NATURE, MUSIC, AND PAINTING

ALL OF us feel some love of Nature; unless we are entirely blind to the things we see about us every day, we cannot help this natural love. All of us, however, do not have a natural love for music, and yet how closely are Nature and music allied. Neither do all of us have a liking for the wonderful paintings the artist has given us—even the paintings of Nature. With these three—Nature, Music, and Painting—so closely allied, it is strange that so many of us like one and have no interest in either of the other two. But with our basic love of Nature, it surely would not take us long to appreciate both Art and Music. The artist, as he portrays Nature, comes close to the heart of God, and the musician, as he converts his feelings about Nature into a wonderful combination of tones, plays at the throne of God, and both attain their “Heaven on earth.” We can not all be artists or musicians, but with a true enjoyment of Nature, Music and Art, we do not need to feel unfortunate, at least.

Nature—moonlight on water, early morning mist creeping among the tree tops, the sight of a rose covered with dew, the bright-colored bird as he sings his early morning song; the white-churned foam splashing furiously against the rocky coast; the freshly plowed ground; the rainbow after a shower; the farmer sowing his seed; the laborers gathering the grain; a road in sunlight; the calm, peaceful landscape—all of these increase our happiness and bring us the kind of beauty created by the artist, for “art is man’s highest expression for and joy in the beauty of Nature.” Nature is the master teacher of the artist. She is as inexhaustible in her effects as the organ is in its numberless stops, when it creates the beautiful tonal effects of the rich, deep-throated diapason, of the poignant strings, of the soft flutes and the beautiful vox humana.

Recently I went to an organ and piano recital, and as I listened to each piece, I realized how closely akin Music, Nature, and Painting really are. Every piece, or every change in tone color brought to my mind a picture, some picture of Nature which the musician has created in tones and the artist has created in image and color. The love of Nature leads the artist to paint landscapes just as it leads the poet to write great lyrics and the musician to let his feelings overflow in beautiful tones; each forgets his own individuality for the moment, as he becomes absorbed in the beauty of his natural surroundings, and then he transmits his own individual feeling about what he sees or hears to us, in tone and color. “He is fond of Nature for its own sake.” And yet how late it took man to realize this. It was not until the seventeenth century that artists began to study and paint the landscapes in this spirit.

As I sat at the music recital and heard Benedict’s Sweet Repose is Reigning Now played on the organ, and as the singing strings pierced through the soft flute accompaniment, I thought of that first real Dutch landscape painter, Meindart Hobbema, and his delightful picture of the Avenue of Trees. It is a composition of vertical lines in opposition to horizontal; an arrangement of the spaces of Nature entirely without adornment, we might almost say; or, at any rate, portrayed just as the artist found it. Some may be inclined to think that his work is homely and even uninteresting; some say that it doesn’t “soar,” but “walks afoot like the common people.” This may be an adverse criticism, but as for me, I like to walk with the common people. It gives one a feeling of security, of peacefulness, of solidity that is sometimes most comforting. Certainly Hobbema was not inventive like Claude Lorrain, who invented a formal, classic, cold landscape; he did not draw an idea from his own imagination. And yet, if one has keen and true insight into things of
Nature just as they are, and a sincere sympathy with those things, this may just as surely be imagination. It was this kind of imagination that Hobbema possessed. He must have loved the countryside, studied it as a true nature lover, because he has depicted it with such intimacy and delicacy of truth that one can visualize the road to Middleharnis as plainly as the artist saw it over two hundred years ago. How wonderful to think that by the line of the rugged poplars, by the use of the clouds, by the use of color, of lights and shadows, we can read the message that Nature had for us in that scene: self-reliance and smiling peace, matter-of-factness, and sweet and intimate simplicity.

During the recital, when the organist changed for the string stop, that of the sonorous bourdon and diapason stops, I immediately thought of Homer Martin's View on the Seine, for there is something in his picture which has "less a suggestion of songfulness in it than that of music traveling on and on." "There is a suggestion that the ether is a tidal ocean connecting the fragment of circumstance with infinity," I once heard someone say. In the line of the poplars on the right side of the picture, each reaching for the sky, there is a sense of "springing adoration," with a simplicity that inspires reverence. I read once that Mrs. Martin had said of her husband's paintings that there was an "enveloping atmosphere which bound all things together and made harmony." This is most surely true, for one who can bind simple severity, a remoteness, and even a certain "savagery" together in a sunny and peaceful landscape is a master of harmony.

As the organist proceeded with his selection, the tones of the calm, imperturbed wood winds came to my ear, and I was reminded of the early painters, among them, Ruisdael, who painted the Landscape with Mill. His landscape has an air of stern reality, just as do the notes of the wood winds, and the noblest feature of his scenes is the fine sky with its masses of clouds. Surely none of the Dutchmen of the seventeenth century had been so impressed with the "vastness and buoyant force and freedom of the sky" as Ruisdael.

Next on the recital came a pianist who interpreted MacDowell's Scottish Tone Poem with real depth of feeling. One could almost hear the fierce sea, pounding against the rocky coast and visualize one of Winslow Homer's elemental sea pictures, The Northeaster, "where the crests of the waves look like inlays of white marble on lapis lazuli." He could almost hear "the surge and thunder of the Odyssey," just as one can when he looks at a Winslow Homer. One felt that there was "evidence of a great mind, for the time being, unreservedly consecrated to great ends and expressing itself in an imagery of grandeur and undying suggestiveness," when one could so successfully portray the elements of Nature, either in Music or Painting.

Near the close of the recital, an organist played some of Bach's numbers, for no recital is ever complete without some of his works since he is the greatest of all masters of the organ. The familiar strains of Bach seemed so firm, so comforting. I heard decided rhythm, so much repetition and contrast in the entrance of first one voice and then the other, that I immediately thought of Millet's pictures, which have in them so much balance, so much contrast, so much rhythmic effect. I saw The Gleaners and The Sower, and how Millet, by his use of line, form, color, light and shade, made us feel all of these things which go to make up his pictures. In The Sower we see a man with his weight planted equally on both feet, and yet not in a stationary position, for he has the freedom and naturalness of life. We can read the character of all Millet's figures as he uses lines, color, light and shadows to represent them to us, just as we know Bach's characteristics through the in-
interpretation of his free, yet stately organ music.

The concluding numbers on the program were two piano numbers, Mendelssohn's *Spring Song*, and Chopin's *Nocturne in D Flat Major*. The first number reminded me of that school of artists at Fontainebleau-Barbizon, who painted so delightfully, and I thought of Carot and his *Dance of the Nymphs*. The beautiful tones of the piano are due to a perfect relation which exists between the different parts, and in a picture it seems that "tone is the result of all colors being so perfectly related to one another that the vibration or rhythm of the whole color harmony is increased." Corot had a great love for Nature and loved especially the early dawn and the late evening, when the light is very faint and in the hush the trees "loom up like quiet spirits." Nature is never wearisome by always being the same, and Corot gives us this in his pictures. "His artistic life was filled with the beauty of the light and air. These he painted with a great singleness of aim and great poetic charm." Most of his work is in "a light silvery key of color." He has surely never had a superior in producing the pervading light of morning and evening. Surely, for this, if for no other excellence, he most deservedly holds a high rank, for one who can portray such lovely things in Nature as Corot did, can take his place in my list of the great, at any rate.

The *Spring Song* also brought to my mind a most charming picture, *Springtime on the Delaware*, by Cullen Yates, which I had seen only recently, but which seemed most adequately expressed by it.

As the last number was played, the rich tonal effects of the Nocturne reminded me of Inness's *Peace and Plenty* with its equally as rich and warm tonal effects and its lovely lights and darks. Inness once said, "Rivers, streams, the rippling brooks, the hillside, the sky, clouds, all things that we see can convey sentiment if we are in the love of God and the desire of truth." It seemed to me that as I had sat and listened to the recital and visualized all the pictures it had brought to mind, I had really been in the love of God.

But we are all in the love of God as we see the beauty in Nature about us, and as we hear and see the music and painting which Nature inspires. If we keep our eyes and ears attuned to the best God has for us, we will find it is as the poet says—

"E'en in the mud and scum of things,
Something always, always sings!"

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**UNDERBIDDING** through fear that otherwise the position will be secured by someone else usually results in the low bid being used as a club to force the salaries of all to a lower level. The teacher who applies for a dozen positions at a low salary is equivalent, so far as effect is concerned, to a dozen teachers applying for one position at that salary. It creates in the minds of school boards a false idea of the number of teachers available and also a false idea of the salary level at which good teachers may be had.—Editorial, *School and Community (Missouri)*.

Now everyone with the merest excuse of a certificate is looking for a teaching position, not because he is qualified, but because he wants a job. Is there any reason that the children should be made to pay for this situation?—E. M. Hosman.