

E. HAROLD GEER

1886 - 1957

It was with genuine regret that we learned during the Christmas season of the sudden death of Professor Emeritus E. Harold Geer at the age of seventy-one years, more than half of which were spent as a member of the Vassar faculty in the Department of Music.

Those of us who knew him well respected his musicianship, and his uncompromisingly high musical standards. He gave unstintingly of his service to the college as a teacher, organist, director of the Vassar Choir and of the Madrigal Group, and as chairman of the Music Department for a period of years after the resignation of Professor Dickinson from that position.

Mr. Geer was born in Tabor, Iowa in 1886. He received the B. A. and M. A. degrees from Doane College in Nebraska, and a Mus. B. degree from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music in Ohio. In 1949 Doane College bestowed upon him an honorary Mus. D. degree. He studied organ and composition with Widor and Gedalge in Paris, organ with T. Tertius Noble and piano with Ernest Hutcheson in this country, and composition and conducting at the Conservatoire Americain de Fontainebleau in France.

Before coming to Vassar College Mr. Geer taught at Lake Erie College for Women in Ohio and at Albion College in Michigan. From 1913 to 1916 he was organist and choir director of the First Congregational Church in Fall River, Massachusetts. In 1916 he came to Vassar College as Assistant Professor of Music and taught here for thirty-six years. After his retirement in 1952 he went to Chatham College in Pittsburgh. Subsequently he served as acting chairman of the Music Department at Hood College in Maryland. Last summer he taught at the Yale Music School in Norfolk, Connecticut.

He was a member of the College Music Association, Pi Kappa Lambda and a Fellow of the American Guild of Organists. He edited and arranged over one hundred compositions of choral music for women's voices. He edited the beloved "Peace I Leave with You", originally harmonized by George Coleman Gow for women's voices. He also made an arrangement of this for mixed voices. Mr. Geer was editor of The Hymnal for Colleges and Schools published in 1955 By the Yale University Press and now in use in the Vassar Chapel. His last publication E. HAROLD GEER (Continued)

was a book, Organ Registration in Theory and Practice, which came out last month (December, 1957). The study of this subject was carried on by Mr. Gear for many years at Vassar College. Grants from the Salmon Fund

aided his research and the publication of the book. Mr. Geer gave organ recitals at the Prague Municipal Auditorium in Czechoslovakia and at York Minster, England. He had numerous appearances in recital in this country, playing programs of organ music in colleges, universities, civic auditoriums and churches. His Sunday evening organ recitals on the Vassar Campus offered a wide variety of excellent literature skillfully performed. To many generations of students these programs came to be known as "dark music" since they were performed in the dramatic setting of the dimly lighted chapel.

Unquestionably Mr. Geer's primary musical interest at Vassar College was the Choir, which he directed from 1920 to 1952. He devoted scholarly research to the selection of choral material which represented the world's finest settings of sacred texts. The music he introduced ranged in style from the works of English composers in the Renaissance Period to those of Vaughan Williams and Kodaly in the twentieth century. The insistent emphasis on superior music certainly had a great influence in improving the musical taste of students who sang it and heard it from the days of required chapel to a later time when chapel attendance was no longer obligatory.

The music for the regular chapel services and for other programs was meticulously prepared and beautifully performed. Under Mr. Geer's direction the annual program of Christmas music became a tradition at Vassar College and attracted large audiences.

To a casual acquaintance Mr. Geer may have seemed to be rather reserved and formal but he was certainly far from that when he conducted performances of the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, "Trial by Jury" on Founder's Day. To those who were intimately associated with him he was a kind and understanding friend and excellent teacher. His perceptions were keen and he possessed a quick sense of humor. He was frank and outspoken, and even those who disagreed with him on policies he favored or with his methods of procedure, never doubted for a moment the sincerity of his convictions.

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Socially the Geer home on Raymond Avenue was always a friendly place to visit. The choir parties which Mr. and Mrs. Geer gave each year for choir members and faculty guests and the memorial Geer family Christmas cards, which Mr. Geer designed, will long be remembered.

We extend to Mrs. Geer and to his surviving sons and daughter the sympathy of the faculty in their loss

and express to them the appreciation of the faculty
for professor Geer's long and distinguished service
to Vassar College.

Donald M. Pearson

Barbara Swain

John M. Peirce

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