George Thompson
Circa
April 1853
THE
Mazurkas, Valses,
and
Nocturnes,
of
Frederic Chopin.

For
The Pianoforte,

With Memoir by J. W. Davison.

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FREDERICK CHOPIN.

When the school of Dussek, Steibich, and Weber must be separated from that of Mozart, Beethoven, and Mendelssohn in a general estimate of pianoforte composition, there is another, which, of inferior order, has nevertheless sent a prominent part in the history of the instrument and of those who either contributed to the glory of the piano as executants, or enriched its repertory by their productive genius. The school represented by Hummel and Moscheles—who (with different results) may be said to have drunk at the fountain of Mozart and Dussek, perpetuating in a more or less degree the style and characteristics of each, while at the same time bearing a sufficient amount of independent thought and invention to save them from the accusation of being absolutely imitators of either—not here touched upon here by the author of "Zwizan"—is Chopin, M.B. Hesse, and Stephen Heller—who claims that merit an exclusive chapter in a historical and analytical examination of the subject. Not only have his followers obtained just renown as original thinkers, but, by their technical forms and executive proficiency they have varied and augmented the resources and possibilities of the instrument. As the head of these schools, unquestionably, Chopin, who—wh ether regarded simply as a "virtuoso" on the piano or as one who, from peculiar temperament and genius, found many things to express through the medium of sound which no one had expressed before him—cannot fairly be spoken of in other terms than beautifully apostrophize a novel, attractive, and very remarkable individually. If Chopin had done no more than reveal to us through his "Mazurkas" the national musical feeling of his country—a country at once so wretched in misfortune and so politically interesting as Poland—he would have achieved enough to entitle him to universal sympathy. But he has accomplished a great deal more; he has enriched the means of expression by such a varied store of graceful and brilliant devices, that he may be accorded a place among those who have materially aided in the progress of the art of pianoforte playing. Thus, both in the poetical and literal sense of the word, Chopin has a right to be styled innovator; and this apart from any critical view that may be taken, by disputations of truth, of the influence which his eminence and, at the same time, exceptional talent has exercised.

There is not much to retake in the life of Chopin, and a mere collection of the incidents that marked it would be an easy task. He was born in 1810, at a small town called Zelzow, Wola, near Warsaw. Dr. Litz inform us that Chopin never knew how old he was until, in 1820, he received a present of a watch from

*Beethoven cannot be said to have founded what is mistily meant by a school, even through a disciple of Mozart, one of the world, except when exemplifying in his earlier period, he oddly resembles as patterns. In this sense they are only imitations.

**Antonin Radziwill, Governor of Poland, who assisted the music to France.**
graver psychologcial absurdity than Chopin—seen through the microscope of the doublet Plutarch whose style has so much charm for Dr. Laurie. Another extract, and epohe has been gathered from this questionnable source. It appears that Chopin's power of conception was the attention of enlightened men, just as his feasible temperament excited the interest of poetic and romantic women; while on the other hand—

"...show of a perception less refined, embellished with his caprice performances, were the most taken by his organ, whereas they did not respect, in the opinion of their frank soul nature, that as Chopin's power this was the perfection of a duty in which sympathy counted for nothing." Chopin never married; but he abominated, it is said, an attachment all his life. This, Dr. Laurie informs us, was for a young companion of his—"beilles d'asie jeune fille, comme on Madame de Lavau, etc., etc." It appears that the "beilles d'asie jeune fille" loved Chopin, with an earnest love, to the end, and really, in estimating the ecstasy incident of his life, it is difficult to assign any reason why he should not have married her. She was faithful to his memory after death, and wanted her mummification in constant care and solicitude for his surviving parents. She made a portrait of her, which Chopin's father would never allow to be replaced by any other; and in a thousand various ways exhibited her devotion. But Chopin, who (like Beethoven) was very popular at school, became intimate with Prince Eمؤسوره وناتشكا and his brothers. At their house, music was assiduously cultivated, and he saw and knew the Princess-nunmber, "beille ecorce," and of an "epee sympathique," whose smiles were the most brilliant and remarkable in Warsaw.

The Princess—number (beille ecorce) was, nevertheless, only a man in the new sphere which now became Chopin's universe. How Plutarch—

"At the house of this princess, Chopin often met the most distinguished visited the capital; he became acquainted with those adorers ladies whose possess were European, at a time when Warsaw was celebrated for the songs, the elegances, and the grace of its sobriety. Through the intervention of the Princess Conventrynshe he had the honour of being introduced to the Princess Loeper, at whose house he became intimate with the Courtiers Zapeczynska, the Prince Radziwill, and the Princess Akerma—who, surrounded by other ladies in his vicinity, took the conception of the Mazurka, as Chopin understood it, here took place in his perplexed brain. Let the important period (to have done with entrusted) be described at length—"with the apology for Dr. Laurie's French is not easy to reduce into English—

"Still very young, it fell to the lot of Chopin to govern his steps ('surveiller ses pas') by the shadow of his place. In three countries, which might have been likened to assemblages of islands, he was no less often enabled to discover, seldom savour'd in the whole of the desire (regiment du désir en moncherbille et la douleur), the nature of those aspiring and tender hours: he was able without difficulty to read in their eyes, which chased with foreign sympathy toward his admittance, and were what a mixture of resolved grace and a love of seeing the original (à l'âme de saphir et d'ange du cœur) was fondled the poetic soul of his country. When harbingers—

"These honest folk, had they known him better, "would have said that he was more valuable than living, and that he in themselves were ennui, would have removed correctly."
While in Paris, Chopin formed several friends, who obtained more or less influence, and among others, M. Fortuny, editor and painter of the \textit{L'Artiste}, and \textit{Mme. Octave,}, who at the age of twenty was killed at Algiers; and, most remarkable of all, that extraordinary instance of precocious genius, Charles Bihain.\footnote{\textit{L'artiste} Paris 1847.} Though admired as a composer and highly respected as a master, Chopin never became popular. His piano-terms and especially \textit{Dr. Liiu}--endeavour to excuse him on every kind of pretext; but not one that has been adduced would, in all probability, have dissuaded Mr. Thackeray, had he been acquainted with him, from devoting a chapter, in a certain inconsiderable series of papers, to the genius of which Chopin is merely the representation. So affectionately distant were his manners--at times even to the point of hatred, if at all, his infirmities in intellectual endowments (always, provided they did not happen the exclusive adores, and made the small talk of the boulevard, with the same preferred dams to Chopin himself--for, if they did, he was all the more meekly silent), that, in literary circles, his name was by no means cherished as a household word. \textit{He held himself dead} (says \textit{Dr. Liiu}) \textit{the most celebrated person in Paris their noisy career troubled him. He inspired less industry than they; his character and his habits partaking more of social originality than of serious eccentricity.} Perhaps, had Chopin's \textit{originality} been a little more \textit{eccentric}, it might have been, also, a little more gospel. One anecdote of the off-hand way in which he disposed of indifference is, however, worth recording. Shortly after dinner, at the house of M.,--the host, who had, no doubt, promised himself and his guests a musical treat, conducted Chopin to a pianoforte, which was open in the drawing-room. The hint had no effect; the Polish pianist quietly declining to amuse the company during the moments proper to digestion. The master of the house, more musical than condescending, became importunate in his entreaties, whereupon Chopin remonstrated.\footnote{\textit{Dr. Liiu} \textit{Ah! monsieur, je n'ai presque pas l'air,} or better still, \textit{I have been otherwise engaged.--ah! monsieur, je n'ai pas l'air!}} A profound tone of woman's-voices, Chopin raised a distinct exclamatory to make the acquaintance of Mme. Sand, whose, with whom he subsequently, however, formed an intimacy which for more years wholly absorbed him. In 1842, this celebrated lady accompanied Chopin to the island of Majorca, where he had been ordered by medical advice, and where he remained, tenderly nursed by the matron of \textit{L'Artiste}, during an abortive and lingering illness. What chance now remained for the \textit{soleil de douce fuite},\footnote{\textit{Dr. Liiu} le soleil de douce fuite, comme pour mieux entrer en guerre.\textsuperscript{1}} pianing in the land of noeticks?--The remembrance of the days passed in \textit{Majorca}--says \textit{Dr. Liiu}--was gravened on the heart of Chopin like that of a supper, as one which to fire anxiety but once to the most favored.\footnote{\textit{He was not} \textit{(it is probably Mme. Sand who}}

From the year 1842 Chopin's health gradually declined. His only resort from physical pain were during occasional visits to Nohant, where he chiefly employed himself in composition. From 1842 to 1847--we learn from his biographer--he could not climb a staircase without being on the eve of suffocation, and only remained by means of oppressively bad and presence. In the spring of 1847, Chopin was given up by his medical attendants, but lived to survive the rupture of his intimate with Mme. Sand, over which, as over his alliance with that eminent novelist, a veil may be thrown without detriment to either.\footnote{\textit{Dr. Liiu} \textit{et d'espoirs de commencer,}} was one of the cynical \textit{bon mot} of the authors of \textit{L'Artiste} in one instance as he, perhaps, a pity there should ever be a beginning. During this long illness, Chopin's principal attendant and most constant associate was his pupil, M. Grimaux, for whom he entertained a real affection, and who was occasionally relieved by M.\footnote{\textit{Dr. Liiu} \textit{et d'espoirs de commencer.}} the Princess Czartoryska, an enthusiastic admirer of Chopin's talents, social and artistic. The following summer found the painter better, if not considerably, but too far to leave Paris to his favourite country resort. Nevertheless, in the winter of 1847-8, Chopin resolved to procure his original designs (conceived as far back as 1837) of visiting London, quitting France, in the month of April, just as the revolution of 1848 had broken out, abandoning his \textit{pre-eminence} and \textit{etraordinary talent} for the shores of a \textit{private alliance}. Before leaving Paris, Chopin gave a concert in the salons of M. Pleyel, the eminent pianoforte manufacturer.\footnote{\textit{Dr. Liiu} \textit{He had not} \textit{(it is probably Mme. Sand who}}

This was his \textit{demi-song}, in the Fervet capital, and, as might have been anticipated, created an extraordinary sensation, not only among the best minds of the Hubourg St. Germain, but in the world of amateurs and artists.

In London, Chopin gave two concerts, in \textit{Wilberforce Rooms}, and played as the concert and ball actually held at Guildhall for the benefit of Polish refugees. He also paid a visit to Scotland, where he remained six weeks, and was heard on one or two occasions. But the idea that accompanied his name abroad only found a faint echo here, and his audience in this country was entirely more brilliant in a public sense than if it had been the visit of an illustrious \textit{inconnu}.\footnote{\textit{Dr. Liiu} \textit{He could not} \textit{it is probably Mme. Sand who}}

\textit{Dr. Liiu} said, and often seemed, that this too, the long friendship, is breaking, leaving a fail.\footnote{\textit{Dr. Liiu} \textit{He was not} \textit{it is probably Mme. Sand who}}

The last \textit{Quarto} published, was \textit{Grece Pleyel}, the most famous composer and husband of Madame Marie Pleyel, the pianist.
The art of Chopin must be either accepted or rejected; it will not stand the test of criticism. The persistent tone of his music is melancholy. Whether in his choral pieces, such as the two concertos with orchestra, and the two sonatas for pianoforte alone, or in his lighter and more sprightly, such as the Ballades, Nocturnes, Polonaises, and Mazurkas, it frequently suggests the idea of suffering—of suffering for the most part accompanied by resignation, but at times too for endurance. This peculiarity is imparted to the hearer, who, if he has any strong tendency that way inclined with the mental sympathy of the composer, derives, at intervals, only a questionable enjoyment from his music. Even in the Preludes and Eroica-preludes Chopin's most artistic and masterly productions, and where the search for musical difficulties carries the pre-eminent, it is, as it were, away from the sphere most homogenous to his nature, planning his own or others' and even more severe problems, he deliberately feels every now and then a sort of, and calls attention to the fact that it is Chopin who speaks, and that it is not a fait du d'esprit of Chopin to be for too long period healthy and vigorous, for any long period entirely separated from the regions of dreams. Much that he has written bears internal evidence of a longing after some unknown ideal, a deep and irrepressible yearning for the unattainable—of that inward aspiration, as seen, described by Shelley, as—

"The radii of joy the soul for.

The sphere of our sorrow."

Such a feeling, it is true, is in some measure an essential attribute of poetry, and inseparable from the poetic nature. In Mozart, Weber, in Mendelssohn, and most remarkably in Berlioz, it can be traced. But with them it does not necessarily shut out all other manifestations; it is not a despotic instinct, an unconquerable will to be felt, not seen. A simple march was then struck up by the band, during the performance of which the coffin containing the body of the deceased was slowly carried up the middle of the room. Prince Alexander Czerny, M. Eytzinger, Dr. Schuck, M. Pekovitch (the actor), and M. Grienz (of Grandeur), Chopin's faithful and affectionate friends, eight others, each holding a flower, formed the procession, and were followed by a group of the posthumous society. M. Adam Carnypka accompanied the body to the church which was Chopin's own Abel. From there, accompanied by M. Henry Reytz, a group of the Berlioz and Mendelssohn societies, the coffin was placed on the piano, M. Eytzinger's coffin, and the coffin was accompanied by the Berlioz and Mendelssohn societies, the coffin was placed on the piano, M. Eytzinger's coffin, and the coffin was accompanied by the Berlioz and Mendelssohn societies, the coffin was placed on the piano, M. Eytzinger's coffin, and the coffin was accompanied by the Berlioz and Mendelssohn societies, the coffin was placed on the piano, M. Eytzinger's coffin, and the coffin was accompanied by the Berlioz and Mendelssohn societies, the coffin was placed on the piano, M. Eytzinger's coffin, and the coffin was accompanied by the Berlioz and Mendelssohn societies, the coffin was placed on the piano, M. Eytzinger's coffin, and the coffin was accompanied by the Berlioz and Mendelssohn societies, the coffin was placed on the piano, M. 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**PREACE**

In those short lines we seem to have a duplication of Chopin's existence, social and artistic.

Chopin was essentially the musician of the belles lettres. Upon the same theme and with the same sort of music, he composed a work that was always unique.—In his lifetime, he played, which, in spite of a pyrrhic wildness, an enigmatic irregularity, a too-speak effeminate expression, was incompatible in its way of expression—so intense, so pure, so wholesome, so disquieting. The charm attached to his very marked individuality went away, even now that the man himself is no longer among us, so that it is by his personal example. When his friend, biographer, and enthusiastic manicurist, Dr. Franz Liszt, in that extraordinary way (already mentioned) published at Paris, Brussels, and Leipzig, in 1842, and signed the title of

"P. Chopin par F. Liszt,

"par construction Chopin as one of the chief of the so-called 'Romantic School,' which leaping into existence just after the revelation of 1840, and at the head of which stands no less a personage than M. Victor Hugo, still more, when the same enthusiastic panegyrist holds him up as one who, while advancing with the new movement, still adhered to all that was worth retaining in the older forms, as being one a philosophical revolutionist and a philosophical conservative; it is as well to warn those who feel interest in the subject, to whom the welfare of art is a beloved ideal, and its preservation by false prophets, however eloquent, a thing to be deplored, against placing any faith in this brilliant pianist and very questionable critic. Chopin's genius was not of that high order, his talent was not of that exclusive stamp, his requirements were not of that remarkable depth, to influence the real progress of art, for good or for bad. His pretensions were much more moderate. His was, as has been suggested, a marked individuality, working out materials for which it was indebted to none other than Auber, making its appeal to the middle world in a manner calculated to influence some powerfully, others emphatically, either slightly or at all, but in no respect destined to leave an indelible impression. Chopin played with music, rather than followed it up as the impressing pursuit of a life; and wherever the attractions belonging to the curiosity of his style, and the union of social qualities with professional ability for which he was eminently distinguished, he cannot be said at any time to have passed the threshold of the Temple of Art, or to have won for himself a niche among those who are its kings and high priests. It placed his feet in the bowels, and remained at the foot in that Venusian amott tout russe de salles and salon, the adobe of performers, the flippings of fins, soft voices of aristocratic dames the adulatory phrases of carpet-knight's and the general atmosphere of dressing-room existence. For energetic ascetics with the outer world, for mixing with men, and enduring the buffets of fortune, neither his physical frame nor his mental constitution adapted him. When, therefore, Dr. Liszt says: "With outward tendencies more modern, simpler and less esthetic (1), Chopin endeavored for art that respectful worship which characterized the first masters of the Middle Ages; for him, art was a refined and holy occupation ("une toile et sainte invention") like them he was proud to have been united to the virtuosi, and represented it with religious piety,"—when Dr. Liszt says as much of Chopin, he draws, as it were, a portrait for which Chopin never sat. However pleasing, sentimental, and alluring, Chopin's talent was narrow and squinting; and to demand a place for him among the great masters of the art, is to ask for what cannot, with deference for truth, be accorded.

The following extract from a private letter, written in November, 1849, by one who, without sharing in the encha-
sions of Dr. Lieut., &c., was apparently well-disposed to the Polish musicians, both as men and as artists, is worth citing—

"During his long residence in Paris, Chopin's concerts were among the highest triumphs of faction, by whom he was received in every respect as an equal. His polished manners, cultivated mind, and a certain easy grace which marked his conversation, rendered him the idol of the drawing-rooms and the salons. His society was courted by those whose men in Chopin's sphere was suddenly prone to courts, and the institutions he was inclined to give, at once intimate and at a high character, were bought with gaiety. Happy the young man who could accept a few lessons from him without instruction. Owing to the current utility of his talents, Chopin rarely played public, and when at intervals he did so, between, he was prevailed on to give a concert, and perform some of his own compositions before a select audience; the concert was considered a special privilege to be low, and, by the time limited in number, nearly always longer up. Owing to his inalien way of living, and his national position, Chopin had very few professional friends; and, indeed, his original name spoiled by the eulogies of society—he was too apt to treat his brother artists with a superficial familiarity, which annoyed, his equals, and others, perhaps his rapacity, was apt to engender a certain becoming. Want of sympathy with the man, however, tended them so overwhelming the fact that a profuse complaint was band, and, every day obtained from and female, humbled, him ill suited for social enjoyment, or the relations of artistic capriciousness. In short, self-depreciating Chopin, in his comparatively secluded, but it is wholly unlike the present tendency of the public, either to tragedies or melodrama. This opinion is in a great many, warranted by the fact that the few intimate musical friends he possessed (some of them friends) were so devotedly attached to him as the most romantic of his artistic contemporaries.

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"This is the occasion to analyse the claims of Chopin as an artist. Thus far, when the remonstrances of the personal influence he exercised has held sway, whether the repulsion he enjoyed as a composer (of his peculiar merit as a pianist there can be no question) was well or partially deserved, or whether, as some believe, his genius has been largely overrated by his intimate circle of artists (Lieut. and others) who drew the greatest influence on his belief, while the great mass of amateurs and musicians, knowing very little about him, are superficial or so indifferent to examine for themselves a true taste in all that he produced in his period. It cannot be acknowledged that, by some means, Chopin obtained the reputation of a musician on sound inventions and profundity; and it would be a great joy to have him placed among the most original, if not the most gifted and accomplished, composers who have contributed to the library of the piano.

Chopin produced, in all, about seventy works, including two grand concertos for piano with orchestral accompaniments, two grand sonatas for piano solo, two sonatas for piano and violoncello, other pieces with orchestral accompaniments, several books of studies and preludes, together with a large number of mazurkas, polonaises, baladas, scherzos, mazurkas, variations, &c. These do not include his parthenian works, two volumes of which have appeared, the last consisting of the last works, numbered Op. 47 (which is difficult to say), Op. 47 being alluded to his Tristiae, &c., in A flat, and published not long since, with the original Polish words and German versions, by Herr Gumberg, the popular lyric poet. That Chopin, however, excelled less in works of 'vague balada' than in works of lesser pretension, will hardly be denied. His Etudes, his Preludes, his Polonaise, his Mazurkas, and above all his Mazurkas, are quite enough to save him from oblivion, whenever may eventually become of his concertos and sonatas. The variety with which in the Mazurkas he has said the same thing fifty times over, will go far further than anything the power that Chopin's genius, whatever its eccentricities and foibles, was decidedly immersive. The best of the Mazurkas are without question those that smell least strongly of the long, those which, hierarchised in the least affected manner, are easiest to play, and best the clearest affinity (in some cases is almost identical) the national delineations of his country. Some of them are gems, as faultless as they are attractive, from whatever point of view regarded; others, more evidently published, are less happy; but one of them is wholly destined of points that appeal to the feelings, surprise by their unexpectedness, fascinate by their plastic character, charm by their ingenuity. Mendelssohn, in speaking of one of the Preludes of Chopin, expressed himself in terms of such unqualified admiration as to effect a query from an interpolated able to understand the cause of the great master's enthusiasm. "I love it," replied Mendelssohn, with unusual warmth,—I cannot tell you how much, or why; except, perhaps, that it is something which I could never at all have imagined." On the other hand, questioned about the front of one of the sonatas, Mendelssohn said briefly and bitterly—'Oh! I adore it.' When Chopin was first in Paris, he took lessons on the pianoforte of the late Kalkbrenner, whose reputation as a professor then was very high. This first for some unfortunate reason, used to be kept in a secret by Chopin, and was only denied by some of his friends, disposed to believe that such a wonderful and gifted genius could receive any benefit whatever from the tuition of a musical drill-sergeant. It is, nevertheless, true and equally to the Mendelssohn, with whom so the time Chopin had conducted a friendly intimacy, expressed his astonishment, on being told by Chopin himself, that he had come to Paris expressly to study under Kalkbrenner. "Why," said Mendelssohn, always quick to appreciate talents in others, "you play better than Kalkbrenner."
CHOPIN'S MAURICIAN.

Vivace.

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