THE THEATRICAL SITUATION OF TO-DAY

Chapter XIII

THE THEATRICAL SITUATION OF TO-DAY

The Evolution of Musical and Dramatic Enterprises—Moving Picture Shows—Overproduction and Superfluous Theaters—The "Star" System and Present-day Productions as Compared with Those of the Past—Various "Schools" of Operetta—The Press Agent and His Ingenuity.

THE evolution of musical and dramatic enterprises in the past forty years is, to my mind, as distinct as the evolution in commercial and other pursuits.

The advent of Lydia Thompson and her bevy of English beauties including Pauline Markham, Eliza Weathersby, Ada Harland, Rose Massey and that sterling comedian, Harry Beckett, in their presentation of a burlesque entitled "Ixion" at Wood's Museum (present site of Daly's Theater, Broadway and 30th Street) in the early seventies made the *jeunesse dorè* of theater-goers sit up and was the forerunner of a number of burlesque shows that followed suit. Then came the opera-bouffe period with the diminutive Tostée at the little French Theater on 14th Street near Sixth Avenue, where she presented "The Grand Duchess" and other Offenbach pieces; and almost immediately after Montaland and Aujac in a season comprising the works of that same composer at the Grand Opera

House, New York, followed by the fascinating Marie Aimée, who captivated for many years her audiences in the works of not only Offenbach but those of Lecocq, Vasseur, Hervé and Audran. Almost at the same period Maurice Grau presented his excellent company of opera-bouffers including Paola Marié (sister of Galli Marié, original creátrice of Carmen in Paris) Tauffenberger, Vauthier, Mezieres and later on Théo, Angéle, Nixau and Capoul, who performed in New York and toured the country with much success.

About the period of the opera-bouffe invasion in New York, Dion Boucicault was presenting at the old Wallack's Theater (then at 13th Street and Broadway) "The Shaughran," one of his most popular plays, with Harry Montague, a fine looking young fellow, who became a veritable "Matinee idol." It was Boucicault who christened 14th Street and Broadway the original "Rialto," which became such a feature of Metropolitan life that the belles of the then smart Fifth Avenue residence section began to include the Rialto in their daily promenades.

But one manager in New York was ever known to object to the Rialto as a rendezvous for the members of his company. All the others regarded it in the sense of a paying advertisement for their houses and their people. Seeing the actors and actresses on the street only whetted the appetite of the paying public to see them in favorite rôles on the stage. Augustin Daly took an opposite view of the matter. He claimed that the promenade on the Rialto cheapened the value

of his people, reducing the fascination of the stage by bringing them face to face in a prosy manner with the public who paid its money to see them surrounded by all the allurements of the stage.

The famous old Rialto is a thing of the past. There is now what is called the "New Rialto," which extends up Broadway from the Casino at 39th Street to the Columbia Theater at 47th Street. The glories of the old "Rialto" have gone forever. They will be remembered with pleasure by the old players and old playgoers, but to the present generation they are simply ancient history interesting only as a characteristic of the old-time Metropolitan stage.

Reverting back to the opera-bouffe attractions previously mentioned I recall that the casts were generally good but the choruses, the scenery, the costumes, other accoutrements and orchestra were decidedly the reverse.

In the early eighties, with the inauguration of the Casino I insisted upon a production that should combine a first-class cast, a good looking and vivacious chorus, a complete orchestra, appropriate scenery, costumes and properties resultant in the presentation of Johann Strauss' "The Queen's Lace Handkerchief" and thus establishing the popularity and vogue for many years in America of operetta by Austrian composers and the performances of not only the works of Strauss, but those of Suppé, Millöcker, Czibulka, presented by the McCaull, the J. C. Duff, the Henry W. Savage, the F. C. Whitney, the Amberg and the Conried Opera Companies. At this same period

the Gilbert and Sullivan creations were also the rage and they continued the rage, although the public had somewhat tired of Viennese operetta.

In 1886 with my presentation of "Erminie" by Edward Jakobowski, who although Austrian by birth had lived in England during most of his career, there was instituted a period of a lighter class of works, which took the fancy of the American public and for the following ten years the operettas of Chassaigne, Solomon, Lacome, Jones, De Koven, Herbert, Englander, Luders and Kerker held the boards; then with the advent of Leslie Stuart's "Florodora" the era of musical comedy set in and continued for many years. It was no doubt on that account that during my presentation in 1900 of Johann Strauss' posthumous operetta, entitled "Vienna Life" ("Wiener Blut"), at the Broadway Theater, New York—although the production was magnificent and the cast included Raymond Hitchcock, Ethel Jackson and Amelia Stone—the theater-going public kept steadily away, having been inoculated with musical comedy and rag-time and preferring that class of entertainment to the old-time Viennese operetta.

A short time after my "Vienna Life" experience I visited Berlin, heard Lehar's "Die Lustige Wittwe" ("The Merry Widow") and wrote to a prominent New York manager, praising that opera and stating that with some slight changes it ought to make a hit in America, when to my surprise the aforesaid manager informed me that he didn't want any more

JOHN PHILIP SOUSA

VICTOR HERBERT

REGINALD DeKOVEN

Dutch operas! This "Dutch" opera was later produced by George Edwardes in London and then was captured by Henry W. Savage for America and proved not only one of the greatest successes in modern times, but was again the forerunner of the wants of the public and this line of Austro-German operetta is still in vogue, as is evidenced by the success of Oscar Strauss' "A Waltz Dream" and the "Chocolate Soldier," Dr. Leo Fall's "Dollar Princess" and "The Siren" and Lehar's "Gypsy Love" and the "Count of Luxembourg."

I have no hesitation in asserting that the casts selected for operetta presentations in the eighties and nineties were decidedly superior to those in the years following, for the reason perhaps, of the marked invasion of vaudeville by the better class of operetta artists, where the duties are not quite so arduous and the salaries higher. Another reason, too, was because there were many managers in the field, all striving for the best material to fill the various parts and the competition was keen, but it all redounded to the advantage of the public. On the other hand the present-day operetta productions surpass in every way, so far as sumptuousness of costumes and scenery are concerned, the old-timers; and yet when the Messrs. Shubert recently revived "The Mikado," "Pinafore," and "Die Fledermaus" (the latter under a new title "The Merry Countess") at the Casino, those popular operettas have played and the last is playing to more than double its original receipts of twenty-five years ago at the same old stand, the Casino; evidencing that the revivals of a dozen of the most successful of

old-time Casino productions would now be received with open arms by light opera lovers.

The cost of the present-day first class operetta production will average from $15,000 to $40,000, entirely out of proportion to the cost in former times, hence I consider the present two-dollar orchestra seat as more reasonable than the one and one-half dollar seat, fixed as the price during my long régime at the Casino.

Precisely the same difference as recorded above relative to musical productions, I find in the dramatic performances of the past compared with those of the present, owing perhaps to a very great extent to the introduction of the "star" system. To those who remember the excellence, the completeness of the Wallack, the Daly, the Palmer, and the Frohman companies of the past, the difference is at once discernible.

Managers are obliged to follow the trend of the theater-going public, however, who seem to idolize an actor or actress who has achieved popularity, the playwright is then swayed by the situation and writes accordingly, resultant is a cast of characters not as strong as that required in plays of former generations. On the other hand, a play is so original and great that it will "go over" without more than an ordinary company, and again the master hand of a David Belasco will take plays, even of mediocre construction and not only mould them, but the leading artists into phenomenal success.

Another reason why the principals in casts of present operetta and musical comedy performances are not equal to those

in performances of former years is because of the rapid increase of grand opera.

Besides the Metropolitan in New York, the Chicago, Philadelphia and the Boston companies offer opportunities for young, fresh voices, and Germany, France, Italy and England, too, have found places for worthy American singers. To-day American singers have triumphed in grand opera. Their natural voices are excelled by none, their musical intelligence, artistic capacity, dramatic talent and personalities are of the very highest quality.

This triumph has come within the last few years. Little more than a decade ago its beginning was represented in the demonstrated capacities of one or two gifted vocalists. At the present time every first-class operatic organization, either here or abroad, included among its leading singers men and women from various states of the Union—of which the following is a partial list:

Lillian Nordica, Emma Eames, Mary Garden, Olive Fremstad, Geraldine Farrar, Bessie Abbot, Alice Neilsen, Edyth Walker, Marie Rappold, D'Alma Chandler, Bernice de Pasquali, Felice Lyne, Rita Fornia, Alma Gluck, Jane Osborn Hannah, Caroline White, Marie Cavan, May Scheider, Minnie Saltzman Stevens, Agnes Berry, Charlotte Guernsey, Rachel Frease-Green, Louise Homer, Florence Wickham, Josephine Jacoby, Madame Jomelli, Kathleen Howard, Mariska Aldrich, Henrietta Wakefield, Lillia Snelling, Lucy Gates, Eleanor de Cisneros, Bessie Ingram, Jeska Swartz, Bernice

Fisher, Lucille Marcel, Anna Case, Florence Decourcey, Minnie Tracey, Emma Juch, Mabel Riegelman, Florence Rose, Helen Allyn, Jeanette Allen, Helen Wetmore, Alice Souvereign, Mme. Charles Cahier, Ada Saverni, Isabella Trasker, Marcella Craft, Kate Rolla, Marcia Van Dresser, Maud Fay, Yvonne de Treville, Marguerite Lemon, Bella Applegate, Gertrude Rennyson, Loretta Tannert, Giulia Strakosch, Alys Lorraine, Emma Hoffmann, Norma Romana, Mignon Nevada; Ricardo Martin, Orville Harold, Herbert Witherspoon, Putnam Griswold, Lambert Murphy, Clarence Whitehill, Allan Hinckley, Henri Scott, William Hinshaw, Basil Ruysdael, Ellison Van Hoose, George Hamlin, Frank Preisch, Rafaelo Diaz, Edward Lankow, Robert Blass, Robert Kent Parder, Arthur Philips, Sydney Segal, William Picaver, Harry Weldon.

In former years when serious opera opportunities were not available, aspirants after completing their studies would seek out the best comic opera or operetta companies and therefore the casts were of a better calibre than those at present.

It is remarkable, too, that once an artist becomes aligned to grand opera, he or she is not (except in very rare cases) fitted for comic opera, operetta or musical comedy. The artist seems to be imbued with the broadness, the grandeur of the former, contrasted with the lightness and vivacity of the latter. An exception to this rule is the case of Miss Fritzi Scheff, who sang at the Metropolitan Opera House before entering the

field of operetta and making a success in "Babette," "Mlle. Modiste," and other light musical plays.

Away back in the late sixties I remember as a boy I attended two or three performances of the widely heralded "Black Crook" at Niblo's Garden (at Broadway and Prince Street, New York). It was the most spectacular show of the period, and its magnificent ballets with Bonfanti, Sangali, Betty Rigl and its Amazonian march, transformation scene, with playing fountains and illuminated palace, will never be eradicated from my memory. A certain portion of the clergy of New York took exception to the "Black Crook" and endeavored to invoke the law, looking towards its suppression. They did not succeed, however, and only helped to stimulate public interest, so much so, that that show ran on for hundreds upon hundreds of nights, filling the coffers of Messrs. Jarrett and Palmer, its managers.

The exception taken by the clergy in former years to certain performances did much to cleanse burlesque and other cheaper forms of entertainment and to cut out vulgar and indecent dialogue and situations. Although some of the present day productions are not of the most refined, the clergy evince a much more liberal view now than they did in the past.

The nearest approach to the "Black Crook" entertainment is that now given at the New York Hipprodrome, with the difference that the enormous size of its stage, added to the modern mechanical and electrical effects and its hundreds of supernumeraries, make it a more grandiose spectacle, a large

share of the credit of which is due to the masterly conception of its chief scenic director, Mr. Arthur Voegtlin.

The development of the moving picture shows has undoubtedly reduced the receipts in the gallery and balcony of legitimate theaters and yet there is no cessation of theater building in New York, accountable perhaps to the steadily increasing population and the likewise steadily increasing number of transient visitors who are principally counted upon to fill the more than sixty New York theaters night after night. With a successful production the receipts of any first-class theater will reach from $10,000 to $18,000 per week, far in excess of the fixed charges and running expenses, but in many cases, plays are kept on the boards in New York even with very meager returns, in order to help their road business. What effect the contemplated improved moving picture shows, to combine spoken dialogue and musical accompaniment, will have on the regular theater business remains to be seen.

The fact remains, also, that on account of the many theaters in New York, managers are obliged to "try on" inferior plays, in order to avoid closing their houses.

At the present time musical and dramatic performances suffer materially from an economic condition which is unsound from a business point of view, owing to over-production. Some years ago, when the so-called "Theatrical Syndicate" was organized its directors decided that the surest way to win a monopoly of the theater business was to lease or purchase the leading theater buildings in the United States and then

refuse to "give any time" to managers who opposed them. On that account the comparatively few independent managers were obliged to build theaters in cities when they wished their attractions to appear. When a few years later a second syndicate was organized, it necessitated the building of a new chain of theaters to house its productions. As a result of this warfare between the two syndicates nearly all the principal cities of the country are now saddled with more theater buildings than they can support.

In New York, this condition is even more pronounced. Nearly every season some of the minor producing managers change from one syndicate to the other, so that they seldom seem to know far enough in advance just where they will make their next production in New York, and thus in order to assure themselves of a Broadway booking, they are obliged to build a theater of their own, resulting in the last few years in a veritable epidemic of theater building in New York.

A theater building is a great expense to its owners, especially if located in one of the most costly sections of a city, more particularly in New York. It is hazardous for the owners to permit the building to stand idle for any lengthy period. They must keep it open as many weeks as possible throughout the year; and if play after play fails upon its stage, they must still seek other entertainments to attract sufficient money to cover the otherwise dead loss of the rent. Hence there exists in America a false demand for plays, a demand which is occasioned not by the natural need of the theater-going public,

but by the frantic need on the part of the warring managers to keep their theaters open. It is, of course, impossible to find enough first-class plays, operettas or musical comedies to meet the fictitious demand, and the managers are therefore obliged to secure second-class material, which they hardly expect the public to approve, because it will cost them less to present second-class attractions to small audiences—particularly regular plays, because they are devoid of expensive costume and scenic equipment—than it would cost them to close some of their superfluous theaters.

No very deep knowledge of economics is necessary to perceive that this must become eventually a ruinous business policy. Too many theaters showing too many plays too many months in the year cannot finally make money; and this reacts against art itself and against the public's appreciation, and yet there are managers who are continually willing to take chances, figuring that one "great big hit" will overshadow in profit the loss incurred on eight failures. Thus good work suffers by the constant accompaniment of bad work which is advertised in precisely the same way; and the public which is forced to see eight bad productions in order to find one good one, becomes weary and is apt to lose faith.

I repeat that since the old days of "The Black Crook" in the sixties, followed by the Lydia Thompson British burlesquers, and the French opera bouffe, the Austro-German operetta, and the Gilbert and Sullivan works, there has been a decided backward movement as regards the adequate portrayals of the vari-

ous parts in those classes of entertainment. The very best artists procurable were secured to fill adequately all the various parts, and managers vied one with the other in their procurement, and hence the performances met public approval and resulted in exceedingly long runs as a general rule.

To-day, with the "star" system in vogue it is not possible with generally inferior casts, to expect the same all around artistic presentation as in former years. I refer not only to musical plays, but to dramatic performances as well. Indeed, "the star" is put forward so strongly, that in a great many cases even the title of the play becomes of secondary consideration. It may be that a popular "star" becomes a box office magnet, but that is no reason why the artistic completeness of a production, and the theater-going public should thus be made the loser.

There is no doubt that an adequate, all-round cast is the most important factor and no expenditure of large sums of money for scenery, costumes and accessories can suffice without the right players.

A few of the present time composers and librettists of operettas or musical plays, who seek to emulate a Johann Strauss, a Franz von Suppé, a Carl Millöcker, a Jacques Offenbach, a Charles Lecocq or an Arthur Sullivan should bear in mind that something more than clever musicianship and skill in writing humorous verse is necessary. Old observers know this and even the careless listener realizes it, though uninterested in the technical elements of stagecraft. Vulgar

humor and musical commonplace have brought in many instances the entertainment which is called operetta and musical comedy to a low plane, but the more thought and purpose have been degraded, the more have craftsmanship and attention to external elements been advanced. Roistering fun-makers, gorgeous scenery, pretty chorus girls in picturesque gowns and ingenuous stage management have unhappily become of greater moment than comedy with a purpose and music which does not offend good taste. The more sincere the attempt to give artistic aim to musical comedy, however, the greater the demand upon technical skill in creation and production.

Time changes nothing else in us so much as our sense of humor. This development notable in the individual who grows up, is more notable still in the growing community, so that always the oldest nation has the finest and keenest instinct of fun. Our own progress was apparent in nothing more than in our altered taste for musical comedy.

We began by appreciating only the broadest burlesques and spectacular melo-dramatic representations, then the Austro-German operettas, and finally Gilbert and Sullivan lifted us suddenly from the lowest to the highest plane. These two last-mentioned men were a phenomenon, almost unique in theatrical history, because they were as peerless, as inimitable, as supreme in their own field as Shakespeare or Wagner. There never has been another Shakespeare nor a Wagner; there probably never will be another Gilbert and Sullivan. At the height of their vogue, Charles Hoyt began producing rapid-

MASCAGNI

fire farces in which the songs were incidental and this kind of entertainment, redeemed by the wit, the constructive skill and the genius for characterization of a master, speedily degenerated to the musical comedy of the early nineties, in which in some of them the plot was silly or non-existent, the dialogue a selection from the comic weeklies, the music elemental and the predominant purpose of the whole nothing more nor less than the exhibition of the largest possible number of women in the smallest possible number of garments. These pieces were built rather than written. Of what use was a clever librettist when good lines were desirable chiefly when they could be revealed by abbreviated attire. and when half a dozen unusually pretty girls atoned for any possible vapidity of play?

"The Merry Widow" turned the tide, the Austro-German operettas previously named and "The Spring Maid," "The Pink Lady," "The Quaker Girl," "The Enchantress," "The Red Widow," and "The Rose Maid" followed. Long before then the public had sickened of its feed, but the managers had been somewhat slow to see it. A single success did the trick. The one-fingered would-be musicians went out of fashion, and they were replaced by talented composers.

It is possible no longer to introduce into any sort of a scene any sort of a song. Stage directors nowadays do not consider it entirely apropos to lower a motor boat into a drawing room set in order that some basso-profundo recruit from vaudeville may warble "Nancy Lee."

One of the most delightful of recent revivals in New York was "Robin Hood" at the New Amsterdam Theater. "Oh, Promise Me" of course brought tender recollections of Jessie Bartlett Davis and one was agreeably reminded of Henry Clay Barnabee, Eugene Cowles and Tom Karl, and those other Bostonians who first presented that admirable De Koven and Smith work, more than twenty years ago at the Standard Theater. Walter Hyde and Bella Alten, both recruits from grand opera, sang delightfully the music allotted to them. Vocally the entire production was perfect. Basil Ruysdael, Carl Gantvoorst and Sidney Bracy brought out the fullest beauties of the score, while it is safe to say that Annabel's one solo, "I'll Love Tho' All the World Say Nay," was never better sung than by Ann Swinburne, so suddenly and deservedly elevated to the prima-donna rôle in Lehar's charming operetta "The Count of Luxembourg."

Florence Wickham's most sensational success was her appearance in the tights of *Alan-a-Dale*, and this is not underestimating the richness of Miss Wickham's contralto voice. Edwin Stevens was very amusing as the *Sheriff of Nottingham* and Pauline Hall was warmly welcomed in the rôle of *Dame Durden*, and George Frothingham's *Friar Tuck*, which was the original, continues to be an example of how much an artist can do with very little. The production was sumptuous, both as regards costumes and scenery. The second act, a forest scene with its lovely greens and browns, its running stream and its patch of verdant grass realistically lighted, made one

think of the landscapes of a Diaz or a Troyon. The chorus looked and sang remarkably well.

As previously mentioned "The Queen's Lace Handkerchief" at the Casino, was the forerunner in the early eighties of the Austro-German operetta craze, followed by the "Erminie" craze in 1886 and by the "Florodora" musical comedy craze in 1900. Upon every hand you heard nothing but stories about the piece, of how the members of the cast were like one big family, how delighted they were at their ultimate success, how the cast continued no less than three leading women who dwelt in the greatest harmony, of the enormous fortunes made by the different chorus girls in Wall Street speculations, of their various matrimonial affairs, and as for the famous sextette, their names and reputed exploits were to be found in the public prints at least seven days a week.

Then there was the music. Why, you simply could not escape it, no matter how hard you might try.

First thing when you arose in the morning someone in your neighborhood would be playing "The Shade of the Palm." Later when being served with your eggs at the breakfast, your otherwise irreproachable and irreplaceable maid would be quietly humming "I've an Inkling." Then all day long, in either business or residential section of New York, the good old hurdy-gurdies would grind out one tune after another, the favorite in this repertoire being "Tell Me, Pretty Maiden." Indeed, one had to have patience and fortitude during the "Florodora" fad. Yet it represented an enthusiastic era; and

with the one possible exception of "Erminie" there had never been anything quite like it before, nor has there been since.

The original cast of "Florodora" included Robert E. Graham, Cyril Scott, Willie Edouin, Fannie Johnston, Mabel Barrison, Edna Wallace Hopper. The six girls who comprised the original sextette were Margaret Walker, Vaughn Texsmith, Marie L. Wilson, Marjorie Relyea, Agnes Wayburn and Daisy Greene. These were the original bona fide "big six," as they were called.

For five years after the first night of "Floradora," at least nine-tenths of the chorus damsels in the world, young and old, fat and slender, blond and brunette, each and every one made the claim "Oh, I was in the original Florodora sextette."

In a literal compilation of names of various girls identified with the sextette at one time or another, the number is some seventy odd, and of these only three achieved anything like lasting success, one of whom soon gave up her stage position for the greater security of matrimony. These three were Edna Goodrich, Julia Frary and Frances Belmont.

Miss Goodrich joined the cast not long after the opening, and aided by remarkable personal charms, she went steadily ahead, first in musical plays and then in legitimate comedy, eventually finding herself leading woman with Nat Goodwin. Miss Frary was apparently made of the stuff that counts, having advanced herself soon after her advent as a "sextetter" to the position of prima donna with Frank Daniel's Company, while recently during two seasons she has been leading femi-

nine support with Elsie Janis in "The Slim Princess." Had Miss Frances Belmont remained on the stage there is no telling what she might have achieved, for she seemed well started upon a most promising career. At this time, however, she did not display any notable histrionic talent as she nightly warbled "There are a few, kind sir." Nevertheless, she passed immediately from the show girl ranks to the position of leading woman with Charles Hawtrey in two of his plays, "A Messenger from Mars" and "Saucy Sally." She seemed thoroughly in earnest and in a fair way to maintain a stage position of importance.

Then somewhat abruptly she gave up the stage and went to Paris to live. The next thing heard of her was the information that she had married into one of England's most exclusive titled families. On February 19th, 1906, she became the wife of Francis Denzil Edward Baring, the fifth Baron Ashburton and holder of the oldest of the four peerages held by the Baring family, the ceremony being performed at the English Church at Passy, France.

It speaks volumes for the former Casino girl that the marriage has been a happy one and, being the second Lady Ashburton, the first having died in 1904, she has successfully filled the generally trying position of stepmother to four daughters and a son. She and her husband have visited this country several times since their marriage, but there is not the slightest possibility of her ever returning to the stage.

It is a fact worth chronicling that of the few American

actresses who have married into the British peerage, Miss Belmont has been the only one to make a success of it. Nor was the marriage influenced on the part of her husband, either by callowness or senility, for at the time he was forty years old and she was twenty-two.

An actor who has attained a high position in the profession informed me not very long ago, that he was first engaged as a super at the old Boston Museum, for the munificent salary of two dollars per week. Connected in even so humble a capacity with a company which occupied a theater so full of traditions, handed down by Booth, Barrett, McCullough and the other makers of American theatrical history, he was contented with his lot, even though it cost his father ten times more than his salary.

His schooling in the Boston Museum Stock Company, wherein he was gradually advanced to utility and eventually more important parts, only served to increase his appetite for histrionic honors. The disadvantages of being an actor did not protrude themselves on his horizon until long after he had left his native heath.

When engagements with various companies throughout the country began to attract him, by reason of the opportunity for travel, he was soon initiated into the vagaries of the vagabond life, and from that time until he was selected for the principal rôle in a certain play, there were enough disappointments to make him cry time and time again, "The actor's life is not altogether a happy one."

Small road companies are not the only organizations which have cause to complain of their lot. They have been the target at which humorists have darted their shafts of wit, but many an important company having outlived its usefulness in the larger cities, is compelled to experience much discomfort at the hands of the unsophisticated natives in the rural districts. That, however, is not the worst feature of being an actor. Seriously, a player who spends three-fourths of his time away from home, has less advantage than the alien who enters the country as an immigrant and in a year has naturalization papers. The immigrant then has a voice in the selection of office holders; he is licensed to conduct a business; in time if he is thrifty he owns his home and becomes a tax-payer, and eventually, in many instances, he is heard from as a public-spirited citizen.

The actor, in all likelihood born in this country, educated in its schools, begins his fiscal year by spending two or three months in the spring and summer in New York City, waiting for some producing manager to select him as a type for a character in a new production. Failing in this, he takes the best road job which offers itself and begins to work, sometimes in August, more often in September and not infrequently in October.

As the amusement business is the first to feel the effects of any unusual condition which might happen to develop commercially, the season for the actor has been variously averaged at from twenty-five to thirty-five weeks. During this time he

is on the road, paying more for his living than if he had his own home, thus contributing, in the various cities which he visits, a part of the great amount of money expended annually by transients. It is a well-known fact that the commerce of any city depends in a great measure on the itinerant public. Through all of this expense, inconvenient existence, and in many unsatisfactory hotels, the actor does not even get a chance to vote. If he leaves his company for the purpose of casting a ballot in his home town he will probably lose his engagement.

When the actor herein referred to had been provided with his first "star" part, he had had all and more of these disagreeable experiences that fall to the lot of any one player. The advance of civilization has not penetrated the nooks and corners of this country sufficiently to eradicate from the narrow minds of some natives the idea that the actor is no longer a vagabond. He believes there is still extant in England a law which defined the actor as a vagabond and he thinks that it has been very widely interpreted in many towns which he has visited.

The hotel clerk is usually the first important personage the actor meets on his arrival. As soon as he realizes you are with the show, he seems to dig up all of the garret rooms which have not been dusted since the last troupe played in the town, and that may mean two weeks, or two months, according to the ability of the local theater manager to get a contract.

The bell boy no sooner plants your luggage in a musty room

before he asks you for a pass. Just about the time you are ready to rest after your journey, the maid will repeat the request, by the time you reach the dining-room the colored waiter has already spotted you and expressed a desire to see the show that night. Before you reach the door, the porter, the clerk and all of the other attachés who, for some unknown reason, believe that their services are indispensable, feel that the only possible reciprocity is an order on the box office for two seats. If you happen to be the star of a play, this request is made by the messenger boy, the cab driver, the newsboy who takes your money for a paper, and, in fact, from every considerable angle someone will find some excuse to ask for a pass.

The pass fiend, however, is not the only one who besieges a successful player. As soon as the critics approve of a play, and their judgment is corroborated by the paying public, there will come a stream of playwrights, confident, sanguine and insistent that they have the play, the great American play long awaited, which needs only the personality, talent and popularity of the star. If he takes the trouble to read a few of these manuscripts, he will find that in most cases the subject is identical with that in the play in which he happened to be appearing.

Most people seem to think that the actor has nothing to do but enjoy himself. This statement has probably been made so often that it might be classed among the "bromides" of modern journalism. But it is nevertheless a fact, in spite of the columns and columns of press matter, which have been and are being written daily about actors and the personal side of

their lives, and which should by this time have been sufficient to show the public just how the actor spends his time.

If he begins his day at noon, provided he is not compelled to travel, he has as many if not more, appointments made for him than most notable captains of industry. He does not dare turn down an interview from a paper; he has clubs, societies and leagues whose invitations must not be neglected, and by the time his performance is over in the evening, there are usually two or three friends whom he has not seen for months or years, who drop in unannounced. So there is very little time left for himself.

This routine, of course, is applicable only to those players who are sufficiently interested in their business to observe an attitude of tact and diplomacy. For, after all, the profession is a business and it must be conducted as such.

There are not many angles of the profession which have not been discussed in clubs and in the public press, so that the play-goer who reads is by this time, most likely, quite familiar with the inside facts of the profession. While it is a profession from its artistic side, there is that system and method of conducting a theatrical enterprise which is rigid and precise.

If the actor, or an executive in any other department of a theater, were to devote as much time to a commercial enterprise, as is expected of him in his own profession, he feels confident that his energy would put to shame some of the results attained by our men of affairs.

From the time a manuscript is put into rehearsal the actor

HENRI MARTEAU

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS

becomes the victim of circumstances. It is needless to relate here the hours, the days, the weeks of tedious work consumed in the preparation of a production. Neither is the author going to dwell upon the excitement and nervousness of a first night after these weeks of rehearsal, waiting for the verdict of the proverbial "death watch" who sit like undertakers at every *première;* nor will he attempt to describe the feelings of the players, some of whom sit up all night waiting for the first edition of the morning papers, wherein will be reported their success or failure.

But when you reconsider all of these experiences through which an actor must pass, when you realize how long he has to fight for recognition and when you understand that his personal popularity is measured by the whim of the public, you will not blame him for repeating, "The actor's life is not altogether a happy one."

It is not generally known that the so-called "press agent" plays a very important part, if he is clever, in the ultimate success of a play or musical production. Frequently adverse newspaper criticisms create in the minds of some of the theater-going public a lukewarmness towards certain new productions and lessen the box office receipts for a week or two. The excision of bad and the introduction of good material added to quick action on the part of the press agent, will in many instances turn a failure into a success.

I remember when "Florodora" was produced at the Casino —that musical comedy having already enjoyed a great meas-

ure of popularity in England—its business for the first few weeks was very mediocre, but the quick and persistent work of the press agent, the heralding of the tuneful, original and catchy sextette, helped "Florodora" to develop into one of the greatest artistic and financial successes of a decade and such was the case in a number of previous Casino productions.

It is a remarkable fact that the press agent is of more importance in America than he is in Europe, where the public is not so eager for sensation and for continuous newspaper stories about the popular artists.

In the case of Caruso, for example, months previous to the return of that idolized tenor to fill his accustomed season's engagement at the Metropolitan Opera House through the press agent's manœuvring the newspapers all over the country devoted columns upon columns to narratives—whether true or untrue—regarding that artists' doings abroad, his domestic affairs, the presentation to him of decorations from potentates, the scramble for tickets at fabulous prices whenever he appeared in Berlin and other cities in Germany, at Ostend, etc., stories that have been repeatedly told, and yet the opera-loving public delight to read them and they help in filling the coffers of the Metropolitan Opera House on "Caruso" nights.

The same method is pursued by the press agent regarding artists in other lines, for example, Eva Tanguay, now one of the highest-priced woman performers on the vaudeville stage. Many stories have been written of her eccentricities, of her physical prowess, of her belligerent disposition, of her love

affairs, and few of them accurate. Once at Bostock's animal exhibition in Dreamland, Coney Island, so the press agent related, she posed before the camera with a cub lion in her arms. Upon her arrival the trainer proposed that she pose also in a den of ferocious tigers. Impulsively she agreed. Five minutes later when she looked into the cage of roaring beasts, she regretted her promise, but she did not flinch. Into the den she sprang, and there she stood motionless, while a less brave photographer from a place of safety "took" her again and again. This exhibition was not altogether bravery on Miss Tanguay's part, for she was frightened almost to collapse; it was the will power and determination that have brought her to her present eminence in her chosen and "I don't care" calling.

More than any of her colleagues Miss Tanguay believes in the efficacy of advertising. Her advertisements frequently are quite as puzzling as her other products. At least they are novel enough to arouse comment and to induce her readers to look for them, which is, after all, the acid test of advertising.

During one of my recent visits to Paris I investigated the theater status there quite thoroughly, and as the conditions are somewhat different from those in America I thought that it might interest my readers.

As is well known, many Paris theaters are subsidized by the Government, which exercises a certain supervision over them. They either receive a certain sum of money annually from the French treasury or their taxes are in part or as a whole re-

mitted. The theaters receiving aid from the Government are required to conform to certain laws as regards and governs safety, sanitary and other conditions, and they are not permitted to ask exorbitant prices for seats, or raise the prices, except with the permission of the Government, and then only when the expense of the production is so great as to warrant a rise in the prices of seats. Yet even then there is no extortionate rate demanded, as is so often the case in London and New York, when a play is to be produced or a grand opera to be sung with an all-star cast.

The prices of admission to the average Paris theater range from ten cents (50 centimes) in the gallery to four dollars for a box seating six persons. A balcony seat is from forty to sixty cents, the parterre seats bring from sixty cents to a dollar. These prices are for such theaters as the Gymnase, the Antoine and several others. The higher priced playhouses are the Varietiès, the Vaudeville, the Sarah Bernhardt, the Odéon, the Français and a few others. Their prices ranging from twenty cents in the gallery to three dollars in the orchestra, and boxes from five to eight dollars.

The Paris theaters have the usual matinees, but they are not so well attended as the matinees on this side of the water, although the prices are slightly reduced. Most of the Paris playhouses give performances seven evenings a week the year round, except the Grand Opéra, whose doors are closed during certain parts of the year, and whose stage is in darkness three nights out of every week, there being no performance Tuesday,

FRANZ VON SUPPÉ

HENRY E. DIXEY

GEORGE GROSSMITH

Thursday and Sunday, except on special occasions. The Théatre Français is the favorite with the Parisian public and it is there that the best in the distinctively French play may be seen. This theater receives annually from the Government, enough to cover all taxes, approximately $25,000, and the remitting of all dues to the city of Paris for the care of streets upon which it is located; the Government caring for the insuring of buildings and properties. The Odéon receives a like sum of money, and several other playhouses are sufficiently subsidized by the Government to cover much of the actual expenses of caring for the buildings. On the other hand, the theaters, the Grand Opera and the Opera Comique in Paris are obliged to pay a large percentage of their receipts, half of which is devoted toward a fund for the poor of Paris and the other for royalties to authors and composers.

All Paris theaters are obliged to support two firemen of the regular municipal fire department, who stand guard at the stage door during all performances, their hand grenades and other first call appliances at hand. Paris has, too, a theater fire department, an engine, hook and ladder and hose cart, in several of her engine houses, that are used for no other purpose than first alarm at a theater. This outfit has appliances especially adapted to the extinguishing of fires in theater buildings, very long steel ladders, small hose reels and extension grappling hooks, to be used in small passageways behind the stage and among the scenes, where most fires in theaters originate. All Paris playhouses are required to have fire curtains

or drops and the buildings are usually constructed of stone and the interior work, balconies and galleries of steel, the danger of fire is remote, and the thing most to be dreaded is panic, the aisles, passage-ways, exits and stairways being narrow and hence dangerous in the event of fire.

The method of theater vendors in Paris is also different from ours. Quite a number of Paris playhouses have their ticket vendors at the principal street corners and even in front of or adjacent to the box office. These men receive a commission and the commission varies with the number of tickets disposed of. An interesting character in Paris is the ticket broker who sells his wares upon the street curb. He will offer you a ticket at six o'clock at a less price than you would have to pay for it at the box office; at seven o'clock at still less, at seven thirty o'clock he will make it to you at possibly a third off; at eight o'clock there is another drop in the price; at the rise of the curtain he has vanished, whether he has disposed of his tickets or not. It seems that he buys a certain number of tickets at reduced prices, allowing him to make a good profit if he sells them early in the evening; he offers them at a slightly lower figure from the box office rate, then failing, as the hour for curtain approaches, in disposing of the requisite number, he is obliged to turn in the unsold tickets at half price. Yet in the long run the broker comes out ahead.

The theaters in the French capital are quite well policed, the entrances and aisles are kept clear, the women ushers well in-

structed in their duties, polite and courteous, yet overbearing in their demands for tips. The theater programs are neat and artistic and not quite so voluminous as those in American theaters and for which a small charge is exacted. (To my mind both the tips and the charges should be eliminated.) The Paris theaters are in general well managed, but they lack the comfort, cleanliness, and the otherwise spacious seating arrangements of the average American houses.

It is an astonishing fact that in England, Germany, France and Italy the old actors and actresses retain their popularity and are revered by the public until they are hardly able to trod the boards and in this country, with rare exception, as soon as an actor or actress reaches a certain age he or she is relegated to private life. In this age of progressiveness, the public often is wrongly accused of forgetting and neglecting its old favorites and of paying court to younger people. The old actor and actress forget, however, that unless they happen to be extraordinary artists, they cannot create the illusion of youth. They are not all gifted with the genius of a Sarah Bernhardt or a Coquelin.

In dramatic and musical productions the manager always seeks for novelty. It is the new meritorious play or operetta which draws and so in large measure it is the new personality. Only where the lack of youth and charm is supplemented by great artistic worth is the actor or actress able to overcome this desire for something new.

A story was once told of a certain actress, at one time well

known and decidedly popular, who had been for several seasons without employment, or when employed had been practically unnoticed by both the press and the public; and as she was no longer young, she found herself engaged finally for the character rôle of the mother in a certain production. Years before, she would have been eagerly accepted as the heroine—the daughter—as the characters fell in the cast in question.

Now a younger, fresher, more immediately successful leading woman was engaged for that rôle, but the night of the first performance, the older actress in the rôle of the mother carried off all the honors. She gave a wonderfully sympathetic, mellow, finished portrayal, at least so the critics said next day, and judging from the applause and curtain calls, there was no doubt that she had made the hit of the play.

When, however, some friends went into her dressing room after the last curtain fall, instead of the happy woman they expected to find, they saw her lying on a couch sobbing as if her heart would break. "Why, you've made the biggest hit of the season," some one said. "You'll be the talk of New York to-morrow." But she only went on sobbing and nothing could console her.

"Yes," she said finally, "the hit of the piece as an old woman, only the beginning of the end for me and my work."

Now that woman would have been in a position to retire comfortably years before. How much happier she might have been with her old memories to warm her in her old age, instead of remaining in a position where even success meant merely the

raking over of dead ashes! And the same might be said of innumerable prima donnas of the past who persist in continuous farewell performances.

The adulation in both the dramatic and musical profession is so direct, so personal, so immediate that it gets to be second nature with most artists to expect it. After all, the artist cannot appeal to posterity, cannot wait till next year, next month, next week to learn that he has succeeded. He cannot sit back complacently in the face of failure and hope that a future verdict will reverse the present judgment. With the artist it must be now or never, and the older an actor is, the more impatient he will be to hear the verdict of success registered in applause.

For one thing, the opportunities then are fewer. As a result, when the time comes that the younger favorite takes the applause, it hits hard, wounds deeply. And it must be an exceptionally well-balanced mind that can be philosophical about it.

Many years ago when the entrancing "lullaby" and the catchy "Dickey Bird" song from "Erminie" were sung, hummed and whistled the country over a young man of eighteen, after studying for a short period in his little home town, was prevailed upon to play the tenor rôle *Eugene* in "Erminie" at an amateur performance of that operetta by local talent. He wore tights that evening, his legs were neither bowed nor knocked at the knees, but fortunately he had other physical qualifications, the most conspicuous being a barrel-like chest—

useful to the singer—and plenty of shoulder. He was barely under man's coveted six feet, and he had a man's countenance and a man's sweep of jaw. For some time he lived in his "Erminie" triumph. He practiced vocal exercises about the house, built a few air castles and waited for a knock on the front door that he felt must come to summon him to singing fame and fortune. A knock did come, though different from the one expected. It was a peremptory command to sally forth and hustle to keep the family going. He accepted a position as salesman on the road. Whenever he made a stop he always hunted up a singing teacher for a lesson or two. Almost every small town has some sort of a vocal instructor who gives lessons, at from fifty cents to a dollar.

Promiscuous tutoring brought confusion to such technical methods as he employed, for singing instructors, though aiming at one perfect result, have a marvelous difference of opinion as to how it may be attained. He would sing his high tones in a certain fashion for a little while, change teachers and be informed that everything he did was bad. Then he began all over again.

In his third year of travel, he chanced to hear a first-class opera company in a performance of "Il Trovatore." The impression left upon him fired his cherished ambition anew, and it blazed to hitherto untouched heights as he read, in the reviews printed the next day of the big salaries paid some of the principals. Near the close of summer he resigned his position as salesman.

Most people hold an erroneous opinion that an exceptional voice alone is required to win distinction and commensurate financial rewards. "He has a great voice" asserts the average American. "Why doesn't he go into grand opera? Caruso and Titta Ruffo each make their two thousand dollars a night."

They do, and they earn it, but with the help of other factors besides their glorious voices.

The average singer counted as successful and the celebrated prima donna alike, call business sagacity to their aid, for without it they never go the distance possible otherwise.

Right here, I recall, that when Adelina Patti, then in the zenith of her powers, attempted to give some concerts in the early eighties in Steinway Hall, New York, under the management of her secretary, who was not conversant with the American method of management or publicity, and who simply counted upon her tremendous reputation, the attendance was pitiable, so much so, that Henry E. Abbey was speedily called into requisition and after a lapse of three weeks during which period proper advertising and direction was resorted to, the diva again appeared at Steinway Hall to literally "sold out" houses!

If the truth were known about some singers who win high financial recognition, it would appear that their musical worth was considerably below par. With such competition to meet, the meritorious artist must be up and doing early in the morning, most particularly in a business way.

But to return to the "Erminie" tenor. After retiring from his position as salesman, he decided to take up singing as a life work. New York, as now, offered the broadest opportunities to the student. Straightway the metropolis became the object of fascination and he prepared carefully for the journey. He had three hundred dollars saved, which he judged sufficient for the first plunge into real musical waters. He first attended one of the many conservatories, but left it, after a certain period chastened, though not discouraged; sought a church choir position and procured it; and shortly thereafter by advice of some student friends he found the teacher he was looking for, who combined that rare quality in any profession or business—able to unite theory and practice—and in whose private studio, he felt he would meet singers further advanced than those at the conservatory, and also gather useful information by rubbing shoulders with professionals who showed a preference for "coaching" with independent rather than conservatory instructors.

His new voice master—for he was a master—followed the practice of many teachers regarding reduced rates. There were two other young singers besides himself, who paid two dollars and a half for a lesson supposed to bring twice that amount. This concession was never made to singers unless they had very good voices. The voice master was a fair minded man who believed in the "square deal" policy and at his suggestion the three youngsters pocketed their pride and hunted up restaurants that were willing to engage soloists for

occasional evenings at small fees. The benefits to the "trio" were many because they were able to apply in public the principles taught them in the studio, and to acquire composure while under scrutiny of many eyes.

Singing in a studio, with nothing at stake, and in the presence of an assemblage, are quite different affairs.

Even a singer who feels at home in a solo sung in a choir-loft, may find his knees sagging, once he steps upon the concert platform. Many careers never materialize for singers solely because they "go to pieces" in public; and though some people do not have it in them ever to conquer stage fright, most of them by frequently appearing before large and small audiences, manage to acquire the necessary self-control.

Considering the apparent wealth of partially developed singing material contained in New York and other cities in America it seems odd that comparatively little was afterward heard from. Hardly a day passed that did not bring some splendid soprano, contralto, tenor, baritone or basso to the attention of the musical colony, thus adding to the large list expected to contribute a goodly portion of artists to those who had "arrived."

There were plenty of reasons, however, for the failure of most of these promising young singers to fulfill expectations, though one after another heard such remarks as: "She has a beautiful voice and sings with so much dash that, with her delightful personality, nothing should be impossible!" Again, "Just wait until that young man is heard publicly once or

twice; he has a baritone with Amatós quality, and a physique as well!"

Remarks like these, however, seldom mean much, for they are purely superficial. And it is due to just such indiscriminate praise that thousands of young men and women are now battling for moderate and big musical opportunities which can never be won because of the singer's shortcomings, shortcomings that are overlooked in an appraisal that does not weigh every essential a successful vocalist must have.

The aforementioned "trio" on off restaurant engagement nights, made it a point to attend the Metropolitan Opera House, where perched in the uppermost gallery they heard such artists as Jean and Edouard de Reszke, Melba, Eames, Nordica, Scalchi and Plançon.

One afternoon the voice master received a mesage from one of the leading musical agencies seeking a tenor who could sing that night at a private musicale; for agencies are sometimes compelled to ask assistance of teachers when their "listed" artists are otherwise engaged. The "Erminie" tenor was given the appearance and the agency manager, who was in the fashionable audience present, asked him to call at his office the next day.

Though it turned out to be one of those fortunate "starts" there were other young singers given similar opportunities who did not prove so lucky; for luck does seem sometimes to be an element in singing success. In this instance the head of the musical bureau happened to be a guest of the hostess giving

To Rudolph Aronson with the best wishes of
June 1st 1908 Wm H Taft

To Rudolph Aronson
with the regards of
Theodore Roosevelt
Jan 17th 1908

the function, and he also happened to have need for another young tenor. Directly he had other local musicale appearances, then was sent to neighboring cities to sing in concerts of modest pretensions; and at length an oratorio engagement came.

The adage "nothing succeeds like success" was applicable in his case. It was only tiny for a time but it soon began to grow.

A society woman, belonging to the class known as "tenor worshippers" recommended him for numerous private musicales. Her patronage proved profitable, until he incurred her enmity by declining luncheon, dinner and other invitations so numerous that, had they been accepted, they would have seriously interfered with his work.

At the end of his fourth year in New York he decided that before opera house doors would be open to him, further experience in Europe would be necessary. So he sailed. His equipment when he reached his foreign destination was better than eight out of ten Americans who go to the other side. He spoke Italian almost fluently, French fairly well and had some knowledge of German. Not only was his tone production proper and secure, but he had memorized nine first tenor rôles in standard grand operas and had been coached in the dramatic action of all. A further security was furnished by a substantial balance he had in his New York bank.

In the next six months he learned something about singers studying in Milan, Florence and Rome, singers from all

countries. Americans, the strongest numerically, were floundering about in ignorance of every sort. Only a small percentage of them knew the Italian language, an opera repertoire and had a proper method of tone production and through poor advice and lack of intelligent procedure fell into the hands of ordinary or incompetent teachers. Americans who were lucky enough to select or have selected for them efficient singing teachers got on—some splendidly, and all knew that when they were ready for débuts, money could procure them.

During those six months he studied assiduously with one of Italy's most distinguished and capable maëstros whose influence was far-reaching, and in another month found him preparing calmly for his operatic début as *Rodolfo* in Puccini's "La Bohême."

The favorable reception accorded him by an Italian audience in a small theater in one of the unimportant towns occasioned no surprise. He was well equipped for his career, at that point of it surely; and though he was not satisfied with his efforts, it seemed that the people present, who knew their opera, were. His action was stiff, but he experienced a nervous exhilaration but no sense of consuming fear.

He had nearly twenty appearances with that mediocre company, then came a rest due to the ending of the season. His salary was ridiculously small, the theater was dingy and most of the principals of second-rate ability, but he didn't mind; he was acquiring experience. One rôle he appeared in twelve times with a few chances at three others. Thus he gathered

confidence, vocal and dramatic freedom, and learned tricks of the trade that come only under professional conditions.

One night as the engagement was approaching a conclusion the manager of an opera house in a good sized Italian city visited his dressing room. He had heard of him and after sitting through a performance, expressed his willingness to place him in his company for the ensuing season. He accepted the offer carrying a small monthly salary.

A similar experience came to him ten months afterward during an operatic presentation in a more pretentious opera house, but this time the engagement laid before him was for the United States and by an American impresario. The tour was to begin in November and last until the middle of the following March, and he was to be the first tenor, have forty appearances guaranteed, with an assurance of being heard in ten rôles, and certain publicity featuring; the salary was a fair one. He accepted the terms, signed the contract and fulfilled his part of it in the winter that followed. And it all goes to illustrate that in many instances patience, push and energy win out.

THE AMERICAN PALACE OF ART

Chapter XIV

THE AMERICAN PALACE OF ART

Proposed Plan for a Palace of Art for Washington, D. C., to Comprise a Conservatory of Music and School of Dramatic Art—The Scope and Details of This Suggested National Institution.

AS far back as 1905, in Paris, I proposed the organization of a society for the management of European débuts for worthy American students gratis. My proposal in a letter to the Paris *Herald*, was cabled over to the New York *Herald*, and read as follows:

Herald Bureau,
No. 49 Avenue de l'Opera,
Paris, Oct. 17th, 1905.

To the Editor of the *Herald*:—

After many years of discussion, without action, there has at last been developed a plan for advancing American musical talent that is promised the warm support and active co-operation of music lovers, concert and opera goers in the principal cities of Europe and the United States.

This is not a project to educate American students, but it begins where education leaves off and at a point where so many talented musicians are compelled to drop back and sink out of sight with the goal in reach; for it is well known that the success of a musician depends upon the début at some European center, and this début costs money.

It is ofttimes the barrier between failure and a successful career. Without the éclat of such début, to say nothing of the recognition it brings, no manager of repute will undertake the direction of an artist.

It is then at this point that the great number of American students in Europe and the United States, the majority well equipped for public careers, fail. They lack the financial means to take the next essential step.

With this idea is formed the Agence Musicale Internationale, a semi-philanthropy.

From funds subscribed a number of concerts are to be given annually in Paris, London, Berlin, Vienna and Milan, where those students judged worthy and sufficiently talented will be given, without any charge whatsoever, an opportunity to make their début under the most favorable auspices.

It is for this laudable project that I ask the New York *Herald* to receive subscriptions, recognizing the interest that it has steadfastly evinced in the elevation of American art and artists.

My long experience in musical enterprises in the United States and Europe, convince me that with the *Herald's* aid, its success is assured, and I shall be pleased to take charge of the preliminary arrangements and management of the concerts.

Cordially yours,

RUDOLPH ARONSON.

M. Jean de Reszke, among many other prominent artists in Paris heartily endorsed my plans, as signified by him in the following letter:

Paris, November 20th, 1905.

Dear Mr. Aronson:—

Your suggestion to create a fund for the purpose of giving one or two concerts with orchestra and famous artists, annually, in the principal music centers of Europe for the purpose of "bringing

BRAHMS

JEAN DE RESZKE
as *Raoul* in "The Huguenots"

EDOUARD DE RESZKE
as *Mephistopheles* in "Faust"

out" worthy American students free of any cost to them whatsoever, is a capital one, and should have the hearty co-operation of the thousands of American music lovers at home and abroad.

Very truly yours,

JEAN DE RESZKE.

This matter lagged along for years, and from it was evolved the idea of constructing in Washington, D. C., the American Palace of Art which now (1912) has my most serious consideration.

The American Palace of Art will aim to combine a National Conservatory of Music for all branches of study, vocal and instrumental, under the tutorship of the best professors procurable in America and Europe, free of charge, and thus avoid the difficulties, the expense, the danger, which beset our would-be students abroad, far away from their relatives and friends, and on the completion of their studies at this Conservatory, opportunities would be offered them to "go on" at the opera-houses in New York, Chicago, Boston and Philadelphia and eventually in Paris, London, Berlin, Vienna and Milan. There is also planned a School of Dramatic Art and Theater for operatic and dramatic performances, its large stage and tier of boxes to permit the giving of a short season of grand opera from the Metropolitan Opera House, New York. There, too, meritorious works of American composers, with adequate casts of American artists and American chorus would be first presented, and also many first performances of the better class of plays, musical comedies, operettas, etc.

(before presentations in the larger cities of the United States), during the fall and winter, before discriminating and highly cultivated audiences, such as Washington then affords. The large foyer of the theater would be used for exposition of paintings by talented American artists. A concert hall is planned with a stage sufficiently large to accommodate the Boston Symphony Orchestra in its entirety and other famous organizations, and where orchestral and band concerts, vocal and instrumental recitals can take place. Both theater and concert hall are to have an adequate number of seats at popular prices in balconies and galleries, a long-felt want in Washington.

These buildings are to be surmounted by a roof garden sufficient in area to accommodate 5,000 persons. Here, in addition to the regular concerts, great meetings, and musical festivals could be given.

Washington, as the capital of the United States, and as one of the most beautiful of cities, is the ideal and only place for this project, which is national in scope, and it is expected that the returns from the theater, opera, concert hall and roof garden will be more than sufficient to make the National Conservatory of Music and School of Dramatic Art self-supporting.

I have procured an option, for this vast enterprise, on a piece of property in the most central residence locality of Washington, one-third again larger than Madison Square Garden in New York.

Any number of distinguished persons have endorsed this project most heartily and they include Monsignor Thomas J. Shahan, rector of the Catholic University of America at Washington, the famous bandmaster and composer, Mr. John Philip Sousa, and Mr. Heinrich Hammer, director of the Washington Symphony Society.

On Sunday, October 8th, 1911, the Washington *Evening Star* published the following editorial:

THE NATIONAL ART CENTER

Mr. Rudolph Aronson's appreciation of Washington as the ideal American artistic center may not immediately lead to the creation here of an institution or a structure or any other tangible token, but it must nevertheless advance the day of the capital's recognition as the truly national intellectual focus. For many years conditions have been tending toward the development of the District in this respect. The Government's own establishments have given to Washington a scientific equipment second to none in the world. Educators have recognized its exceptional advantages as a field of work. A marked influx of people of wealth and leisure and taste has been in progress for two decades, until Washington is now for fully half of each year a place of residence of many of the country's leaders in all lines of thought. The local population grows rapidly and lacks many of the elements that in other cities tend to affect unfortunately the quiet and comfort and artistic atmosphere. There is no such inordinate rush as to prevent a rational enjoyment of wholesome pleasures, and the average of culture among the population is exceptionally high.

In these circumstances it is not remarkable that from various sources should come at different times suggestions of institutional developments here utilizing the national spirit and the high grade of intellectual life which finds in Washington an ideal field. Artists, singers, musicians, writers, scientists, all who are active in

the realm of mind are here, eminent members of their professions and specialties. There is a growing local encouragement of their efforts. Here is a public that could undoubtedly support any first-class artistic institution properly founded and maintained. Mr. Aronson's specific idea is of building a great building modeled on Grecian lines where could be given the most attractive and significant musical performances this country enjoys. His ideal is inspiring, and it is to be hoped that it is to be realized. Such an institution as he conceived would add immeasurably to the capital's equipment and virtually establish it beyond cavil as the American center of art.

INDEX OF NAMES

INDEX OF NAMES

(Note.—For reference to illustrations see list in the front of the book.)