

Esthetic Essays on Esthetic Subjects

The Amateur Band and The Afflicted Community

One of the freest of America's numerous free institutions is the amateur band. Its very existence is a most commendable evidence of the tolerance of the American people and the stability of the backing guaranteed to American institutions. It enjoys immunity from interference because it is a part of a system of institutions governed by general laws, which if changed to eradicate the evils from some special part, must also affect the others. Having thus explained its presence, we feel free to dwell for awhile upon its eccentricities and upon the relation between harmony and its frantic paroxysmic effusions.

It is a beautiful evening in June. The sun sinking to rest in the west floods the long village street with its golden rays of light, while Nature slumbers peacefully, not knowing how soon her repose is to be disturbed. The air is redolent with the fragrance of dewy eve, and every prospect pleases—and only man is vile. For from the center of the business square there comes a heart-rending screech which climbs and falls through different altitudes of the scale; wavering, melancholy and lonesome. When about to perish from want of force to keep it alive, it is supplanted by a wild clamor which seems to have been noding itself in reserve to spring into action at the critical moment. Now that the whole works is well under way, one knows that it is only the village band so flagrantly desecrating the peace that Nature has set down over the village.

Drawn by curiosity one wanders down, and stands at a respectable distance from the center of attraction, just close enough to view the performance comfortably; but the farther back you are the more evident is the fact that you have pretensions to respectability. Now they are playing a waltz, jerking out the notes in hop-skip-and-jump style, the cornet leading the rest by several paces and the base horn grinding out a steady measure some six or eight beats behind. Here and there in the crowd a gay-spirited youth or maiden skips about, or an elderly damsel capers around in spirals and circles with the vivacity of a fly partly mired in molasses navigating about on its side with one-half free.

After several tunes have been executed, one begins to study the various evolutions of individual players. The man with the second alto works away as conscientiously as a woman writing to an acquaintance of the fallings of her social rival. The band leader shakes his stick at him and he blares back a defiance full in the face of that dignitary, with a volume of wind that flecks his locks and causes his coatails to flap. Yet in spite of all prompting, he persists in his course, being as unreliable in his work as an editor's sworn statement as to the circulation of his paper. The man with the slide trombone deserves honorable mention in this gallery of tin horn artists. With set features and solemn countenance he works his slide with erratic and diversified movement, like a farmer sharpening a scythe. From out of the depths of a monstrous base drum comes at intervals a hollow boom, generally tardy in its arrival, or interrupting at the wrong place. The clarinet men has a grievance against humanity, and he now avails himself of his opportunity to take some of it out. He pours out of a stream of notes embracing all the chords and discords known to the system. He, together with the others described, is typical of the general make-up of the band and the others may be excused from criticism because they are not responsible for their actions.

As the evening wears on and one's nerves wear out, the climax approaches. It comes in the nature of a dirge, sad in itself and sadder in execution—in notes so mournfully wierd and melancholy that it makes a fellow afraid to go home alone. So intense does the strain become that even the players are affected. The emergency is a great one, but one man proves equal to the occasion and rises high above it. In the midst of the soft waves of melody the bass horn gets floundered and goes off on a campaign tour under its own direction. After various ex-

periments it finally reaches the proper levels and pursues its course together with the rest.

As the last wailing notes of the dirge die out, the players file out and disperse. With those last, plaintive notes ringing in their ears, the crowd now disperses and the people go shuddering home to disordered slumbers and horrible dreams.

Between This and That

The gray mare trotted along merrily over the smooth road. The young fellow driving, snapped at the roadside bushes with his whip, and stole glances at the rosy face of his companion, half visible beneath her pink poke bonnet. They were going home from meeting and had spoken no word since Hattie Lambert had observed that the road was dusty, three miles back, and Harrison Ayres had responded, "I guess that's so," and scanned the horizon cautiously. He had been going to add that they needed rain, but the words stuck in his throat.

He was now thinking hard about something—something that made him swallow nervously at intervals. Sometimes an added tinge of red stole up under his sunburnt skin. It almost seemed as if Hattie knew his thoughts, they sounded so loud in his head. Perhaps she guessed, for she was unusually silent, and pulled her bonnet farther over her curls. She looked very pretty with the rosy reflection of her pink bonnet on her rounded face, and her long golden brown curls tumbling softly over her neck.

Harrison hitched himself farther away on the buggy seat, and then, thinking better of it, hitched back closer than before. She drew her hoop-skirt safe out of harm's way. He began to consider how he should say it.

"Say, Hattie."
A pause. Harrison coughed.
"Eh, Mister Ayres?"
"Say, Hattie, I'm goin' away."
"Oh, he you?"
"To the war. Tomorrow."
"Be you?"

There was a note of coquettish interest in her voice. He could not see her face.

"Say, Hattie."
"Well?"

There was a little quiver, now. The sore feeling in his throat grew more choking.

"I'll be gone a long time, Hattie, and—when—"

"When what, Mr. Ayres?" she queried saucily.

For awhile he said nothing. They were nearing the Bear Hill cross-roads.

"Say, Hattie—"

"Hey, there, Har'son, gimme a lift," exclaimed a new voice, and Isaac Harvey limped up to the buggy.

"Oh, ye nee'n'ter mind me," chuckled the old man, "jes' go on with yer courtin'."

Harrison blushed a warm brick color and grinned sheepishly. Hattie answered icily, "Oh, thank you, Mr. Harvey. Very good of you, I'm sure."

The rest of the ride was accomplished in silence. Harrison was uncertain whether he was glad or sorry for the intervention. He helped her down at the front gate, but she would not look at him.

"Goodbye, Miss Lambert," he said as she ran up the front walk.

"Oh, I forget; good afternoon, Mr. Ayres," she called from among the syringas.

"Say, Hattie—" But she was gone.

Harrison saw Elder Lambert in the village next day, and after exchanging views on the crops, and the probable time it would take to lick the Johnnies, he asked jocularly, "Say, Elder, will you save one of your girls for me till I get back?"

"I guess, Harrison, I guess," responded the Elder. "You're a good worker. I'd like to hev you take one as well's any other man. Good-bye."

Four years later Harrison Ayres walked up the syringa path with regular step, and knocked at the big front door. A tall slip of a girl opened it

to him. She looked very sweet and fresh as she stood there in the vine-covered doorway, her pink lawn dress gleaming against the opaque darkness of the "keeping-room," and her golden curls falling almost to her waist.

"Why, come right in, Mr. Ayres," she cried, and then turning—"Mother! mother! Here's Harrison Ayres."

"Well, how be-ye? Brown as a hick'ry nut, I do declare. Ain't he a soldier, though, Lottie?" But Lottie had vanished.

Harrison stayed to supper, and joked confidently with the long tableful. His bronzed face and martial air impressed the girls and made the boys envious. Such stories of how the Union army had thrashed the Rebs, and how the slaves were freed! The family listened breathlessly.

"An' where's Hattie," he asked, buttering his fifth biscuit, and adorning it with strawberry preserves.

"My, these buscuit taste good to a feller that's been livin' on hard-tack and salt pork, Mis' Lambert."

"Hattie!" she exclaimed; "Hattie? Why your brother Abner married her a year come hayin'-time. They're livin' on the Isaac Harvey place."

"Yeou was kinder courtin' Hattie fore ye left, wan't ye?" said Uncle Sam chuckling covertly.

"Oh, jes' liked her some," said Harrison, carelessly.

"Wa-al, I was a calculatin' as, seein' Abner and Hattie hitched up, ye might take Lottie, here. She's a mighty good cook."

Harrison looked over at Lottie's pretty, blushing face.

"What say, Lottie?" he asked, jestingly.

Her head drooped lower. Uncle Sam's sides shook, but he looked on interestedly. She leaned over and stretched out her hand.

"I—I say—That!" which was a ringing box on the ear, and she fled.

"Co, boss! co, boss!" It was a sweet feminine voice that called over the lower pasture. The setting sun cast its rays athwart the great pine woods, and made the rank grass a pale yellowish green. The red Durham cows, sleek and sweet-breathed, came slowly over the hilly field, cropping mouthfuls of grass by the way. The frogs croaked in the wet places, and a night-hawk overhead uttered his weird cry. The shadows lengthened slowly.

"Co, boss! Co, boss!" This was a sonorous bass from across the fence. The Ayres' herd of Jerseys went slowly up the lane just across, a tall, soldierly figure marching behind. The girl in the pink calico tried to break a black birch switch, which bent and twisted, but still hung by its tough fibers. She sawed and jerked it to no avail. The soldierly figure leaped the fence.

"Let me, Lottie," he said, taking out his knife.

"Do you want it peeled?"

"Yes, please."

He gave it to her, all white and glistening. She struck at the bushes nervously.

"Would you want to hit me again, Lottie?" he asked quietly.

"No." She looked away and blushed at the remembrance.

"Would you hit me if I asked you

something, Lottie?"

"No." Her eyes were full of tears.

"Well, Lottie, 'what say?'" His lips were smiling, but his eyes serious.

She studied the horizon for a full minute. Then she half turned, shyly.

"It isn't 'that' this time. I guess it's—this."

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