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THE DEMOCRACY OF MUSIC

(Written for "The Listener" by the Rev. Thos. A. Brady)

THE Centennial celebrations have been a decided success, and would have been more so had they not been overshadowed by the cruel, brutal war. No part of them, however, has been more successful than the musical. There is an obvious explanation for this. There is a democratic element in music and it plays an important part in the cultural development and progressive education of the nation.

Of all the arts music is the most democratic. It is the soul of the finest art and the most loved of all and by all. Its great composers were democrats. They were of the people, lived with the people, and shared the common lot of the people. When Beethoven was once shown a picture of Haydn kneeling and kissing the ground of the one-roomed thatched house in which he was born he said: "Strange that so great a man should have so lowly an origin."

That is equally true of all the masters. Beethoven himself was born into the midst of poverty. Haydn was proud of his lowly origin for he always said he had produced something from nothing. Penury and want cannot freeze the musical currents that flow through a creative soul. Genius is never deflated by poverty. Its great reward is in what it produces and gives to the world. Rich, immortal music born in poverty is the great legacy the masters have bequeathed to the world, a legacy that enriched the world for all time and serves as an undying monument to their memory.

Community of Interest

It would be interesting to show how the masters interpret the very soul-life of their various nationalities. But it is more to the point to remember that the music of the masters demands a community of interest for its performance. It is true that some of the master-composers have declared themselves most beautifully in solo forms—Chopin in his piano music; Wolf in his songs; but the greatest of them wrote work for masses of voices, instruments, and actors. Such works can only be performed under communal conditions. To understand this we have only to examine, for instance, Rossini's "Stabat Mater" or any of his grand operas. These need a large number of people to perform them. Indeed all operas and oratorios demand a large chorus and orchestra to stage them. How could the famous "Carmen" of Bizet or the ever popular "Messiah"



THE REV. THOS. A. BRADY

of Handel be given without a mass of performers?

A Democratic Response

The most striking and impressive thing about music is the response of the people to its magnetic spell and power. What a testimony to the power of music in the Greek legend about Orpheus and his lute. As the mystic strains flooded the air the wild beasts of the forest left their lairs to hear, the waves of the ocean sank to rest, the hearts of pitiless gods were melted, and souls in

bondage had a respite from their woes. All of which is a parable. If the Greek, whose knowledge of music was necessarily limited could thus testify to its power, what must be said of music today with its richly accumulated works of the great masters and the songs and hymns of the centuries?

Music speaks a universal language. It has a tongue as long, and far more powerful, than wireless. North, South, East, and West, its power to move is just the same. And why? Simply because it is the language of emotion. All are creatures of emotion and music has the power to awake that emotion. Whether it is conveyed by the means of opera, oratorio, choir, community singing or instrumentation, music captivates democracy, because it stirs the emotional type of Demos.

The Food of Love

"Music is the food of love," says Shakespeare. Yes, but it is the food of more than one kind of love. It is the food of every kind of pure love under the sky. The best songs of every nation are its love songs. How wonderful are the songs of love possessed by our Maori people. And how they move you when they find expression through their poetical souls. And so it is that we find song has played and still plays a leading part in the political and social struggles of the peoples of every country. During the first part of the last century, when the masses of England were beginning to fight their way towards democracy, they had poets and musicians who gave them songs that nerved and inspired them. During the agitation for cheap bread in the Corn Law times Tom Hood wrote his "Song of the Shirt" with the heart breaking lines:

"Oh, God, that Bread should be as dear,
And flesh and blood so cheap."

That stirred the blood of all who suffered hunger and want in those tragic times. Ebenezer Elliot, both poet and musician, wrote songs that have moved and inspired the people across the silent years.