

Deum is, perhaps, the greatest composition in the world; yet I never in my life heard Handel but I could think of something else at the same time. There is a kind of music that will not allow this. Dr. Worgan has so touched the organ at St. John's that I have been turning backward and forward over the Prayer Book for the first lesson in Isaiah, and wondered that I could not find Isaiah there! The musician and orator fall short of the full power of their science, if the hearer is left in possession of himself."

It is evident from this, therefore, that even "the good Cecil," as he was affectionately called, perceived his own exposure to peril in the reach and strength of his enthusiasm for music; and it is not impossible to believe that he may have put away his temptation in the violent way the story suggests. It is enough here to say that art is a servant; and when it begins to act as master, devotion disdains even its proffered help.

Charles S. Robinson.

In Re Church Music.

THE expression "worshipping by proxy," as applied by Dr. Robinson to church music, emphasizes, in a certain way, a habit of thought which is harmful to the highest usefulness of music in the public service. Of course, Dr. Robinson does not really object to "singing by proxy" any more than to "praying by proxy," but the readiness with which the phrase comes to hand indicates the extent to which this habit of thought has grown upon us. Do we not often allow our attention to be called away from what is being sung to who is singing and how it is being performed? Have we not allowed ourselves to look upon the singing as a "performance" and not an act of worship. And, as we settle ourselves in our pews to "listen to the voluntary," do we, as a general thing, endeavor to understand the thought of the composer (supposing the music to be properly selected), or do we rather criticise the singers and spend all our thought upon the execution of the "selection"? It is this latter habit which gives point to the expression "by proxy," and not that it is another's voice that sings.

We go to church, it may be, to be lifted up, to be inspired, to be carried away out of ourselves to something better and above us, and beyond what we can understand from the level monotone and discord of daily life. As we come away from the morning service at Trinity, perhaps, where we have listened to the boys' clear voices rising through and over the full tones of the men, and with the organ, under and above all, filling the vast spaces with an ecstasy of song and praise; where we have heard deep calling unto deep, and angel voices telling unutterable things which only the inner ear at such times can hear and partly understand,—must we be told at the door as we come away, "down from the mountain," that we have been "singing by proxy," because, forsooth, the boys laughed amongst themselves during the sermon? Must we lose the inspiration of the morning because our soprano's good honest voice, in "I know that my Redeemer liveth," must be compared with Patti's? Or must we lose it entirely because we must not sing by proxy, and we certainly cannot sing it ourselves? The trouble is not so much in our singers as in our worshippers. We find what we seek.

One word, not in defense, about singing in a "foreign tongue," or, what amounts to the same thing, singing so that the words cannot be understood. In the first place, do we not sing many hymns to one tune? It is the tune and not the words that we care most for. Again, some of us may have listened to high mass in some grand cathedral, where every word was in a foreign tongue; shall we ever forget the emotions, the exaltations, the utter self-forgetfulness? Did we not, indeed, "bow down and worship," although we knew no word of what was being said? True, the words might have been assistants at the first, but once in that higher atmosphere and words do not avail,—it is "the worship of song."

W. H. S.

An Ideal Church.

PERHAPS I cannot place my view of this whole question of "Artistic Help in Divine Service" more clearly before those I want to reach than by telling them of an ideal church I have in mind. In that church the clergyman, the choir-leader, and the organist are a committee, meeting regularly to arrange for each service. The clergyman sets the tone of the service; and the organist and choir-master adapt themselves thereto, choosing music bright or sad, as is best, but always *the best*. In the choir gallery of that church are the best voices obtainable, and the choristers are ladies and gentlemen. The clergyman has confidence that his sermon will be supplemented by a service of praise which will heighten its effect, and the members of the congregation know that they will be given opportunities for joining audibly in the service of praise, and of worshipping by proxy through the medium of devotional music so sung and played that it will certainly call their minds from the contemplation of earthly to heavenly things.

Is that ideal church impossible of realization? I should like to have all concerned make strenuous efforts toward that end.

Fred. W. Wodell.

The Study of Acting in Paris.

ONE day, in Paris, in a conversation about the stage, Monsieur Régnier said to me: "I have many applications from Americans for private lessons and for admission to the Conservatoire; the number of such students is constantly increasing. Why is it that they do not study at home?"

I answered: "In America, acting is considered a trade rather than an art, save by very few; and the few, being forced to live like the wandering tribes of Israel in order to live at all, cannot teach. The opinion is often expressed by our actors that the quality of a dramatic performance is a matter solely of individual feeling; that it is, therefore, impossible to establish a standard of acting; that, moreover, no man can give another any valuable aid in learning to act."

"But you teach your young painters to see, although every human being looks through his especial pair of eyes; you have so-called 'art schools,' have you not?"

"Yes, many. We train our young lawyers, our young preachers, our young authors, all whose professional worth depends upon knowledge of human

nature — all save those that are to personate humanity. They are supposed to have intuitions that are superior to education."

"And what is the result? You have a great number of theaters, I am told: are all that enter your companies gifted with genius, and does untrained genius give satisfactory performances?"

"Not always. It happens, sometimes, that Shakspeare is misinterpreted on our stage. I have seen ladies and gentlemen, royalty itself, represented by persons ignorant of the grammar of their own language, and having the articulation and manner of cowboys and kitchen-maids; diplomatists and scholars by men whose faces expressed scarcely enough intelligence to sell shoe-strings. I have heard a French nobleman speak with a hideous Irish brogue, and that in a serious drama on the stage of a first-class theater. I have seen 'Hamlet' played in New York when the King of Denmark appeared more like a tramp than a king. These performances were given by actors for whom 'experience, the only teacher,' had done its utmost. Many, even of these, have the power of exciting emotion in themselves and in their equals, and emotion is generally accepted as a sufficient substitute for intellectual conception and execution. The truth is that the conditions of an actor's life in America are such that the wonder is, not that so many performances are bad, but that any are good. Attracted by the publicity that seems so like renown, or the promised gratification of frivolous desires, a great many young men and women that lack stability enough to ground themselves in the common fields are drawn into the rapids of theatrical life. Every season a multitude of companies leave New York with every kind of play — tragedy, comedy, drama, melodrama, spectacle, burlesque, farce, and their indescribable hybrid offspring. No examination is necessary to an engagement, even for a novice. First engagements are dependent upon circumstances more or less relevant, personal appearance being the most weighty consideration, amount of salary desired the next. The result is obvious. In one company, whose members should work together like the parts of an organized body, may be found elements so antagonistic that their fusion is impossible. Each individual is an autocrat, resentful of criticism when it is offered, which is seldom. Following blindly his own impulses, he uses his rôles as so many means to exhibit his own personality, instead of looking upon himself as the shapeless clay from which he is to mold many and varied forms. Too many, even of our celebrated actors, are noted because of some peculiarity that marks, appropriately or otherwise, every character they assume. It is seldom that a company travels with a *répertoire*. An actor plays a part during an entire season, often during several. Having learned his lines and spoken them to his own satisfaction, his work is done; he repeats the performance and draws his salary during the run of the piece, which may be for months, or even years. His life is spent in cars or hotels; his social life is the gossip-parties of the company. He may have begun his career full of enthusiasm, but, having so few incentives, he is apt to lose inclination to improve. He finds that his reputation depends upon caprice; he perceives the injustice of judgments, and how little advancement is affected by desert. His enthusiasm dies of inanition, and his

last performance is no more meritorious than his first. Owing to greater delicacy of organization, all these results are intensified in the actress, with the added evil of nerves weakened by fatigue, exposure to cold and dampness in theaters and hotels, and irregular habits. Of one hundred who enter this terrible school of experience, five may possess genius, may be unconquered, even benefited; but the ninety-five do not retire. They go on giving performances that lack any merit, and ruining themselves mentally and physically. There is no one to tell them that they are mistakes; experience does not render them capable of measuring themselves. They are quite as likely to prosper financially as the five."

Régnier smiled at my long speech and said:

"I have been told much of this before. The things of which you speak could not happen on our stage. We believe that our actors are not different from other human beings, and need the same conditions for healthy growth. We think, too, that we have not the right to ask money of the public for the crude work of students in any art. Authors expect to be interpreted, not slandered; the public would not submit to caricatures of itself."

Through the kindness of Monsieur Régnier I had the privilege of attending the classes at the Conservatoire. In our theaters there are many young people feeling the need of authoritative instruction, failing to find it at home, and deterred from seeking it elsewhere by the uncertainty of such an undertaking. To such, and to all that enjoy the theater, or are desirous for its improvement, I am sure that a sketch of the method pursued in Paris with students of acting will be welcome.

The Conservatoire is an institution supported by the Government for the training of musicians and actors. It is called the "Conservatoire de Musique," the dramatic classes having been an afterthought.

The professors of acting are elected from the *Société* of the Théâtre-Français, and are given a sufficient recompense for their services. Established for life in their theater, it is possible for those that have proved great to give the benefit of their experience to the young. They do not feel humiliated by coming out of the mystery of their fame and telling students, in simple words, how that fame was won; to them it is a joy to teach, because they love their art better than themselves. No fee is asked of candidates for admission; they are required only to recite a poem or to act a scene from a play, and, if judged worthy of instruction, are assigned to the class of one of the professors. Many that fail in their first examination enter as listeners, and make another trial the next year.

The pupils assemble in the parquet of a little theater. In the center, beside a table, sits the professor. The listeners occupy a narrow gallery, that corresponds to our dress circle. There is a stage, draped at the back, furnished with tables and chairs, and reached by steps from the parquet.

Roll is called; then, at a sign from — we will say Delaunay, a young man mounts to the stage. He is studying *Gustave de Grignon*, in "La Bataille de Dames." One of the ladies volunteers to represent the *Countess*, and "give him the reply." They act a scene, with no comment save the observations of the other pupils, in undertone.

This talking is never allowed to become obtrusive, but a stranger wonders that it should be permitted at all. A remark made one day by Monsieur Got explains it. A young girl acted beautifully a scene from one of De Musset's comedies. The class listened spell-bound. On finishing, she was embarrassed by the silence.

"Was I so very bad?" she asked.

"Look at your fellow-students," said Got; "when they listen without comment, you may know you are very near right."

Montval, having finished his scene, comes forward for criticism. Delaunay questions him as to his conception of the part, and asks if he founded it on the lines of De Musset, or on the interpretation of some actor. Montval is, perhaps, unable to give a definite answer. Delaunay then, forming his idea from the words of *Grignon* and all that is said of him in the play, sketches, in clean outlines, the man's character; gives, as a background, the circumstances that surround him, and shades and lights the figure with the emotions they must excite in such a man. Montval's recitation is then reviewed, and found to indicate a quite different conception. Beginning again, he repeats the scene, Delaunay interrupting to criticise his delivery of paragraphs, sentences, phrases, words; showing where he is untrue to *Grignon*, often where he has belied a correct idea by false intonation, gesture, or facial expression. The young lady is noticed only when her replies give an unintended meaning to *Grignon's* speeches; but it is likely that she is studying the part she recites, and she listens attentively, for a knowledge of *Grignon's* character as affected by the *Countess* will aid her in forming a conception of her rôle.

The session lasts two hours, the pupils following one another in order, and several scenes are acted and reviewed, the professor often illustrating points by bits of his own experience or anecdotes of other actors.

Each of three professors teaches in the theater twice a week. On Got's days the class of Monsieur Maubant meets in another room.

Monsieur Got's class is conducted on the same plan as is Delaunay's, but in a different spirit. Delaunay reasons with his pupils; Got imitates them, showing their mistakes by witty or grotesque exaggeration. Delaunay talks with a musical flow of language that charms them into attention; Got speaks in terse sentences that stir them to exertion. Severity is Delaunay's last resource—a pupil will work untiringly to escape it; a *très-bien* from Got is equally rare—a pupil will slave to win it. The result of Delaunay's teaching is spirituality, smoothness, finesse; the result of Got's is intellectuality, vigor, power; not that Delaunay is weak or Got unpolished, but the strength of Delaunay's work is its beauty, and the beauty of Got's is its strength.

The *répertoire* of the Comédie-Française is studied,—tragedies, and old and modern comedies. Delaunay requires that his comedians study the tragedies, for the development of the voice and the acquirement of breadth of gesture and dignity of bearing. A teacher of deportment is provided, to correct especial awkwardness in the young people and to teach them to walk, to fall, etc.

The Conservatoire students come, almost invariably, from the *bourgeoisie*; they are the sons and daughters of tradespeople. During the course of

three or four years they are educated, mentally and physically. They attain to the greatest familiarity with the meanings as well as with the words of French dramatic literature, and, through it, with history and romance. They have free admission to every theater in Paris, and see their art exercised in all its branches. They have the benefits of practical experience without its disadvantages. They perform on a stage before an audience. In their lessons, as much attention is given to stage business as to elocution; every part of a play is acted by a different person, and while, in each scene, one pupil is the object of criticism, every line of the other parts must be spoken, and spoken intelligently. They are spared the pain of exhibiting their imperfections before the world; and their critics are artists whose acknowledged greatness gives them authority.

At the end of the season a competitive examination is held. The scenes that have been studied during the winter are acted before a jury. The winner of the first prize is entitled to three débuts at the Comédie-Française. If he proves competent, he remains there. Winners of second prizes, or "*accessits*"—equivalent to "honorable mention"—either continue their studies at the Conservatoire or seek engagements in other theaters. They are sure to take whatever rank they deserve, and to advance as fast as they improve. Those who go to the Française may be said to enter a college where they study under their former teachers until these die, and pupils, qualified by experience, become in their turn masters. Plays are constantly in rehearsal at the Française, under the direction of the senior *sociétaires*, each of whom serves for a week at a time and is called the "*semainier*."

The effect of this system is to be realized only by attendance at the theaters. The Comédie-Française is the mirror of manners and morals, the school of language—it is the mind of Paris. Sure that all the shades of their thoughts will be rendered in their just values, the authors of France give their best work to the theater; sure of justice from public and press, the actors give their lives to their art.

And their lives are theirs to give. Having permanent positions and sure incomes sufficient for all needs, the problem of existence, which possesses our minds, is solved for them; they are free to form family and social ties, to cultivate the many talents that are accessory to the dramatic; that is, to lay a firm foundation for an artistic structure.

They have a home at the theater. Their dressing-rooms are not wretched, damp little closets, but furnished rooms, which the artists vie with one another in making inviting. There is a library, rich in theatrical annals as well as in other literature, and a fine collection of busts and portraits. In the green-room the actors meet socially the distinguished in arts and letters.

If we could live in intimacy with these actors, we should doubtless find selfish ambition and vanity in them; but they are not allowed to inflict their idiosyncrasies upon the public. One leaves the Théâtre-Français impressed, not with the marvelous toils of Mademoiselle A., not with the beauty of Mademoiselle B., not with Mademoiselle A. nor Mademoiselle B. at all, but with the persons they represented, with the excellence of the performance as a whole.

It is impossible for a foreigner to become a pupil of

the Conservatoire unless he have quite conquered his foreign accent. Let him not think for an instant that his own ear is competent to judge. The French ear is far more acute and far more exacting than any other. Not long ago a young American, after studying a scene from "Camille" with a French actress, until she thought herself perfect in it, ventured to recite before the jury that decides upon applicants for admission. The young lady had not spoken four lines when these gentlemen began to laugh—the kindest but most conclusive of laughs. Monsieur Régnier says that she spoke intelligently and with feeling, "but there was an accent."

Neither is it possible to have private lessons of Régnier, Delaunay, or Got. Régnier has ceased to teach, even at the Conservatoire. Coquelin and Worms sometimes give private lessons, I believe, but it is doubtful whether either would take a foreign pupil, unless interested by an extraordinary talent. Even if they could be obtained, the benefit of such lessons is questionable. The principles of the art are laid before the classes at the Conservatoire; principles fundamental to acting in all languages. These must be learned. When, feeling himself to be grounded in them, the student begins to study plays, it is well to submit to criticism in order to eliminate defects of pronunciation, carriage, etc.; but such criticism must be better given by one who speaks the language and can enter entirely into the spirit of the characters under study. If one were to act in French, no critic could be better than Coquelin aîné; but if one is to act in English, an Englishman, even if he be not so good an actor, is the better teacher.

It is less difficult to enter the Conservatoire as a listener. A written word from Régnier is an "open sesame," and, as he is least occupied and most approachable of those in authority, it is best to go to him.

Thorough knowledge of the French language is quite indispensable, and is to be gained only by speaking it with French people. The first sensation of most Americans arriving for the first time in France is astonishment at their ignorance of the language. A few months of intercourse with a native family, however, will train a dull ear to comprehension, and the tongue is an apt pupil of the ear.

The Conservatoire opens in November, but it is well to go to France in May or June.

Women should not go alone. Among Parisians a woman that is alone is always under suspicion. A student owes to her art as well as to her womanhood to protect her reputation; to have, as companion, a married woman older than herself.

The summer may well be employed in making the acquaintance—the friendship—of the French drama. Most of Molière is played; of Racine, "Britannicus," "Phèdre," "Andromaque," and "Iphigénie;" of Corneille, "Le Cid" and "Les Horaces" are still played. The modern dramas are legion; to read them seems an endless task, but a listener at the Conservatoire, if he be not familiar with them, will find much of the instruction unintelligible. In other ways, also, they repay the reading. There is no better means to acquire facility in understanding and speaking than to read them aloud. There is a book-store under the Théâtre-Français where any play may be bought, and the salesmen will take pleasure in marking in a catalogue the names of the most popular ones. Regular attendance

at the theater is as important as attendance at the Conservatoire. The Français is, of course, first on the list.

The Odéon is called the "second Théâtre-Français" only because the classics are played there also. The performances are not to be compared with those given in several other theaters. Pupils of the Conservatoire who aspire to playing tragedy, and who fall short of the first prize, go to the Odéon. Some of the now celebrated actors began their careers there.

Almost as powerful as the theaters to train the judgment are the criticisms in the papers. The articles of "Un Monsieur de l'Orchestre," in the "Figaro," can scarcely be called criticisms, but they are full of suggestive wit. Monsieur Auguste Vitu is the critic of that paper, and writes in a dignified style that carries conviction. Monsieur Sarcey, acknowledged leader of living dramatic critics, writes for "Le Temps." The student will form no pleasanter habit than going to his news-stand on Sunday afternoons, buying his "Temps," and reading Monsieur Sarcey's article by the fireside. The day after the first performance of a new play he will buy all the papers, and learn as much of the literary, dramatic, and moral qualities of the piece, the history of its growth in the author's mind, and the work of the actors, judged by their own ideals and in comparison with great ones of the past, as by seeing the performance a dozen times. He will be delighted with the earnestness, the educated intelligence, and the impartiality of these criticisms. There is no vague, thoughtless praise; there are no long sentences that indicate nothing but an abnormal secretion of adjectives in the writer's brain. "It is enough to make a man respect himself," he will think, "to be held worthy of treatment like this; and to stand such a test, he can permit himself no weak points." A paste diamond would turn very pale under the searching light that is thrown upon the jewels in the crown of Paris—the actors of her drama.

The advantage of a year of study in Paris to an American depends upon himself. If his object in going upon the stage be to make a fortune or to display his individual peculiarities, or if he go abroad expecting to act in Paris and return with a European reputation, to sweep like a comet before the "upturned, wondering eyes of mortals," filling the theatrical sky with a glittering Parisian tail, then he will gain nothing. It will be far wiser to stay at home, engage some playwright that knows him to put together some incidents in which his eccentricities can be made conspicuous, and start "on the road," heralded by flaming pictures and advertisements written in the superlative. If he be prompted by a sense of the importance and the consequent dignity of his art, by a conviction that he can do his life-work better in that field than in any other, then a season spent in the theaters of Paris will be of inestimable value to him. He will, perhaps, make little progress in the technicalities of acting; he will go home to begin at the very bottom; but he will have gathered a store of knowledge that will aid him at every step, and he will have conceived an ideal that will inspire him, make him indifferent to difficulties, and feed in him the determination to do his utmost to help on the organization of our theatrical class into a dramatic world.