

Edgar Elgar and the Phonograph

THE phonograph is winning its way in the world of art.

Of course, the tendency is to sneer at anything that is cheap. What is cheap reaches the many. And it is the first principle of the art snob, as of all snobs everywhere, to consider the common people incapable of any excellence.

But it is also true that in art, as everywhere, the really great master always reaches the masses.

And there is no reason why a machine cannot do artistic work. The reason machine-made furniture, for instance, is ugly is not in the machine, it is in the machine-maker.

And there is no reason why an automatic piano-player, which faithfully reproduces the performance of Harold Bauer or Miss Leginska, should not be much more artistically valuable in a home than a regular piano played atrociously by the young lady of the house.

Sir Edgar Elgar, the noted composer, recently presided at the opening of the new headquarters of a gramophone company in London.

Elgar is a great believer in the mechanical reproduction of music, and always conducts for the records of his own works.

"What musicians want," he said, "is more listeners."

And when he said that, he said, as the mayor's wife of an American city is reported to have said to a visiting European monarch, he "said a mouthful."

The more listeners, the wider the pub-

lic that appreciates and wants good music, the more demand there will be for first-class performers and the better they will be paid.

The phonograph teaches the multitude how to listen. The public will and can never learn all the technical secrets of music, but it can learn how to enjoy good music and what good music is.

And the only way to learn to love good music is to hear it over and over.

The reason why the average person, when asked what he wants to hear played, suggests the Missouri Waltz or Tipperary, is not that he is incurably low-brow, at least that is not wholly the reason; it is that he has heard said stuff often enough to know it, understand it and follow it.

If he had had a phonograph at home, and had heard Beethoven symphonies and the works of Schubert, Gounod and Wagner over and over, he would know them, love them and ask for them.

One who has heard selections from *Il Trovatore* till he is familiar with them is much more likely to go to grand opera when he visits New York. A want has been planted in him.

Sir Edgar Elgar is right when he recommends the modern mechanical music reproducer, with its superior technical accomplishment, to what he calls "the wild and virulent piano playing of the suburbs."

Which reminds us of what Oscar Wilde said, that the best criticism of a play or a musical creation is a good performance.