Literature Music Art

WITH THE PHILOSOPHERS

Immanuel Kant

He never traveled beyond about a distance sixty miles from the town in which he was born," and, knowing this, we can deduce for ourselves Kant's peculiar characteristics. He was poor in the first place, sensitive, shy with strangers and averse to making friends, deeply and reverently studious, and so true a philosopher that without learning through bitter experience he knew that the joys of this life come neither to the rich nor the affluent because of riches or affluence, but are poured lavishly upon those who make no great work of seeking them, for happiness is not to be sought after, nor bought with gifts, nor won with strength or power, but ever eludes those who try hardest to capture it. And so, in the nature of things, though poverty did not last forever with Kant, he was never rich, and he did not attain fame until he was past sixty years old. He was one of the few philosophers who can be called genuine originators, and is said to be the only modern philosopher who can be placed in the same rank with Aristotle and Plato. He was born in 1724 and died at the age of eighty. Always possessing a weak constitution, he cultivated mental self-control, and followed a strict and careful habit of life. "His care extended to his breathing in an almost Oriental fashion. He cured his pain on occasion by control over his attention; and by the same means worked against sleeplessness. He was troubled with defective vision; and in general he narrowly escaped hypochondriac tendencies by virtue of a genuinely wholesome cheerfulness of intellectual temper."

A Comparison of the Beautiful With the Pleasant and the Good

He who fears can form no judgment about the Sublime in nature; just as he who is seduced by inclination and appetite can form no judgment about the Beautiful. The former flies from the sight of an object which inspires him with awe; and it is impossible to find satisfaction in a terror that is seriously felt. Hence the pleasurableness arising from the cessation of an uneasiness in a state of joy. But this, on account of the deliverance from danger which is involved, is a state of joy when conjoined with the resolve that we shall not more be exposed to the danger; we cannot willingly look back upon our sensations of danger, much less seek the occasion for them again.

Bold, overhanging and, as it were, threatening rocks; clouds piled up in the sky, moving with lightning flashes and thunder peals; volcanoes in all their violence of destruction; hurricanes with their track of devastation; the boundless ocean in a state of tumult; the lofty waterfall of a mighty river; and such like,—these exhibit our faculty of resistance as insignificantly small in comparison with their might. But the sight of them is the more attractive, the more fearful it is, provided only that we are in security; and we willingly call these objects sublime, because they raise the energies of the soul above their accustomed height and discover in us a faculty of resistance of a quite different kind, which gives us courage to measure ourselves against the apparent almightiness of nature.

This estimation of ourselves loses nothing through the fact that we must regard ourselves as safe in order to feel this inspiriting satisfaction; and that hence, as there is no seriousness in the danger, there might be also (as might seem to be the case) just as little seriousness in the sublimity of our spiritual faculty. For the satisfaction here concerns only the destination of our faculty which discloses itself in such a case, so far as the tendency to this destination lies in our nature, whilst its development and exercise remain incumbent and obligatory. And in this there is truth and reality, however conscious the man may be of his present actual powerlessness when he turns his reflection to it.

The man who is actually afraid, because his finds reasons for fear in himself, whilst conscious by his culpable disposition of offending against a Might whose will is irresistible and at the same time just, is not in the frame of mind for admiring the Divine greatness. For this a mood of calm contemplation and a quite free judgment are needed. Only if he is conscious of an upright disposition pleasing to God, do those operations of might serve to awaken in him the idea of the sublimity of this disposition conformable to his will; and thus he is raised above the fear of such operations of nature which he no longer regards as outbursts of His wrath. Even humility, in the shape of a stern judgment upon his own faults—which otherwise, with a consciousness of good intentions, could be easily palliated from the frailty of human nature—is a sublime state of mind, consisting of a voluntary subjection of self to the pain of remorse, in order that causes of this may be gradually removed.

In this way religion is essentially distinguished from superstition. The latter establishes in the mind, not reverence for the sublime, but fear and apprehension of the all-powerful Being to whose will the terrified man sees himself subject, without according Him any high esteem. From this nothing can arise but a seeking of favor and flattery, instead of a religion which consists of a good life.

Sublimity, therefore, does not reside in anything of nature, but only in our mind, in so far as we can become conscious that we are superior to nature within, and therefore also to nature without us, so far as it influences us. Everything that excites this feeling in us, e.g., the might of nature which calls forth our forces, is called then, although improperly, sublime. Only by supposing this idea in ourselves, and in reference to it, are we capable of attaining to the idea of the sublimity of that Being which produces respect in us, not merely by the might that it displays in nature, but rather by means of the faculty which resides in us of judging it fearlessly and of regarding our destination as sublime in respect of it. . . .

THE ART OF DANCING IN RUSSIA

Nowhere else in the world has the art of dancing arrived at such a perfection as in Russia. The government of this country is responsible for its training and maintenance, and has supervised the ballet now for more than a hundred and twenty-five years. The Russian church does not uphold dancing at all, and the love of the art must be very deep-rooted indeed, when the peasants ignoring the religious ban cultivate the national dancer assiduously. The movements and pyrries are very picturesque and quaint, and on Sundays and fete days the youths and maidens of the villages gather together to dance and sing. In regard to ballet dancing in particular, an article in the London Times tells us:

The Russian ballet, which is only now becoming known to the rest of Europe, has long been the object of the tenderest solicitude on the part of the court, and has been enthusiastically upheld by the public. The first ballet was presented in Moscow in 1675 before the Tsar Alexis, the second Romanoff. Before it began an actor appeared on the stage and sang some German verses in honor of the "noble qualities of the soul of the Tsar." A slight delay ensued, as the Tsar knew no German, and it was necessary to translate the verses. The unskilled dancers then proceeded to interpret the story of Orpheus with grotesque steps and in strange disguises. Some of the figures were dressed up in huge cardboard pyramids covering them from head to foot, with transparent sides lit up from inside.

Peter the Great was the first Tsar to introduce ball-room dancing into the country, and all Europe contributed to his list, gavottes, minuets, but, above all, the Polish mazurka, which still holds its own as the favorite dance among Russians. The swift, glissading step of the women, more suggestive of Meredith's "gliding women" than any other human motion, is no easy thing for a foreigner to acquire; and dancing masters have been heard to say that none but the Slav woman ever achieves it. Peter issued a ukase ordering the wives and daughters of the nobles to appear at court in English, French or German attire. But so long as the Tsar was absent at the wars he was conducting this order remained a dead letter. It was only in 1718, when Peter settled in St. Petersburg, that he was able to enforce the social intercourse of men and women, and to try to make his "assemblies" like the court functions of the rest of Europe. He desired his guests to dance, and, since they could not, he set about to teach them, making such "caprioles," says Bergholz, that any dancing master might envy him. The Swedish officers who were his prisoners of war at the time helped him greatly in this.

In 1735 the Empress Anna, determined to have a real ballet of her own, invited to her court the Neapolitan composer Francesca Areja to compose the music and conduct the orchestra, and a Frenchman, Lande, as ballet master. Once a week an Italian intermedio with a ballet was given before her majesty, and, as there were no professional dancers, the young noblemen of the military cadet schools were made to learn and dance the parts. A beginning was made, however, to prepare dancers without having recourse to the cadets. Lande collected several poor children, boys and girls, and trained them free of charge. When their progress was deemed sufficient these children danced before the Empress, who was so delighted that she took all the expense of their education upon the State. Lande was paid specially for the lessons he gave them, rooms in one of the palaces were provided for them, and we learn that the children were looked after by the widow of one of the court coachmen. This was the humble beginning of the famous Dramatic school of St. Petersburg.

By Catherine's reign cadets were no longer requisitioned for the stage; and when, in 1802, Didelot was called to St. Petersburg, he found enough material ready from the school to satisfy even his genius. This wonderful man raised the ballet to heights it had never reached elsewhere. He was untiring in his work, a strict, nay, almost a cruel, master, with a love for his art that was fanatical. Under him the ballet took that prominent place in Russian life which it has never lost. Didelot considered dancing an auxiliary to the ballet, and plastique and mime the principal features. He declared that there was no limit to what a ballet might express, and, to prove it, he put on Racine's tragedy Phedre with much success. The ballet became so popular that when the passion for opera began to spread the entricates were occupied by a repetition in dumb show by the corps de ballet of the previous act of the opera.

Catherine devoted much time and care to the organization of the theatre. It was in her reign that the theatres were first opened to the general public, private companies allowed to play, and money taken for tickets. She also put the whole business on a purely bureaucratic footing, appointing a director, with two committees under his control, one in St. Petersburg and one in Moscow, to look after all the material details concerning the theatre.

From the first the music written for ballets was acknowledged to be a most important factor, and both music and the subject reflect the prevailing fashion of the day. In the 18th century sentimental pastorals were chiefly given, though the national Russian feeling, then steadily growing, found expression in a ballet full of Russian dances and melodies written by Anjolini in 1770, "and this new invention of his brain," writes the historian Stelin, "has surprised all, and gained him great praise." Later, the romantic and the realistic schools found interpretation in the ballet. In recent times it has been the custom of the directors to order ballet music from leading composers. Tchaikovsky was one of the first of these to compose a whole ballet, not merely incidentally as part of an opera. His first ballet was "The Sleeping Beauty," and of which he said himself that it was the best thing he had done, excepting only his opera, Eugene Onegin. The story of a ballet is chosen, the programme of each act written out, then the ballet master decides on the dances that are to represent and express the action.

The ballet dancer of Russia begins early and leads a strenuous life; at nine years the child—boy or girl—is presented to the school, and, if the candidate passes the small entrance examination and satisfies the physical requirements as to growth and development, may be accepted. A considerable proportion of the pupils are the children of dancers, but the school is open to all classes. Parental responsibility practically ends here. The child is entirely brought up at the cost of the State, and receives a very fair secondary education, is well cared for and looked after, and is thoroughly trained in the art that is to become the work of his or her life. Four hours a day are devoted to dancing during the eight years the pupil is at school. Any child who proves incapable or who grows too tall or does not grow enough may be sent away without right of appeal. While still at school the pupils frequently appear on the stage in dances created specially for children. They also take part in the "crowds" in operas where children are needed, as in the first act of Tchaikovsky's Dame de Pique. At 17 they start their career as members of the corps de ballet. Every pupil can count on an engagement, and after dancing 18 years retires with a pension at 35, only exceptional artists being permitted to continue after that age. In the small country houses, to which all Russians of any means resort in the summer, dancers will cause bars and ropes to be put up, and practice for many long hours daily during all the months the theatres are closed, and they rise only when every detail of the difficult technique is so mastered as to become what all technique should be—a mere instrument in the expression of individuality. As Jules Lemaitre says: "Dans la danse le corps de la femme semble n'etre plus sujet aux lois de la gravitation," and this quotation from Belinsky expresses well what the ballet really should be: "Dancing is a great art, and with laws and rules that must be studied not only by those who dance, but by all who would understand and appreciate it—just as in music or painting. Dancing combined with music becomes plastique; plastique which has left her pedestal, which becomes movement and harmony."

Russia is not behindhand with the newest form of stage dancing which Duncan introduced, and nowhere had she such enthusiastic audiences as in Russia. Pavlova and Mordkin at the palace showed us what they could achieve in these "plastic harmonies," and to the sound of classical music, in costumes designed by famous painters, they thrilled London with their grace, temperament, and understanding. Pavlova is much admired in her own country, and the feeling was well expressed by an old general who, in answer to her good-bye, "May all that is best be yours!" said, "How can the best be ours when you are depriving us of the very best we had?" Yet the loss of one artist cannot be greatly felt when such dancers as Preobrajensky, Sedova, and Karsavina remain, where there are ballet masters like Fokine, Legate, where in addition to individual talent there is the ensemble, the exquisite finish of every detail which gives one the sense of complete perfection experienced by all who see the performances of the Imperial Russian Ballet of St. Petersburg or Moscow.

LITERATURE AND SPEECH

Mr. W. B. Yeats, in a recent lecture, spoke of that close connection which must exist between literature and the spoken word if both are not to degenerate. We are now so used to reading our poetry in books that we scarcely think of it in connection with speech or song. England, said Mr. Yeats, is pre-eminently the land of "that miserable thing the printed book"; and it is perfectly true, as our very language proves, that we regard the art of words as an art, not of speech, but of writing. We call it literature, as if were born in letters, not in words. And yet poetry in all its forms is a glorification of speech and was developed originally out of speech and out of the effort to make it more beautiful and expressive to the hearer. The invention of printing was, after all, a purely mechanical device, like the gramophone; its uses are obvious, and it can do no possible harm where it is employed for purposes that are not artistic. We can, for instance, read the works of Herbert Spencer in print without losing any of their effect, for they are pure thought; and print is a convenient means of communicating the writer's thoughts to his readers. But no work of art is pure thought. Every work of art is addressed to an audience, and it employs its own peculiar means of address. Poetry employs speech, and addresses the mind through the ear, not through the eye. It has a material beauty of sound, like music, which has been developed by its appeal to the ear; and without this material beauty, which is always a means of expression, it loses its expressive power and ceases to be art. The poet, in spite of the modern predominance of the printed book, does not write, but speaks or sings; and if once he forgets to speak or sing and is content to compose as if he were writing only for readers, like a philosopher or a man of science, he loses his peculiar power and is merely hampered by his form of verse.

A great deal of modern poetry, and indeed of all modern literature, has suffered from the divorce between speech and writing produced by this predominance of the printed book. The poet forgets his audience, since he has no audience, but only readers; forgets the material beauty of sound and all those arts of composition which are necessary so long as the artist speaks to an audience. "The Excursion," for instance, is evidently a poem that was written to be read, not spoken, and it is difficult to read for that very reason. Wordsworth, when he wrote it, must have forgotten that poetry should be addressed to the ear. There are long passages of it in which he seems to be, not speaking, but thinking, and in which his thought is not addressed to any one, and therefore has clothed itself in no artistic form. The very verse shows a constant tendency to degenerate into the mere prose of thought. It ceases to be glorified speech, and ceases even to be speech at all. And at the same time the matter is often rambling and incoherent, because the poet knows that what he has to say will be read at leisure and not listened to by an audience impatient of any irrelevance. In fact, Wordsworth was encouraged by the fact that he wrote altogether for readers in all his natural faults. If he had been forced to test his poetry on an audience he would have corrected these faults, and would not, surely, have lost his poetic power so many years before his death.

No one, of course, would propose that poetry should cease to be printed; but there is no reason why writers and readers alike should not be on their guard against the growing divorce between literature and speech. We can all of us learn to judge poetry more by its effect when it is spoken, and we can learn to speak it properly. The effort to do that should have a good effect not only on our poetry but on our speech, for that also has degenerated owing to its divorce from literature. We think of speech now as a purely utilitarian thing, as a means of communication, not as a means of expression. If children were all trained to speak poetry well they would understand that in poetry it is a means of expression, and that its expressive power depends upon the clean and precise enunciation both of vowels and of consonants. The delicate metrical effects of our finest poetry are entirely destroyed when it is spoken with slurred consonants and with vowels all reduced to one or two vague sounds. So long as poetry is only read the reader is quite unaware of these effects and of all the expressive power that is in them. But as soon as he is trained to say it aloud he must become suddenly conscious of the shortcomings of his own ordinary speech, of its inadequacy as a means of expression. Speech, in fact, can only be preserved from its natural tendency to degenerate by its connection with the art of words. For it is that art which imposes laws upon speech, which raises it from a means of communication to a means of expression, and in the process sharpens and quickens it. In the same way speech imposes its laws upon literature, for speech is the proper medium of literature and gives to literature its material beauty. Thus, when the two are divorced; both become lawless and suffer alike from the anarchy into which they fall.—London Times.

A MUSICIAN'S LOVE-STORY

A little romance in which the great Chopin played the leading part, has recently come to light. Chopin, in common with most great artists, had more than one affaire d'amour, and the story that we speak of, though it ended in the dismissing of Chopin by the young lady or the young lady's parents, did not have a very unhappy effect upon the musician for any length of time.

They met first as children, when Maria came to fetch her brothers from the house of Chopin's father, where they boarded for a year; and when Maria's mother came to Warsaw the two families became acquainted and would spend their Sundays together. On these occasions Chopin found himself sooner or later at the piano, playing to the little girl, who was nine years his junior, or accompanying her as she sang his songs. They both left Poland in 1830, Chopin to make a tour through Bohemia and Germany on his way to Paris, Maria to settle eventually with her family in Geneva. Here she took lessons in piano-playing and composition from Field, and sent Chopin some variations on a theme, which re turned into his brilliant Valse in B flat, numbered Op. 18. They met again in 1835 at Dresden; and this meeting gave birth to the Valse in F minor from Op. 69, which he dedicated to her and left in her hands. Other compositions, which belong to this period and show to some extent his state of mind, are the two Nocturnes in C sharp minor and D flat, numbered Op. 27, and the Study in F minor from Op. 25, which he called a "spiritual picture" of Maria. Next year they met once more at Marienbad, Chopin making the journey on purpose to meet Maria and her mother; and this time it seemed as if things would come to a head. They took long walks together, and Maria's album was offered to Chopin for the usual contribution which all young ladies extorted from their friends. But the inspiration would not come, the composer's nerves were too much for him, and the pages remained blank.

However, after they had been together a month and had moved from Marienbad to Dresden, Chopin, feeling that the moment was ripe, summoned up his courage, and on September 11, the eve of his departure for Paris, asked Maria Wodzinska to become his wife. She replied that she could not run counter to her parents' wishes (and they were already in anxiety about Chopin's health), but she promised to cherish a "grateful remembrance" of him in her heart. This is how Maria narrated the incident in after years, though her accounts vary somewhat. Anyhow, Chopin does not seem to have taken her answer as a definite refusal; for the next day he returned to Paris, where he settled down cheerfully to work, writing amongst other things the serenely beautiful Nocturne in B major numbered Op. 32. Frequently letters, too, were exchanged with Maria, but in spite of his happiness he began to lose his calm of mind; and, in order to quiet himself and satisfy his cravings, he drew out from its drawer the album which Maria had given him a year before; and the result was a little book of which a facsimile has just been published. In this album are songs, nocturnes and concertos, and when the original had been completed, Chopin sent it to his enamorita.

On receipt if the album Maria wrote Chopin a stiff little note carefully worded, expressing unimpeachable sentiments. The voice of the father can be heard in it, and Chopin doubtless realized that the seventeen-year-old Maria was not the kind of daughter to stand up against him. He seems to have accepted the situation philosophically, and shortly afterwards he received his official dismissal. Next year Maria married a Count Skarbeck, the son of Chopins' godfather, and on the dissolution of her marriage with him accepted the hand of a Pole named Orpiszewiski. Chopin kept her letters, however, for they were found amongst his papers after his death, tied up with pink ribbon and with the words "Moia bieda!" ("my misfortune") scribbled on the wrapper.

MUSICAL NOTES

Madame Ada Crossley is leaving London shortly for an important concert tour in South Africa, where music-lovers are to be congratulated upon the opportunities that await them of hearing this rarely-gifted artist. The distinguished contralto, who will be supported by a concert party, sails on the 18th inst., and is due back in the middle of September, in time for the Norwich Festival. She has been obliged, however, to refuse an engagement for the Sheffield Festival which was offered her.

Caruso's stipulation, in connection with his engagement at the Imperial Ouera in Vienna for "permission to smoke on the stage until the ascent of the curtain," naturally recalls his most famous predecessor's passion for the "weed." We have heard it said that Caruso's partiality is for cigarettes—"of," as it was once amusingly stated, "an expensive Egyptian brand." But Mario's passion was for cigars, of which he smoked a quite inordinate quantity. Indeed, it was once said that his yearly expenditure in this direction would have suff[illegible] keep several families in comfort. Bu[illegible] was a generous man, and as free with hi[illegible] as he was with his money. The rule [illegible]ing smoking behind the scenes at Cov[illegible] den was always waived in the case of [illegible] tenor. Mario could not smoke ciga[illegible] paper affecting his throat. In her i[illegible] memoir of him, recently published, [illegible] ter, Mrs. Godfrey Pearse, recalls h[illegible] Spain in the "fifties." "In a to[illegible] country like Spain, Mario's devo[illegible] met with universal sympathy, a[illegible] the audience begged him to [illegible] stage when he was singing[illegible] gladly accepted, although [illegible] in mouth, listening to the [illegible] a Fernando listening [illegible] Valentine, and pufing [illegible] the air, did not prese[illegible] torical accuracy. O[illegible] at Madrid, the stage[illegible] cigars, and amongs[illegible] cases, some of whi[illegible] with jewels."