

# An Appreciation of a Great Bandmaster

By MERTON NEVINS

WHEN on the last day of the expiring year of 1926 Frederick Neil Innes (one of the most noted of American bandmasters) passed from the charted sphere of the human visible and audible, and entered into the uncharted *somewhere* of the invisible, the inaudible and the impenetrable — with his passing the instrumental field in general and the band world in particular lost its living touch with a once sterling director, an artistic performer and program builder, an educational factor of force, and a dominating personality in the realm of music.

In brief obituary: Frederick Neil Innes (whose decease occurred on December 31, 1926) was born in London, England, in 1853. He came to this country under the managing supervision of the noted Patrick Sarsfield Gilmore (another great bandmaster), and made his initial public appearance with Gilmore's Band at Manhattan Beach in the summer of 1880 as trombone soloist unique and extraordinary. America's *Salve!* to the future bandmaster and instrumental educator was the intense furor of enthusiasm aroused by his marvelous manipulation of the trombone as a solo instrument. Practically speaking, Innes may be said to have been the creator of the later school of trombone playing, as up to the time of his advent here the full possibilities of the slide trombone never had been demonstrated, nor had it been in vogue to any great extent as a solo instrument.

Frederick Innes acquired his finishing education at the London Conservatory of Music (studying piano, violin and harmony as well as trombone), and prior to his appearance in America was trombonist in the King's Life Guard Regiment Band — a crack organization stationed at Buckingham Palace. He continued playing with Gilmore until 1887, when he organized his own band at San Francisco, and the concert and festival tours of that celebrated ensemble were prominent factors in writing American instrumental music history. In 1915 he founded the Innes School of Music in Denver, Colorado, which afterwards was merged into the present Conn National School of Music, and of which institution he was president and head instructor at the time of his demise.

Besides being a premier trombone soloist, a noted bandmaster and a proficient teacher, Mr. Innes also had composing among his accomplishments. He composed *The Ambassador*, a romantic opera; *California*, a descriptive overture; several *Orchestral Suites*, and quite a number of compositions in smaller form; he also wrote and lectured on music topics.

The passing of this man and musician surely left a vacant niche in the active world of instrumental music in America, but his work as a conscientious educator, a proficient and painstaking instructor, an upbuilder of American musicianship and a benefactor to music in general stands as a monument to his energy, efficiency, enthusiasm and incentive.

## VALE AND VALEDICTORY

For the American instrumental music world and its living contact and association with Frederick Neil Innes, the "moving finger" has written: *Vale!* And yet through the herewith posthumously printed article, in a way there now comes what Tennyson so beautifully embodied in verse as "the touch of a vanished hand, the sound of a voice that is still."

In response to a request from Mr. C. V. Buttelman (the managing editor of this magazine) for some facts regarding the Conn National School of Music, and his own work in connection therewith, a brief note came from



FREDERICK NEIL INNES

Mr. Innes stating that, "feeling quite seedy," he was up in Ontario taking a much-needed rest, but that he would do his best to meet the request. With the note there also came — not typewritten, but with pencil and in his own hand — what in all probability is the last material for publication written by the late Frederick Neil Innes, and practically his *Valedictory*. The manuscript — in reality a letter, and not intended by Mr. Innes for verbatim publication — is one of Mr. Buttelman's most valued possessions, not only for its historic worth, but as a remarkably accurate reflection of the heart and character of one of the finest and biggest men the world of music has ever known.

## THE VANISHED HAND AND VOICE

"My initiatory work with the Conn National School of Music was to organize and place on a sure footing a true school for the younger musicians of America. The school is now well established with a faculty of nationally famous teachers, and in some respects is a non-profit-making institution — it gave away about sixty free scholarships this year, the recipients of them comprising students of violin, piano, harmony, public-school music, directing, and all band and orchestral instruments; also, for these scholarship students the school has established its own dormitories. There also is a Lyceum-Chataqua Department, which thoroughly trains students for this branch of work and places them in positions after completion of the course. We also have our own leased radio system (Station WTAS), and on every Thursday night our advanced students are permitted to broadcast in turn. The student orchestra and band are both trained and directed by myself; also, I am president and managing director of the school, which in reality is the successor of the former Innes Correspondence Teaching School in Denver, Colorado.

"The Denver school was organized by me some six or seven years ago, when because of the illness of a member of my family it became neces-

sary for me to take her to the Colorado climate. Not having anything with which to occupy my spare time, and thinking that the establishment of such a school might be a means of expressing my gratitude to the musicians of America who so largely had contributed to my success as a soloist and band director, I organized the Denver institution. The inevitable finally came. I was left alone, and thereupon determined to give up all active work in music and enjoy a long rest through the few remaining years of my life.

"In coming to this determination, however, I had reckoned without Mr. Greenleaf. He came to me in Chicago and presented convincing arguments that, as a duty, I owed it to the instrumental music profession to establish a *much larger institution* and carry it to even a greater success. At first I did not wish to 'carry on' with the project; I had ample private means whereby to live, and felt that I not only needed but was entitled to the rest. However, Greenleaf is a most persistent chap when he once starts after a fellow, and so in the end I simply was obliged to capitulate and 'enlist for action' in the

## CONN NATIONAL SCHOOL OF MUSIC

"Under the plans as outlined, and to assure its success, a great deal more money was put into the new school than as an individual I had felt justified in putting into the original, and the institution has become one of the largest and most successful music schools of its kind in this country. One inviolable rule of the school is that any propaganda regarding particular make of instruments is strictly prohibited, and insofar as the school itself is concerned all makes of instruments look alike to us. The school recently held two great summer courses for directors, each course covering five weeks of very intensive study; one of these was for graduates, the other for post-graduates. There is an ever increasing demand for our graduate and post-graduate students. These are snapped up for service by other schools, municipal bands, etc., almost before they have received their school credits, diplomas and degrees — the latter being issued by authority of the State of Illinois.

"Naturally, the work connected with the Conn school is quite different from my original work as director of the Innes Band (an organization with which I traveled for thirty years as its head), but the realization of the great good I now am enabled to accomplish for so many hundreds of worthy young American musicians through the agency of this school makes my new work thoroughly congenial. I am gradually withdrawing from all personal teaching, because my duties as executive head of the school are more than sufficient to occupy two men. However, the withdrawal can be made only by gradual degrees, as at present the school seems to rest largely upon my individual reputation as an authority on instrumental music, but gradually I am training some of the younger men of the faculty to take over and carry on my work.

"My supreme ambition is to make the Conn school a national authoritative aid to the public schools, whose present band and orchestral accomplishments eventually bid fair to make America the greatest musical country on earth. A great work already has been done in this direction, and the future gives promise of even greater things. I think that one of the big factors which tended to promote the growth of the present school music movement, was the organizing and training by myself of the Boy Scouts' Band in Denver some eight