

GOTTSCHALK'S DIARY.*

It may be questioned whether one pays a very flattering tribute to any person in calling him the most conspicuous of American musicians, but this is perhaps the truest statement that can be made of Gottschalk's claim on our attention. Even this is hardly more than technically correct, for though the accident of birth made him an American citizen, he did not represent, in race, training, language, or disposition, any of the features which mark our national life. Born in 1829, at New Orleans, of a Creole mother and a father English by nationality though German in name; educated through his earlier years in that least American of American atmospheres, and after the age of twelve in France; passing his young manhood in Europe and his later life in the most varied wanderings, and dying in Brazil at the age of forty, after an absence of more than four years from his native land; speaking several languages with freedom, but habitually thinking and writing his personal memoranda in French; possessed, finally, of a tropical nature, open to all sensuous impulses, full of undisciplined benevolence, moved by every appeal to his sympathies, giving magnificent charities, but with as little moral or intellectual earnestness as a humming-bird—spending at one time, for example, six years in West Indian languor and indulgence, to which he alludes with a sort of defiant repentance;—it is plainly almost a misuse of language to call him an American at all. Such as he was, however, he no doubt filled a more notable place in music than any other of our countrymen; and so, on the principle that beggars should not be choosers, we must be glad for whatever credit attaches to his career.

It is hardly worth while to take time in a serious attempt to estimate his musical importance. As a composer, he has left perhaps a half-dozen pieces which will live. The "Last Hope" and "Cradle Song" will always be played in boarding-schools, and musicians will doubtless for many years yet place his name occasionally on their programmes. His manner was original, but probably no one will pretend that he was in any proper sense a creator in music. His earliest and most lasting successes were gained in compositions based on negro and Creole melodies; and one may learn much of his conception of things from chance remarks in his diary like this: "I am composing *an important arrangement* on 'Un ballo in maschera.'" A very large proportion of his published works are of this sort.

He was beyond question the most accomplished pianist of American birth who has yet appeared. His talent showed itself at an incredibly early age. At seven he gave a successful concert in New Orleans, and at twenty-one was handsomely complimented by such musicians as Berlioz and Adam. But with all his technical skill he was to piano-playing substantially what the illustrious Gilmore is to the orchestra. He was great in a *potpourri* of national airs, and during our late war his variations on the "Battle Cry of Freedom" never failed to excite the wildest enthusiasm. He produced with *éclat* a "Siege of Saragossa" for ten pianos, "dedicated to Spain"; and one of the funniest passages in his diary is the story of the amateur of San Francisco who volunteered to assist at a performance of the march in "Tannhaeuser" for *fourteen pianos*! Gottschalk makes fun of the arrangement which he "saw at Havana" of the march in "Le Prophète" for flageolet with guitar accompaniment, but it is by no means certain that he would have refused to put that very arrangement on his programmes if he had supposed it would help fill the house. Indeed, if one were to recognize in him any truly American characteristic, it must be a certain "star-spangled conspicuousness," as Howells

* NOTES OF A PIANIST. By Louis Moreau Gottschalk, Pianist and Composer, Chevalier, etc. etc. Preceded by a short biographical sketch. with contemporaneous criticisms. Edltd by his sister, Clara Gottschalk. Translated from the French by Robt. E. Peterson, M.D. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co.

calls it, which is not obscured even by the exuberant sentimentality of "La Morte " and the "Murmures Eoliennes."

But with all needful reservations, and in spite of a deplorably halting and clumsy translation, our gratitude is distinctly due to this erratic artist for the entertainment afforded by his diary, which, rescued from many dangers, sees the light for the first time now, twelve years after the death of the writer. An unpretentious and rather loose-jointed sketch of his life precedes the diary proper, which is by no means a biographical monument, but is composed of "notes written without order and without connection, with hasty pen, upon the leaves of my pocket-book," and "at first destined only to be read by myself." Its worth consists in its frank and circumstantial record of the life of a travelling pianist of eminence, and is enhanced by the singular variety of his experiences, embracing court receptions, bull-fights and public presentations, charity concerts, a series of triumphant tours reaching from Quebec to San Francisco and from Milwaukee to the Straits of Magellan; perils of war, peace, and locomotion, battles, invasions, cold, and heat; — a knight out of a fairy-book in search of adventure could hardly have done and suffered more. The pictures of this tourist-life are not so full of seductive charm as some persons might expect. One extract on this point may stand for many:

"I live on the railroad; my home is somewhere between the baggage-car and the last car of the train. Certain naturalists pretend that insects reflect in their physiological conformation the peculiar characters of the vegetation upon which they live. According to this (if the peculiarity of insects extends as far as pianists) I ought to have the gait of a locomotive and the intelligence of a hand-box. All notions of time and space are effaced from my mind. Just like the drunkard, of whom some one asked the distance between the Chaussée d'Antin and the Porte St. Denis, who replied 'Just ten small glasses.' If you ask me what time it is, I will reply 'It is time to shut my trunk,' or 'It is time to play the 'Banjo,' or ' It is time to put on my black coat'. These three events are very nearly the most memorable of my daily existence. I console myself by thinking that I am not the only one of the species."

The style of these notes is vivacious and pointed, though much of the keenness is sadly blunted by the translator. Such expressions as "anteriorly" for "previously," "truly to speak," "solution [meaning interruption] of continuity," betray something more than inexperience; and the repeated allusions to " Dwight's Paper" show a singular want of acquaintance with ultimate facts in musical history. But with all this the book is full of entertainment, and tempts the reviewer to exceed his limits in extracting from its pages. Two or three specimen passages may be given. There is, for example, a certain *naïveté* in this:

" It was an hour before commencing a concert at Boston that a dispatch from one of my uncles apprised me that my father was in the pangs of death, and had just blessed me — singular and touching wandering of his great intelligence at the moment of his dissolution—in seven languages, which he spoke admirably. I cannot describe to you my despair, but let those who comprehend it add to it the terrible necessity of appearing in public at such a moment. I might have put off the concert, but the expenses had been incurred; the least delay augmented my loss.

* * * I drove back my despair and played. * * *

A newspaper had the melancholy courage to say that doubtless it was unfortunate that I had lost my father, but the public had paid a dollar for the purpose of receiving a dollar's worth of music, and had nothing to do with the personal affairs of Mr. Gottschalk,—a logic which was more rigorous than christian."

Several points of the writer's character are illustrated in the following incident:

"At Washington I had the whole diplomatic corps at my concert. * * * I was to play the 'Union,' a patriotic fantasia in which I have intercalated the American national airs. The idea

came into my mind to salute each one of the gentlemen by playing to him the national air of the country which he represented. This entered into my conception of the piece, enlarging the whole, its title being, as I have told you, 'The Union.' I had the pleasure of seeing all these official countenances brighten successively as fast as appeared 'Partant pour la Syrie,' 'La Marche Real,' Garibaldi's Hymn, 'God save the Czar.' Not knowing the Belgian Hymn I was satisfied by playing, as counterpoint to 'Partant pour la Syrie,' Blondel's air, 'O Richard, O mon Roi.' Mr. Blondel, the minister of Leopold, found my impromptu to his taste, and rewarded me with some beautiful verses, which I intend to set to music."

The waiter-girls in the Western hotels receive their share of attention:

"These young girls are for the most part ugly and dirty. I suspect that they are princesses in disguise; their squeamish looks, their air of offended dignity with which they give me a very small piece of roast beef, make me divine their illustrious origin and fill me with confusion."

He frankly discloses his fondness for applause and rebukes the coldness of the public in certain unhappy localities. Even a dispassionate writer cannot fail to sympathize with the indignation of the artist at the rudeness of some of his audiences. Thus, at a Connecticut town:

"The concert was deplorable this evening. Complete silence. I correct myself. Silence when I entered and when I went out, but animated conversation all the time I was playing. But happily we conducted things briskly, and despatched over eight pieces in twenty-five minutes."

The statement that "as a composer for the piano Beethoven falls below mediocrity" may be quoted as one of the most original things in the book; and some hearts may respond to the sentiment, "I know nothing more ill-bred than a fashionable Englishman, unless it be *two* fashionable Englishmen." In that particular case there were three, and the pianist's cup overflowed.

CHARLES S. HOLT.