

Department for Children's Work

THE BOYHOOD OF SOME FAMOUS PIANISTS.

C. A. BROWNE.

So accustomed are we to the use and abuse of the pianoforte that we seldom stop to consider that this most remarkable musical instrument is the outcome of a steady and systematic growth from age to age, and that it has a long and distinguished genealogy which stretches far back into the dim and distant past—to the biblical times of dulcimer and psaltery—and coming down through the days of the Greek and Roman harps and lyres, which were struck with a quill or a little stick of ivory or polished wood called a plectrum.

FRANZ LISZT.

"Three things," said Mozart, "are necessary to a good performer," and he pointed to his head, his heart and the tips of his fingers—meaning that we must have intellect, sympathy and skill in technic.

Surely these gifts were united in the fair-haired, blue-eyed Hungarian lad who was born on October 22, 1811 in the village of Raiding, and was destined to become the greatest and most adored pianist of all.

His father, Adam Liszt, was a good performer on the piano and violin. For some time he held an office under Prince Nicholas Esterhazy, and in this way came in personal contact with Haydn and with Hummel, who were engaged by the prince to conduct his orchestra.

From earliest childhood the little Franz showed a special fondness for the piano, and, thanks to his father's careful teaching, he made his first public appearance at nine years of age, when he played a concerto by Ferdinand Ries and a fantasia which he had composed himself.

Prince Esterhazy was in the audience, and is said to have been so pleased that he put a purse of fifty ducats (about fifty dollars) in the young musician's hand. Later on several Hungarian noblemen agreed to allow him six hundred florins (two hundred and forty dollars) a year, for six years, to give him a musical education. Accordingly, the family moved to Vienna, where Franz made rapid progress under Carl Czerny, that tireless writer of exercises so well known to us all.

"Play Czerny diligently," Liszt recommended to all his own pupils when he grew up. The boy worked hard, and in a year and a half had improved so greatly that he won great praise at a concert of his own, at which Beethoven was present. The fall of that year found the boy and his father in Paris, but Franz was disappointed in not being allowed to study at the conservatoire on account of his foreign birth. However, he continued his studies under Reicha and Paer. While the gates of the conservatoire were closed, he was everywhere petted and caressed. At thirteen he was the idol of Paris. But at fourteen he lost his good father and was thrown upon his own resources in the great city; so that he set resolutely to work composing and giving concerts.

FREDERIC CHOPIN.

Recognized by Liszt and other distinguished contemporaries as being one of the most wonderful of piano players, it is not strange perhaps that his compositions should be exclusive for that instrument. "Chopin's bars are of solid gold," says an enthusiastic admirer. And it is noticeable that practically many pieces that he wrote tell complete stories in themselves, or paint some picture that we can easily understand. He was born one hundred years ago, in 1809 (?), at a little Polish village six miles from Warsaw. His father was a highly educated Frenchman, and his mother of an aristocratic Polish family. Frederic is described as a frail, blue-eyed boy with fair hair and fine manners. His musical education began early. Zwiny was his piano teacher, and he had lessons in composition from Joseph Eisner later on. He began to compose, it is said, almost before he could wield a pen, and at eight years of age he played in public a concerto by Gyrowetz. Boylike, he was more concerned about his new collar than about his playing. "Everybody was looking at it," he told his mother. But everybody was charmed with the little Frederic, and people began to speak of him as a second Mozart. When Madame Catalani, the celebrated singer, heard him play she was so delighted that she presented him with a watch, on which she had had engraved her name and his name and his age—ten. His father had a boys' private boarding school, and among the stories told of Frederic at that time is one which tells of his playing so beautifully that he first put to sleep and then awakened a party of unruly school boys. He began by telling them a fairy story, while he played the musical description of it upon the piano. He was always a skillful mimic, and when absent from home would write very clever, lively letters to his mother, of whom he was extremely fond. But music was not permitted to interfere with school work. He was sent first to Warsaw College, and then to the conservatory. When the director of the conservatory at Warsaw came to know Chopin he observed: "Let this youth alone. He has extraordinary gifts. He will develop an originality which has never before been equaled."

SIGISMOND THALBERG.

The history class will be able to remember the year of Thalberg's birth by the date of our second war with England—1812. He was born at Geneva, on the 7th of January, which made him about three months younger than his great Hungarian rival, Franz Liszt. And although his compositions are not in vogue at present, he was a great artist in his day, and filled a large space in the musical world for more than forty-five years. He was the son of an Austrian nobleman, and his inherited talent for music must have been noticed at a very early age, for the boy was under instruction before he had completed his sixth year. His first teacher was Mittag, to whom he owed the wonderfully rich and mellow tone of his playing. From this man the future great pianist passed to the care of Hummel, who was accounted one of the most notable virtuosos of the age. The boy also studied the theory of music with Simon Sechter, an eminent contrapuntist. Although Thalberg was not yet ten years old, he astonished his hearers by the great precision of his fingering. And he mastered the most difficult passages almost by instinct, no doubt largely on account of his careful fingering; because the very best way to correct a mistake is not to make it in the beginning. Chopin was three years older than Thalberg, and did not admire him. When they met, later in life, Chopin said to a friend: "Thalberg plays famously, but he is not my man." Thalberg was too much of a technical player, and he had Jewish blood, both of which things did not please the illustrious Pole. When Thalberg was fourteen, he went to London in the household of his father, who had been appointed imperial ambassador to England, and the lad was placed under the instruction of the celebrated pianist, Moscheles. This man speaks of Thalberg as being, even then, at fourteen, already an artist of distinction and rank. He came to America twice—in 1853 and again in 1857. It is said that he never played a piece in public till he made it absolutely the property of his fingers, and we can readily believe this, for we are also told that Thalberg himself once remarked that he never ventured to perform any of his celebrated pieces in public until he had practiced it at least fifteen hundred times. Just consider the immense labor—and the neighbors!

LOUIS MOREAU GOTTSCHALK.

It is a somewhat singular fact that the first American pianist to attain distinction in Europe should have been also the first to introduce Chopin's music in America. At that time our country was in the very beginning of its artistic growth. Chicago was a swamp, and St. Louis a small town, when, in 1829, New Orleans gave us a little one who was to become the pioneer American pianist. The father, Edward Gottschalk, had come to this country in his youth, and, settling in New Orleans, had married a French Creole lady. Louis was the oldest of their five children, and loved music so dearly that when he was but three years old he was able to play on the piano a melody he had heard. He was placed under a good teacher, as soon as his strength would permit, and by the time he was six had made such progress upon the piano that he was also given instruction on the violin, and was soon able to play pieces of more than ordinary difficulty. They tell us that at the age of eight the child gave a benefit concert to assist an unfortunate violin player. After he grew older, while he had many faults, he was always kind and generous to those in need. So that it is pleasant to read that this first concert was successful; and it brought the little Louis into prominence as a child prodigy. The parents were very anxious to send him to Paris for instruction, and this was finally accomplished in 1842, when he was thirteen. He was first under the teaching of Charles Hallé, later under Stamaty, then the ablest professor in the city. A year later, at fourteen, he began the study of harmony and counterpoint. He had two aunts in Paris, who were titled ladies, countesses, so that he was much petted in aristocratic society. But the future composer of the "Last Hope" worked hard, beyond his strength, and had a severe attack of typhoid fever. After he recovered, and had a little vacation, he returned to Paris, and became the pupil of Hector Berlioz. Under this master the young Gottschalk devoted himself to study so completely that he even declined an invitation from the Spanish Queen to become a guest of the court at Madrid. However, in his twentieth year, 1849, a second invitation came from Spain. And when Louis Gottschalk, an art prodigy from the then land of musical savages, arrived at Madrid he was made a guest at the royal palace, quite like the things that happen in a fairy story.

HANS GUIDO VON BÜLOW.

This distinguished German pianist possessed one of the most prodigious musical memories on record. It enabled him to perform unheard-of feats, both in conducting and in playing the piano. It is stated that he memorized every score written by Beethoven and Wagner. And it was his proud boast that, he could give twenty recitals, each requiring two hours, entirely from memory.

Von Bülow was born at Dresden, in 1830, and, strange to say, showed neither talent nor delight for music, in his earliest years. Some accounts declare that he sustained a severe blow upon the head as a child, and others maintain that it was after a long illness that musical gifts came to him in a marked degree. Both stories may be true, for the blow might have caused the illness. When he was nine years old he studied under Friedrich

Wieck, that Wonderful piano teacher, the father of Clara Schumann. And it was Wieck who patiently laid the foundation for the great musical success which came to von Bülow later on. For the boy was not an infant phenomenon. His parents considered music, not as a future profession, but merely as a pastime. So at eighteen, in 1848, he was sent to Leipsic to study law. But he also kept up his musical studies, had lessons in counterpoint under Hauptmann, and wrote articles for a paper called *Die Abendpost*, in which he defended the new school of musical doctrines led by Wagner and Liszt. In 1850, when he heard the opera of "Lohengrin," he was so moved by it that he gave up the study of the law, went to Zurich, and placed himself under the advice of Wagner. The next year he went to Liszt, at Weimar, and studied pianoforte playing with him. Many of his compositions have been published and he has also critically revised and annotated editions of some of the pianoforte works of the great classical composers. For instance, in Beethoven's Sonatas you will find his explanations very helpful. Twice von Bülow visited this country, and exhibited both his great musical genius and his eccentricities. One of his tours had to be shortened on account of his peculiarities. The strain of playing every day was too much. It was at this time that some wag wrote the burlesque rhyme :

"One wants but little von Bülow,
Nor wants that little long."

VLADIMIR DE PACHMANN.

This Russian pianist is acknowledged as one of the greatest of present-day artists, and is as eccentric as talented. The best interpreter of Chopin — yet he feels annoyed that the public seems to associate him so invariably with the music of that master. "For," he says, with characteristic modesty, "I love all music and I play all music equally well."

He was born at Odessa, a city and seaport of South Russia, on the north-western coast of the Black Sea, which is much frequented in the summer months by the Russian and Polish aristocracy, on account of the sea bathing. De Pachmann had the advantage of being born of cultivated people. His father was a professor in the university at Odessa, and a good violinist; and it was from him that the boy received his first musical instruction. In so many cases it is the mother who is the earliest teacher, and has all the responsibility. When he was eighteen years of age he was sent to the Vienna Conservatory, where his talent and industry were rewarded with the gold medal. Yet his own performances were not yet satisfactory to him, although his concerts met with much success; so that he retired from public playing for some eight years in order to devote himself to hard study. As he asserts, "No piece can be mastered very quickly. Often it is a matter of years before one fully appreciates all the meaning and beauty of a passage."

IGNACE JAN PADEREWSKI

It will interest the little country boys and girls to find that the wonderful Paderewski was born on a farm, too. He has a very beautiful and expensive one of his own now, very different, probably, from the one in Podolia, the province of Southwestern Russia which was the place of his birth on November 6, 1860. While his parents were not wealthy, they were in comfortable circumstances, the father being a gentleman farmer of position and a Polish patriot.

When the son was three years old the father was "suspect" and was banished to Siberia by the Russian government; and although his exile did not last long, he came back much broken in spirit. From him the child inherited high culture and a love of work, but unfortunately the mother, from whom he received the musical nature which has made him famous, died while he was yet an infant. A recent biography states that talent showed itself early, and it is said that the youngster would climb to the piano stool and try to produce as beautiful a tone as possible long before he could play. The great distances in the country make it almost impossible to secure a good education of any sort; and when Ignace began to study music, at six years of age, his teacher was a fiddler who could not play the piano, although he gave lessons upon it. "Later on," says the same history of his life, "an old teacher of the instrument was engaged to come once a month to the farm, and he taught the boy and his sister to play simple arrangements of operatic airs. When he was seven years old Paderewski wrote a set of Polish dances. At twelve years of age he went to Warsaw, where he was able to have regular music lessons at the conservatory. He studied harmony with Roguski, and the piano with Janotha, the father of Natalie Janotha. When sixteen years of age he made a tour through Russia, during which he played his own compositions as well as those of others. But as yet he possessed little of his present technic. For two years after his return to Warsaw he continued to study at the conservatory, until at eighteen he was appointed a professor of music. As he says: "I had to work awfully hard I gave lessons from morning till night." There is much more to be added to the story of his struggles, and of how at last he came to study under the remarkable Leschetizky.

MORIZ ROSENTHAL.

The boy who was to become the rival of Paderewski was born in 1862, at Lemberg, one of the finest towns of Austria, and capital of the province of Galicia — one of the ancient principalities of Poland which fell to Austria in one of the various partitions of that country. Rosenthal was the son of a professor in the public schools of that town, and his talent for music attracted the attention of Carl Mikuli when he was eight years old. The grit of the boy is shown by the fact that two years after he walked all the way to Vienna to see Joseffy, who agreed to take him as a pupil after hearing him play. He also appeared in public for the first time at the age of ten. He gave a concert in Vienna when he was fourteen, at which Liszt, then sixty-five years of age, was present. The older musician praised the lad warmly and said : "There is within you a great pianist who will surely work his way out." Although Rosenthal worked hard at his music he continued his studies at the University of Vienna, and finally took the degree of Master of Arts. For ten years he was a pupil of Liszt, whom he followed yearly to Weimar, Pesth, Vienna and Rome. He is not only a man of general culture, but has well-earned the title, "An Amazing Technician."

EMIL SAUER.

Called the bravura pianist on account of his extraordinary execution, Sauer is a living example of what can be accomplished by sheer hard work and strength of character. Born at Hamburg, Germany, in 1862, the same year as Rosenthal, he received his earliest musical training from his mother. And it was at her desire that he made a life-study of music and abandoned that of law, for which he had originally been intended. When, at thirteen, he played to Rubinstein, that master musician expressed his opinion that the child should be trained for a professional. But it was not until he was seventeen that his musical education was begun in earnest, as he spent the intervening years at school. In 1879 he was sent to Moscow, and became a pupil of Nicholas Rubinstein — the brother of Anton — until that teacher died in 1881. His first concert tours were not very successful, but in 1884 he went to Liszt, at Weimar, where he remained for some time. His after appearances met with such favor that his career as an artist may be said to date from that time.

OSSIP GABRILOWITSCH.

His playing is such as to excite the greatest enthusiasm. This, with a most brilliant technic, has given him the nickname — a second Rubinstein. His father is a prominent attorney, and Ossip, born in St. Petersburg, January 26, 1878, is the youngest of four children. The family is very musical, and at four years of age Ossip was able to sing a great many Russian folk-songs. The Gabrilowitsch family live in Rubinstein's former house in St. Petersburg. They were great friends, and Gabrilowitsch spent much of his time with Rubinstein for years. In fact, it was on the advice of the celebrated Anton that Ossip was started at piano playing at the age of six. And from that time on, Rubinstein had the direction of his musical education. At the conservatory he won the Rubinstein prize under Prof. Tolstoff. And later on, taking the advice of Rubinstein, he went to Vienna for two years, to be under the training of Leschetizky. At eighteen, he began his virtuoso career, which has been one of great success, as he is a sympathetic player, and one whose musical personality creates spontaneous interest.

JOSEF HOFMANN.

"I would rather be Edison than be the greatest pianist on earth," once said this musical prodigy, who has been the astonishment and admiration of two hemispheres — such is his regard for our wizard of electricity. Next to music, the subject which most keenly interests him is physics, and he is also devoted to athletic sports. His conflicting tendencies may be due to heredity. His father is a German, at one time a professor of the conservatory at Cracow, where Josef was born, January 20, 1877. His mother is a Pole by birth, and was a distinguished singer.

However, when the child was two years old, the family moved to Berlin, so his environment and education have been German. But, like all Poles, he has a natural aptitude for acquiring languages — speaks five of them with ease — Polish, Russian, German, French and English. When he was but three years old, he began to pick out tunes on the piano. At six, he appeared in public at a concert given for charity. At eight, Rubinstein heard him for the first time, and declared that the world of music had never before produced such a boy. In 1886, when he gave a matinee in Berlin, the critics were amazed at the talent of "the little mite, who scarcely looks nine years old, who could not yet reach the pedal with his feet and is therefore in need of a special appliance in order to use it." In 1887, he came over here, and is best described as a dimpled little boy, with warm brown eyes, a lovable smile, and ten phenomenal, small fingers. He gave fifty-two concerts in two months and a half,

and it was no wonder that the child's health gave way under the strain. He was taken back to Berlin, and settled down to continue his education. With the exception of studying theory and composition under Prof. Urban, his father had been his only teacher ; so that it was like the realization of a dream when he was accepted as a pupil by Rubinstein. In that master he had centered the most devoted hero-worship of which he is capable. And when Rubinstein died, in 1894, the lad, who was then in London, was inconsolable, for his loyalty and attachment amounted almost to idolatry. The affection was probably mutual, for Rubinstein once said of him : "Hofmann can do anything, if he will only give himself completely to art and to work."