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TUESDAY - - - - NOV. 21, 1899

### DEGRADATION OF MUSIC.

Europe has been given an impression of American taste for music which is not at all complimentary to the refinement and culture of the nation. Dan Godfrey brought a brass band across the Atlantic and played to large audiences. On his return to London with his pockets stuffed with American gold he moralized in this fashion:

"We played lots of good music, but what Americans really want is some catchy tune with a swing. We would give 'Georgia Camp Meeting,' or a 'Rag Time Cake Walk' and they would nearly tear down the place."

Dan Godfrey spoke the truth about the audiences to which he catered, but he failed to catch the true spirit of the musical tastes of those who really understand that art. To the uncultured ear the cake walks, rag-time melodies and cheap waltz tunes are a pleasure, occasionally because they are simple melodies, easily learned and whistled on every corner. More often the words of the song have caught the fancy of the gallery. These rag-time melodies and songs have begun to degrade and blunt the sensibilities of the people, and the theatrical profession to a large degree is responsible for that degradation. First the minstrel men learned that gallery gods shouted with delight at the tale, to an orchestral accompaniment, of the unspeakable woman who dismissed her masculine companion because he ran short of funds. The farce comedians began to take up the evil and introduce specialties like "I'm Sorry, Mr. Johnson, but I've Got to Turn You Down." Even the light opera organizations make features of words set to evanescent ditties in which are described the tribulations of people whose existence is not talked of in polite society.

The same words one hears musically spoken in the family circles of people who know better and have higher aspirations would not be tolerated if expressed in prose. Once heard in the theater the children and their grown-up relations think they are free to repeat them. There is no lack of good music, no lack of noble sentiments expressed in verse and song. For five hundred years genius after genius have given their lives to composing grand music and their works have been perpetuated. The musician may purchase the nobler compositions for the same trifle that is asked for the grosser combination of notes and words. Students of music, with the same application, may learn Beethoven, Mozart and Chopin compositions as easily and far more understandingly than they can master the disgusting ideas of "Why Don't You Get a Lady of Your Own?" because the masters

wrote simple sonatas as well as difficult oratorios.

The fault of American music, particularly that admired by the uncultured, lies in the education given by the theater, the bands and in the home circle. It is claimed for the United States that children are nowadays given as good an education as the children of Germany, France, Poland, Russia, Italy and England, yet the Old World children imbibe from infancy love for all that is good and pure in musical compositions. In those nations there is veneration for the masters among the humblest of the population. The ragged boy on the streets of Rome knows the operas and masses of his famous musical countrymen; the German child learns to understand and appreciate the beauties of Beethoven, Liszt and a score of noted masters. And so it is with other peoples on the continent. They hear little else from childhood to the grave, are never tainted with the flood of trashy ditties which infest America today.

What would benefit the United States today is a music censor, with power to expurgate indecent allusions from songs, to suppress ballads and songs full of false notes and jarring chords. Not only would such a person elevate the morals of communities all over the land, but he would advance his country in the estimation of well-bred people all over the world.

Dan Godfrey's audiences, however, can not have been composed of the educated musical people of America. Among that class, which does not necessarily include only the wealthy and those favored of higher secular education, there exists the same refinement for the really good things in music that one finds in musical audiences of Germany, France and England. This class is a power for higher education, for purer thoughts and deeds, for better manhood and womanhood. It aids the young man and young woman with musical aspirations, cheers the circle of artists who aspire to make America a power in realms of music and song. If it is once properly recognized by the now uncultured ear the flashy song and degrading ditty will soon pass into obscurity.—Spokesman—Review.

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