

MUSICAL HOURS IN WEIMAR—LISZT AND
HIS PUPILS—A MATINEE AT THE HOUSE
OF THE MASTER—A BLIND ORGANIST.

[FROM AN OCCASIONAL CORRESPONDENT.]

From sultry, noisy, mal-odorous, brutal Berlin what a relief it was to arrive at cool, cheerful, stony little Weimar, whose effect is of having faithfully washed its face before breakfast every morning since it began to be! We came to pay our devoirs to one of the muses who haunt the place, for my friend was one of the musical aspirants who go there in the summer to Liszt, and who practise the ears of their neighbors off their heads to such a degree that it is often very difficult for a "Lisztianity," as the Weimarese call them, to find a place where she can bestow herself and her piano. We ensconced ourselves in the remotest corner of the Rüssischer Hof, where I, at least, was enchanted to find, besides the excellent table d'hôte, such a cup of tea as I should not have supposed could have been made out of England. Liszt had been away to Baireuth to the grand Nibelungen rehearsals of his distinguished son-in-law, and only returned the day we ourselves got there. His custom is to meet his class at four o'clock on specified afternoons of the week, and also on Sunday mornings at eleven o'clock. The latter occasions are called matinees, and at them he gives no instruction, and only such artists play as he invites to do so.

As the companion of a former pupil, I had the privilege of attending three of these Sunday occasions. At the first one, when we entered, music was already going on. The "Meister," as he is always called, was seated at the piano playing the bass of a four-handed composition of Weitzmann's, of which some young man was playing the treble, and most of the class were serried so closely round the instrument that we could not see him. So, fearful of making an interruption, we slipped into the nearest chairs and waited. It has been said that no one can enter Liszt's salon without being affected by it, and that the assertion has some truth in it I can testify in my own case. The two small but high rooms, destitute of a single picture, but hung with banded crimson draperies and set round with low sofas and chairs covered with the same material; the grand piano stretching its graceful length over closely-set piles of music on the floor, and the racks full of music near it; the few and unapparent other pieces of furniture; the vases and dishes of flowers scattered about, arranged, it is true, in the stiff fashion of the German gardener, but with a delicious bunch of roses on the writing table that does not look like the gardener, all combine to form a harmonious whole devoted to a single supreme idea, which stamps upon the mind an ineffaceable impression.

As I sat there and listened to a piano which was sounding under Liszt's fingers, even though only in the bass, I could scarcely believe my own identity,—that I was, indeed, in the very home and presence of this world-renowned man. The windows of the drawing-room overlook the interior of the exquisite Weimar park. Several of the casements were open to this lovely August morning, and, in the Sunday stillness, with the masses of the trees waving slightly outside in the summer air, it was a glimpse of the ideal such as is seldom vouchsafed to the common-place dweller in this utilitarian world. As the piece concluded we rose, the circle opened, and Liszt saw and greeted us. His figure is a little bent, and he begins to show his sixty-five or more years, but there was never a more noble and wonderful head, or a more singular, tragic and changing face, or rather mask, than his. The class dispersed ~~east~~ among the seats, and my friend pointed out to me those whom she knew. There was Fraulein Gaul of Baltimore, but two years ago rosy sixteen, and now pale with anxious study at Stuttgart and here of this most inexorable instrument, the piano. There was little Timanahof, the Russian, who is as plump and even more solid than she was six years ago, when at only fifteen she was one of the best pupils in ~~Serge~~ ^{Sauzige} conservatory. Sitting next to her was her friend Fraulein Rielke from Vienna, with some share of the famous Vienna beauty, but as delicate and fatigued-looking even in her first youth as a New England girl. Then there were Zarembski and May Pinner, special pets of Liszt's, the former a young Pole with a profusion of flowing blonde locks and an ensemble something like Rubinstein, the latter a New Yorker, with the most musical face in the room, but with too tense and strained an expression for perfect well-being of body or mind. Mr. and Mrs. Sherwood, too, were present, he a young composer and artist from Lyon, New York, she a pianist from Boston, full of talent both of them, but not so anxious over their art as some others, as her happy, brilliant smile fully implied. The strikingly handsome Maas, English-born but German descended and bred, the Italian-looking Mr. Pratt of Chicago, both of them aspirants for the composer's crown; the Belgian Guicks with his French physiognomy and finely discriminating expression, and two little American Frauleins of German parentage, students of talent, but not yet, like the others, ready for the concert room, completed, with my friend, the list of the artist-pupils. Beside these, Fraulein Breitenstein, the singer, and several musicians belonging to the Weimar orchestra were present; also Gottschal, Liszt's Weimar factotum, and, lastly and least, sundry musical and antiquated maidens, German and English, who compose the extreme outer edge of the fringe of adulation that always surrounds the great man, and who dare do nothing more than worship him at a distance and kiss his hand when he deigns to extend it to them in adieu.

Never before had I found myself one of such a palpitantly musical company, nor ever before so realized the expenditure of the musician's life. Amid these young creatures, with their concert-

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Pinner

Guicks

room triumphs all before them, moved about the colossal virtuoso whose similar triumphs are all behind him. To them the least of his musical honors would be a glory. To him they are all as vanity, faded and worthless in comparison with the meed which the world bestows on creative genius alone, and which has long been his only real aspiration. Liszt rarely plays now, not even to this high-strung and appreciative audience. The whole range of accepted music is such a worn-out emotion to him, that his only pleasure seems to be in reading over new compositions for four hands, of which he takes one part, or for two instruments, of which he plays the piano accompaniment. As the devourer of current literature glances at every book and magazine that comes in his way, so does Liszt skim through the reams of new music that are sent to him, in the hope of coming across a gleam of original talent—of something new—in short, of a musical "sensation." Never was there a man who so gives one the impression of being utterly *biase*, and yet of having still an immense reservoir of vitality and commanding energy which has not found an adequate scope. Like a caged lion he walks up and down restlessly among his pupils, all of whose "eyes wait upon him," and makes here a little jest, there a trivial remark, yonder a sly sarcasm, until we wonder how much of real earnestness there is behind that face with the Voltairean smile, which is at such variance with its powerful, tragic features and square, iron jaw.

At last he asks Fraulein Rielke to play. She goes to the piano and dashes off his "Gnomon Reigen" (Fairy Rings), in a very fairy-like manner indeed; but it is an intensely hazardous thing, and she is so nervous that she loses a good many notes. They don't show, however; and as the conception of the piece is right Liszt appears satisfied. Then he calls the little Russian, Fraulein Timan-hoff. This young lady has been in training ever since she was six years old, and has studied with the greatest masters, even to Tausig and Rubinstein, so that, as she naively said in her pretty guttural English when I asked her if she were gaining a great deal from Liszt, "O, the master doesn't tell to me nothing, for I knew it all myself before I came to him." She is Liszt's pronounced favorite this summer, and she is asked to play every Sunday, to the consuming jealousy of most of the rest of the class, who would not, as a whole, give her their suffrage as the first artist among them, by any means. She sits down with the most complete *sang-froid*, and plays a "nouvelle melodie" of Rubinstein, of which Liszt is very fond. It is an exquisite adagio composition, a veritable "song without words," and she plays it in a way so masterly that my friend and I whisper to each other that if she is equally great in brilliant music she is indeed a consummate artist. Rubinstein himself could not render it better. Every nuance of a nuance, all the innumerable gradations of sorrow and of chagrin that one would think could be learned only in forty years' experience and disappointment, steal out from under the assured fingers of this little beer-drinking maiden, with her light hair in a wild frowse such as is often seen in Germany, but which west of the Rhine I think no feminine head would dare! Every few bars she lifts her eyes composedly to the master who sits facing her at the other end of his little salon. Liszt always looks at his listeners himself, and that is one of the things he makes his pupils do. "Throw me a look!" he will cry, as he sees their eyelids drop too fixedly over the keys. It is not such an easy thing to learn, they say, and requires just a little more "cheek" than most of them at first possess. But it is a valuable concert-room acquisition, as every one will admit who re-

members how effectively used to be Gottschalk's half-lifted glance and the faint glimmer of his smile as he turned them upon his audiences.

We all applaud the Timan-hoff, and Liszt takes two or three turns about the salon. But something has annoyed him, and he must vent it on some one before he can be perfectly serene. As he passes by our chairs he mutters, alluding either to us or to some others who came in still later: "They come in here as if to a hotel, and do not even salute me." This cuts my friend, who, like all the rest, adores her master, to the quick. She jumps up, and, rushing after him, seizes his hand; "Why, Herr Doctor, it was only because we were afraid of interrupting you that we waited until the music was over. We were afraid of interrupting you!" He mollifies instantly at her earnestness, and, patting her shoulder, smiles and says in German, "All right, all right!" and she returns to her seat. But it was the one drop too much. The associations of this room, where she had spent so many happy and exciting hours two years previously, had almost overcome her as it was, and now the tears welled up and kept brimming quietly over for the next half-hour. She could not bear it that on this first day Liszt should ever seem to misunderstand her! But the incident was Liszt all over, and so I give it. If anything puts him out, he must find a victim immediately, guilty or innocent. When he has drawn blood, he is appeased. My friend was disgusted with herself, for Liszt hates tears. He loves smiles and jollity.

Liszt now goes down on his knees on the floor, and rummages under the piano among the music. When he has found what he wants, he sits down and accompanies Fraulein Breitenstein in some songs by Metzdorf, a former pupil of his. The song, the voice and the expression are beautiful; but no voice can be beautiful enough to a stranger to atone for the fact that Liszt is *accompanying*!—is playing second where we wish him to be first; to be alone, "the one and the only." The songs finished, Zaremski plays Liszt's arrangement of Schubert's March most beautifully, and after it Liszt tries with him a duet from manuscript of the young man's own composition; but I was not far enough in the music of the future to be able to seize a single definite idea from it, and I did not hear any one else say that *they* had. The matinee closed with Liszt playing an immensely long and uninteresting thing for flute and piano with the leading flute-player of the Weimar orchestra. How in the world he could bore himself and the class with a stupid composition, which was written for nothing in the world but to show off the difficulties that *could* be performed by the flute, I could not imagine. Probably to do the performer a kindness, for within certain limits Liszt seldom refuses a favor. The player was accomplished, but he lost his place or broke down several times, and then Liszt with a smile and an "oaf" would cover it with one of his marvellous cadenzas. "No one will ever equal Liszt with his rolling basses and his flowery trebles," said my friend afterward of him with a sigh. At the end he swept the poor flutist off into infinite space with a little laugh and a single scale, which embraced the entire key-board and seemed impossible to have been performed by detached human fingers. There was no break between the notes. It was just a swi-s-h—h—h. As much the token of his unapproachableness as the circle which Apelles struck with a single stroke,—"his mark." Then he got up and said to my friend in French: "In the groves, in the groves,—the flute goes well enough!"

A day or two afterwards we met Liszt in the street with his train of pupils, factotums and aforesaid distant admirers, and he told us to be

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sure to go to an organ concert which a blind organist of only eighteen or twenty was to give the following afternoon at the Stadt-Kirche. "It is only ten groschen," said he, holding up his fingers, and of course we would have been only too glad to go to please him, had it been ten times as much. We went accordingly to the church at five o'clock, and found Liszt and his train just going into it. He seated himself in a pew with Timan-hoff on one side, and Rielke on the other, the rest of the fringe accommodat-

ing itself at due proportional distances. The first thing was an arrangement for organ from Liszt's "Holy Elizabeth," a subtle and pathetic composition, expressive of the asceticism and mysticism of the middle ages, and to me very beautiful. The other organ pieces were Bach's fantasie and fugue in G-minor, Thiele's famous theme and variations, and, as a finale, Bach's Toccata—surely the most wonderful expression of the joy and aspiration of nature toward a Creator to which the mind of man ever rose. All these tremendous compositions were given in the most masterly manner—better than I had ever heard them from the best organists in this country, and I never was more grateful for an unexpected pleasure than for this beautiful hour which beforehand I had supposed would be just endurable only. Liszt had dreaded it himself, as he had remarked to my friend that blind musicians often came to him, but that they were rarely true artists, the disadvantage against them being too great. But no youth could have accomplished more than this one had done, and Liszt sat with closed eyes and tranquil, almost transfigured, look, listening as if he really enjoyed it. After it was over and all were outside again, the organist (whose name, unfortunately, I cannot remember) came down to speak to Liszt, led by his poverty-stricken little mother in black. It was hard to believe that that slight, pale, insignificant-faced boy, with his sightless eyes, was he who had been pouring out upon us those glorious surges of sound, and as I counted up how little he must have made out of his audience at "ten groschen apiece" (twenty-five cents), I wished that he were the organist of one the many rich churches in our large cities, whose splendid organs go half-dumb under the hands of tyros.

ZERO.