason why the Metropolitan Opera Company—already a monopoly in the East, and incidentally a near-monopoly in Chicago's and San Francisco's operatic setup—should actually prevent the development of local institutions. If the company has so much time to spare, then let them give a forty-week season in their home town, citizens of which cannot get tickets to the performances. Let Los Angeles music shift for itself; it is perfectly capable of doing so. We harbor no enmity toward the Met, and we recognize it to be a great institution, but we do believe that it is a left-over from the last century and wishes to perpetuate a managerial tradition that is an anachronism in a modern democratic republic. Let us hope that the large cities of this vast country which takes pride in their own museums, universities, and all sorts of other institutions, will realize that it is to their and the country's advantage to have their opera too. They would not want their local university or museum displaced by a branch office of some Eastern university or museum; there is no reason why they should go to great sacrifices for the benefit of a New York institution when they can have their very own. We hope that this controversy will be settled amicably when it is realized that this kind of empire building may be all right in industry but is definitely harmful for an orderly development of art. We feel sure that Californians will stand up and defend their musical climate.

PAUL HENRY LANG.



"What's the sense of growing up if we have to be adults?"

## HENRY ADAMS: MAN OF LETTERS

(Continued from page 12)

in spite of the fallacious cosmology upon which it is based. The criticism of Henry Adams is only beginning to reach that stage.

Only in the esthetic expression of his position did he reach any degree of finality. To him his major works, the "Chartres" and the "Education," formed a unified, albeit an imperfect, whole. The importance of their interrelationship is stressed by his repeating in his preface the key passage of the "Education" in which he explains their common purpose.

The two books in concept are one, a planned work of the imagination rather than an historical, autobiographical, or scientific record or argument; he would evaluate the timeless quality of experience rather than the circumstantial references. As art, these books should therefore be approached only as companion studies in unity and multiplicity. As contributions to the philosophy of history, they may be accepted or discredited at will without invalidating this approach. Man's inner need for discovering a system of unity in his experience and his constant difficulty in reconciling this need to the multiple influences of the world outside of himself is the most persistent theme of all literature. It is the problem of Oedipus, Hamlet, and Faust; of Tom Jones, Ahab, and Ma Joad. Emerson discussed it for his age; Henry Adams did the same for an age when the conflict was infinitely more acute and the solution less apparently obvious.

In exploring the nature of unity, Adams was led back to his study of medieval history, and he added to it a wide reading in chivalric poetry, works on medieval architecture, and the writings of Christian philosophers from Abelard to Thomas Aquinas. Again he was the inspired amateur rather than the documentary scholar or the conventional man of letters. He read books only when they "helped." Slowly he formed his pattern about the symbol to the Virgin—not Mary as person or as divinity, but the Lady of Chartres as creation of the medieval imagination. The selection of the century 1150-1250 was dictated by the facts because then the conception of the Virgin had become, for one moment in history, an effective symbol of man's eternal desire for inner and outer harmony, expressed both in art and philosophy. Just how this image evolved and what significance it might have not only for medieval but for universal man

became one-half of his life's concern. The result has served as a study of the medieval mind; it is only now coming to be recognized for its insight into the universal mind.

The structure of the book is apparent only when this central purpose is kept in mind. Adams's facetious statement that it is merely a *tour de force* for the entertainment of his nieces and "nieces in wishes" is obvious screening of its profound value to him. His light, bantering tone persists throughout, without hampering the careful unfolding of his plan.

The book falls into three somewhat unequal parts: the preparation of the medieval mind for its gigantic effort of synthesis just before its collapse; its achievement of emotional unity in the first half of the thirteenth century as represented in the Cathedral of Chartres; and the translation of this process into the rational terms of medieval philosophy. For the first the Archangel Michael serves as personal focus, for the second the Virgin, for the third St. Thomas. Above them all the Virgin becomes the symbol of unity achieved. The transition from worship of a masculine to that of a feminine deity is hinted at in the "Roman de la Rose" and acknowledged in the religious chivalry of Thibault. Poetry, history, and architecture combine, with all their intricate details, in an esthetic synthesis which makes manifest the sovereignty of the Virgin. Abelard, Bernard de Clairveaux, St. Francis, and St. Thomas add each his philosophy to emphasize the result and to translate it back from emotion to scholastic logic, from the supreme feminine intuition to the masculine approximation of truth through reason. For once, man's inner need for harmony seemed, at least in the perspective of later centuries, to have been partially supplied.

THE truth which Adams here tacitly recognizes is that unity may be achieved through emotion even when denied by reason. His Virgin is completely irrational, her power nonetheless centripetal. "Mary fills her church without being disturbed by quarrels" because she "concentrated in herself the whole rebellion of man against fate. . . . She was above law; she took feminine pleasure in turning hell into an ornament; she delighted in trampling on every social distinction in this world and the next."

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Yet she answered the prayers of her suppliants because she judged by love alone. She could put in terms of positive symbolism what the hooded figure in Rock Creek could only permit by reflection. This is what Adams had learned from the American woman, but he had to trace it back to twelfth-century France to find it unembarrassed and whole. Intuition is above reason; love may triumph over logic; art can speak deeper truths than science.

With the same detachment Adams then turned immediately to the other half of his problem: the study of multiplicity. Here the age of obvious choice was the present, the person of obvious focus himself. Even at the risk of being accused of merely writing his autobiography, he undertook "The Education of Henry Adams, a Study in Twentieth-Century Multiplicity." The detachment of the third-person pronoun is not an affectation; it is an integral part of his scheme. He might have written of someone else had he known any other experience as well as his own. As the forces which he wished to examine are universal, as well as peculiar to the age, he would do as well as another for their point of impact. For the impersonality of the Ego, he turns again to Oriental thought. In a biographical testament of friendship to George Cabot Lodge, published in 1911, he states that the poet seeks unity in "some one great tragic motive." From the analysis of his own experience, Adams might witness the action of this tragic movement in the modern world and in harmony with the new concept of Energy which science had supplied. This he attempts in the "Education."

This book also falls roughly into three parts: the inadequate and misleading preparation of a generation which reached maturity at the moment in history when the challenge of modern science became generally felt; the effort of one individual to adjust to this new and centrifugal world of multiplicity; and the translation of the result into a rational formula. The problem was more baffling because the perspective of time was lacking. On the other hand, the material was more familiar. Nor was a central symbol as easy to find. Frank Norris, at the same time on the same

quest, adopted the railroad as symbol in "The Octopus." Adams, in the high excitement of discovery, chose the dynamo which he saw first at the Chicago Exposition in 1893. Here was the outward image of his second kind of force, almost specific enough to excite worship if worship were due.

It would be dangerous to press the symbolic parallelism of these two books too far, but the temptation to explore it is great. As the power of the Virgin is humanity on the level of divinity, so that of the dynamo is mechanism raised to the infinite. In the one case, the power operated on an impassive and non-human object, the Cathedral of Chartres, which in a sense becomes a subordinate or reflective symbol; in the other, the object of the mechanistic force is human, is Henry Adams made impersonal and passive. From this perfectly balanced equation, the symbolism is developed on the one hand in terms of architecture, art, philosophy, persons, and events (stained glass windows, figures of saints, the rebellion of Pierre le Droux, the poetry of Thibault, the philosophy of Abelard), on the other in terms of politics, science, philosophy, and again persons and events (Anglo-American diplomacy, the geology of Sir Charles Lyell, two World's Fairs, William Henry Seward, and Lord John Russell).

Intricate and balanced as these imaginative elements are, it would be a mistake to hold that Adams had perfected a new sort of epic or symbolic form. The result gives the impression of work still in progress as Adams felt that it was. The overall form is massive and sprawling like that of Melville and Whitman, rather than balanced and finished as one knowing the man Adams might expect. He was never satisfied with it, published the books privately, allowed them reluctantly to be offered to the public. But they are thoroughly American in that whatever order and discipline they achieve is organic. The refined inheritor of Adams's energy had allowed his feelings and his understanding to mold their own form about them. "The pen works for itself," he confesses, "and acts like a hand, modeling the plastic material over and over again to a form that suits it best. The form is never arbitrary, but is a sort of growth like crystallization, as any artist knows too well.

*Robert E. Spiller, Professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania, has also taught at Harvard, Columbia, the University of Southern California, and the New School for Social Research. He has written several books on James Fenimore Cooper.*

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## THE REPERTORY CRITIC

ONE of the stranger musical abnormalities of our time is the status and *modus operandi* of those commentators on the musical scene, the music critics. The record reviewer, as a newly sprouted and somewhat tender offshoot of the not very ancient tree of music criticism, is still doubtfully situated.

I shall have to deny that I, as a record reviewer, am a music critic in the usual present-day sense. First, because I am more interested in music itself than in its performance. Second, because I am passionately addicted to non-repertory music.

The duty of today's music critic is mainly to judge performance, because performance is what makes music go 'round. His judgments in this respect are meticulous, accurate, and above all *comparative*; to make them he must necessarily be a repertory man. His knowledge of standard concert and recital items must be prodigious, whether it be Wagner, Italian opera, or Chopin, Schubert, lieder, or the Brahms symphonies. His life is largely spent gathering repertory know-how; his write-up, if it is good, is tempered by the past experience of perhaps hundreds of playings of the same notes.

All of which is legitimate and of concrete informational value, the concert world being what it is. Yet in acquiring this immense repertorial experience a seasoned music critic is likely perforce to leave unused an equally important critical faculty—the judgment of *the music itself*. That is a faculty which is best exercised on unfamiliar or new music.

I am no critic in this sense because I have made the gigantic personal discovery that in all truth the very greatest music (for anybody) and most of the best, at this tiny instant in history, lies utterly outside and beyond the small corner of music that is the concert repertory-of-the-moment, the popular, the best-seller works that so preoccupy the music

makers and hence the music critics, too; that the standard "great works" are less than the scarce drop in the bucket, alongside of all the great works of music. Dangerous discovery! Once on the trail of this kind of heresy, fresh proofs multiply. This week, for instance, I am singing in an entire concert of French Renaissance music by men whose names are meaningless even to many musicians—Brumel, Compère, Mouton, De la Rue, Josquin, Le Jeune, Janiquin. To the best of my belief much of this very music ranks with the greatest of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven; and more—once learned and familiar—it is so utterly timeless in its human feelings and musical expression as to be perfectly contemporary. This is music on a par with Shakespeare. How, I ask, could a music critic believe *this*—and follow his repertory?

I play, too, in a quartet of recorders, a most un-repertory instrument! Not to be precious, but because I can cope with the instrument and because for centuries great (and unknown) music was composed for its use, music that I can play. Again, I recently resurrected from dusty oblivion on a major publisher's shelves a fine set of published music, first rate in quality, that clearly hadn't been touched for decades. Good music, printed, edited, ready to perform for the asking. But no one had asked. It was just not conventional repertory.

And so it goes. As a music critic I am beyond recall, for no critic can afford to know much of this music, either old or new, and keep his job! Lucky the record reviewer; he can at least choose his own programs. And if he takes the bull by the horns he may even exert a certain non-repertory influence on behalf of the record buyers, who—if they only knew—would buy all the non-repertory stuff the industry could put out.

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