

THE COLLECTOR PHILOSOPHIZES

WITH a sigh of exhausted nature the Musician sank into the easiest chair the Collector's study afforded.

His host prepared the necessary restorative, and, as the smoke of his cigarette arose and the bubbles in his glass subsided, the Musician gained sufficient strength to say:

'Well, the beastly job is arranged at last, and I am to write the analytical programme.'

'Are you speaking about this concert - the "Popular Concert," with a big P?'

'Yes; we've got a ripping programme, chiefly modern foreign classic, with some good vocal stuff that X. is to sing. He's great on German, Russian, and Hungarian folk-songs. He sings them, too, in the original languages.'

'And you --?'

'Oh, I do a couple of pianoforte solos - I won't tell you what they are - the latest thing out; you shall hear them. I don't think there's more than half a dozen copies in England yet; but they're going strong abroad. They are very modern; an old fogey like you will think them queer.'

'And you do the analytical and explanatory programme, eh ? - to tell 'em what to think about what they hear?'

'Quite so; it would be double Chinese to such an audience if we didn't explain.'

'My dear young friend, I think if I were a despotic monarch I should invent some terrible punishment to fit the crime you are about to commit. I should first prepare your mind by a compulsory lesson in fable - I mean that one where the fox invites the stork to dinner, placed in a flat dish that is convenient for the tongue of the fox (who quickly licks it all up), but is not adapted, so the fabulist says, for the long bill of the stork. The stork has his revenge, however, by a return invitation to a meal placed in a long, narrow vase well adapted to the long bill of the stork, but hopeless for the fox.'

'I don't see the point, old boy.'

'No, I didn't think you would after hearing what you propose for a concert for the "masses" - the people with a capital P. I fancy you would, though, if you were tied in a chair, and had to listen to what the populace *really* like, and to be compelled to study an explanatory programme.'

'But, hang it, man! we must give people good music, for art's sake.'

'Have you realized that "art" is a big word, and extends backward, as well as forward, and that such poor mortals as you and I have no right to fix its limits? If our generation says that such items as make up your programme are true art, can we be certain that the next generation will endorse our opinion? Do you, as a modern musician, get enthusiastic over the stuff that the Victorians of fifty or sixty years ago considered "jannock," if you will pardon the Lancashire way of putting it? What business have you to write an explanatory sheet to bewilder honest men, or make hypocrites of those who may pretend to understand the music, which can only be really understood if it be felt? Music is not a diagram, or a panorama, to be explained by the tapping of a lecturer's wand. Those of your audience to whom the music you present is more than a pleasant, or a tiresome, jingle (and I am not saying there may not be some there who appreciate it to the full), will require none of your interpretation. They will find their own meaning and appeal in it; that meaning may be different - nay, *will* be different - from yours, or from the composer's, but, nevertheless, it will be a true interpretation, and far better than what you would wish to force down their mental throats.'

'That last is a wild metaphor, old boy. I'm not convinced; our programme is all right, and good art, as we understand it to-day, whatever the future may say about it.'

'I agree, I quite agree - art of the best; but that is not my point, and your analytical programme scheme emphasizes this, for it admits that it is so much above your expected audience that it requires explanation.'

'It is educational.'

'There you go - the eternal spirit of pedagogy - we all have it, as we all have original sin, but it is not a virtue. There have been as many crimes committed under the banner inscribed "Educational" as under the name "Liberty."

'Art has no business to pose as education; it is a pure and unfettered delight; and the minute we find out any law or rule that has caused it to be art, that moment its spirit has fled and left a dead thing behind it.

'Art is not a subject to be treated as a lesson by which the pupil's own innate art conception is killed, crushed by the overpowering weight of some one else's. It is our curse, and the blighting of original thought, this "education" in art. True art is an individual growth, not a parasite. .

'I quarrel with your programme because it contains nothing born of English temperament; and by the constant reiteration of works born of temperaments opposite to the English character, we are killing our own national art, and feeding on something the liking for which has to be acquired by education. We have to empty our native likings to make room for what has originally appealed to a mind quite dissimilar to our own. And so we import gloom from Russia, and nastiness from several parts of the Continent, to provide modern drama and literature for healthy-minded English folk. It is only what you cult people call the "stupid" element that has the keeping of our English sanity.

'Your friend X. is singing Russian, Hungarian, and German folk-songs, and adding the insult of rendering them in their own languages, which not one of your audience will understand. English folk-song that he might have selected he leaves alone. Folk-song is eminently a song of a nation's temperament, and though X.'s songs may appeal to their own particular peoples, why should he expect them to do so to an English popular audience? I have heard you clamour for a municipally supported theatre and opera, but this you do under the full expectancy that the fare provided shall be such as is acceptable to you and your fellows in thought. You expect the man in the street, who will certainly be called upon to pay the bulk of the piper's fee, to have no choice in the tune. You say we must not descend below art - that is, your definition of art - and as the man in the street has, notoriously, rather a low standard of it, and is very submissive, you will certainly have the matter in your own hands, or in the hands of the faddist who has most will-power.

'As for myself, I have strong sympathy with those old fellows who, wishing to cheer their old age with a little music which they like, pay big sums for the teaching of music to their offspring, only to find (after enduring many years of the torture of "practising") that the offspring's music-master forbids, and pronounce the old man's loved airs banal and "bad art." And so, like Mother Hubbard's dog, he gets none.'

'I am old enough to remember the time when a howl of derision would have come forth had it been proposed that songs taken down from the lips of yokels in a village tap-room should be sung on the concert platform. And yet are not these folk-ditties now rightly considered as among our richest store of national song?

'You musicians,' concluded the Collector, rising to enforce his point, 'move in circles of limited areas, and are too apt to condemn as outside art all that lies outside your own particular radius.'

'A very enlightening discourse, my dear fellow,' said the Musician yawning, 'but I'm afraid you stand very much alone in your ideas.'

'I am afraid I do,' answered the Collector.

FRANK KIDSON.