

## The Pioneers of Music in America.

LYRIC AND OPERATIC.

II.

BY JEROME HOPKINS.

THE distinguished personages spoken of in a previous article may be called the Operatic and Lyric Pioneers of Music in America; but there were many pioneers who worked in other fields of the art and were neither operatic nor lyric.

There were pioneer pianists, organists, orchestral conductors, choral conductors, violinists, military bandmasters, ballad specialists (such as Dempster and Kelly) down to small confederations of part-song interpreters (like the "Alleghanians" of Mr. Bowler, the "Peake Family" and the "Hutchinsons"); and then there were the tribe of so-called "Church-Music" propagandists, among whom Lowell Mason, L. W. Emerson, W. B. Bradbury, J. B. Woodbury, P. P. Bliss and others were conspicuous, few of whom, however, knew anything about the true ecclesiastical flavor.

A long essay might be written about all these personalities, but I can only touch upon a few of them.

Henri Herz, the noted French piano-player, may be said to be the first really distinguished foreign virtuoso on that instrument to visit America, and within a few months Leopold de Meyer (an Austrian) followed him. This was in the early forties (1844, I think). Herz was a polished gentleman, and his playing was a lovely example of *finesse*, while de Meyer was just the reverse, and was the first example of Teutonic *klatterdashmasch* that Americans had ever heard. (They have since had a sufficiency of others!)

Some remarkable stories used to be told of de Meyer, and it was said that in New Orleans, after one of his concerts, his valet was "rubbing him down" and actually wrung a pint (or a quart, I forget exactly which) of sudorific exudation from his underclothing. It was also reported that the Turkish Sultan's only remark, after hearing him, was that he had entertained all the famous pianists, but that de Meyer "sweated" most of them all!

This reminds me that a talent for perspiring used to be a valued attribute of the Scotch ministers, one of whom is eulogized by a certain ecclesiastical historian in these words: "Eh! He had a great power o' watter for he grat" (*i. e.* groaned) "and spat and swat like mischief"; and a certain Rev. Mr. Forbes kept this up during six-hour sermons!

In every American city where Herz and de Meyer both played, partisanships were created, and the public took sides as to which was the greater. So far above any previous American ideas of pianism were such performances, that their stimulating effect upon young students was in many places prodigious.

It is hard to believe that Herz wrote and published no fewer than five piano concertos, all of them now a good deal dearer than those of John Field, whose realm was St. Petersburg, altho he was English, and who lived a generation before Herz; yet such is "fashion."

De Meyer's compositions had greater vitality than Herz's, and his Fantasias on F. David's beautiful song "*L' Hironnelle*," Paganini's "*Carnival de Venise*," and Donizetti's "*Lucrezia Borgia*," as well as his own "*Airs Russe*," and "*Marche Marocaine*" (this last having been orchestrated by the great Berlioz), would be well worth reviving by some "hustler" pianists of to-day.

Richard Hoffman was another pioneer pianist. He came from England (his real name being Andrews), and attracted attention through the friendship of the late auctioneer, Arthur T. Jones. Hoffman was but nineteen when he played at Jenny Lind's concerts; and he is one of the few great artists from abroad who has never deteriorated by settling in this country. It was he who first made Chopin's divine "Concerto in E" known to us at the New York Philharmonic Society concerts.

Alfred Jaell came a little later, and, if I do not err, played at Sontag's concerts. He was a German, and a handsome, thick-set, dapper little man, with side-whiskers. His transcription of Verdi's "*Caro nome*," from "*Rigoletto*," made his reputation (as the *Galop di Bravura* did that of Schulhoff, who, by the way, never came to this country).

After Jaell I do not recall any notable pianist from abroad till Gustave Satter came from Vienna, said to be the greatest reader from orchestral scores next to the unapproachable Franz Liszt. About the same time (*circa* '58) the fascinating youth, Arthur Napoleon (*aetat.* 14), appeared, but only for a short time.

His poetic, thoughtful face made a deep impression upon me, while his clear and intelligible interpretations of masterworks charmed all. I have never heard Pauer's famous "*La Cascade*" more exquisitely played than by him. He afterward settled in Rio de Janeiro.

A short time before Arthur Napoleon's visit, one of the most famous of all pianists came to America; and for a wonder made money. This was Sigismund Thalberg. Technic, technic! Oh, what a master of technic was Thalberg! It is the fashion now to "talk him down"; but let me assure some of the machine pianists of to-day, that an executant of enormous facility, who *never* allows his fingers to run away from his head and heart, but invariably forces the latter two to govern his fingers, is as rare now as it was forty years ago; and I strongly suspect that the absence of intellect in modern concert audiences is largely owing to the absence of intellect in

concert-pianists and singers. Thus most of our great technicians have to take to the teaching treadmill to get bread and butter.

And Thalberg was *such* a refined and polished gentleman! I have a letter from him in my collection, dated 1856, in which he assures me that "he would be happy and proud" to play at one of the concerts of the "American Music Association" (of which I was then the President), provided he returned to New York in time from the West. But alas! he arrived too late.

After Thalberg came S. B. Mills, an Englishman, educated in Leipzig, if I do not mistake. As one of the later "pioneers" in piano-playing in America, Mr. Mills deserves most distinguished homage. It was he who first opened to us the glories of Schumann's monumental piano concerto in A minor (universally now conceded to be the king of all concertos). It were vain for me to try to describe the intensity of emotions produced upon my ever music-hungry young soul by that man's godlike performances at Bergman's Sunday concerts at the old Broadway Assembly Rooms. His technic (like Thalberg's) was perfection, and his powers of endurance were prodigious. I think Mr. Mills can be safely added to the few great foreign artists that stimulated "young musical America" to renewed efforts toward a high ideal.

Mills became very celebrated as one of the Parepa troupe. (Now Mme. Parepa was a great singer without doubt, and perhaps should have been mentioned above with the other vocalists, but the truth is that I always thought she was overestimated.)

At the same time with the advent of Mills or a little earlier (in the fifties) musical New York was fairly earthquaked by an entirely different breed of pianist, a Hebrew Creole born in New Orleans, but educated in Paris, and his name was Louis Moreau Gottschalk.

Octavia Hensel has written the biography of this fascinating and consummate genius of the keyboard, if ever there was one; and altho I might rave over him for pages, I can do better by referring the reader to that lady's little gem of musical biography.

If the special and distinctive one among Gottschalk's other entrancing attributes were to be designated, I should pronounce it to be his *bravura*, or the ability to work up a climax of virtuosity into a *tourbillon* of passion, with the most miraculous control of digital muscles, and never forgetting the proper use of the pedals—that pitfall of nine-tenths of the pianists, who so often worship their fingers but forget their feet. Gottschalk's selection of certain Negro melodies for themes of his piano paraphrases, was one of the happiest of conceits, and was felicitous indeed when contrasted with Dvorak's analogous ambition to incorporate native melodies in *his* "American Symphony"; for poor Dvorak seems to have been supplied (by some booby) with ugly and uncouth themes in spite of beautiful ones being so plentiful.

Gottschalk's treatment of the lively and brilliant "*Bamboula*" is *sui generis*, and was pronounced by as high an authority as the immortal Hector Berlioz to be a "new departure in piano composition." His other works, "*La Bananier*," "*Ossian*," "*Berceuse*" and "*Pastorella e Cavalliere*," the Nocturne in F sharp minor, the "Banjo" and the pathetic and original requiem "She is Dead" are all distinguished by an extraordinary variety of conception and ingenious construction and are generic "concert pieces" that neither put audiences to sleep nor drive them out of the hall, as so much piano-playing does today.

Many of my readers may recall the Thalberg and Gottschalk performance of the former's renowned "Norma Duet" for two pianos. There is a certain chromatic scale in it extending through many octaves and played first by one and then by the other performer, and admirably calculated to exhibit the contrasted beauty of touch in the two players. Musicians used actually to hold their breath in expectancy of this crucial test of pure technic by two such incomparable interpreters. Thalberg's scale was one oleaginous and honeyed streamlet of smoothest ecstasy, while Gottschalk's was all of these but with a certain sparkling individuality of each separate link in the wondrous tone-chain added, and comprising a gradual crescendo up to the skyrockety treble keys that fairly entranced the auditors and forced from them a volcano of applause *in the midst of the music!* That *Duo* was an epoch by itself.

Another noted pioneer of music was William Vincent Wallace, ushered on to the public stage in America by William Hall & Son, the well-known music firm, then corner of Broadway and Murray Street. That must have been between 1859 and 1862. Wallace was an Irishman, and when I knew him must have been at least forty-five. He was a brilliant pianist, a good deal in the style of Maurice Strakosch, but rather of the *ad captandum* school, if such a thing can be classified. Wallace was not a beauty, and in fact were it not for his affable manners, he might well have passed for a hostler or tradesman. But he was an excellent scholar in the art, wrote contrapuntally and grammatically, which was more than could be said of Leopold de Meyer and Ole Bull, and had the greatest appreciation of the immortal Masters, "who being dead, yet speak," a virtue not quite invariable with successful *virtuosi*.

I remember a Philharmonic concert, at the old Broadway Tabernacle, down near Leonard Street, and at which Wallace and his wife appeared, for she was also a fine pianiste, and a very beautiful Creole. They played Wallace's *Duo* for two pianos, on the Romance from Halévy's opera, "*L'Eclair*," and, their stools being too low, I remember two chairs were sent for, on each of which a long cushion from one of the pews was doubled up (for the Tabernacle was a church, be it remembered), and the ends stuck out about four feet on each side of

the chairs. And this was in "swell " New York. It is worthy of remark that both Wallace and Strakosch won their great popularity through a polka; Wallace's was called the "*Polka de Concert*," and Strakosch's, "The Flirtation." Both were dainty and effective works, and had a great run.

Wallace died in Europe. His four operas are "Maritana," "Lurline," "Matilda of Hungary," and "The Amber Witch"; but only the first two are much known, and he never heard the second one at all. This is not the place for an analysis, but it is conceded that the overture to the first is the best thing Wallace ever wrote. It, like Weber's "Euryanthe" Overture, is one of the few such works with a charming little piece of fugal writing in the middle.

But I am forgetting the limitations of time, space, and of human musical assimilation, and only regret that I cannot add to the above, some reminders of the pioneer violinists—Sivori, Ole Bull, Vieuxtemps and Carl Rosa; the pioneer organists, Drs. Hayter, of Boston; Edward Hodges, the Nestor of true ecclesiastical music at Old Trinity, New York City; the genial and wonderful George W. Morgan (who first showed the New World how John Sebastian Bach's Titanic Fugues should be interpreted); Father Mooney, of St. Bridget's, Tompkins Square, New York; the eccentric Herr Mayerholer, of the Roman Catholic Church of the Nativity (a little-known but magnificent organist); the pioneer conductors, George Loder, Carl Eckert, George F. Bristow, Max Maretzek, Anthony Reiff, Dr. Leopold Damrosch, Julius Benedict, Theo Eisfeld, C. Bergman Carl Anschuetz, Josef Gungl, Rudolph Bial (a true but ill-used genius of the baton), the great Jullien, Musard, and our own talented Allen Dodworth, the greatest bandmaster known in America up to 1860, without doubt.

To these should be added the Philadelphia pioneers, Signor Trajetta, one of the purest masters of the traditions of Italian singing ever known in the United States; Dr. Meignen, a contrapuntist, whose name is respected by the first musicians; F. C. Hupfeld, whose chamber-music concerts were a school of great value; and Charles Hommann, who composed no fewer than six symphonies, and was himself a fine organist.

In Baltimore one of the most enthusiastic pioneers in music was J. M. Deems, not only as cornet virtuoso and conductor, but also as composer. His cantata of "Esther" is a noble work.

Among the Boston pioneers should be mentioned Carl Zerrahn, the noted choral conductor; Kreismann, a fine tenor and teacher; and Otto Dresel, a refined pianist. Thomas Ryan, founder of the famous "Mendelssohn Quintet Club" of instruments, ough', however, to be honored still more than any of these; for his labors in the cause of the best music were abnormal, and their continuity extended over thirty years.

Nor should those musical pioneers be forgotten who were neither singers, players, composers, teachers nor conductors. I refer to the literary enthusiasts whose pens were often more puissant than some of the others' throats and fingers. And it must be confessed that they have been very few in number; and among them I cannot recall a solitary foreigner of ability except Monsieur Oscar Commettant, a great friend of Gottschalk's—and whose short sojourn in New York served to disgust him with its art-despising atmosphere, and so he shrank back into Paris—and H. C. Watson, an Englishman.

R. Storrs Willis (brother of the poet, N. P.) posed for some years as an authority on music, and as editor of an absurd, dilettantic little periodical called *Once a Month*. I often thought that it was "once too much"; but still Mr. Willis was a "pioneer," *malgré* his Miss Nancyisms, "negligences and ignorances."

Another, of far greater caliber, was R. Grant White, known better as the author of "Shakespearian Studies." Mr. White, altho narrow and eminently conservative, still did much admirable service in the columns of the now deceased *New York Courier and Enquirer*, and also in the now equally defunct *Galaxy Magazine* in behalf of the Dignity of Art. He had a facile pen, a smooth flow of illustration and metaphor, and wrote an eminently charming article; but he was an insane enemy of Richard Wagner's music-dramas, and wrote as if forgetful that there is as great a variety in human ears as in human noses.

But John S. Dwight, of Boston, was, perhaps, the most influential musical literary man of all American pioneers in music. For over twenty years he edited the *Journal of Music*, which was to thousands of students a priceless weekly *vade mecum* of sturdy honesty, consistent integrity, and sound scholarship, but without a particle of patriotism and with seldom any but perfunctory praises for budding talent. He, too, was a fiend of scornful vituperation of the new school, and kept up peppering the Titan Wagner with his little pea-shooter as long as he lived and wrote. He it was that because some letters from Wagner to his costumer were published, dubbed him "the milliner composer"!

Another literary musical pioneer was H. C. Watson, previously mentioned, an English song-writer and composer of real worth. He edited and, I believe, founded the *Art Journal*, a poor, sickly little weekly designed to straddle the two horses of music and printing, but which soon dropped design and "ran" only music, if "creeping" can be called "running."

I honestly consider Mr. Watson's articles on Gottschalk's concerts the finest specimens of piano-playing criticism I ever read; and I do not know a writer in the country to-day who could equal them, unless he were some great pianist.

Unfortunately, pianists as a rule either cannot, at least they do not, either write or speak, and when they do, they resemble some of our loveliest watering-place, summer girls; the moment they open their mouths the illusion vanishes!

The name of Fanny Malone Raymond (afterward Mrs. Ritter) should be recorded as the solitary worthy feminine musical literary pioneer known to me. The lady did excellent work for many years, not only in New York but also in Cincinnati and Boston, and always in the cause of high art, thus proving her superior claims to respect over her European prototype, Elize Polko.

But the greatest name among our literary musical pioneers is that of the late lamented and outrageously neglected Wm. H. Fry, of Philadelphia, who for many years was the musical critic of the *New York Tribune*.

I could fill many columns about Mr. Fry, who was an undoubted genius of philosophy, politics, and music, as well as of literature. His devotion to "Abraham Lincoln" killed Mr. Fry by overexertion in out-of-door speeches during those fierce days of sectional struggle. As a cynical iconoclast, who had no reverence for the dry dust of traditional and bag-wig musical "authority," Mr. Fry was simply immensely refreshing to me—then not much more than a boy.

Fry could not abide the "vain repetition" of words that old Handel and his contemporaries indulged in as "the fashion" in their works; and their unpoetic didacticisms used to almost make him froth at the mouth when he talked of them. For example, said he:

"How is it possible to get up any dramatic enthusiasm over such words as

" ' All we like sheep-eep-eep have gone astray.'

" ' And their land brought frogs-ogs-ogs.'

" ' Amen-a-- men-men-men-en-en—' etc.

"Why, I'd as lief set a sheriff's advertisement to music!"

Mr. Fry was all opera. He had no use for music apart from poetic sentiment and passionate expression. He seemed to me to know little or nothing of the organ or piano; but he composed two operas and a *Stabat Mater* which ought to be revived, besides writing volumes of conscientious and incisive critiques on musical events, among them, one on Gounod's "Faust," and his analysis of Wagner's "Tannhäuser," which was as exhaustive and elaborate as that of "Faust."

In conclusion, dear reader, it is sad indeed that with "a past" by Pioneers in music such as I have endeavored to recall, and by hundreds of others, and in spite of armies of so-called "teachers" and "professors" of the art in every town and city; and altho our country is well peppered by "conservatories" of music, including everything from a jewsharp to a bombardon, no manager, unless he is insane, will risk a concert by the greatest artists and of the best music *without a guaranty subscription!*

This is certainly a roost extraordinary fact. The best and sublimest music is a losing game unless it is associated with charity, with fashion, with conviviality, or with rum, whisky and beer. As to the *why* and *wherefore*, let the conundrum be answered by a greater philosopher than "yours truly."

The above sketch is an attempt to show that the present condition of music in the United States (if at all creditable to a nation of such imposing pretensions in other ways) has not been owing to any one school of pioneers or propagandists, but to many; and my list is very imperfect, without doubt.

I cannot close, however, without a word or two of respect—nay, almost veneration—for three more pioneers of the art, namely, the great publishing houses of Oliver Ditson & Co., G. Shirmer and A. P. Schmidt, of Boston. The first two were the pioneer publishers of the greatest musical classics, and at a time when it was simply impossible to make them pay; the third has made a specialty of American works.

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