THE ALCOTTS

. . . Concord village, itself, reminds one of that common virtue lying at the height and root of all the Concord divinities. As one walks down the broad-arched street, passing the white house of Emerson—ascetic guard of a former prophetic beauty—he comes presently beneath the old elms overspreading the Alcott house. It seems to stand as a kind of homely but beautiful witness of Concord's common virtue—it seems to bear a consciousness that its past *is living*, that the "mosses of the Old Manse" and the hickories of Walden are not far away. Here is the home of the "Marches"—all pervaded with the trials and happiness of the family and telling, in a simple way, the story of "the richness of not having." Within the house, on every side, lie remembrances of what imagination can do for the better amusement of fortunate children who have to do for themselves—much-needed lessons in these days of automatic, ready-made, easy entertainment which deaden rather than stimulate the creative faculty. And there sits the little old spinet-piano Sophia Thoreau gave to the Alcott children, on which Beth played the old Scotch airs, and played at the *Fifth Symphony*.

There is a commonplace beauty about "Orchard House"—a kind of spiritual sturdiness underlying its quaint picturesqueness—a kind of common triad of the New England homestead, whose overtones tell us that there must have been something æsthetic fibered in the Puritan severity—the self-sacrificing part of the ideal—a value that seems to stir a deeper feeling, a stronger sense of being nearer some perfect truth than a Gothic cathedral or an Etruscan villa. All around you, under the Concord sky, there still floats the influence of that human faith melody, transcendent and sentimental enough for the enthusiast or the cynic respectively, reflecting an innate hope—a common interest in common things and common men—a tune the Concord bards are ever playing, while they pound away at the immensities with a Beethovenlike sublimity, and with, may we say, a vehemence and perseverance—for that part of greatness is not so difficult to emulate.

We dare not attempt to follow the philosophic raptures of Bronson Alcott—unless you will assume that his apotheosis will show how "practical" his vision in this world would be in the next. And so we won't try to reconcile the music sketch of the Alcotts with much besides the memory of that home under the elms—the Scotch songs and the family hymns that were sung at the end of each day—though there may be an attempt to catch something of that common sentiment (which we have tried to suggest above)—a strength of hope that never gives way to despair—a conviction in the power of the common soul which, when all is said and done, may be as typical as any theme of Concord and its transcendentalists.

III. "The Alcotts"

ten.

p moderately

pp

pp

pp

ppp

faster

mp

ten

mf

f ff mf f

In a gradually

excited way.

l.h. l.h.

ff ff

accel.

Moderately

ff mf mf r.h. l.h.

slower

l.h. l.h. r.h. p

r.h. r.h. pp

faster but lightly

rit. p

Slower and quietly

p p

piu ten.

hold back a little

ten. pp

A little faster
piu rit.
mp
pp
p
p
ten.
hold back a little
pp
faster
mp
gradually faster
f
gradually more animated

f

cresc.

l.h.

r.h.

cresc.

animando

ff

ff

rit.

maestoso

gradually slower *ff* *slowly and broadly*

fff

dim. e rit.

ff *f* *mp*

piu rall.

f *mp*

pp

pp

slower

THOREAU

. . . And if there shall be a program let it follow his thought on an autumn day of Indian summer at Walden—a shadow of a thought at first, colored by the mist and haze over the pond:

Low anchored cloud,
Fountain head and
Source of rivers. . . .
Dew cloth, dream drapery—
Drifting meadow of the air. . . .

but this is momentary; the beauty of the day moves him to a certain restlessness—to aspirations more specific—an eagerness for outward action, but through it all he is conscious that it is not in keeping with the mood for this "Day." As the mists rise, there comes a clearer thought more traditional than the first, a meditation more calm. As he stands on the side of the pleasant hill of pines and hickories in front of his cabin, he is still disturbed by a restlessness and goes down the white-pebbled and sandy eastern shore, but it seems not to lead him where the thought suggests—he climbs the path along the "bolder northern" and "western shore, with deep bays indented," and now along the railroad track, "where the Æolian harp plays." But his eagerness throws him into the lithe, springy stride of the specie hunter—the naturalist—he is still aware of a restlessness; with these faster steps his rhythm is of shorter span—it is still not the *tempo* of Nature, it does not bear the mood that the genius of the day calls for, it is too specific, its nature is too external, the introspection too buoyant, and he knows now that he must let Nature flow through *him* and slowly; he releases his more personal desires to her broader rhythm, conscious that this blends more and more with the harmony of her solitude; it tells him that his search for freedom on that day, at least lies in his submission to her, for Nature is as relentless as she is benignant. He remains in this mood and while outwardly still, he seems to move with the slow, almost monotonous swaying beat of this autumnal day. He is more contented with a "homely burden" and is more assured of "the broad margin to his life; he sits in his sunny doorway . . . rapt in revery . . . amidst goldenrod, sandcherry, and sumach . . . in undisturbed solitude." At times the more definite personal strivings for the ideal freedom, the former more active speculations come over him, as if he would trace a certain intensity even in his submission. "He grew in those seasons like corn in the night and they were better than any works of the hands. They were not time subtracted from his life but so much over and above the usual allowance." He realized "what the Orientals meant by contemplation and forsaking of works." "The day advanced as if to light some work of his—it was morning and lo! now it is evening and nothing memorable is accomplished . . ." "The evening train has gone by," and "all the restless world with it. The fishes in the pond no longer feel its rumbling and he is more alone than ever. . . ." His meditations are interrupted only by the faint sound of the Concord bell—'tis prayer-meeting night in the village—"a melody as it were, imported into the wilderness. . . ." "At a distance over the woods the sound acquires a certain vibratory hum as if the pine needles in the horizon were the strings of a harp which it swept. . . . A vibration of the universal lyre. . . . Just as the intervening atmosphere makes a distant ridge of earth interesting to the eyes by the azure tint it imparts." . . . Part of the echo may be "the voice of the wood; the same trivial words and notes sung by the wood nymph." It is darker, the poet's flute is heard out over the pond and Walden hears the swan song of that "Day" and faintly echoes. . . . Is it a transcendental tune of Concord? 'Tis an evening when the "whole body is one sense," . . . and before ending his day he looks out over the clear, crystalline water of the pond and catches a glimpse of the shadow-thought he saw in the morning's mist and haze—he knows that by his final submission, he possesses the "Freedom of the Night." He goes up the "pleasant hillside of pines, hickories," and moonlight to his cabin, "with a strange liberty in Nature, a part of herself."

IV. "Thoreau"

* Very slowly and quietly

l.h. *r.h.* *l.h.* *one chord* *l.h.* *r.h.* *l.h.* *l.h. one chord* *r.h.*

ppp

r.h. *l.h.* *r.h.* *l.h.* *r.h.*

più accel. *a tempo*

rit. *più ten.* *ten.* *più accel.* *più rit.* *l.h.* *r.h.*

ten. *pp*

* This Thoreau movement, is supposed to be played in a lower dynamic ratio than usual; - i. e, the "forte" here is about the "mezzo piano" of the preceding movements.
Both pedals are used almost constantly.

stringendo mp a tempo

l.h. r.h

p ten.

ten. p

more broadly but still quietly

and sustained gradually faster and louder - - - - - - - - - - to here

slower mf l.h. p

slower

mp

cresc.

gradually faster

f slower

p

pp

gradually with more ac -

più stringendo

tion - to here

rall.

slower

rall.

slowly, with a broad and steady rythm

mp

pp (legato)

pp

l.h.

pp

rit.

a tempo

a little slower

f>p

f>p

hold pedal down

poco stringendo

with more animation

l.h.

l. h.

a tempo

mf

l. h.

p

l.h.

sustained and quietly again

l.h.

r.h.

mf ten.

più rit.

mp

mp

(a little faster) (evenly and perversely)

gradually - - - more - - - - and - - - - more - - - - active

animando - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - rit. e cresc.

l.h.

f

f r.h.

mp

broadly and slowly

l.h. *........keep sustaining pedal down..........

f
più decresc.
slowly
e accel.
mp
l.h.
più accel.
a tempo
pp
a tempo
pp

K. skips this (1969)

faster

mf

faster

f rit. p

mf

più rall.

slower and broadly

Flute

p

p

p (For Piano alone)

Flute

accel.

3

hurried - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - slowly again

mf

*

mf

* Small notes in piano to be played only if flute is not used.

pp rit.

pp rit.

gradually slower

8va

p l.h. più moto a tempo pp più rit.

pp

più rall. più moto slowly

ppp

(as a chord)

pppp

pp

. . . CAN human qualities or attributes which go with personality be suggested, and artistic intuitions which parallel them be reflected in music? Actually accomplishing this is a problem, more or less arbitrary to an open mind, more or less impossible to a prejudiced mind.

That which the composer intends to represent as "high vitality" sounds like something quite different to different listeners. That which I like to think suggests Thoreau's submission to nature may, to another, seem something like Hawthorne's "conception of the relentlessness of an evil conscience"—and to the rest of our friends, but a series of unpleasant sounds. How far can the composer be held accountable? Beyond a certain point the responsibility is more or less undeterminable. The outside characteristics—that is, the points furthest away from the mergings—are obvious to mostly anyone. A child knows a "strain of joy," from one of sorrow. Those a little older know the dignified from the frivolous—the Spring Song from the season in which the "melancholy days have come" (though is there not a glorious hope in autumn!). But where is the definite expression of late-spring against early-summer, of happiness against optimism? A painter paints a sunset—can he paint the setting sun?

In some century to come, when the school children will whistle popular tunes in quarter-tones—when the diatonic scale will be as obsolete as the pentatonic is now—perhaps then these borderland experiences may be both easily expressed and readily recognized. But maybe music was not intended to satisfy the curious definiteness of man. Maybe it is better to hope that music may always be a transcendental language in the most extravagant sense. Possibly the power of literally distinguishing these "shades of abstraction"—these attributes paralleled by "artistic intuitions" (call them what you will)—is ever to be denied man for the same reason that the beginning and end of a circle are to be denied. . . . .

. . . Human attributes are definite enough when it comes to their description, but the expression of them, or the paralleling of them, has to be, as said above, more or less arbitrary, but we believe that their expression may be less vague if the basic distinction of this art-dualism is kept in mind. It is morally certain that the higher part is founded, as Sturt suggests, on something that has to do with those kinds of unselfish human interests which we call knowledge and morality—knowledge, not in the sense of erudition, but as a kind of creation or creative truth. This allows us to assume that the higher and more important value of this dualism is composed of what may be called reality, quality, spirit, or substance against the lower value of form, quantity, or manner. Of these terms "substance" seems to us the most cogent, and comprehensive for the higher, and "manner" for the under-value. Substance in a human-art-quality suggests the body of a conviction which has its birth in the spiritual consciousness, whose youth is nourished in the moral consciousness, and whose maturity as a result of all this growth is then represented in a mental image. This is appreciated by the intuition, and somehow translated into expression by "manner"—a process always less important than it seems, or as suggested by the foregoing (in fact we apologize for this attempted definition). So it seems that "substance" is too indefinite to analyze, in more specific terms. It is practically indescribable. Intuitions (artistic or not?) will sense it—process, unknown. Perhaps it is an unexplained consciousness of being nearer God, or being nearer the devil—of approaching truth or approaching unreality—a silent something felt in the truth-of-nature in Turner against the truth-of-art in Botticelli, or in the fine thinking of Ruskin against the fine soundings of Kipling, or in the wide-expanse of Titian against the narrow-expanse of Carpaccio, or in some such distinction that Pope sees between what he calls Homer's "invention" and Virgil's "judgment"—apparently an inspired imagination against an artistic care, a sense of the difference, perhaps, between Dr. Bushnell's *Knowing God* and knowing *about* God. A more vivid explanation or illustration may be found in the difference between Emerson and Poe. The former seems to be almost wholly "substance" and the latter "manner." The measure in artistic satisfaction of Poe's manner is equal to the measure of spiritual satisfaction in Emerson's "substance." The total value of each man is high, but Emerson's is higher than Poe's because "substance" is higher than "manner"—because "substance" leans towards optimism, and "manner" pessimism. We do not know that all this is so, but we feel, or rather know by intuition that it is so, in the same way we know intuitively that right is higher than wrong, though we can't always tell why a thing is right or wrong, or what is always the difference or the margin between right and wrong.

Beauty, in its common conception, has nothing to do with it (substance), unless it be granted that its outward aspect, or the expression between sensuous beauty and spiritual beauty can be always and distinctly known, which it cannot, as the art of music is still in its infancy. However, it cannot justly be said that anything that has to do with art has nothing to do with beauty in any degree,—that is, whether beauty is there or not, it has something to do with it. A casual idea of it, a kind of a first necessary-physical impression, was what we had in mind. Probably nobody knows what actual beauty is—except those serious writers of humorous essays in art magazines, who accurately, but kindly, with club in hand, demonstrate for all time and men that beauty is a quadratic monomial; that it *is* absolute; that it is relative; that it *is not* relative, that it *is not*. . . . The word "beauty" is as easy to use as the word "decadent." Both come in handy when one does or does not agree with you. For our part, something that Roussel-Despierres says comes nearer to what we like to think beauty is . . . "an infinite source of good . . . the love of the beautiful . . . a constant anxiety for moral beauty." Even here we go around in a circle—a thing apparently inevitable, if one tries to reduce art to philosophy. But personally, we prefer to go around in a circle than around in a parallelepipedon, for it seems cleaner and perhaps freer from mathematics—or for the same reason we prefer Whittier to Baudelaire—a poet to a genius, or a healthy to a rotten apple—probably not so much because it is more nutritious, but because we like its taste better; we like the beautiful and don't like the ugly; therefore, what we like is beautiful, and what we don't like is ugly—and hence we are glad the beautiful is not ugly, for if it were we would like something we don't like. So having unsettled what beauty is, let us be arbitrary enough to claim, with no definite qualification, that substance in music is the only valuable thing in it, and moreover that in two separate pieces of music in which the notes are almost identical, one can be of "substance" with little "manner," and the other can be of "manner" with little "substance." Substance has something to do with character. Manner has nothing to do with it. The "substance" of a tune comes from somewhere near the soul, and the "manner" comes from—God knows where. . . . .

. . . The humblest composer will not find true humility in aiming low—he must never be timid or afraid of trying to express that which he feels is far above his power to express, any more than he should be afraid of breaking away, when necessary, from easy first sounds, or afraid of admitting that those half truths that come to him at rare intervals, are half true, for instance, that all art galleries contain masterpieces which are nothing more than a history of art's beautiful mistakes.

If he "truly seeks," he "will surely find" many things to sustain him. He can go to a part of Alcott's philosophy—"that all occupations of man's body and soul in their diversity come from but one mind and soul!" If he feels that to subscribe to all of the foregoing and then submit, though not as evidence, the work of his own hands is presumptuous, let him remember that a man is not always responsible for the wart on his face, or a girl for the bloom on her cheek, and as they walk out of a Sunday for an airing, people will see them—but they must have the air. He can remember with Plotinus, "that in every human soul there is the ray of the celestial beauty," and therefore every human outburst may contain a partial ray. And he can believe that it is better to go to the plate and strike out than to hold the bench down, for by facing the pitcher, he may then know the umpire better, and possibly see a new parabola. His presumption, if it be that, may be but a kind of courage Juvenal sings about, and no harm can then be done either side. "*Cantabit vacuus coram latrone viator.*" . . . .

. . . Many will resent the abrupt separation that a theory of duality in music suggests and say that these general subdivisions are too closely inter-related to be labeled decisively—"this or that." There is justice in this criticism, but our answer is that it is better to be short on the long than long on the short. In such an abstruse art as music it is easy for one to point to this as substance and to that as manner. Some will hold and it is undeniable—in fact quite obvious—that manner has a great deal to do with the beauty of substance, and that to make a too arbitrary division, or distinction between them, is to interfere, to some extent, with an art's beauty and unity. There is a great deal of truth in this too. But on the other hand, beauty in music is too often confused with something that lets the ears lie back in an easy chair. Many sounds that we are used to, do not bother us, and for that reason, we are inclined to call them beautiful. Frequently,—possibly almost invariably,—analytical and impersonal tests will show, we believe, that when a new or unfamiliar work is accepted as beautiful on its first hearing, its fundamental quality is one that tends to put the mind to sleep. A narcotic is not always unnecessary, but it is seldom a basis of progress,—that is, wholesome evolution in any creative experience. This kind of progress has a great deal to do with beauty—at least in its deeper emotional interests, if not in its moral values. (The above is only a personal impression, but it is based on carefully remembered instances, during a period of about fifteen or twenty years.) Possibly the fondness for individual utterance may throw out a skin-deep arrangement, which is readily accepted as beautiful—formulæ that weaken rather than toughen up the musical-muscles. If the composer's sincere conception of his art and of its functions and ideals, coincide to such an extent with these groove-colored permutations of tried out progressions in expediency, that he can arrange them over and over again to his transcendent delight—has he or has he not been drugged with an overdose of habit-forming sounds? And as a result do not the muscles of his clientele become flabbier and flabbier until they give way altogether and find refuge only in a seasoned opera box—where they can *see* without thinking? And unity is too generally conceived of, or too easily accepted as analogous to form, and form (as analogous) to custom, and custom to habit, and habit may be one of the parents of custom and form, and there are all kinds of parents. Perhaps all unity in art, at its inception, is half-natural and half-artificial, but time insists, or at least makes us, or inclines to make us feel that it is all natural. It is easy for us to accept it as such. The "unity of dress" for a man at a ball requires a collar, yet he could dance better without it. . .

. . . Coherence, to some extent, is presumably something which satisfies the listener's subconscious perspective. But is this its only function? Has it not another of bringing outer or new things into a wider coherence? Is the side of the sense of perspection which is usually the first satisfied, unduly influenced by some things made by a narrow (though natural enough) conscious "plan of coherence"? How much of this influence is artificial and unnecessary? If this question could be answered (and I wouldn't want to try it), would it explain why many musicians are apt to slide easily into the habit of taking the "past" as a stronger criterion for the "future" than is fair to the "future"? A critic, by profession and nature, or anyone who has to listen to a hundred concerts a season, in which there is much repetition, not only of the same pieces, but the same formal relations of tones, cadences, progressions, etc., may subconsciously be over-influenced by a certain routine-series of image-stimulants, which he doesn't seem to need until they disappear. For some such cause, this man may find himself more inclined to "the thinking about" than "the thinking in music,"—more to "the looking towards it" than of "the going towards it." . .

. . . To Emerson, "unity and the over-soul, or the common-heart, are synonymous." Unity is at least nearer to these than to solid geometry, though geometry may be all unity.

But to whatever unpleasantness the holding to this theory of duality brings us, we feel that there is a natural law underneath it all, and like all laws of nature, a liberal interpretation is the one nearest the truth.

. . . If an interest in, and a sympathy for those greater contemplations that have been caught, as it were, in the "World's Soul" and nourished for us there in the soil of its literature,—the thought-visions of men like Charles Kingsley, Marcus Aurelius, Whittier, Milton, Sophocles, Francis of Assisi, Voltaire, and all kindred spirits and souls of great measure, from David down to Rupert Brooke,—if a study of the thought of such men creates a sympathy, even a love for them and their ideal-part, it is certain that this, however inadequately expressed, is nearer to what music was given man for, than a devotion to "Tristan's sensual love of Isolde," to the "Tragic Murder of a Drunken Duke," or to the sad thoughts of a bath-tub when the water is being let out. . . . .

. . . The plan rather embraces all that should go with an expression of the composite-value. It is of the underlying spirit, the direct unrestricted imprint of one soul on another, a portrait, not a photograph of the personality—it is the ideal part that would be caught in this canvas. It is a sympathy for "substance"—the over-value together with a consciousness that there must be a lower value—the "Demosthenic part of the Philippics"—the "Ciceronic part of the Catiline," the sublimity, against the vileness of Rousseau's *Confessions*. It is something akin to, but something more than these predominant partial tones of Hawthorne—"the grand old countenance of Homer; the decrepit form, but vivid face of Æsop; the dark presence of Dante; the wild Ariosto; Rabelais' smile of deep-wrought mirth; the profound, pathetic humor of Cervantes; the all-glorious Shakespeare; Spenser, meet guest for allegoric structure; the severe divinity of Milton; and Bunyon, molded of humblest clay, but instinct with celestial fire."

There are communities now, partly vanished, but cherished and sacred, scattered throughout this world of ours, in which freedom of thought and soul, and even of body, have been fought for. And we believe that there ever lives in that part of the over-soul, native to them, the thoughts which these freedom-struggles have inspired. America is not too young to have its divinities, and its place legends. Many of those "Transcendent Thoughts" and "Visions" which had their birth beneath our Concord elms—messages that have brought salvation to many listening souls throughout the world—are still growing, day by day, to greater and greater beauty—are still showing clearer and clearer man's way to God! . . . .

. . . The strains of one man may fall far below the course of those Phaetons of Concord, or of the Ægean Sea, or of Westmoreland—but the greater the distance his music falls away, the more reason that some greater man shall bring his nearer those higher spheres.—

(From "*Epilogue.*")

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