

Modern Calvinists and Their Pernicious Influence Upon Art

Prohibition Doctrines Not Confined Merely to Drink—What Next in an Age of Unwished-for Paternalism?—The Calvinist in Music Who Would Prohibit Bach, Beethoven and Wagner

By THEODORE VAN HEMERT

THERE was a time, in the good old Victorian epoch, when the good people did not consider it a disgrace to be drunk occasionally. The fine old port and Johnny Walker were going strong in those happy days. The Calvinists of that period limited their efforts to the sale of Bibles and whiskey to the heathens of darkest Africa, dreaming naught of world dominion, or of interfering with man's inherent right to liberty and the pursuit of happiness. While we do not approve of drunkenness in any shape or form, we wish to remark, nevertheless, that strong drink did not seem to interfere with the affairs of the nineteenth century, which may justly be considered one of the most brilliant since the beginning of time. The arts were flourishing; inventors ushered in steam and electricity; industry developed everywhere with giant strides, and progress and civilization were going hand in hand in the best of worlds. Philosophers, writers, poets, painters, illumined the world with their genius, and two of the greatest composers the world ever saw gave to the astonished peoples their wonderful music. It is doubtful whether our Calvinistic twentieth century will ever be able to produce another Beethoven or Wagner.

In America, Poe, Emerson, Whitman, Whittier, Whistler illustrated American letters and arts; in England, France, Italy, Russia, in Germany, everywhere, science, art and industry vied with each other to make this a better and happier world, free from all the complex problems which are now on the point of driv-

ing poor, suffering humanity to distraction.

In those happy days there was no prohibition, and the privilege of indulging one's tastes for light wines and beer was not frowned upon by a Calvinistic minority. We do not approve of strong drink in excess, but we cannot help remarking that booze did not prevent Beethoven Senior (who was a regular tipster) from procreating his illustrious son, and Wagner, who was a worthy follower of Father Noah's traditional pastime, from composing his immortal masterpieces, or our own Poe from being the greatest of the great American poets. In those happy days of art, literature, music, science and industry the H. C. L. did not mean anything to the happy tribe of humanity. The world was, indeed, a good enough place to live in, without Leagues of Nations, Ententes Cordiales, capital and labor questions, imperialism or prohibition. These were the golden days when a dollar was worth one hundred cents. Then came the capitalist, the imperialist and, finally, the Calvinist, and since that time the pursuit of happiness seems to be a "pursuit" indeed, and happiness a thing of the past. To-day we are especially interested in the latter variety of "ists."

Where Is Moral Courage?

There seems to be plenty of physical courage in this world, and recently twenty million dead and cripples in the trenches proved it; but we cannot help noticing the appalling lack of intelligence and moral courage among the youth of to-day. Its lack of intelligence, apathy or spirit of let-well-enough-alone have emboldened the ever-on-the-alert Calvinists, who have gradually taken the upper hand, until now they control or are about to control that illusive pursuit of happiness to which the men of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries devoted their lives.

In America the Calvinists have blessed us within the past decades with their unwished-for paternalism and one kind of prohibition after another. First, horse racing was abolished, then we got prohibition on free speech and freedom of the press, and to-day prohibition on booze. To-morrow we shall, perhaps, have prohibition on tobacco, and then, if the Calvinists continue to have their own way, without opposition, prohibition on music, dancing and all that which smacks of art, on the ground that all things artistic are of the devil; and last, but not least, prohibition on what the French call *la joie de vivre*—prohibition on happiness! If they succeed in their noble intent, we shall have a perfectly lovely graveyard for a world, with art, literature and music hushed, and thought killed outright, for it will then be a crime of *lèse majesté* to think even; and when men will have stopped thinking, the human race might just as well return to that blissful state whence it originated, or our souls might take a flight to that Nirvana of perfect annihilation conceived by Brahma and Buddha.

However, since it does not appear probable that the human soul is, at its present stage of development, ready for a "blowing out" spree, we would suggest that without free thought man is not much better than cattle. Descartes said it: "Cogito, ergo sum." In other words, "I think, hence I am." This is the reason why every thinking being abhors prohibition, whether it is on free uttered or written thought or on booze, or any other sort of prohibition. Prohibition is an abomination, worse than capital punishment.

The Calvinists' Own Spree

However, there is hope, for the pendulum will swing and the worm will turn. Those whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad, and presently the Calvinists seem to have gone on a little spree all of their own. They are drunk with the spirit of intolerance, as in the

good old days, when the wheel and the rack and the thumbscrew were in vogue. They are drunk with ignorance, bigotry, spite, malice, envy, hatred, revenge, lust of gold and blood, and they may go beyond their depth. Unless the twentieth century is to go down in history as an era of weak-kneed, lick-spittle men, without backbone, it is about time that we see a revulsion of feeling, and now is the time for the men unafraid to come to the front; in fact, they should have spoken long ere this, when giving vent to one's opinion was dangerous. By all means let us enforce prohibition on the prohibitionists of every shape, form, color and creed, urging these holier-than-thou to try a dose of their own medicine, thus paving the way for a new era of tolerance and the dawn of the brotherhood of man on earth.

When speaking of Calvinists in general, we do not refer alone to those Pharisees whose intolerance has oppressed the world with their bigotry and hatred, but also to those greedy charlatans who have invested themselves with the self-appointed mission of censors of the people's morals. These Calvinists do not confine their activities to religious dogma or politics; they are to be found everywhere, decreeing the kind of patriotism each one should profess, the kind of democracy the world should have, what the world should hear, read, eat, drink, wear and think; even to our amusements do they intend to spread their control. These Calvinists are right in our midst, at the beach, in the theaters, concert halls, in our own homes, to dictate what is proper, and on matters of which they have not the slightest conception (for Calvinists are usually ignorant).

In the field of art and music we find the worst brand of Calvinist, one whose ignorance is only surpassed by his meanness. In music, these Calvinists tell us what kind of music we shall have, and if at all. In fact, in many States music is taboo on Sundays, even the so-called sacred music, because.... Music is a thing of the devil, and the fear of that hell, where the first Calvin is reaping what he sowed, is ever ringing in the chaste ears of the modern Calvinists.

Other Calvinists and "patrioteers," fearing lest the average common-sense American be led astray—Americans, according to the Calvinists, are not to be trusted and need a guardian—have pronounced their verdict on certain so-called German music. Prohibition on Bach, Beethoven and Wagner, that is their program. According to these well-informed censors, the music of Bach, Beethoven

and Wagner is not to be trusted; it is insidious, mesmerizing, full of propaganda, cult and kick, even as defunct old John B.—please do not confound with John D., pseudo pianist and billionaire. According to these patrioteers, Bach's music is full of blood-curdling crimes, and American ears are not made for this barbaric music. The Chicago Calvinists have created to this effect a society for the perpetual damnation of German music; in Milwaukee the Calvinists became indignant when an American singer of Scandinavian descent sang several songs by Grieg in Norwegian, which these Calvinists mistook for German, hurriedly leaving the hall to show their disapproval and ignorance; and in New York some folks wonder whether we should allow a season of German opera at the Lexington Opera House, and whether it will be proper to have the obnoxious music performed in Aeolian or Carnegie Hall.

We can readily understand how American composers who have music of their own for sale feel about it, and we sympathize with them, and we wish to say right here that we are in favor of American music first, last and all of the time. Certainly, we are in favor of American music, as we are in favor of English, French, German, Italian or Russian music, whenever it is grandiose, masterful, artistic. We would be in favor of Chinese music if it did not grate upon our sensitive Occidental ears.

We believe that music is an international language, which is readily understood by the adepts, cognoscenti and illuminati of any and every nation, and does not need to be translated or interpreted, although it remains a dead language to the profane ears of the Calvinists and the uninitiated of any latitude or longitude. We can all learn the universal language spoken to us through the medium of Bach or Beethoven by opening our soul to the harmonies of the universe by becoming adepts. If we should cut out the message sent to us from the great Cosmos by the agency of Bach, Beethoven or Wagner, to mention only three of them, we would shut out the light from our midst, preventing American ears from hearing, learning and absorbing the wonderful harmonies of the universe. Shall we bite off our nose to spite our face, and please the Calvinists, or shall we be men unafraid and listen to the voices of the great Cosmos in spite of them? Let us be consistent. If we must cut out this so-called German music, then by all means let us out-Calvin the Calvinists and do away

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