

New Orleans Place and People (Extract concerning Gottschalk)

Grace King

Moreau Gottschalk's "Danse Nègre" falls upon the ear. Moreau Gottschalk! how completely he had been forgotten in the account of that brilliant American period of the city! That any one could ever have forgotten him! He who carried the music of New Orleans into the great European lists, and won name and fame for himself and his city there. Yes; at that day it was called fame. It is a Creole pianist who is playing the "Danse Nègre" now. All the Creole pianists play Gottschalk's pieces, one can hear them at any time in the Creole portion of the city. And may they never cease to be played in the city of his birth and inspiration, for no music, imported by money from abroad, can ever speak to the native heart as it does. It is the atavism of the soil in sound. What can be written about his place and his people, that is not to be felt in his Danses, Berceuses and Meditations? and in him, in Gottschalk, too; one of the best of Creole blossomings, the purest French, Spanish and good old Holland blood, ripened by all the influences of the place, into the p359efflorescence of music. And what a ripening influence he has been for others! How many little Creole boys and girls since his triumph have been spurred to the daily routine practice at the piano by stories of how little Moreau Gottschalk at seven years accomplished his six hours a day. And ah! what meteoric visions of a Moreau Gottschalk future have cheered the five-finger exercises and the long sittings on the hard, round, haircloth stool, so inexorably out of reach of the pedals. And later, when another age had succeeded to the five-finger exercise age, when all the glamorous details of the artist's life (until then so carefully concealed, which made them all the more seductive) became known, with his tragic death in South America, the fervid hearts of the young pianists beat for all that too, as for the only life and death for an artist.