

FOREWORD

Of the new operas presented, and to be presented, by the Montreal Opera Company this season, none is more interesting, or more worthy of study, than "Le Chemineau," the greatest work Xavier Leroux has so far produced. It is one of the most notable contributions to the new French school of opera which has developed contemporaneously with the Italian "Verismo" school. It possesses in abundance the very qualities which have aroused so much discussion and been the subject of so much controversial debate. It has the qualities of its defects; it also has the defects of its qualities. The opposing paradoxes will be apparent to all who hear it with ears inclined to appreciate what is original and true.

Leroux, Charpentier, Alfred Bruneau,—to name the most distinguished of the pupils of Massenet,—are doing today for French opera what Giordano and his associates endeavoured to achieve for opera in Italy. But, as the writer has observed elsewhere, "there is a vital difference as to metier. The Frenchmen approach the dramatic climaxes of their work with less direct emphasis on the elemental in human passions. It is, if anything, a finer art: certainly it possesses distinction and tremendous vitality, and it is marked by inspiration, unflinching sincerity, and a tremendous dramatic appeal.

"'Le Chemineau' is Jean Richepin's story of rural life set to music of a most poignant, virile, and pulsating character. The movement back to the lives of the lowly for operatic subjects is a welcome one, even though opinions differ—as they necessarily must—as to the aesthetic value and the moral significance of such works as 'Le Chemineau,' 'Louise,' and others in the same genre.

"The composers who are engaged in composing operas of this type are at all events intensely sincere, and their productions are vibrant with human interest of a type that knows no class limitations but appeals to all by reason of its strength, its vitality, and its uncompromising realism."

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