

OUR "CARUSO" DELUSION



THE Caruso fad is derided by a recent foreign visitor, Mr. André Tardieu, who gives some additional testimony about our operatic delusions. Writing in a recent number of the *Paris Temps* Mr. Tardieu comments with some acerbity upon American taste in music, as shown in the worship of a beautiful voice and the blindness to every other requisite quality. One of the habitués of the Metropolitan is reported to have said to the Parisian journalist: "We may assert, without boasting, that in this house we have listened to the finest voices in the world." Upon which Mr. Tardieu comments in these words, which we translate from the Paris journal:

"This is certainly true. And this tradition is still kept up. At this moment it is Caruso who reigns. His prestige is incomparable. He owes it first of all to the enormous price which he charges for his services, for in the theater the American public admire only those artists for whom they pay dear. He owes it also to the extraordinary vocal power with which nature has endowed him. We can not judge him from the rare occasions on which we have heard him in Paris. In New York, on the contrary, Caruso sings everything excepting Wagner. And everything that he sings he sings with the same facility, with the same sonorous prodigality—and also with the same bad taste. The Americans are surprised and dumfounded when they hear this criticism of Caruso. They admit that Caruso may not be particularly artistic, but they do not judge him as he deserves to be judged. In listening to him they forget to study him, and the richness of his voice satisfies them. This, however, is not sufficient for the European, fastidious with regard to style and artistic form. When Caruso sings a vulgar piece of music, 'Paillasses,' the unfitness of his acting and the mediocrity of his dramatic expression are equally palpable, but in 'Faust' he is absolutely lost. Throughout his representation is absurd. It is curious to notice his American public does not seem to be affected by his deficiencies. At any rate, they do not lay any emphasis on them, but, on the other hand, they listen with almost contemptuous indifference to artists of the second class, many of whom are in some points excellent. I have been struck by the quality of certain among them. On this point and from the general superiority of its company the Metropolitan is vastly superior to any opera-house in Europe. It has over them the advantage of a full treasury, because its opulent patrons are always on hand to make up any deficiency in the budget. Those who preside over its destinies have also a laudable regard to vocal perfection."

Apropos of these remarks of Mr. Tardieu are the following observations of "Mephisto" in *Musical America* (New York):

"This practically brings up the discussion again as to the difference between the taste of the public in this country in operatic matters and that in Europe. In Europe, when a man who has once been a fine singer loses his voice, but remains a great artist, they will listen to him. Of this, we have a splendid instance in Van Dyck, the Dutch tenor, who is still a favorite, but who some seven or eight years ago when he was in this country made a *fiasco d'estime*, because the public refused to forget his vocal deficiencies for the sake of his artistic ability.

"Critical people, while they like to hear music well sung, are not ready to accept a singer who has absolutely no artistic qualifications beyond the beauty of his voice and his fine method of using it. But the tenor with the 'golden notes' will always appeal to the women. It is but just to Mr. Caruso to state that a considerable part of his popularity in New York was gained by his amiability and his kindness to newspaper men. He was ever ready to give an interview or make a caricature—and most of his caricatures are very clever—and so the press worked for him, and that, with his unquestionably splendid voice, made him, for the time being, a great attraction."