

A NATIONAL CONSERVATORY.

What It Is Doing for Music in America.

HISTORY OF ITS ESTABLISHMENT.

Work of the New York Institution Organized by Mrs. Thurber—List of Distinguished Patrons—The One Thing Needful.

A National School of Music.

Arthur Chilton in American Magazine... It has been frequently remarked that Americans are now giving many musicians, and especially singers, to the world. No one pretends, of course, that we have yet developed the art of composition. Operas, oratorios and symphonies are written by Americans, without doubt; they are even written with extreme industry, but they are not, save on rare occasions, heard by the public. There is a well-grounded impression, nevertheless, that some of these works are worthy of a hearing, and, if heard, would do credit and honor to their composers. However this may be, the truth remains that American composition in music is a thing of the future, rather than of the present. But, in executive music, as it may properly be called, our country has certainly shown its proficiency. Our singers, above all, have shown their proficiency. They have graduated from the brilliant centers of Europe in the most triumphant way. They have appeared in the concert-rooms and theaters of both Europe and America with conspicuous success. There seems, indeed, to be a potent natural tendency among Americans towards free and facile vocalization: at any rate, our American voices, particularly those of women, have been listened to with delight and a sense of positive assurance. Furthermore, the taste for music, on the whole, rather strong in Americans, and music is now almost as essential a part of our education as grammar or arithmetic. Possibly the fact that our national character is the result of extraordinary crossings of blood accounts for our decided love for music. It will also account, I think, for what we shall greatly accomplish in musical creativeness.

In the circumstances, it appears odd, to say the least, that so little has been done, in a broad and liberal manner, for musical education in the United States. True enough, we have schools of music by the score; we have even a few conservatories, so called, which, unfortunately, are too closely bound to the projects of trade; and we have many excellent teachers, though fewer than we have a right to. But, until recently, we have had no school of music that could be honestly described as National, that could be entirely respected, that looked to a future of noble and generous achievement. Until recently, to put the matter bluntly, there had been no serious attempt to establish such a school. There had been no serious attempt to encourage musical education. Not one with culture enough and money enough seemed to be anxious or even willing to offer the Americans what they needed so profoundly, a National Conservatory of Music.

Yet, we have enjoyed the advantage of splendid schools for all the other arts. Science, literature, painting—these have been supported by Americans with rare unselfishness and genuine enthusiasm. It is in the case of music supported after a fashion—usually after a fashion which thinks less of art than of public exhibition. What does opera mean in New York, for example, if not public exhibition? What is the case with Americans is, I admit, the case with people in various countries. Music is everywhere, to a painful degree, a social means rather than a beautiful end. But it should be regarded, as a mere statement of fact, that in almost every country save the United States, music claims and receives the benefit of government help. Indeed, ours is the only great country that looks upon the subvention of artists' projects as an unemotional proceeding. We assume that art is highest when it is wholly independent. But we forget that art strives more easily than it thrives; that it does not thrive, often, simply because it wants to breathe and meat of substantial recognition. If art has been helped forward with the friendly hand of government for centuries, why should the government at Washington refuse to give thought and cheer to it? What have we to show—we who are rather proud of our democratic freedom—that is equal to the best of art in Europe, maintained at its own expense by government money and sympathy?

I have, however, been led into a digression. My point is that we have, finally, in this country, a conservatory of music which deserves the lofty description of "national." And it is due to a single individual, a woman, that this conservatory exists. The National Conservatory of Music, which has its temporary home at 129 and 128 East Seventeenth street in New York, was founded by Mrs. Francis B. Thurber. I need scarcely remind the reader that Mrs. Thurber's name has been associated with many artistic and philanthropic enterprises. She is one of those sympathetic and far-sighted women who perceive the opportunity for artistic advancement in America, and who are glad to spend their money and energy to further this advancement. Mrs. Thurber knows that a national conservatory cannot be established here at the first stroke. She has clearly outlined her project; but the project must be attained bit by bit. It was mapped out in her mind several years ago, when, while traveling between Toulouse and Cete, she took part in a conversation on music, and on art in general, with a choice party of French and English gentlemen. She is one of those who led her to sketch on the fly-leaf of a Bradshaw's Guide the plan of a National Conservatory. Associated intimately as she was with European feelings and ideals, she was still intensely American in her anxiety to assist the art progress of her own country.

A National Conservatory, as she had planned it, though necessarily more restricted in its scope than a conservatory to be, was finally established; and it represented in her mind and in the minds of her co-laborers, a purely industrial and patriotic enterprise. It was not, in other words, a non-making scheme. It was likely to be on the contrary, a money-losing scheme, bravely philanthropic. In a noteworthy letter to one of the newspapers here, Mrs. Thurber suggested her personal view of the conservatory. She wrote: "The population of our country amounts at the present time to some fifty odd millions of people. In this

vast multitude there is a very high percentage of noble voices united for the most part to a high degree of intelligence, and in most instances to exceptional ability. But for the most part, also, these voices are possessed by those who have not the means to secure a musical education without which their gifts must remain uncommensurate to themselves and unproductive of results to others. In a land which has done more, perhaps, than any other for the general education of the masses of its people, the above is a condition of things doubly to be deplored. Who is there among us that would not wish to see it permanently and effectively remedied? Who is there that would not recognize as a national blessing the placing of the means of all, and free of cost, a thorough musical education, so that no really noble voice in the land should remain silent for want of it, and no exceptional ability of a musical character rendered sterile by its absence? Well, this is what we have been and are endeavoring to create. But the work is one of considerable magnitude, and "Festina lente" is a proverb it is well to bear in mind in connection with it. A National Conservatory has many branches. To attempt to establish all at once, and in a fitting manner, would need enormous resources. It appeared to us infinitely better to constitute a branch by branch, and to have a great educational agency which was so sorely wanted. Hence the foundation of our National School of Singing, or of a First Branch—Voice."

After the school had been at work somewhat over a year, there had been under instruction between 100 and 200 pupils. Classes of elocution, accompaniment, and drama, had been established from the first. The instruction given was summarized as follows: Schools of solfeggio (which, for some reason hard to understand, is rarely taught by our American singing-masters); school of advanced singing; school of lyric and dramatic singing by means of the great educational agency which was so sorely wanted. Hence the foundation of our National School of Singing, or of a First Branch—Voice."

The fact that Mrs. Thurber and her associates did all in their power, at the outset of their undertaking, to give the new conservatory a national, not merely a local character, should be mentioned upon it. The conservatory had, and still has its home—and a very modest home for the present—in New York. But its pupils have come from everywhere. Against local prejudices it has naturally to contend; for it is hard to disabuse the minds of residents in any city that a New York conservatory is not, to its very heart, a thing which belongs to and which is meant to glorify New York. Now, until the institution projected by Mrs. Thurber and her friends had been brought into existence there had been no conservatory which was not local and which was not conducted wholly for financial gain, but the new conservatory, as I have already said, was not founded for money-making purposes, but for the purpose of art. Thus it assumed, from its beginning a national importance. The nearly every state territory in the union has representation in this school. In view of all this, an I not justified in quoting Mrs. Thurber once again—through a statement also contributed to the press and which will be published hereafter—that an effort is being made to develop the musical talent in which our country is as rich as in other things, to furnish free education in music to as many as possible, and to do this in the way of enlightening our people as to the methods and plans of our one National Conservatory should make it clear that here, at least, is a popular institution which deserves the name of artist, most liberal, encouragement.

A few words upon the history of the National Conservatory will, I am certain, be read with much interest. The officers, at its foundation, were Mr. F. B. Thurber, president; Mrs. F. B. Thurber, Mrs. Richard Irvin, Jr., treasurer; Mr. Arthur H. Vivian, secretary; and Mrs. F. B. Thurber, Mrs. Augustus M. Ward, Mr. August Belmont, Mr. Andrew Carnegie, Mr. W. G. Cheate, Mr. W. K. Vanderbilt, Mr. Henry G. Mayer, Mr. Jesse Seligman, Mr. William R. Grace, Mr. Theodore Thomas, Mr. F. B. Thurber, and a number of ladies and gentlemen who are highly esteemed in the city. The first course of instruction would cover from three to five years, varying with the musical attainments and progress of each student. Entrance to the conservatory was not conditioned upon any previous knowledge of music, but candidates were only eligible to the higher classes when their natural endowments were judged to be entirely exceptional. All students were bound, on the completion of their studies, to assist in carrying out the national educational work of the conservatory, contributing for a specified time in each case, one-fourth of all the money earned professionally by them over and above the sum of \$1,000. This was a faculty of eleven persons, the conservatory was opened on the 15th of December, 1885. The main object sought at first to be obtained was the thorough cultivation of the vocal powers from the earliest rudiments of solfeggio to the fullest development of lyric and dramatic singing.

It has received no aid from the government, but it has been and is to-day supported by Mrs. Thurber and her associates, who are amply willing to spend their money on a project which, in the long run, is bound to awaken immense public interest and encouragement. The few must do at first what the many will do later. That is the law, as it were, of philanthropies. But it must be clear that this philanthropy is grounded in a popular need. It must be clear that some one shall undertake, with unselfish ardor, a labor that is certain to be the cornerstone of a vast educational edifice. Those who do not help the labor now will help it to-morrow. Those who misunderstand to-day will understand to-morrow. I have mentioned that Mr. Parke Godwin was the first president of the National Conservatory. He was succeeded by Mrs. Thurber, who holds that dignity at this moment. Jacques Bouly, a musician and teacher of extraordinary ability, has replaced Mrs. Fursch-Madi as director, and Mr. Richard Irvin, Jr., remains as treasurer. Moreover, there is a distinguished board of trustees, composed for the years 1887-88, including President Cleveland, Secretary Endicott, Secretary Whitney, Justice Miller, Secretary Lamar, Admiral Porter, Senator Allison, Senator Evans, Senator Macpherson, Congressman Perry Belmont, Mr. Roswell P. Flower, Mr. Erasmus Winman, Mrs. C. P. Huntington, the Misses Cooper, Mrs. Anna Langdon and many others whose names are known all over the United States. The instructors in the school to-day, besides M. Bouly, are Mme. Eugenie Pappenheim, Mr. Christian Fritsch, and Mrs. Frida Ashforth, for singing; Mr. E. J. Dulcken, repertorialist; Mr. A. H. Holt, elocution; M. Bibeyran, stage department; Mme. C. Bornemann, Sign. Frenchelli, Mons. A. Perrot and Herr Rumpf, solfeggio; M. Boris Sencic, fencing; Signor Canelli, music; Mr. Joseph M. Miss Piney, Miss Margules and Mr. G. Hanecker, piano; Mr. Leopold Liechtenberg, violin; Mr. Oscar Klein, harp and counterpoint; Mr. Henry T. Finck, the accomplished musical director of the Evening Post orchestra; and Mr. Joseph Mosenthal, chorus master. No one who is at all acquainted with the musical instructors of New York needs to be assured that the names mentioned together a very brilliant and unusual showing.

What is the conservatory actually doing? The reader may ask. It has classes of solfeggio, of preparatory and of advanced singing, of accompaniments, of Italian, elocution, stage department, arms; also a school of piano and of violin, and for the teaching of harmony, counterpoint and composition and of the history of music. There are in working order from 9 till 12, and from 1 till 5 daily. Then there are evening classes between 7 and 10 at night.

It will be learned, too, with interest, that a chorus, made up of lovers of music of every nationality, has been recently formed, with a view to the giving of three concerts during the winter months. Rehearsals will be held once a week. The first concert was made at the conservatory on Wednesday, October 15, by Mr. Joseph Mosenthal, who has been engaged as chorus master, and who is the highly esteemed director of the Mendelssohn glee club. The latest addition to the conservatory is the establishment of children's classes in solfeggio and the theory of music. Children from eight to fourteen years old are admitted to these classes, which, being given twice a week for instruction, are clearly designed to train children in early youth, and to benefit choir-boys and others. The majority, seven-eighths, of the pupils have been admitted free of charge, others pay special rates.

The national conservatory is, however, free to persons of every race, creed, and color, on the one condition that they give proof of sufficient natural talent to justify the expenditure of time and money, and are unable to pay for the teaching they receive.

What must be done in the future by the conservatory has been clearly shown in the national conservatory, Berlin, London, Vienna, Leipzig, Hamburg and Stuttgart. There is no reason why our own should not be equal to these, even without the assistance of government subsidies. Mrs. Thurber, in a private circular, indicates how the school in which she is so deeply interested, can be adequately supported, without subsidies. Here is what she suggests:

"In the first place it is clear that, valuable as every cent is in a cause like this, it is not the occasional cent, or the accidental dollar, that is wanted, so much as that regular and systematic help which, however small, becomes invaluable because it is constant. The yearly dollar is the factor wanted. If we could secure a hundred thousand of these, every difficulty would be at an end, and of the noblest institutions of its kind would be the result. Now, should there not twenty generous people among our fifty millions who were willing to give \$5,000 a year to such a cause as this? Or, again, is it impossible to find one hundred among us who would give \$1,000 each, or fifty who would give from \$100 to \$500 each for such a purpose? Let us then first do our own part, and then ask the friends of music in every state to cooperate with us in securing a creditable building and an adequate endowment fund. Our way will thus be plain before us.

"Having thus indicated the real sources of (annual) subscriptions from which all unsubsidized institutions derive the greater portion of the income by which they subsist, let me now suggest an accompaniment—an endowment fund. The sum of \$1,000,000, the necessity of this, is self evident. Of course such a fund appeals more to the wealthy among us than it does to others. But what an army of millionaires this land can boast of! Let this class here in New York city set a good example in the matter, and every other city will follow suit. There are no where in the country brighter minds and warmer hearts than here. Let us earnestly ask their dispassionate and generous consideration for the work upon the permanent success of which the future of so many must depend."

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Detroit Free Press: Further up the Yankin, after leaving Morgan's, I came to a hamlet of eight or ten houses and here I decided to rest for three or four days. I was to get letters here, and I must have my shoes repaired and some washing done. A widow named Kinney soon fixed a room for me, and by and by I went over to the postoffice to see about mail. It came into the town every other day on horseback from a point twenty miles away. The postoffice was a family room, and the corridor was the open air, with a pane of glass out of a window through which one stack his nose to inquire. The postmaster was a tall, sharp-nosed, hawk-eyed native of 50, and as I made inquiry he came to the window and asked: "Be you he'un?" "Yes, sir." "And you hain't nobody else?" "No." "Hold up your right hand. Do you solemnly swear that you won't lie about this matter?" "I do."

"Then you kin cum inside. We heard you was cumin' this way. You hain't relashed to the postmaster general, I reckon?" "No." "Wish you was, Captain Jones is playin' onery on me and tryin' to git to be postmaster. Mebbe you'll recommend me afore you go?"

All the mail was in a soap box. "All" comprised a paper and two letters outside of my own mail, and my letters looked as if they had been handled over a hundred times. "Anybody dead?" queried the wife of the postmaster. "No." "Anybody married?" queried her daughter. "No."

"Some postmasters might hev opened them letters," said the official after a time. "but I didn't bust nary one. I was never called onery, and I hope I never shall be."

I was about through when "Captain Jones" put in an appearance outside and held said: "Look yere, Sam, don't you go far to play peek on me 'cause I'm going to be the next postmaster. I'm a-expectin' sum very important letters, and I reckon they ar' yore."

"Sartin' for you, Cap.," was the reply. "Hain't thar' no letter from Wash ington?" "No." "Don't you go far to hold that yere letter back, Sam! It's a state prison offense to hold letters back!"

"Look-a-yere, Cap. Jones!" exclaimed the postmaster, as he arose. "I don't want to be talked to in that manner! I am a-representin' the United States, I am, and I shan't take no charcoal talk from nobody!"

"Never mind, Sam, I'll hev yer scalp inside of a month!" growled the captain. "You will, eh? We'll settle that right now and yere! Cum inside and be examined!" "Who's the stranger?" whispered the captain. "A person as has shook hands with Cleveland and lived in the same town with the postmaster for twenty years, yere wine to decide which of us shall hev it!"

"Do you think yourself fitted for the office?" I asked. "Perfectly fitted, sah."

"Let me see a specimen of your handwriting." "I'll go home and git one." "Take this pen here." "I hain't writ none for three years, owing to cramps in my fingers, but yere goes."

He was seven minutes laboring away, during which he ran out his tongue and rolled his eyes, and he finally handed me the sentence: "Writ by Cap. Jones, N. P. It was horrible cigraphy, and when I asked what "N. P." meant, he explained: "Next postmaster of this yere post-office."

"Captain, how many states are there in the union?" "How many? Big and leetle?" "Yes." "All over?" "Yes." "Well, I'm a-goin' fur to say thar's fifty, more or less."

"Name the two great oceans." "The two whoppers?" "Yes." "No sayin' anythin' about Lake Erie?" "No." "Wall, I'm a-goin' fur to say the North Pole and the Bay of Biscay."

"How is the state of North Carolina bonded?" "By land and water?" "Yes; but by what states?" "What states? I knowed all about it yesterday, but it's clean dun gone now. Let's see, I'll go for to say she's bounded by—"

"Name ten states." "Ten states? Wall, I'm a-goin' fur to name the two Carolinas, Tennessee, Alabama, Little Rock, Boston, Chicago, New Orleans, Detroit and Dakota."

He made as many blunders on all other subjects, and when I was done questioning he asked: "Stranger, am I fitten?" "No, from it. You can never be postmaster."

"Don't I know nuff?" "To be honest, you don't." "Not fitten to run a postoffice? And that's honest?" "Is it?" "Cap, it's just as I told yez all along," said the postmaster. "Sum is fitten, and sum can't never be fitten. You is fitten to boss a plantation or to be a captain in the army, but you isn't fitten to run a postoffice."

"And it's no use of my tryin' to git the place?" I asked the captain of me. "Not a bit." "And, mind you," put in the postmaster, "this yere gent has shook hands with President Cleveland, and he's in the same town with the postmaster general for twenty years. What he says is authority—way up to the top of the tree!"

"Yes, I reckon, but I've had my heart set on it, Sam."

"I know you hev, captin, but if you hain't fitten what's the use?" "And my wife has calkerated on it, too."

"Sartin' she has, but what's she goin' to do? Here's a gent as has shook Mr. Cleveland's hand. We can't get over that."

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