

“The March King”

THE Queen's Jubilee celebrations were intensely national in character and had no place in them for the official bestowment of honor upon others than the Queen and her subjects. But at least one native American received honor all along the



JOHN PHILIP SOUSA.

line of march, and that was John Philip Sousa, whose “Washington Post” march was, we are told, *the* music of the occasion. Rupert Hughes tells us this and a good many other interesting things about Sousa in *Godey's Magazine* (September). He begins with a defense of the artistic value of march-music:

“In common with most of those that pretend to love serious music, a certain friend of mine was for long guilty of the pitiful snobbery of rating march-tunes as the lowest form of the art. But one day he joined the Seventh Regiment, of New York, and his first long march was that heart-breaking dress-parade of about fifteen miles through the wind and dust of the day Grant's monument was dedicated. Most of the music played by the band was merely rhythmical embroidery, as unhelpful as a Clementi sonata; but now and then there would break forth a magic elixir that

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fairly picked his feet up for him, put marrow in unwilling bones, and replaced the dreary doggedness of the heart with a great zest for progress, a stout martial fire and a fierce *esprit de corps*, with patriotism indeed. In almost every case, that march belonged to one John Philip Sousa, little revered by the upper class of musicians.

"It came upon him then, that, if it is a worthy ambition in a composer to give voice to passionate love-ditties, or vague contemplation, or the deep despair of a funeral cortège, it is also a very great thing to instil courage and furnish an inspiration that will send men gladly, proudly, and gloriously through hardships into battle and death. This last has been the office of the march-tune."

So much for march-music in general. Of Sousa's marches in particular, Mr. Hughes says :

"It is only the plain truth to say that Mr. Sousa's marches have founded a school; that he has indeed revolutionized march-music. His career resembles that of Johann Strauss in many ways. A certain body of old fogies have always presumed to deride the rapturous waltzes of Strauss, tho they have won enthusiastic praise from even the esoteric Brahms, and gained from Wagner such words as these: 'One Strauss waltz overshadows in respect to animation, finesse, and real musical worth most of the mechanical, borrowed, factory-made products of the present time.' The same words might be applied to Mr. Sousa's marches with equal justice. They have served also for dance-music, and the two-step borne into vogue by Mr. Sousa's music has driven the waltz almost into desuetude.

"There is probably no composer in the world with a popularity equal to that of Mr. Sousa. Tho he sold his 'Washington Post' march outright for \$35, his 'Liberty Bell' march is said to have brought him \$35,000. It is found that his music has been sold to eighteen thousand bands in the United States alone. It is not surprising that every band in the United States should have yielded to the general demand for the tonic of his marches. The amazing thing is to learn that there are so many bands in this country. Mr. Sousa's marches have appeared on programs in all parts of the civilized world. At the Queen's Jubilee his 'Washington Post' march was the music of the occasion. When the Queen stepped forward to begin the grand review of the troops, the combined bands of the household brigade struck up the 'Washington Post.' On one other important occasion it was given the place of honor, and it appeared constantly as the chief march of the week.

"The reason for this overwhelming appeal to the hearts of a planet is not far to seek. The music is conceived in a spirit of high martial zest. It is proud and gay and fierce, thrilled and thrilling with triumph. Like all great music it is made up of simple elements, woven together by a strong personality. It is not difficult now to write something that sounds more or less like a Sousa march, any more than it is difficult to write parodies, serious or otherwise, on Beethoven, Mozart, or Chopin. The glory of Mr. Sousa is that he was the first to write in this style; that he has made himself a style; that he has so stirred the musical world that countless imitations have sprung up after him."

We extract also the following brief biographical sketch of Sousa :

"Like Strauss's, Mr. Sousa's father was a musician who forbade his son to devote himself to dance-music. As Strauss's mother enabled him secretly to work out his own salvation, so did

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Mr. Sousa's mother help him. Mr. Sousa's father was a political exile from Spain, and earned a precarious livelihood by playing a trombone in the very band at Washington which later became his son's stepping-stone to fame. Mr. Sousa was born at Washington in 1859. His mother is German, and Mr. Sousa's music shows the effect of Spanish yeast in sturdy German rye bread. Mr. Sousa's teachers were John Esputa and George Felix Benkert. The latter Mr. Sousa considers one of the most complete musicians this country has ever known. He put him through such a thorough theoretical training, that at fifteen Mr. Sousa was teaching harmony. At eight he had begun to earn his own living as a violin-player at a dancing-school, and at ten he was a public soloist. At sixteen he was the conductor of an orchestra in a variety theater. Two years later he was musical director of a traveling company in Mr. Milton Nobles's well-known play, 'The Phœnix,' for which he composed the incidental music. Among other incidents in a career of growing importance was a position in the orchestra with which the great Offenbach toured this country. At the age of twenty-six, after having played with face blacked as a negro minstrel, after traveling with the late Matt Morgan's Living Picture Company, and working his way through and above other such experiences in the struggle for life, Mr. Sousa became the leader of the United States Marine Band. In the twelve years of his leadership he developed this unimportant organization into one of the best military bands in the world."

In addition to his fame as a band-master, Mr. Sousa, we are told, "seems likely to take a very large place in the growing field of American comic opera." His greatest success in this line is "El Capitan," brought out by De Wolf Hopper. His compositions of all kinds number more than two hundred. The names of some of his most popular marches are as follows: "Liberty Bell," "Directorate," "High-School Cadets," "King Cotton," "Manhattan Beach," "Sound Off!" "Washington Post," "Picador." His latest and, Mr. Hughes thinks, his best, is "The Stars and Stripes Forever."

