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MUSIC—AND A MAN

An Appreciation of the Late Michael Hambourg

By THE MUSIC EDITOR

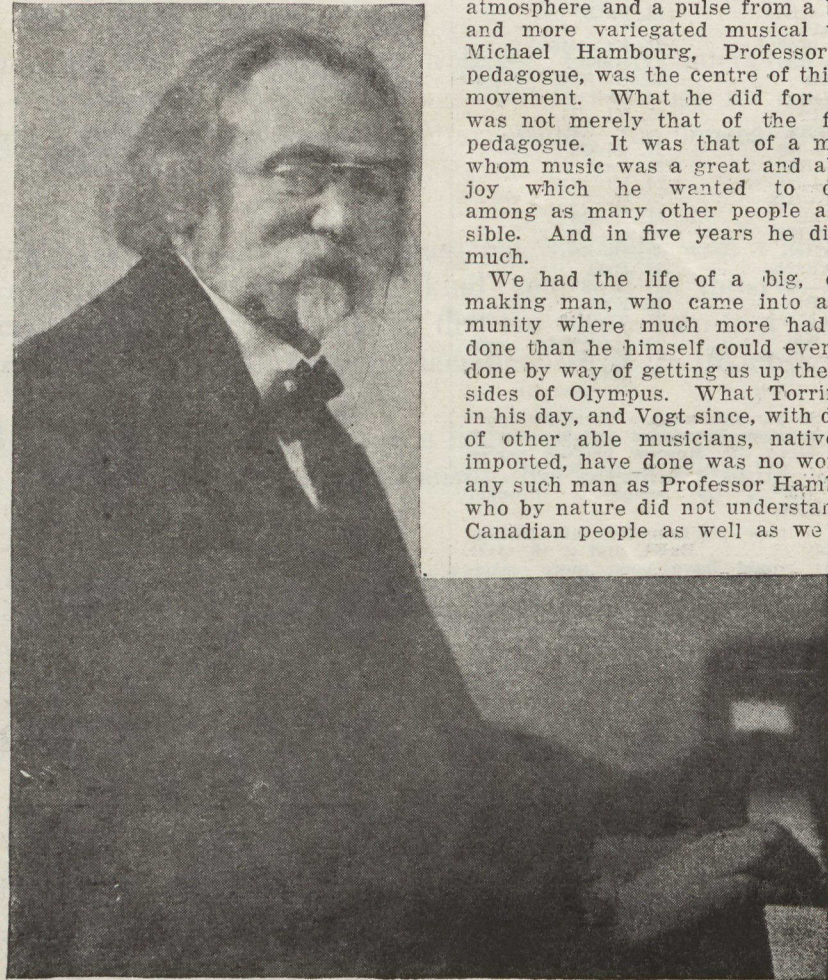
AT the funeral of the master musician, Wednesday, of last week, in Toronto, there was not a sound of music. The body of Michael Hambourg, the Russian pedagogue and Professor of Music, was laid to rest with no ritual except that of the Unitarian Church, conducted by two clear-thinking men, to whom death is the stopping of a watch while time continues to roll on. The funeral was a simple, formless sincerity, as real as the big, sincere man of whom it was the finale to a career of continuous labour in the cause of good music in three countries.

Michael Hambourg had practised at the piano two hours that very morning, as he did every morning, that he might be in form to teach his pupils the next day. In the evening he went

than six years since he came here to settle in Toronto, bringing with him Madame Hambourg, his two sons, Jan and Boris, and three other children. They came on the advice of Mark, who had estimated Toronto as a coming centre of music. And no musical advent to this country ever seemed quite so auspicious.

Six years ago Toronto was famous as the home of a great choir of almost world reputation and of an orchestra well known in Ontario. We had one conservatory and one college of music. Normally Toronto was making more progress in music than perhaps any other city in America. The arrival of the Hambourgs accelerated the movement. But it did more. There is no denying that the establishment of the Hambourg following injected into this part of Canada a musical atmosphere and a pulse from a bigger and more variegated musical world. Michael Hambourg, Professor and pedagogue, was the centre of this new movement. What he did for music was not merely that of the formal pedagogue. It was that of a man to whom music was a great and abiding joy which he wanted to diffuse among as many other people as possible. And in five years he diffused much.

We had the life of a big, epoch-making man, who came into a community where much more had been done than he himself could ever have done by way of getting us up the steep sides of Olympus. What Torrington, in his day, and Vogt since, with dozens of other able musicians, native and imported, have done was no work for any such man as Professor Hambourg, who by nature did not understand the Canadian people as well as we knew



to a recruiting meeting, where he became excited. After he went home he was taken ill. Before the telephone summons to the doctor he was dead. He died the way he wanted to die, dropping practically at his work—though he was virile enough to have had ten or fifteen years more of earthly music but for excessive hard work, rheumatism and the depression of bad weather. His going from Canada leaves a large vacancy in the world of music.

Michael Hambourg was an uncommon figure in this country, where unusual people are becoming a very noticeable and increasing minority. He was a striking figure in London, where he spent twenty-five years of his music. He was a big, recognizable virility in Russia, where, as a young man, he was the friend of Tchaikovsky and the pupil of Nicholas Rubinstein, with whom he was a conferee on the staff of the Imperial Conservatory at Moscow. He was big, as many Russians are, and of amazing virility. He had shoulders like a giant and a strength of muscle that became a very essential part of his music.

Physically so much; but the least of Michael Hambourg, who was the first teacher of Mark Hambourg, his eldest son. What his life was in London, where most of his family were born, has less concern for readers of this paper than what he accomplished and stood for during the little less

ourselves—though he made amazing progress in that direction because of his fine, open geniality and responsive temperament. And he had the equipment of big ideas in music to back up his propaganda. We recognized in him a man of deep and abiding worth to whom enthusiasm day in and day out, hour by hour, everywhere, among all manner of people and conditions, in health or in illness—which he sometimes had—was the great necessity of living. No one ever saw Michael Hambourg when he was not as full of enthusiasm over music as a boy over his games. He was always fresh up in the morning—and the morning to him was most of the day. After he had done a hard day's work teaching—with the expenditure of vital energy such as only a man of tremendous temperament could put forth on his pupil, he went out to some concert or some other meeting almost every night. His hand-clap could be heard in almost every concert of any importance. His Bravo! was the first to break out to encourage some performer. He never seemed weary. Even when he was racked with rheumatic pain he enjoyed a good cigar with a friend down town at noon, lunch and went steaming away with the energy of a motor-car to his next lesson.

Michael Hambourg was too busy to be discontented and too full of enthusiasm to be pessimistic. He



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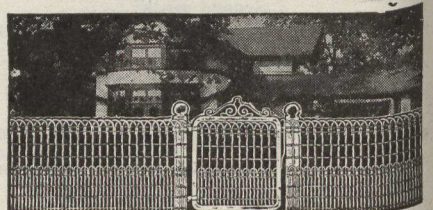
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