



Music as a Human Need

Alma Webster Powell

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From the Preface:

IT will be observed that in the following pages political and economic events are presented in their aspect of emotion-producing forces in social pressure, with but scant attention to their other values. An artificially selective process must also be acknowledged in that, of those events only such as seem to have produced a direct emotional reaction upon a people have been considered. Those long continued economic movements which produced no sudden changes have not been taken into account, because what may be termed their disturbing effects were too gradual to allow of their being included among specific emotion-making forces*; slow changes are not sensed by whole peoples. Uneducated masses, especially, do not become conscious of progressive movements until their effects are so apparent as to require consideration by reason of aroused emotional reaction. The history of a slow transition, therefore, may be for the scientific purposes of this investigation unimportant as compared with the somewhat dislocated perturbation, which resulted at the moment when the events under consideration were happening, and calling forth a reaction definitely emotional. Moreover, at such a precise moment, the events may have been raised to social consciousness, not as they appear to us in the clear afterglow of scientific attitude and historical accuracy, but as popular concepts of the moment, having power to arouse intense national emotional reaction; similar recent popular waves of feeling, due not to facts as they are, but to popular conceptions of such facts, will readily occur to each reader.

With this warning that not the dignity of history, but the intensity of public emotionalism is within the purview and area of our investigation, we may proceed to a statement of the method and of the general thesis.

The method to be pursued, is to examine contemporaneous and concurrent public events and emotion products, as expressed in Music.

The results indicated may be given a preliminary statement as follows:

1. Agitation is a cause of pulse disturbance.
2. Sufficient agitation produces fatal disturbance of bodily rhythm.
3. All strong emotions are disturbers of rhythmic motion throughout the body.
4. Rhythmic motion, too often disturbed, leads to abnormal mental and physical conditions.
5. Civilization constantly "disturbs" the bodily rhythm.
6. The political and industrial troubles of a nation are signs of national "disturbance" of rhythm.
7. Music, closely expressing the emotional life of each period, is the unconscious application of a remedy to a human need of rhythmic stimulus.

These points are part of the general thesis, which may be stated in the following terms: MUSIC IS A HUMAN NEED, INCREASING AND DECREASING WITH SOCIAL PRESSURE.

The tendency of a group in each stage of human development is to produce Music fitting the character of the social disturbances of its time, and communities which most fully meet this need of rhythm by national culture of Music, tend to preserve for longer periods, the serenity of the public mind. Thus it will be seen that national control and support of Music may be assumed to be a national duty. This control and support will aid in the preservation of a healthy state of the public mind. Such a condition will make more effective all other efforts for the abolition of discontent, disease, vice and criminality.

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