Concerning Chopin in Manchester

Susanna Brookshaw

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NARODOWY INSTYTUT FRYDERYKA CHOPINA BIBLIOTEKA



Crumpsall House.

FOREWORD

Information concerning Chopin's visit to Manchester is sparce and scattered. As far as it can be found it has been gathered within these pages.

This booklet is not intended as a section of biography; but is merely a collection of references to the composer which have some bearing on his stay in the City.

It has been set down for the help of anyone who, in years to come, may feel drawn, as I was, to seek for the shade of Chopin in his Manchester surroundings.

PREFACE

Chopin played at one of the Gentlemen's Concerts in Manchester in 1848. My quest for information, in respect of what may be considered a very interesting episode in the musical history of the City, was not satisfied by any of the biographies. Interest was stimulated by the fact, that as a member of the *Société Frédéric Chopin* of Paris, I had discovered that his life and movements were fairly fully chronicled in other directions. A search was then instituted in order to bring to light any matter that would augment the meagre information already printed.

It was not known in which part of Manchester he stayed. Frederick Niecks in his comprehensive book on Chopin, mentions a Mr. and Mrs. Salis Schwabe as having been the composer's host and hostess. The first step, therefore, was to discover where these people lived in 1848. It proved far more difficult than seemed possible.

The name Salis Schwabe, is well known in connection with a print works at Rhodes, near Middleton, now merged in the C.P.A., but inquiry from this source only produced the vague information that " Salis Schwabe had lived at some Hall "—locality unknown.

The help of " Denys " of the *Manchester Evening Chronicle* was next enlisted, and I cannot do better than to quote the paragraph which appeared in his feature, " Through a Northern Window " on November 23, 1934, as it exactly states the motives of my inquiry and the reasons prompting me to undertake it.

" This is one of our hunting mornings," he writes. " A Bowdon reader, S.B., who speaks for a number of lovers of Chopin has induced me to join in a search for details about the composer's solitary visit to Manchester in 1848.

" A great deal more has been said about this visit than is warranted by our knowledge. Mr. Sacheverell Sitwell, for instance, describes it as an act of suicide (which it may have been), and says it was in the ' failing autumn ' of 1848, which it certainly was not. Chopin came here in August and a few days later Jenny Lind sang in the town. Axon's famous ' Annals of Manchester ' records the singer's visit but is completely and absolutely blank about Chopin—a very curious omission.

" As my Bowdon reader points out it is odd that so much has been written about Chopin's stay in London and Scotland on the same tour, and so little about his visit to Manchester.

" There are the press notices, George Osborne's personal recollections of his playing, and a letter from Chopin mentioning his visit. Beyond that a tantalising blank.

" ' For instance,' asks S.B., ' How long was he here? Is the house where he stayed still in existence, and if so, where? Middleton? '

" I like to think that in spite of his illness his stay in our city pleased him, as in his letter he particularly stressed the kindness of Mr. and Mrs. Salis Schwabe whose guest he was, and referring to his audience, says, ' They received me very well. I had to sit down to the pianoforte three times. (Once in the first half of the programme, once in the second, and an encore) '

" Surely, as my reader argues, he must have met some other Manchester people. Meeting Chopin and hearing him play must have been the sort of treasured memory that they would certainly retail to their children. Where are the descendants of these fortunate people?

" We know that 1,200 people heard him play at the Gentlemen's Concert Hall. Where are the children and grandchildren of the people who formed his audience? "

Where indeed? For no information was forthcoming!

I next consulted the Manchester Directory for 1848. It added confusion to the mystery by stating that Salis Schwabe lived at Crumpsall Hall, since a further search revealed not one, but two, Crumpsall Halls (the old and the new), and information concerning them differed bewilderingly. In one place it was stated that both houses were demolished, but in contradiction of this another source indicated that part of one was still standing, though precisely which was difficult to discover.

It came as a relief, therefore, when, through Mr. Edmund Ogden, some reliable information was supplied by an old resident in the Crumpsall neighbourhood Mr. John H. Swann wrote that :—

" Salis Schwabe lived at *Crumpsall House* not Crumpsall Hall. The last resident of Crumpsall House was Colonel Clapham who, incidentally, was on the Committee of the Gentlemen's Concerts, and after whose death in 1920 the house was demolished. The estate has been built upon, the Crumpsall Open-Air School being on part of the site. Crumpsall Lane runs into Middleton Road almost immediately opposite to where Crumpsall House stood in its grounds."

So much for the misprint in the Directory. Now for a description of Crumpsall House : again exceedingly hard to find. Many people had " seen it often " without seeing it consciously at all. Finally I wrote to the Crumpsall Post Office, and received a letter in reply from Miss May Cooling, the sub-post mistress. She said :—

" I fear I do not know a great deal about Colonel Clapham's house. I remember it as an old, square, Georgian mansion with a

very long drive up to it. Rather plain, though I believe the gardens near the house were beautiful. Colonel Clapham's daughter married the Rev. Vaughan of St. Mark's Rectory, George Street, Cheetham Hill, Manchester, 8, and she is still alive, so if you were to write direct to her, she would be able to give you a description of it, and would most likely have a photograph."

I took this advice but, as a reply was not forthcoming within a reasonable period, decided that there was no information to be had or that the matter had been considered of no importance.

Six months later the Rector of St. Mark's telephoned to say that his wife had just found my letter on her return from South Africa where they had both been on holiday. The letter, which had been placed in a drawer by mistake, was, he felt sure intended for the wife of his predecessor as she was the daughter of Colonel Clapham and would I therefore write to Mrs. Maude, Bockleton Vicarage, Tenbury, Worcester.

So at long last through the kindness of this lady I obtained photographs of the house where Chopin stayed.

I also managed to get into touch with a grand-daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Salis Schwabe (Mrs. Evelyn MacMillan of Southport), who promised to have her grandmother's letters re-read in the hope that some reference to Chopin might occur in them, but this has had no result.

The search which has, at best, been singularly unproductive, would have been impossible without the unique facilities for research afforded by the Henry Watson Music Library, Manchester, and I must acknowledge with gratitude the help given to me by its librarian, Mr. John F. Russell.

Bowdon, 1937. S.B.

CHOPIN IN 1848

When Chopin arrived in London at six o'clock in the evening on the day before Good Friday (April 20, 1848) he was in a sad state of health, of which the inevitable end could not long be delayed.

His life, spoken of by Léon Daudet as " une existence en effet toute automnale qui n'a connu qu'un bien court printemps—sans été ", was virtually over. His music was written, his short experience of life had brought him disillusionment and only for another sixteen months did his ruined lungs permit him to breathe on the earth that had become distasteful to him.

Without hope that he might again recapture life, he existed in a kind of false animation, gave lessons, played at fashionable concerts, accepted invitations—all with a cold sense of futility.

His chief concern at this time was to make a little money—he was haunted by the fear of being totally incapacitated and not having enough to live on.

" I even avoid solitude so as not to think," he writes to a friend, " for I must not be ill here long—" So he delivered his letters of introduction and quickly became fashionable.

" What remains of me," he says in a letter, " is just a big nose and an undeveloped fourth finger."

What also remained was, mercifully, a sense of humour, a shrewd insight into character, perfect manners, together with a disarming modesty, and a way of playing the piano that transfigured him.

He went through a London season, in it but not of it, meeting many celebrities from Queen Victoria downwards. Amongst them was Jane Carlyle, who later wrote to Jane Stirling, Chopin's Scottish pupil, saying in the course of her letter :—

" I believe that the writing of each one of his compositions left him fewer days to live."

In due course he came to play in Manchester and that city had an opportunity of hearing the pianist whose touch had been likened to " molten pearls dropping on red velvet " and of seeing Frédéric Chopin at one of his last public appearances.

HE COMES TO MANCHESTER

Chopin first mentions the impending visit to Manchester in a rather despondent letter dated " July, 1848," written from 48, Dover Street, London, to his Polish friend, Grzymala.* It contains the following reference to the Manchester concert :—

**Chopin's Letters*—Collected by *Henryk Opienski.* Translated from the original Polish and French by *E. L. Voynich.*

" For the 29th of August I have accepted an engagement in Manchester where there will be a big concert. I am to play twice without the orchestra and they are giving me 60 pounds. Alboni is coming, but I don't care about that. I shall just sit down and play. I shall stay there two or three days where Neukomm lives with rich local manufacturers."

On the 6th of August he wrote to Auguste Franchomme the 'cellist with whom he was very friendly when in Paris. The heading of the letter is Calder House, which he describes to another friend, Julian Fontana, as being " 12 miles from Edinburgh, if that is any pleasure to you." This was the house of the seventy-eight-year old Lord Torpichen who was brother-in-law to Miss Jane Stirling, and her sister Mrs. Erskine.

He tells Franchomme :—

" I have promised to be in Manchester by the 28th of August, to play at a concert for 60 pounds. Neukomm is living there, but I hope he won't want to improvise on the same day, as I am counting on earning the 60 pounds! What to do with myself next I don't know, but I do earnestly wish that someone would give me an annual pension to the end of my life for not composing." Apropos of this he says later : " Of musical ideas there can be no question I am utterly out of the running," and says that he feels like " a fiddle's ' E ' string on a bass viol." One wonders if £60 was specially good payment in those days. He never fails to mention it, though once he calls it " 60 guineas."

Neukomm, the man to whom Chopin refers wrote a thousand works, oratorios, masses, etc., now all consigned to oblivion in spite of the fact that at one time he was known as the " King of Brummagen," because he was so highly thought of in that city.

Frederick Niecks (author of the standard " Life of Chopin ") wrote to Franchomme to ask if any special meaning could be read into this sentence about Neukomm's improvising. Franchomme replied : " Chopin found Neukomm a boring musician, and it was therefore distasteful to him to think of Neukomm improvising at a concert at which he himself was to play."

Posterity has endorsed Chopin's opinion.

On August 19th Chopin wrote two letters, again from Calder House, Midlothian. In both of them he speaks of going to Manchester. One is addressed to his family in Warsaw. It is a very long letter written on three sheets of paper with views of Edinburgh. Amongst other things he says :—

"I am due in Manchester on August 28th to play at a concert at which the Italians from London will sing ; Alboni, and so on . . . They are to pay me 60 guineas, and as that is a sum not to be refused I have accepted *and leave here in a week,* 200 and something English miles, eight hours' railway journey.

" There good friends await me, very rich manufacturers, with whom Neukomm lives (that best pupil of Hadyn's, formerly Kapellmeister to the Emperor of Brazil, you know him by name). There is also Mrs. Rich (a daughter of Mr. Mackintosh, a greatly respected former member of Parliament, orator and writer, and my great friend), also these ladies Erskine and Stirling. After the concert I return to Glasgow, etc. . ."

The other letter is to Grzymala and he says :—

" I am here to rest after the London season and keep quiet till the 28th of this month when I am due in Manchester. I have promised to go and play at a concert which Alboni, etc., are giving, and they will give me £60 for it. One can't reject that in these days.

" After the 28th I don't know what I shall do. Schwabe (a rich local manufacturer whom you may have seen at Leo's) awaits me in Manchester. They live not right in the town, but a few miles outside, and Neukomm lives there with them.

" Mrs. Rich, that kind old English lady that you met as my guest, is also coming, with Miss Stirling, so I shall not be alone, and it will be less dull for me."

Further on in the same letter may be read :—

" I am ready to go back to Scotland from Manchester, not quite eight hours railway journey."

And again :—

" I will write to you from Manchester."

He did not write from Manchester, however, which is a pity, otherwise he might have given some definite indication as to when he went and how long he remained there.

It was September 4th before he writes again, to Grzymala, this time from " Johnston Castle, 11 miles from Glasgow."

" Since I wrote to you," he says, " I have been in Manchester. They received me very well, I had to sit down to the pianoforte three times. The hall is fine ; 1,200 persons.

" I stayed in the country (there is too much smoke in the town) all the rich people live outside.

" I stayed at the kind Schwabes ; perhaps you have seen him sometime at Leo's. He is one of the first manufacturers, owns the biggest chimney in Manchester, which cost £5,000. He is a friend of Cobden, and himself a great Free Trader. He is a Jew, but a protestant like Leo. His wife is particularly kind. They wanted to insist on my staying on, because Jenny Lind is to come there this week, and also will stay with them (they are great friends).

" At the Schwabe's I saw Leo's* brother who also trades in Manchester.

" This Schwabe knows Albrecht from Havre, etc."

The foregoing letters of Chopin contain all he has to say about Manchester, which is disappointingly little on which to endeavour to reconstruct the scene.

On Monday, August 28th, he played before an audience of approximately 1,200 persons in the Gentlemen's Concert Hall. From the fact that the day was Monday and taking into consideration the difficulties of travel in those days it may be safely assumed that he arrived at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Salis Schwabe not later than the evening of Saturday, August 26th.

The 19th of August which was the day when the letters to his family and Grzymala were written, was the previous Saturday, and in the etter to Warsaw he says that he is leaving in a week.

On the Monday following the Manchester concert (September 4th) he was safely installed in Johnston Castle, where, it may be supposed, he had arrived in time for the week end. This means that he probably spent at least three or four days with the Salis Schwabes as, in his precarious state of health, he would need to be thoroughly rested before he faced another long train journey.

He seems to have nothing but praise for the kindness of his host and hostess, and one likes to think that his visit to Manchester contented him.

He was evidently satisfied with his reception at the concert, and in the one letter where he describes his stay we get none of the caustic (but amusing) remarks he so frequently employs when writing about his Scottish friends and experiences. Remember Liszt calls Chopin " a fine connoisseur in raillery, and an ingenious mocker ! "

Mr. and Mrs. Salis Schwabe lived at Crumpsall House which stood in its own extensive grounds on Middleton Road, almost opposite the end of Crumpsall Lane. From the Ordnance Map and hearsay (which is largely confirmed by photographs) it may be gathered that it was a fine building, severely plain in the Georgian style, with a big stableyard, glass, and the usual outbuildings.

It was surrounded by large ornamental gardens, with an elaborate design of flower beds cut just where they would be seen from the

*The reference to Herman Leo is interesting. He was a calico printer and lived at Willow House, Greenheys, at that time. He was brother to Chopin's friend Auguste Leo, the Paris banker and was directly responsible for Charles Hallé coming to Manchester. Knowing that Hallé had left Paris and was not too settled in London he wrote, saying that Manchester was " quite ripe to be taken in hand." Herman Leo was looked upon as a trustworthy musical authority, an enthusiastic amateur, and a great connoisseur. Manchester owes him remembrance.

windows of the house. There was a sundial garden and a lake, and the fields comprising the estate had attractive and suggestive names such as the Rosemary Field.

The house itself faced east, towards Blackley, and was approached by a long drive from Middleton Road, bordered by trees.

Mr. and Mrs. Salis Schwabe were kindly hospitable people. Salis Schwabe was born at Oldenburg, in 1800. At the age of seventeen he left Germany and for the next fifteen years lived in Glasgow. The prospects in Manchester attracted him in 1832 and the small business which he started there in that year with what capital he possessed flourished apace and he became rich and prosperous.

He was considerate and generous, especially to anyone starting in business as he had done, and would give all the help he could to such people.

His musical sympathies are apparent from his associations. Education also interested him deeply and he just as firmly believed in the cause of free trade, which brought him into friendly contact with Richard Cobden.*

Mr. Schwabe died on the 23rd of July, 1853, at Glyn Garth, his house in Anglesey, which stands on the road from Menai Bridge to Beaumaris. He was buried at Harpurhey Cemetery, Manchester, on July 30th, and was followed to the grave by the Bishop of Manchester, and many of the leading persons of the city. Shortly after his death a life-like bust of him was exhibited in the Art Gallery. It was the work of the Manchester sculptor William Bally, who was also responsible for the beautiful wax medallion of Malibran now in the possession of the Henry Watson Music Library.

The Schwabe vault in Harpurhey Cemetery bears the following inscription :—

" Children and friends may you live and die like him."

Salis Schwabe's body (and that of his wife who died in Naples) have been removed to London and the vault in Harpurhey Cemetery, enclosed by rusty wrought iron railings, is now sadly overgrown with rhododendrons.

Let our last word on Chopin's host be that, " In music he was proficient on the pianoforte and organ, his playing on both being distinguished for great delicacy and sentiment."

Julie Salis Schwabe, Chopin's hostess, was evidently a clever woman, and hearsay credits her with great strength of character.

*We may say in passing that Cobden freely admitted his inability to distinguish " God Save the Queen " from any other tune ! So it was not a mutual love of music that fostered his friendship with the Salis Schwabes.

She published the French edition in 1879, and the English edition in 1895, of a volume of reminiscences of Richard Cobden, in which she describes how she and her husband accompanied Mr. and Mrs. Cobden on their tour of Europe in the interests of free trade.

In this book she mentions a visit to the Escorial when in Spain. In those days a permit was essential if one wished to view the combined palace-monastery and royal burial place for which Philip the Second was responsible. The Cobden-Salis Schwabe party had overlooked this fact, and they were therefore delighted to meet Alexandre Dumas, who came to the rescue, and shared his permit with them.

From scraps of evidence like the above it may be inferred that Chopin's Manchester host and hostess were quite well-known in artistic circles in Paris.

Chopin himself appears to have thought that Grzymala must have met Salis Schwabe at the house of the banker Leo in Paris, where he (Chopin) was a frequent visitor, and where he used to play to a small and appreciative audience.

We have Charles Hallé's word for it that " The Parisian artistic and literary society at that time was so constituted that to know a few men of mark was to know them all.

In another place in his memoirs Hallé tells us that " Victor Hugo, Balzac, Alexandre Dumas and his son, Alfred de Musset and Scribe were but a few of the brilliant host who daily met and dined or took their coffee together on the Boulevards. " Paris," he says, " was then in reality what Wagner wished to make Bayreuth, the centre of civilization."

We can add for ourselves to Hallé's already imposing list of celebrities, the even more dazzling names of Chopin, Liszt, Delacroix, Hector Berlioz, Ingres, Lamartine, Ary Scheffer, Meyerbeer, Moscheles, Hiller, Heller, Halevy, and Hallé himself ! Even that string of names does not include the entire extraordinary constellation of stars. For instance, how do we come to leave out Paganini, Heinrich Heine and she who has been very aptly referred to as " the stumpy ogress whose normal diet was men of genius "—George Sand ?

The memoirs of Sir Charles Hallé are a good source of fascinating information concerning the artists of this glowing period from which sparks occasionally reached Manchester, and it will perhaps not be out of place to mention Hallé's first impression of Chopin and his playing. In a letter to his parents in 1836 he says :—

" The same evening I went to dine with Baron Eichthal, where I was very cordially treated, and where I heard Chopin.

" That was beyond all words.

" Chopin ! He is no man, he is an angel, a god (or what can I say more ?) Chopin's compositions played by Chopin ! That is a joy never to be surpassed.

" There is nothing to remind one that it is a human being who produces this music. It seems to descend from Heaven, so pure and clear and spiritual. I feel a thrill every time I think of it. If Liszt plays still better then the Devil take me if I don't shoot myself on the spot

" Chopin, moreover, is a charming delightful creature. He talked to me a long time, gave me his address, and the permission to go and see him often, a permission he will not have given in vain."

There was no question of Hallé shooting himself, for later he tells us that :—

" Chopin carried you with him into a dreamland in which you would have liked to dwell for ever ; Liszt was all sunshine and dazzling splendour, subjugating his hearers with a power that none could withstand." So it seems that honours were even.

Of Chopin's own view of Liszt a little digression may perhaps be permitted to quote :—

" He will give me a little kingdom in his empire," said Chopin when he heard of Liszt's intention to be present at, and to write the criticism on one of his Paris concerts.

To return to Manchester. Mrs. Schwabe was an intimate friend of Jenny Lind, who, at the time with which we are concerned, was nearing the height of her popularity. She stayed on several occasions at Crumpsall and also in Anglesey with the Schwabes.

The house on the island commanded a magnificent view of the mountains of the Snowdon Range on the Welsh mainland, and there is a story still told of Jenny Lind, who, having climbed the hill behind the house, was so enraptured at the lovely sight of sea and mountains that she stood and sang for pure joy of it.

The following account of Christmas at Crumpsall House is included as it serves to recreate something of the atmosphere of the household in which Chopin had been a guest four months previously.

It is an extract from the second volume of the memoirs of Mdme. Jenny Lind Goldschmidt (original documents, diaries, letters etc., collected by M. Otto Goldschmidt. Edited by Henry Scott Holland and W. S. Rockstro, 1891).

" A large gathering of relatives and intimate friends had assembled at the bidding of the kind host and hostess to keep the ' Merrie Feaste of Yuletide ' at Crumpsall, when Mdlle. Lind was greeted with a hearty welcome beneath its hospitable rooftree.*

*After she married and had a household, when her tree was lit, Madame Goldschmidt (Jenny Lind) her friends and children, would gather round the little Müller harmonium given her in 1849 by Salis Schwabe and sing " Good King Wenceslas " and many other less well-known carols. (From " Jenny Lind " by Mrs. Raymond Maude, O.B.E., the daughter of Jenny Lind, and died in London in February, 1935).

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" No possible arrangement that could tend to increase the pleasure or vary the amusement of the happy convives had been neglected.

" Games, banquets and pleasure parties all played their part in the programme of the daily entertainment.

" There was to be a mighty Christmas tree, and a Ball to which all the available dancers in the neighbourhood had long before been invited.

" *But there was to be no music !*

" Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Schwabe would have permitted a single word to be whispered which could have led their honoured guest to suppose that any member of the party entertained the hope of hearing her sing, though no one present doubted that the desire to do so was universal.

" Mdlle. Lind knew this of course, as well as everyone else ; and while appreciating the delicacy which prevented her kind host and hostess from breathing a word on the subject, made up her mind that the general desire should on no account be disappointed, but that it should, on the contrary, be gratified on the evening on which the greatest number of guests would be present to enjoy the treat she had determined to provide for them.

" The little ruse with which she announced her intention was very characteristic.

" ' There is no piano in this room,' she said to Mrs. Meyer,* Mrs. Schwabe's sister, when passing through the ballroom in the afternoon.

" ' It will not be needed,' said Mrs. Meyer, ' as there will be no music.'

" ' Indeed there will,' she said, ' I am going to sing.' (Ich werde singen ').

" The delight caused by this announcement may be readily imagined. A piano was placed in the room, and at a suitable moment, she entertained the company with a selection of her most favourite songs, and not the company only, for a door was set ajar, and, grouped behind it the servants belonging to the establishment together with those brought by the visitors, listened with a zest as great, if scarcely so intelligent, as that of the more highly favoured auditors."

In all probability something of the kind happened when Chopin stayed there—*i.e.*, music not to be expected, and no piano on view. Such considerate people would be the first to realise that he was too ill to be worried. No doubt he would thankfully accept the situation, and yet a doubt remains. Might he not have played ? If so—who heard him ?

*Probably the wife of Morris Sigismund Meyer, a merchant who lived at Smedley New Hall, Cheetham, not very far from Crumpsall House.

We know that he was always ready to entertain his hosts when staying in the Scottish castles. He says himself :—

" In the evenings I play Scotch songs for the old lord, who hums the tune with me—poor fellow "— : and in another letter to Grzymala in whom he seems to confide all his troubles this sentence appears ' Then (after dinner) I go to the drawing-room where it takes all my efforts to be a little animated because then, they usually want to hear me.' "

Chopin had courage. If he set himself a task, and was ill and in pain when the time came to perform it, he never claimed the privilege of an invalid and cancelled the arrangements. Somehow he would miraculously do that which he had said he would do.

Hallé gives an example of this side of Chopin's character. One day Hallé and Franchomme had been bidden to come so that Chopin and Franchomme might play the former's Sonata for 'cello and piano together. This is what happened :—

" On our arrival," says Hallé, " we found him hardly able to move, bent like a half-opened penknife, and evidently in great pain. We entreated him to postpone the performance, but he would not hear of it ; soon he sat down to the piano, and as he warmed to his work, his body gradually resumed its normal position, the spirit having mastered the flesh."

Another instance of this occurs when, after having returned to London from Scotland Chopin promised to play at a Charity Ball at the Guildhall, organised in aid of the Polish refugees. He was always ready to do anything to help his own unfortunate countrymen, and kept his promise under the most distressing conditions. Once again it is Grzymala he tells that :—

" — the doctor visits me every day. He put me on my feet so that I could play at the Polish concert and ball, which was very splendid, but though I left immediately after playing I could not sleep all night. I had such a violent headache, apart from cough and suffocation."

In another letter he says :—

" I am swollen up with neuralgia, and can neither breathe nor sleep. I haven't left my bedroom since the first of November, except on the 16th for an hour to play at the concert for the Poles. Afterwards I collapsed again."

Poor Chopin ! The pity of it, to think of him playing at such heavy cost to himself, to people who really did not wish to listen, and who only did so reluctantly, until the dancing recommenced. In all the descriptions of this ball, everything is mentioned but Chopin, the man who had to be stiffened up sufficiently to leave his bed for an hour to perform what he considered to be his duty. To quote a biographer :—

NOTICE.

The Directors beg to inform the Subscribers that Mons. CHOPIN will substitute the following pieces for those inserted in the Programme, viz :—

In the First Part,

ANDANTE and SCHERZO .....*Chopin.*

In the Second Part,

NOCTURNE, ETUDES, et BERCEUSE .....*Chopin.*

CONCERT HALL,
August 28th, 1848.

Bart Gerrard

CONCERT HALL, MANCHESTER.

MONDAY EVENING, AUGUST TWENTY-EIGHTH, 1848.

DRESS CONCERT.

MISCELLANEOUS.

Part First.

OVERTURE.....“Ruler of Spirits”.....*Weber.*

TERZETTINO.....Signora ALBONI, Signora CORBARI, and Signor SALVI.....“Io t’amava”.....(Nabuco).....*Verdi.*

RECIT. è CAVATINA.....Signora CORBARI.....“Come provar”.....(La Cantatrice Villane).....*Pacini.*

ROMANZA.....Signor SALVI.....“Ciel pietoso”.....(Uberto).....*Verdi.*

NOCTURNE et BERCEUSE—PIANO-FORTE.....Mons. CHOPIN.....*Chopin.*

CAVATINA è FINALE.....Signora ALBONI.....“Non più mesta”.....(Cenerentola).....*Rossini.*

DUETTO.....Signora CORBARI and Signor SALVI.....“Vieni in Roma”.....(Norma).....*Bellini.*

An Interval of Twenty Minutes.

It is particularly requested that Parties in promenading round the Hall will keep to the right.

Part Second

" It was a well-intentioned mistake, he (Chopin) was in the last stages of exhaustion, and the affair resulted in disappointment."

This " mistake " was Chopin's last public appearance.

Bearing all this in mind, the belief that he played at Crumpsall House grows to absolute certainty. He was in congenial surroundings amongst people he liked, and what was often done from a sense of duty or obligation, would, one feels sure, be done as a pleasure in this instance, if only to recall happier days in Paris, when he and his friends met for music at Leo's house.

There must have been a piano provided for his use in his own room or elsewhere, in order that he might prepare for the concert.

When he was well he would shut himself up for a fortnight before a concert and play Bach, and we can take it that upon this occasion he would at least make some preparation, as he was so intensely conscientious and particular. With Jenny Lind matters were different, she came to Crumpsall for a holiday.

It seems safe therefore, to let the mind's eye dwell for a moment upon a picture of Chopin playing after dinner in the drawing-room at Crumpsall House to his friends, and perhaps with the mind's ear, we can listen with them to playing that has since become legendary.

Who is keeping the memories of this scene which it is virtually certain actually took place ?

THE CONCERT

Extract from the *Manchester Guardian,* August 19th, 1848.

Concert Hall

" The directors beg to announce to the subscribers that a Dress Concert has been fixed for Monday, August 28 next, for which the following performers have already been engaged :—

Signora Alboni.
Signora Corbari.
Signor Salvi, and
Mons. Chopin."

This concert, historically important, but very soon forgotten, duly took place, and a criticism appeared in the *Manchester Guardian* for Wednesday, the 30th of August, 1848. It commences as follows:—

" Of course the lustrous-eyed and liquid-voiced Alboni was the chief attraction of the concert ! " Having made this promising start, the susceptible critic proceeds to rhapsodise over the " peculiar and reckless expression and luscious trembling tones " of the famous contralto. He tells us that she even elaborated the most florid of the composer's ornaments, she embellished his embellishments

" with a graceful profusion and a correctness and refinement of execution positively marvellous."

Corbari pleases him less though he speaks of " the modest grace of her manner " and " chaste style of singing." We learn that this lady substituted " a simple Swiss-like air " for the Cavatina by Pacini with but little effect. She did, however, manage to " secure an encore " in the second part, apparently due to her " pleasing expression."

Salvi fared better. He, it seems, was " worthily encored," and the critic had " never heard him with more pleasure than on this occasion."

" With the more instrumental portion of the programme Mons. Chopin was perhaps an equal feature of interest with Alboni, as he was preceded by a high musical reputation." Does not the word " perhaps " speak volumes from one who has just gushed over Alboni's " wild exuberance of ornament? " It is clear that Chopin and Alboni were by no means equal in *his* estimation, but he wished to be on the safe side.

The notice goes on to say that " Chopin appears to be about thirty years of age. He is very spare in frame, and there is an almost painful air of feebleness in his appearance and gait. This vanishes when he seats himself at the instrument in which he seems for the time perfectly absorbed.

" Chopin's music and style of performance partake of the same leading characteristics, refinement rather than vigour, subtle elaboration rather than simple comprehensiveness in composition, an elegant rapid touch rather than a firm nervous grasp of the instrument.

" Both his compositions and playing appear to be the perfection of chamber music, fit to be associated with the most refined instrumental quartet and quartet playing, but wanting breadth and obviousness of design and executive power, to be effective in a large hall.

" These are our impression from hearing Mons. Chopin for the first time on Monday evening.

" He was warmly applauded by many of the most accomplished amateurs in the town, and received an encore in his last piece, a compliment thus accorded to each of the four London artists who appeared at the concert."

It is curious to note the remark about quartet playing. The critic failed to recognise Chopin as the aristocrat of soloists, but what he said about the playing being unsuited to a large concert hall can readily be appreciated, especially when it is remembered that the piano of the day had a very shallow keyfall and a rather tinkling tone.

Moreover, this is precisely what Chopin was afraid of himself. He asked George Osborne*, who was accompanist to the singers at the concert, not to be present when he played.

" You, my dear Osborne," he said, " who have heard me so often in Paris, won't you remain with those impressions? I know that my playing will be lost in such a large room and my compositions will be ineffective. Your presence will be painful both to you and me."

In spite of Chopin's pathetic appeal Osborne concealed himself and helped to cheer and applaud.

" I heard him then for the last time," he tells us, " when his prediction was fulfilled in part, for his playing was too delicate to create enthusiasm, and I felt truly sorry for him."

One cannot help feeling that the *Manchester Guardian* critic did not enjoy this part of the concert. He evidently failed to discern the exquisite beauty of the compositions, and could only use the cold word " refined " to describe Chopin's playing.

Another paper, the *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, approached the matter in a very different way. A preliminary notice of the concert appeared in the issue for the 23rd of August, 1848.

" Amongst the engagements for the Dress Concert to be given at the Concert Hall in addition to the names of Alboni, Corbari and Signor Salvi, appears that of the eminent pianist, M. Chopin, respecting whom the *Daily News*† of the 10th ult. has the following critique:—

" ' The celebrated pianist and composer gave a performance on Friday at the residence of the Earl of Falmouth in St. James' Square.

" ' There was a numerous and fashionable assembly, who were delighted with the entertainment provided for them.

" ' M. Chopin performed an Andante Sostenuto and a Scherzo from his Opus 31. [Andante Spianato and the Scherzo B flat Minor] a selection from his celebrated studies, a Nocturne and a Berceuse, and several of his own Preludes, Mazurkas and Waltzes. In these various pieces he showed very strikingly his original genius as a composer and his transcendental powers as a performer. His music is as strongly marked with individual character as that of any master who has ever lived. It is highly finished, new in its harmonies, full

*George Alexander Osborne, the Irish pianist teacher and composer (he wrote " duets for violin and pianoforte " with de Beriot) was Kalkbrenner's best pupil, It is interesting to recollect that Hallé, acting upon the advice of Kalkbrenner. took lessons from Osborne when he first went to Paris.

†*The Daily News* was established on January 21st, 1846 with Charles Dickens as editor. He retired on February 9! Chopin refers to this paper as the " Delinjus," which is, of course, how it sounded to him in Polish, " j " being pronounced as " y " in that language. The French translation of the Chopin letters spells it " Deliniousse," which is the phonetic spelling in French.

of contrapuntal skill and ingenious contrivance ; and yet we have never heard music which has so much the air of unpremeditated effusion. The performer seems to abandon himself to the impulses of his fancy and his feelings, to indulge in a reverie and to pour out unconsciously as it were, the thoughts and emotions that pass through his mind.

" ' We have never heard any public performance so remote from anything like exhibition or display. M. Chopin does not seek to astonish by loudness of sound or mechanical dexterity.

" ' He accomplishes enormous difficulties, but so quietly, so smoothly and with such constant delicacy and refinement that the listener is not sensible of their real magnitude. It is the exquisite delicacy, with the liquid mellowness of his tone, and the pearly roundness of his passages of rapid articulation which are the peculiar features of his execution, while his music is characterised by freedom of thought, varied expression and a kind of romantic melancholy which seems the natural mood of the artist's mind.' "

The criticism of the Manchester concert by the representative of the *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* appeared on the 30th of August, 1848.

The writer for this paper was not afraid to say that Chopin had " delighted him." His mind seemed to be in some confusion at first as to which school may have influenced Chopin in his compositions. However, he solved the problem neatly and covered himself with glory by saying that Chopin was " perfectly original " and not a copyist of anyone.

He said : " M. Chopin played in the first part an Andante and Scherzo of his own composition. He has been known in this country for many years as a composer of refined taste and original genius of the French school, though deeply imbued with the German, but his music cannot strictly be traced to any particular school as he is perfectly original and not a copyist of anyone."

" We can, with great sincerity, say that he delighted us, though we did not discover in him the vigour of a Thalberg.* Yet there was a chasteness and purity of style, a correctness of manipulation, combined with a brilliancy of touch, and a delicate sensibility of expression which we have never heard excelled.

*Mention of the name Thalberg recalls Chopin's ironic description of that pianist, who was at one time a serious rival of Liszt. " He is younger than I," says Chopin, " pleases the ladies very much, makes pot-pourris on 'Mesaniello,' plays the forte and piano with the pedal but not with the hand, takes tenths as easily as I do octaves, and wears studs with diamonds." Rubinstein said that in his opinion " Liszt was a god—and Thalberg was a grocer." Is this a forerunner of the recent remark of N.C. of the *Manchester Guardian* concerning " commercial traveller " pianists ?

" He played in the second act Nocturne, Etudes et Berceuse, and elicited a rapturous encore. He did not, however, repeat any part, but treated the audience with what appeared to be a fragment of great beauty. The room was filled to overflowing by a most brilliant audience."

Finally, we have the guarded words of a " correspondent " writing on " Music in Manchester " for *The Musical World* of September 9th, 1848, describing Chopin as "... the French celebrated pianist and composer who is a novelty in these parts." He says :—

" You must pardon me if I venture to say very little of Mons. Chopin's pianoforte playing. He neither surprised me nor pleased me entirely. He certainly played with great finish—too much so, perhaps, it might have deserved the name of finesse rather—and his delicacy and expression are unmistakable ; but I missed the astonishing power of Leopold de Meyer, the vigour of Thalberg, the dash of Herz, or the grace of Sterndale Bennett.

" Notwithstanding, Mons. Chopin is assuredly a great pianist and no one can hear him without receiving some amount of delectation."

These press notices would be our only links with the concert were it not for the Hallé memoirs, a letter written to the *Manchester Guardian* a week after the concert, and the glimpse we get of Chopin in a very interesting article by William Eller, which appeared in the *Manchester City News* of October 4, 1924.

This article takes the form of a reminiscence of Sir Charles Hallé in the course of which we read :—

" The summer of 1848 saw Hallé in his future home, England. Manchester saw him in August when he came here with his friend Chopin.*

" By the way I remember my mother telling me of Chopin's wonderful appearance and performance.

"He was then already dying and was so weak that he was carried on and off the platform.

" My mother used to say that there was only one word to describe his performance then, it was unearthly."

In his memoirs Hallé says :—

" During the same month of August Chopin came, played, but was little understood. He remained a few days only, then went to Scotland. . . . The Scotch climate tried his weak constitution severely, and hastened his death."

*This is not quite accurate. Chopin came from Scotland *meeting* Hallé in Manchester.

In another place Hallé* writes :—

" It was then painfully evident that his end was drawing near, a year later he was no more."

In nearly all the events of Chopin's life the evidence is conflicting, and the manner of his reception in Manchester is no exception. On the one hand it is said that he was warmly applauded, but Osborne's version is that there was little enthusiasm. The reports of " a rapturous encore " are offset by Hallé's remark that Chopin was little understood.

It seems preferable to accept the testimony of Osborne and Hallé upon this point. Two such men would be much more likely to form an accurate opinion about the quality and quantity of the applause than the two rather unconvincing critics, especially as the memory of Chopin's playing in the city has been allowed to fade so easily. Hallé in particular would have plenty of opportunity to test the general feeling in respect of the impression Chopin made, both at the time and later. That there were certain members of the audience, apart from Hallè and Osborne, who could appreciate the true worth of a pianist who was also a poet of his instrument and a composer of the highest eminence, is indicated by a letter which appeared in the *Manchester Guardian* of September 6th. This was written by Carl Engel who had not then made his mark as a musical historian. Since this letter is virtually unknown it is given here *in extenso* :—

To the Editor of the *Manchester Guardian.*

" Sir,

" At a time like the present when the efforts of virtuosi seem rather directed towards the exhibition of skill in overcoming difficulties, and the production of dazzling effects, than towards that eloquence of true music which addresses itself to the taste and feelings, the appearance of an artist such as Chopin whose admirable facility of execution is employed only as a means subservient to a higher end, cannot but be interesting. It is the more interesting too, inasmuch as in his own walk Chopin stands at present almost alone.

" To him, art is not an ornament worn for display, to catch the admiration of the multitude, but a sacred gift of Heaven. That he so regards it is seen best in his compositions, which all bear the stamp of a deep and noble character, and are specially distinguished by originality of modulation, and masterly combination of harmony. They are in consequence very different from the compositions of the majority of contemporary pianists, too often made up of

* I frequently pass Hallé's grave in Weaste Cemetery, and cannot banish the thought that Hallé's son, whose name is also on the commemorative stone—" Fredericus Mauritius,"—was named Frederic in memory of Chopin. He was born on the 21st of October, 1849, just four days after Chopin died.

borrowed melodies from the modern opera stage, arranged to suit the specialities of the instrument. This originality may probably be the reason why Chopin's music requires to be heard more frequently and studied with attention before it is properly understood or appreciated.

" This is specially true of his greater works, for example, the Concerto in E Minor ; the Concerto in F Minor dedicated to Mrs. Anderson ; the Sonata No. 1 in B flat Minor and No. 2 in B Minor ; his Ballads (without words), his Scherzos, etc. This was doubtless the reason too why, on the occasion of his appearance here before an audience to which he was in great measure unknown, he selected several of his smaller works. But the delicacy, the feeling and the clearness with which he executed these ; his legato, his expressive touch, all proved sufficiently the truly gifted master in his art.

" And though a state of feeble and sinking health leaves unfortunately little room to hope for the production of more of these fresh and powerful works, yet it may be safely predicted that by those he has already given us, his name will live—when many of his now more lauded and better-known competitors for fame, are forgotten."

C.E.

No details were given regarding the items of the Manchester programme but it was probably as follows :—

Andante Spianato (from Op. 22).
Scherzo B flat Minor. Op. 31.

Nocturne E flat Major. Op. 9, No. 2.
Etudes C sharp Minor. Op. 25, No. 7.
F Minor. Op. 25 No. 2 *or* A flat Major, Op. 25, No. 1.
Berceuse.

Towards the end of his life Chopin was fond of playing all these pieces, and was repeatedly asked to play the Nocturne which, to his pained amusement, was invariably referred to as " your second sigh," but we have no clue to the identity of the " fragment of great beauty " which was given as an encore. It was, perhaps, one of the later Mazurkas.

Apparently all that can be caught is but a fleeting glimpse of Chopin in Manchester. A tragic figure, elusive, withdrawn, and preoccupied —to be a martyr to his disease for a little while longer, and to the doctors, who, at last, being unable to prescribe anything further to help him counselled him to rest.

" Rest," he said, " I shall have it one day—without them."

On October 17, 1849, he died, and his glory came upon him.

There will never, can never, be another Chopin.

1853

Chopin had been dead for four years when his Concerto in E Minor received its first Manchester performance with Charles Hallé as soloist.

The following criticism appeared in the *Manchester Guardian* :—

" Chopin's Concerto in E Minor is a very long and elaborate composition. We have heard very little of Chopin's music, but have often heard it spoken of in such terms of extravagant praise that we must confess this concerto somewhat disappointed us.

" The first movement which is the longest and most elaborate appears scarcely to carry out its title of Allegro Maestoso—Mêstoso would much better describe some parts of it ; it sounded as if a number of difficult studies for the pianoforte had been strung together ; here and there some beautiful passages would appear, but the movement as a whole seemed too laboured, and hardly to carry out the idea suggested by the title.

" The second movement and the third (Romance and Rondo Vivace) are to our thinking, much more satisfactory. The Romance ' larghetto ' is a beautiful subject, and the Rondo as sparkling and brilliant as one could desire. Had we only heard these two movements we should not have complained ; as it is we will endeavour to get better acquainted with the writings of this romantic composer."

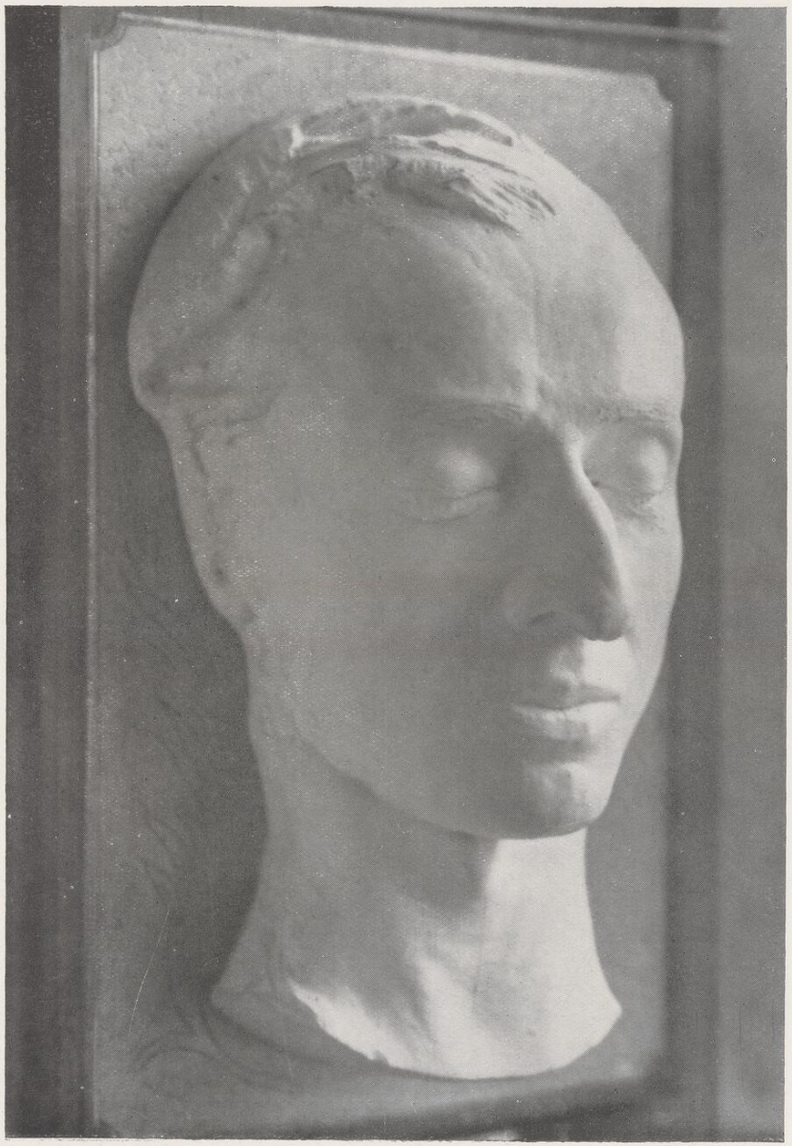
The *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* makes the following observation :—

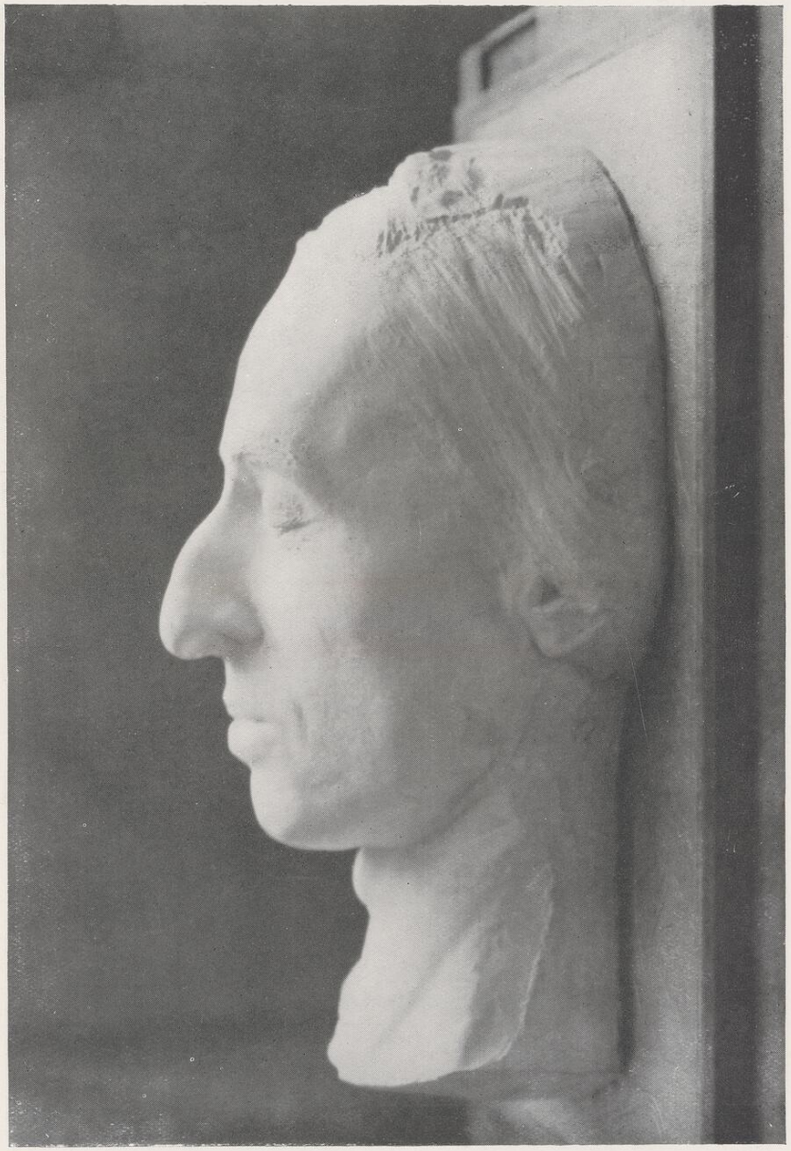
" Mr. Hallé, who was loudly cheered upon taking his seat at the piano, played with his usual skill, and was well sustained by the band under the baton of Mr. Seymour.

" We cannot claim any partiality to the romantic style of the composer, but our acquaintance with his pianoforte works did not lead us to expect so sensible (if we may use such a term) a composition as this concerto in E Minor. We were consequently agreeably disappointed ; the pianoforte has an abundance of impracticabilities assigned to it, these, as such, under Mr. Hallé's hands of course vanished at once, and the effect was decidedly pleasing and consistent, whilst one hearing of the orchestral score impresses us with the opinion that this portion of the work has great merit."

Is this criticism unique in its praise of Chopin's orchestral score ?







THE DEATH MASK

Although, as the foregoing remarks have tended to suggest, Manchester cannot have been fully aware of the great honour done to her by Chopin's visit, yet to-day, here in our midst, is housed one of the greatest of all Chopin relics—the death mask.

Once again the details of its acquirement are vague, but what is known is set out below.

It was in the early hours of the morning that Chopin died.

Some hours later Jean Baptiste Clésinger the sculptor son-in-law of George Sand (" stone tailor " to Chopin, who disliked the man !) went to No. 12 Place Vendôme, where he proceeded to make a death mask.

As a result of his morning's work he later produced his masterpiece " Chopin sur son lit de mort," also the medallion on the monument in Père Lachaise, and, what seems more important, left us an *exact replica of the composer's features.*

Miss Stirling and Mrs. Erskine paid frequent visits to Clésinger's studio while he was working on the Chopin memorials, and in a letter to Madame Jedrzejewicz. (Chopin's sister who had just returned to Warsaw from Paris where she had been with her brother until he died), Miss Stirling writes :—*

" We have seen Clésinger several times. He has finished each small part of the face before our eyes, and it is a beautiful thing. I have the second mould broken in two, with several hairs adhering to it. Seeing how this ' breaking ' affected me, Clésinger said, ' Why do you think so much of masks ? I do not like them—'

" I replied that they were dearer to me than all his marbles. ' Very well then—I will give you the mask,' he added.

" After having told Madame Clésinger (Solange Sand) of your arrival, my sister and I took away the mould. In giving it to us Madame Clésinger said that it was a great sacrifice, as she valued it also. She wished to put up the price.' " †

" I did not reply because her aunt was present. It is not hers, or mine, it belongs to the family (Chopin's). It is very precious because of the hair. How shall I send it to you ? *Clésinger still has the original mask.* I have the plaster of the marble."

From this, one supposes that the mould was duly sent to Warsaw—and later (1863) destroyed by Russian soldiery together with so

* " *Sans le souvenir de Frédéric Chopin* " under the heading " *Jane Stirling et sa correspondance.*" (*Edouard Ganche*).

† This would either refer to the price of the monument which was commissioned by the committee composed of Chopin's friends—Jane Stirling being a member of it, or to the marble " *Chopin sur son lit de mort* " which was later in the possession of Jane Stirling—and probably made at her express desire. It is now in the " Collection Edouard Ganche."

many other Chopin relics, but later Clésinger, true to his word, gave Miss Stirling *the original mask.* She had it beautifully mounted, and cherished it until her death in 1859, when it was bequeathed to Mr. A. J. Scott, who as a young man had been a tutor to the family of Erskine of Linlathen, the latter house being the meeting place of " an interesting circle of friends." *

Most probably Mr. and Mrs. Salis Schwabe were of this number considering their great friendship with Miss Stirling and Mrs. Erskine.

Later, Mr. Scott came to Manchester as the first principal of Owen's College, now the University. At one time he was collecting material for a life of Chopin, which unfortunately appears never to have been written.

In 1910 his daughter, Miss Scott, presented the mask to the Royal Manchester College of Music, and in 1936 it was placed together with a cast of Chopin's left hand in the Henry Watson Music Library, Manchester " on permanent loan."

The following is a passage from " Souffrances de Frédéric Chopin," by Edouard Ganche the president of the Société Frédéric Chopin. It is a detailed description of the mask.

" The anatomical examination of the original mask of Chopin, discovered in 1932 † and which is in as perfect a state of preservation as when it left the hands of the moulder, shows considerable anomalies as to the conformation of the head. The face is asymetric. A vertical line passing through the nose and forehead divides the head into two dissimilar halves. Contrary to the usual construction of the bones of the nose, those of Chopin show the right side to be very oblique, and the left side vertical. The parietal bones, temples, eye-sockets, have neither the same shape, nor the same proportions.

" The bone structure of the left side is much larger, the cheek bone jutting out to form a pronounced and extended zygomatic arch.

" The jawbone is well developed, and the lower part of the left side and its angle—are almost massive.

" All these unilateral signs point to a pathological heredity, though not definitely.

" ('Tous ces signes unilateraux démontrent une hérédité pathologique, quoique non défini ').

" The nose is long and prominent, the lips full, the skull large—a strong head on a feeble body."

A less technical description by the same author in his book, " Voyages avec Frédéric Chopin," reads :—

* To quote Mrs. Anne D. Houston, great neice of Jane Stirling.

† This only means that Hubert Foss brought the mask to the notice of M. Ganche in 1932. It was never lost.

" She (Jane Stirling) had the original mask in plaster which shows a face exquisitely delicate and pure, white as snow, radiant with the highest idealism."

The mask is in no way macabre. The small sensitive face has a " Mona Lisa " quality of fascination, the suggestion of a smile adding to the illusion of a lingering presence—more like sleep than death.

" I have promised to come back next season," said Chopin, when he was leaving London for Paris in November, 1848.

It was to be otherwise. A year later he was in his grave at Pére Lachaise, but it is curious to reflect that all of Chopin that ever returned to England has come back to Manchester. Let us be sensible of the honour.



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Concerning Chopin in Manchester

