

THE STORY OF A MUSICAL LIFE

GEORGES FREDERICK ROOT, 1891

(EXTRACT CONCERNING GOTTSCHALK)

Before leaving New York a gentleman of my acquaintance said to me, " My daughter will arrive in Paris soon after you. The family with whom she is going are not musical, and I shall take it as a great favor if you will see that she has a good piano teacher while she is there. This I readily undertook to do. By good fortune Gottschalk, the great pianist, was passing a few months in Paris, and I found him willing to give some lessons to my young friend, who already played well for an amateur. This was the beginning of an acquaintance with that distinguished man, which continued up to that fatal journey to South America, from which he never returned.

I say "*great pianist*" of Louis Moreau Gottschalk advisedly. Critics and some prominent musicians did not call him a *great* player - all agreed that he was an exquisite player, and all admitted that he was the most popular and successful concert pianist that ever played in America, but those who knew him well could testify to his wonderful repertoire of classic music. He could play all of Beethoven by heart, and he delighted in Bach, but he was too honest to play such music to any extent at his popular concerts, and too strong in the consciousness of his own merit to heed those critics who, if they could have their way, would never give the people any music that they could understand and enjoy.

It was particularly exasperating to hear unfavorable criticisms of Gottschalk's compositions, for they are not only understandable and useful to the people, but elegant and musicianly in a high degree. I think it may be said that his are among the most original and characteristic of all American compositions for the piano-forte.