

# A STORY OF A MYSTERIOUS SONG AND ITS EXPONENTS

## A FRENCH HORN AMONG THE PHILISTINES

By JEFFERSON NOEL

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ALL day long the wind had been blowing hard enough to raise freckles on an Indian. The alkali laden and scorching desert, blinding us and our ponies and enveloping old landmarks in a cloud. Toward sundown it eased up a little, and when we had finished our dry tea only an occasional puff came to the day's discomfort. With the usual savage seductiveness, from which even the familiar moon and stars could not detract, night closed in on the Mojave.

When a full moon came in the conversation of the camp, Juan, the Mexican, seemed to have been waiting for a break in the circle and started in the opposite direction. Glancing over my shoulder, I saw Metcalf standing alone, throwing an armful of brush on the fire. Macpherson and Williams, being old cronies and a bit exclusive in their triple when terms were far apart, had gone off, I thought, to finish the Randburg bottle.

I was dimly conscious of something strange about the whole proceeding. On the desert never wander away from camp, especially when a stranger is left on guard. This Metcalf—here anything that was dim and uncertain in my consciousness gave way to a clearly defined image—this Metcalf had been picked up at the Needles, and in the prospectors' way, we asked no questions. None of us knew him. Suppose I thought, he should put his heel on that dancing bit of flame? Suppose he should pack everything of value on the ponies and make a bee line for civilization?

I hesitated between two impulses. The camp needed me, but since early morning I had waited impatiently for this hour. I wanted to be alone. I wanted to sing.

Never since that faraway September afternoon when I entered, a freshman, at Ann Arbor had I been possessed of the insane desire to raise my voice and affront the cool of heaven. When we were huddled together with our backs to the pale trying to keep large sections of the desert out of our throats the repression gave me a pain.

Something other than the sense pervaded me the music breaking for utterance I had which order. Having only an indifferent memory for sweet sounds and, I must confess, a taste that might be termed popular, I was carried off my feet as much by the recognition of its merit as by its continual recurrence. But, strange as it might seem, despite the continual recurrence of it, I was surrounded by distractions, at the very moment I had an opportunity to do more than listen in dumb ecstasy, try as I might, I could not recall a single note. Laying the blame on my anxiety over the possible loss of our

traps, I allowed the other impulse to get the upper hand and returned to camp. Metcalf was lying on his back, smoking. There was no fire, he did not even turn his head. About his indifference, which was extraordinary, I cared nothing, for just as I got within six feet of him the tantalizing air came again full blown into my brain.

I wondered at my grasp of such a masterpiece. My conception was complete to the final note, and though I had never taken a lesson in music, I knew—felt, rather—wherein it conformed to the highest standards of the art. I followed the flute-like tones that were ringing in my ear, and finally obeying something stronger than my will, I threw back my head and, shaping my mouth as I had seen the fellows of the glee club at the university shape theirs, sang.

Metcalf's groaning brought me to a realization of the absurd figure I cut



standing in the center of the camp beating time with a wisp of sage and singing to the moon as though my life depended on it. Hastily throwing some scrub on the fire, I set off with the determination of reaching the final cadence without interruption if I walked to the other side of the desert. When beyond Metcalf's hearing I

stopped and gathered myself together. The discovery of a talent is something to be well considered. Perhaps my ability as a composer would rank me above the rest of the world. It would be almost conceivable of one musical theme exhausting its originality; rather might it be expected to aid development in that direction.

I grew instantly tired of being a nomad. My life, which had been as uneventful as the dusty tombs I browsed among, was transformed by the out of door world into a full, strong, pulsating man's life; my blood coursed red and pure through my veins; my heart beat against the ribs; my muscles were like steel. But now the zest was taken out of the care free wandering. My joy of awaking under the amethyst sky and lazily watching the drifting clouds was forgotten. The twittering of sleepy birds and the gossiping of the wind among the trees were as though they had never been. All the freedom, the strength and the glad smiles of the morning were turned by the stirrings of civilization into a heap of dust that one might grind under his heel. I seemed to hear the handclapping and to feel the tender gaze of women. My music went to the hearts of men and made life sweet for them! Among the great I was great.

Throwing back my head, I formed my lips to sing, and not a note came forth. All my mental turnings and twistings were of no avail; not a suggestion of the melody that was to open up a noble career for me came to the foreground of consciousness. My castles were ruined.

Of course, now that I look back at it, standing there a solitary figure on the desert, dreaming dreams of conquering the world by music when I knew absolutely nothing of even the rudiments, contained the elements of a tragedy. But it was all so real to me; I seemed to have the very soul of art within reach of my hand; I caught a glimpse of the final purpose of things I have never experienced since.

The reaction caused by my failure brought a feeling akin to disgust. Waiting, dull and inert, not caring if the elusive air ever returned, my ear caught the faint echo of whistling off to the right. I went in the direction of it. As I drew near enough to distinguish between the sounds there seemed a strange familiarity in them. By stretching the imagination a resemblance to my own elusive air could be discovered. Forgetting the indifference of a moment ago, I grew furious. Here was some scoundrel who had evidently heard me practicing near the fire trying to steal the product of my genius. Drawing near, I was about to tax him with his dishonesty when he stopped and, stretching his arms above his head, rose from the sand heap. His "bueno, senor," as he passed on his way to the camp told me it was Juan, the

Mexican, the kindest and gentlest of men. Nothing but folly would appear in accusing him of anything but faithfulness.

Thinking in nervous jerks, my feet keeping time to the unaccustomed mode of thought, I turned away. Scarcely had I gone 500 yards when I heard another whistle offend the night. And it was offensive; it was little more than high treason against music. Williams had no doubt caught the first few bars of the strange air as I sang it near the fire and was determined to make them do duty for the whole composition.

Thoroughly disgusted with his mistreatment of my masterpiece, I stopped my ears with my fingers and hastened away.

Only Macpherson remained. There was no possibility of this man lurking in the shadows when I made that exhibition of myself before Metcalf. Filled with the traditional Scotch honesty, if he had heard me and was interested he would have come forward and asked me to teach him. That much

was all that I could have expected.

At a very palpable error I objected and called to Macpherson that he was wrong, but without paying the least attention he kept at his note. Incensed, I took up the theme and sang it as I knew it should be sung. The Williams at this juncture joined in with his stupid attempt to show acquaintance with the air. And finally Juan awoke and set the pace, musically speaking, for us all. The Mexican's notes were clear and well sustained and gave evidence of some training. Indeed if he had been content to follow his leadership it is hard to say how soon he would have reached something like unison or even harmony, but the strong personality that is engendered in men when they cease to be house animals was apparent in our efforts to sing—rather roar—each other down. I made our attack from different angles, as it were, and struck each a different point. Like a collection of orthodox Jews singing at Yom Kippur, each man holding his individual key, we greeted the purring sun.

Metcalf groaned aloud. There was no humor in that early morning serenade. It contained all the tragedy of an artistic inspiration entering commonplace society. At breakfast we gazed at each other. Williams toyed maliciously with his six shooter, and Macpherson, the peace loving Macpherson, unlimbered himself, placing both knife and gun within easy reach. The silence was ominous. I was the first to speak. Addressing Juan, I asked him if the music did not run like this:

Juan shook his head, but before he could suggest a correction Williams growled out his idea of how it should go.

The half quizzical smile on Macpherson's face gave way to a look of disgust.

These sounds represented his conception of my beautiful air!

Here was a case of disillusionment without a parallel. About Williams I should say nothing. But Macpherson and Juan! I would have taken their simplest word and considered it binding on an oath. Two more honest men never trod the earth. Yet they were undoubtedly guilty of trying to appropriate a masterpiece that I had conceived.

I hastened back to where the wedge of flame pierced the pervading gloom—a gloom that now reeked up from every spot and obscured even the beauty of the stars.

Juan and Metcalf and Williams were scattered lazily about the camp. It seemed impossible to do otherwise than shun my two old friends; so, wrapping myself in my blanket, I stretched out near the man we had picked up at the Needles, and my back had not fully touched the earth before the beautiful air came to me again. As its wonderful charm gripped me I grew dizzy with excitement. The veins in my neck swelled at the memory of being robbed by the very men I had trusted around something hard at my elbow. Then the music surged into my brain like the waves of the sea and swept all thoughts that were not of peace away. I was carried beyond the need of strife. Sufficient glory was the glory of accomplishment. The handclappings and the little bursts of fame—what of them?

It was the gray of the morning when a coarse burlesque of my masterpiece intruded itself on my consciousness. Macpherson was sitting up beating time with a corner of his blanket to a kind of sotto voce reproduction of the absurd sounds he had made the night before. Metcalf was unwatching him and Williams was turning weakly in his sleep.

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"This is how the tune goes, Williams," he broke in abruptly.

There was no question of the energy displayed in Macpherson's performance, but the grace left something to be desired.

I was on the verge of explaining this to him when Metcalf said: "That's the most infernal piece of music I have ever heard, and, furthermore, you are all wrong."

To this day I fall to see what saved his life. It seemed as though a child of mine



HE PLAYED AS MAN NEVER PLAYED BEFORE.

had been murdered before my eyes. Williams and Macpherson both covered him hastily.

"You mean you're a liar," said Williams hotly. "Go on, say you're a liar," echoed Macpherson, nervously fingering the trigger. "If you care to listen to me," answered Metcalf with an indifferent wave of his hand and a shrug that spoke volumes for his contempt, "I will give you a lesson in music."

"Let's give him a chance," I broke in, impelled as much by the anxiety to discover what he meant as the desire to avoid bloodshed. Without another word Metcalf went to his saddlebag and drew forth a sort of flute, which he screwed together. "This is where it tripped you by the heels," he said, nodding to Macpherson. He then gave an imitation of Macpherson's ridiculous squeaks. "This is how it goes," he said, playing like an angel. "That's the chorus. Now the woman comes on. She's a contralto." And again the superb sounds that were a match for the morning filled our ears. A hint of the fullness of life came as he reached the cadence. My throat was full. I was tempted to speak, to cry aloud when a tender note rang out clear and strong, transporting us to a better, truer world. He played this part twice over and finished with a dying fall that was as sweet as sleep after nights of pain.

Perhaps it was a minute, perhaps it was an hour, before any one spoke. Time and space were eliminated from our consciousness. Juan, the Mexican, a glint of reverence in his eye, had edged close to

the player. Macpherson sighed and turned away. Even Williams, the bullet head of the outfit, was visibly affected. "Gentlemen," said Metcalf, calmly uncovering the inspired instrument and stuffing it into his saddlebag, "that proves one half my contention; the other half can be as easily proved."

Macpherson plucked nervously at his tuft of hair and in his blunt, honest fashion said, "I thought that was my own tune."

"I thought it was mine," remarked Williams, and there was in the slight inflection of the last word the suggestion of a man always sure of himself discovering a hole in his armor.

"I had a dream of developing into a great composer on the strength of it," I confessed, and try as I might, I could not repress a sigh. Juan awoke the sigh and turned his eyes away.

Metcalf seemed to be oblivious of his triumph. The indifference that was in his eyes when he looked down the muzzle of the revolver still lingered. "You see all wrong," he finally began, "a man of whom you know nothing wrote it. There was a time when the music stood well in the world's opinion. About the beginning of its vogue I came in contact with it, to my grievous injury."

"Of course there was a woman," he went on after a slight pause. "There all ways is. But she was such a woman as only poets know in their dreams. And by every right that springs from years of unflagging devotion and unselfish love she was mine."

Then he came, the composer, with all his wild world charm and his old world knowledge of the human heart. In some-thing less than a month I learned that all my unflagging devotion and unselfish love could not tip the beam against the least of his smiles. This knowledge came during the performance of the music you claim individually and collectively as your own. As they sang I watched them—But why go on? The music was composed for her; the man's soul was in it.

"That was ten years ago. Occasionally the desire taken possession of me to learn if she still lived, if she is happy—well, I went and I moved in the track of men. I had fallen to a stranger."

Over us the air hung heavy red. The desert wore a strange pathetic look. The blue veil shrouding the mountains awayed indistinctly. Not a twig or grain of sand moved. The wind was dead.

Metcalf quietly added his part. We watched him with the sympathy we felt showing in our faces. "Won't you play for us just a little?" said Macpherson ecstatically. For answer Metcalf drew forth the flute and, leaning against the pony, played as if he were playing for the first time to something more than human and carried us with him into a world far beyond the desert.

# Entertainment and Instruction For the Young Folks

## The Reliance Baseball And Football Club

By ALBERTA PLATT

FRED BING was not happy that afternoon. He sat on the back porch looking gloomily out at nothing. He could hear the shouts and yells of the Beat All and True Blue baseball clubs playing their last game for the championship of the



"I NOMINATE FRED BING FOR CAPTAIN."

twelve-year-olds of Hummertown. The members of these clubs were boys from ten to thirteen, schoolmates of Fred Bing, most of them. But several members of the Beat Alls and at least two fellows in the True Blues were noted as being the tough boys of Hummertown. At every game where they played these fellows used profane language and bad words that made a decent boy ashamed that he knew them. Then, too, they were apt to stir up rows that sometimes made a game end in a fight. Swearing, wild language and fighting were naturally not what a mother would care to have her son become habituated to, and Mrs. Bing said Fred must not play with the tough boys.

Fred was a good son and of course respected his mother's request, but naturally, again, he was not happy for he liked baseball as well as any healthy, active boy could. His father came home early from his office that Saturday afternoon and saw the lad sitting

forlorn and unconsoled on the back porch.

"What's the trouble, Fred?" asked Mr. Bing.

Fred told him. Now, Mr. Bing himself had been a ball player and crack pitcher before the cares of a family began to occupy his time. Even now the great American athletic game would have waked him up lively if he had ever got time to play. So he sympathized with Fred altogether, but at the same time he knew Mrs. Bing was quite right in her objections to the tough boys. He thought a little, then he said:

"I'll tell you what, Fred. We'll organize a new baseball club. We'll make it the first rule of the club that no profane or improper language shall ever be used in a game or on the ball grounds and that all difficulties shall be settled by arbitration. The first fellow to break this rule shall be expelled."

"Invite some of your friends to come to our home this evening, and we'll talk the thing up, and I will show you boys how to organize according to the rules



ON THE FIELD.

of parliamentary usage. We must do things in a parliamentary way, you understand."

So said, so done. Tom Bedlow rapped on the table and called the house to

## Prince Edward of Wales and His Brother Prince George Taking a Lesson In Fishing



order. Willie McBride was chosen chairman and announced that the object of the meeting was to organize a baseball club and elect a captain. It was voted to call the club Reliance, after the American cup defender. The rule was unanimously adopted prohibiting profanity and bad language. An amendment was added to this rule providing that all misunderstandings between club members should be settled by arbitration. Then Phil Richmond arose and said: "I nominate Fred Bing for captain of the Reliance Baseball team."

Fred was voted in, and the new club began its existence. The members have a pretty uniform. Tom Bedlow's father gave them two red foul flags with the letter R painted upon them. The boys

## THE MODEL BOY.

I know a well bred little boy who never says, "I can't!" He never says, "Don't wait for me!" or "You've got to wait for me!" He never says, "I'll tell mamma she calls his playmates 'mean.'" A lad more careful of his speech I'm sure was never known. He never utters a word of profanity, and he never utters a word of profanity. A single word of slang from him would make his mother faint. He never utters a word of profanity. And now I'll tell you why if he test this should seem absurd. He's now exactly six months old and cannot speak a word!

## His Opportunity.

"Little boy, why are you fishing?" is there no school today?"

"Oh, yes, sir, but I got such a cold in my head I can't go, sir."

## What the Plebs Will Do.

"Are we going to have a picnic this year?" inquired a proponent of a Sunday school teacher.

"Why, what do you want with a picnic?"

"Nothing much. But I can get six new scholars if you are going to have one."

## Too Good to Last.

Anxious Mother—I'm afraid Johnnie is ill.

Father—My goodness! What does he complain of?

Anxious Mother—He hasn't begun to complain yet, but I forgot to lock the jam closet today, and there isn't any jamming.

## Queer Cats.

There are many people who are really afraid of the common tabby cat, which is, after all, not an alarming beast. What, then, would these people do if they invaded in Liberia, where the cats are of a bright red coloring? Antipathy to cats is a very curious complaint. Lord Roberts, the hero of a hundred fights, is dreadfully afraid of the feline tribe and finds it impossible to collect his thoughts or make a speech if a cat is in the room. The writer once knew a lady who used to go into a faint immediately a cat got within a few yards of her, even if she did not see it. Yet this same woman was a fearless rider to hounds and had traveled all over the world.

## Hard to Amuse.

"Mother," said a five-year-old the other day, "I wish you wouldn't leave me to take care of baby again. He was so bad I had to eat all the sponge cake and two jars of raspberry jam to amuse him."

## It Doesn't Jar Him.

A boy is never so happy as when the family is moving and he can walk through the streets in his new house wearing a chair on his head. That's the only way most boys can sit on a chair.

## A Rabbit Pie.

Dr. Shalton Hild, professor of zoology at Chicago university, is the discoverer of a new food called rabbit pie. It is an organic phosphorus containing body found in creek, lake, marine and the white perch.

## NEAR AND FAR.

Farm products now imported to the value of \$50,000,000 a year, or 10 per cent of our total importation, can be produced in this country.

It is predicted that the army will be reorganized by the addition of a cross between the horse and the zebra.

The New York university has decided to establish a college extension course in the heart of the city for the purpose of giving a college education to men and women who either are or expect to be teachers.

Edgar W. Conable, who founded a vegetarian colony at Roswell, Colo., has bought 8,000 acres of land near Tropic, Ark., for the purpose of establishing another colony of vegetarians and perfectionists.

Dunbar Rowland of Jackson, Miss., recently found thirty books at Natchez, which proved to be the complete record of the Spanish rule in that section between 1763 and 1798.

"The Society of the True Life" is the name given to a new church established by Bishop Vincent in Bulgaria for people who will not join the Methodist church, but who are dissatisfied with the Greek church.

The new system of examination for the certification of teachers in Massa-

chusetts is now complete, and it is claimed that the combination of oral and written tests, the balance between scholarship and experience, theory and common sense, is the best yet developed.

W. S. Parks of Chicago announces the discovery of a process by which he is able to change a diamond to any color desired and make the color permanent by means of the Roentgen rays.

The largest electric crane in existence is in Kiel harbor. It is so placed that two of the largest vessels may be on each side of it for the purpose of unloading or re-loading cargoes. The crane can lift fifty tons at a time.

Four and a half tons of oak timber make a ton of charcoal, while of pine timber six tons are required.

A French apothecary has been experimenting with bees as messengers. He has discovered that they will return to their hives from a distance of four

miles in about twenty minutes, bearing dispatches after the manner of homing pigeons.

More than 200 varieties of plants are in use in various trades in this country.

It is computed that there are at present 8,000 motor cars in use in the United Kingdom.

The result of experiments made by Dr. Shalton Hild, professor of zoology at Chicago university, is the discovery of a new food called rabbit pie. It is an organic phosphorus containing body found in creek, lake, marine and the white perch.

A scientist recently passed through a peculiar experience. He tasted a small portion of a cup of radium. It acted as a powerful stimulant, affecting both the heart and kidneys. It was several hours before his pulse became normal. It affected the mind also, producing hallucinations.