

MECHANICAL MUSIC.

With hands uplifted in horror, Mr. John Philip Sousa, says the Literary Digest, the purveyor of popular music, contemplates the inroads of mechanical devices that increase to the Nth power and "popularity" of music. He sees the multiplication of phonographs, gramophones, "the mechanical device to sing for us a song or play for us a piano," threatening to overwhelm us "with the speed of a transient fashion in slang or Panama hats." Mechanical music, he thinks, will establish itself among us with disastrous effects, similar to those following the English sparrow, "which, introduced and welcomed in all innocence, lost no time in multiplying itself to the dignity of a pest, to the destruction of numberless native song-birds, and the invariable regret of those who did not stop to think in time." Mr. Sousa declares, in Appleton's Magazine (September):

"On a matter upon which I feel so deeply, and which I consider so far-reaching, I am quite willing to be reckoned an alarmist, admittedly swayed in part by personal interest, as well as by the impending harm to American musical art. I foresee a marked deterioration in American music and musical taste, an interruption in the musical development of the country, and a host of other injuries to music in its artistic manifestations, by virtue—or rather by vice—of the multiplication of the various music-reproducing machines. When I add to this that I myself and every other popular composer are victims of a serious infringement on our clear moral rights in our own work, but I offer a second reason why the facts and conditions should be made clear to every one, alike in the interest of musical art and of fair play."

The wide love for the musical art to be found in America, says Mr. Sousa, springs from the singing-school, secular or sacred; from the village band, and from the study of those instruments that are nearest the people. "There are more pianos, violins, guitars, mandolins, and banjos among the working classes of America than in all the rest of the world, and the presence of these instruments in the homes has given employment to enormous numbers of teachers who have patiently taught the children and inculcated a love for music throughout the various communities." The foundations of this great structure Mr. Sousa sees in danger of undermining. He continues:

"Right here is the menace in machine made music! The first rift in the lute has appeared. The cheaper of these instruments of the home are no longer being purchased as formerly, and all because the automatic music devices are usurping their places. "And what is the result? The child become indifferent to practise, for when music can be heard in the homes without the labor of study and close application, and without the slow process of acquiring a technic, it will be simply a question of time when the amateur disappears entirely, and with him a host of vocal and instrumental teachers, who will be without field or calling."

With the recession of the tide of amateurism, Mr. Sousa thinks, there will be left only the mechanical device and the professional executant.

"Singing will no longer be a fine accomplishment; vocal exercises, so important a factor in the curriculum of physical culture, will be out of vogue." With these changes will come a train of consequences appalling to contemplate. Mr. Sousa sees them in this wise, and asks:

"Then what of the national throat? Will it not weaken? What of the national chest? Will it not shrink?"

"When a mother can turn on the phonograph with the same ease that she applies to the electric light, will she croon her baby to slumber with sweet lullabys, or will the infant be put to sleep by machinery?"

"Children are naturally imitative, and if, in their infancy, they hear only phonographs, will they not sing, if they sing at all, in imitation and finally become simply human phonographs—without soul or expression?"

Congregational singing will suffer also, which, though crude at times, at least improves the respiration of many a weary sinner and softens the voices of those who live amid tumult and noise.

"The host of mechanical reproducing machines, in their mad desire to supply music for all occasions, are offering to supplant the illustrator in the class-room, the dance orchestra, the home and public singers and players, and so on. * * *

"There was a time when the pine woods of the north were sacred to summer simplicity, when around the camp-fire at night the stories were told and the songs were sung with a charm all their own. But even now the invasion of the north has begun, and the ingenious purveyor of canned music is urging the sportsman, on his way to the silent places with gun and

rod, tent and canoe, to take with him some disks, cranks, and cogs to sing to him as he sits by the firelight, a thought as unhappy and incongruous as canned salmon by a trout brook.

"In the prospective scheme of mechanical music we shall see man and maiden in a light canoe under the moon upon an Adirondack lake with a gramophone caroling love songs from amidship. * * *

"Shall we not expect that when the nation once more sounds its call to arms and the gallant regiment marches forth, there will be no majestic drum-major, no serried ranks of sonorous trombones, no glittering array of brass, no rolling of drums? In their stead will be a huge phonograph. * * * How the soldiers' bosoms will swell at the thought that they are being led into the strife by a machine!"

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