

RECOLLECTIONS OF GOTTSCHALK.

BY JOHN FRANCIS GILDER.

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I HAVE heard many pianists of note, dating back into the "forties," beginning with Henry Herz, and extending through to Paderewski. Of the entire number, I consider Thalberg, Gottschalk, and Rubinstein the three greatest. Each possessed genius, originality, and individuality as a composer. Rubinstein covered a larger range of composition than either of the others. Thalberg created a new school of piano effects, and Gottschalk had very great individuality as a composer. His compositions, however, require for their proper interpretation not only an almost perfect technic, but a touch capable of the most delicate expression, and also of great power. To be a "good Gottschalk player" requires a poetical nature. One must possess the delicacy of a Joseffy combined with the power of a Rubinstein to be able to give a correct idea of the full capabilities of Gottschalk's music. Although I appreciate and admire Gottschalk as a composer, I think he was still greater as a virtuoso. I feel grateful to him for having been the author of a number of compositions that I have used for concerts and recitals for many years with the greatest success. I had many opportunities of hearing him play, and imbibed inspiration from his superb performance of his most notable pieces; consequently, though not, strictly speaking, a pupil of his, I acquired from him many useful points of expression and style.

The most valued musical souvenir I possess is a photograph of Gottschalk that he gave me, with the following inscription written on it "To my friend, F. Gilder, N. Y., 8th Sept., 1864: L.-M. Gottschalk." He always manifested the kindest interest in my professional success, and seemed to realize and appreciate the profound regard and respect I felt for him. In the height of his popularity, during his wonderful series of concerts in New York City, I began to make a specialty of his compositions, and I always make them a prominent feature of my recitals and concerts.

It is the fashion in some quarters for certain musicians to underestimate Gottschalk as a composer, and to say that his music is not now played so much as formerly; The publishers of Gottschalk have no cause for complaint on that score, as there are a number of his compositions that sell by the thousands every year, and the royalty received by his heirs amounts to a handsome yearly income. The average sale of his pieces keeps up year after year steadily. His "Last Hope" is an inspiration that will probably be admired and played as long as piano music exists. The most generally used of his pieces, besides the latter, are his "Tremolo Étude," "Marche de Nuit," "Pasquinade," "Dying Poet," "Berceuse," "Banjo," and the duets, "La Gallina" and "Ojos Criollos." His "Serenade" is one of the most original and

charming of his compositions. Many consider his "Pastorella e Cavaliere" his most musicianly composition.

I have used his four-hand arrangement of the overture to "William Tell" at many concerts, and its exceeding brilliancy makes an immense effect. Gottschalk used to play it with Richard Hoffman, Harry Sanderson, and other celebrated pianists.

When Gottschalk came upon the stage at a concert, he always wore white kid gloves, and, after seating himself at the piano, while slowly pulling off his gloves, he would look around at the audience, smiling and bowing to friends whom he recognized. He usually improvised a few chords before beginning the piece, and the exquisite harmonic effects he produced were always in perfect taste and in correct form. His touch was indescribably charming, and he produced tones from the piano that have probably never been equaled by any other performer. I never heard Liszt, but I presume that there were points of similarity between him and Gottschalk.

Undoubtedly, they were the two greatest pianists that ever lived.

It is not true that Gottschalk only excelled in the performance of his own compositions. I have heard him play Bach's fugues and other classics, one after the other, with the most wonderful effect. Whatever he played he glorified with the superb quality of tone and brilliancy of execution always at his command. Of course, he played his own compositions better than any other performer could. This is not remarkable. He, however, played the works of many composers, and had an enormous repertoire at his command. It is true that he played in public principally pieces of his own composition. People wanted to hear Gottschalk play Gottschalk. There is nothing very remarkable in that. When Charles Dickens gave readings in this country he read from his own works exclusively. No one criticized him for not reading selections from the works of other authors. Of course, with some pianists who also compose, it would not be advisable for them to play mostly their own pieces, as they might not be sufficiently meritorious and distinctive in character to warrant their doing so.

Gottschalk's compositions are so original and charming that they were, when played by him, indescribably effective. Who can ever forget the wonderful trill in octaves in the cadenza of his "Murmures Æolians" ? He began it very softly, gradually increasing it to the most tremendous fortissimo, almost raising the audience to their feet. When he played his "Last Hope" he made the melody sound as though some one was playing it on an organ with the *vox humana* stop drawn, and the delicate runs accompanying it sounded like the murmurs of an Æolian harp. The effect was such that many in the audience would be affected to tears. It may seem extravagant language, but I consider Gottschalk the most

perfect master of pianoforte effects that ever lived. With the exception of Thalberg, I have never heard any other pianist whose execution and touch were so absolutely flawless. A number of great pianists have appeared since, and have delighted the world by their masterly performances; and I certainly would not undertake to depreciate their great merits. I Only assert the impression that Gottschalk's playing made upon me. There are many others, however, who coincide with my opinion of this great genius.

Gottschalk was born in New Orleans, in the year 1829, and died in 1869 at Rio Janeiro. When he left us it could be truthfully said that his like would ne'er be seen again. He was not only an accomplished musical artist, but a man of fine education and a great linguist. There was a wonderful magnetism about him, and a polish and refinement, that made him an idol in social circles; His kindness of heart and generosity, combined with the most perfect manners, endeared him to all with whom he came in contact, and intensified the admiration that his genius as a musician. —*Musical Record*.