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CHOPIN.

LIFE OF CHOPIN

BY FRANZ LISZT

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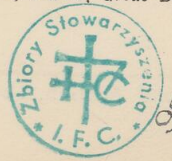
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PUBLISHERS' NOTE.

In explanation of the sentence on the title "Translated in full for the first time" the publishers desire it to be understood that they have discarded the version previously issued by them by M. W. Cook, as it was but a partial Translation. They have substituted the present new one, which will, for the first time, present the entire work in book form to English readers. A Medallion portrait of Chopin appears as a frontispiece.

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LIFE OF CHOPIN.

CHAPTER I.

CHOPIN! Sweet and harmonious genius! Is there a single heart to whom he was dear, a single individual to whom he was familiar, who, on hearing that name spoken, is not startled as by the memory of a superior being whom it was once his good fortune to know. But, however deeply regretted Chopin may be by the world of artists and by all his many friends, we may yet be permitted to doubt whether the moment has yet come when he whose loss we so deeply mourn can be appreciated at his proper worth, or can occupy that exalted rank which is reserved to him in the future.

If it has but too often been proved that "no one is a prophet in his own country," is it not also a matter of experience that the men of the future, the men who in their works anticipate and reach forward to the future, are never recognised as prophets by their contemporaries? And, to say the truth, could it possibly be otherwise? Without entering into the sphere in which reason ought, up to a certain point, to serve as a guarantee of experience, we venture to affirm that in the realm of the arts every innovator endowed with genius, every author who forsakes the type and the ideal on which his contemporaries are nourished and to which they are attracted, in order to evoke a new ideal and to create new types and new and unknown forms, will wound the tender susceptibilities of his fellows. It is only a coming generation who will comprehend his thought and his sentiment. The young artists who are gathered around that innovator may protest as they will against the reactionaries whose invariable custom it is to strike down the living by the dead; but in the musical art, even more than in the sister arts, it is frequently reserved to time alone to reveal all the beauty and all the value of new inspirations and new forms.

The manifold forms of art being only a kind of incantation, the vastly varying forms of which are destined to call forth within the magic circle those sentiments and passions which the artist would render sensible, visible, audible, tangible genius, in order, as it were, to communicate its own tremors, manifests itself in the invention of new forms, adapted sometimes to sentiments which have never yet surged into that magic circle. In music, even as in architecture, sensation is connected with emotion without that link of thought and of reason which is ever present with eloquence, with poetry, with sculpture, with painting and with the dramatic art, which at once demand that their subject shall be known and comprehended, and that the intelligence shall be seized upon before the heart can be touched. With the musical art it must of necessity be the case that the introduction of unaccustomed forms will present an obstacle to the immediate comprehension of a new work. The impressions it makes will be new, and new impressions, by their very novelty, produce surprise, and even wearisomeness; and that very surprise and fatigue will, to many, make the new work sound like a message written in a language which they do not understand,

and which, on that very account, they will be likely to pronounce barbarous and uncouth. The ear will not without effort grow accustomed to the new language, and many will not study it because they will not go to the necessary trouble. The new work must win its way through the medium of the younger and more vivid imaginations, which are less under the thrall of habit, and of those more ardent souls which are at first attracted by curiosity and then filled with resistless zeal for the new idiom. Through these channels will it finally penetrate to the obdurate crowd, which will then apprehend its meaning, its aim and its construction, and be able to appreciate the beauties which it offers. Composers who do not confine themselves within the narrow bounds of conventional routine have therefore more necessity to wait for the verdict of time. They cannot expect that their own death will at once give to their works that plus-value which accrues in like circumstances to the works of painters; and no composer could, with any advantage to his writings, repeat the trick of one of the great Flemish masters who wished to forestall in his lifetime any future glory which might gather around his pictures after his death, and charged his

wife to spread a report that he was dead, so that the paintings with which he had filled the walls of his studio might become more precious in the eyes of his admirers.

However great may be the popularity of the compositions of a writer broken down by suffering long prior to the day when death seized him, it cannot be doubted that his posterity will hold his works in far higher esteem than did his contemporaries. Those who shall in future write the history of music will assuredly give a very exalted rank to one who distinguished himself in his art by so rare a genius for melody, and by such wondrous and graceful expansion of the resources of harmony; and his triumphs will be far more appreciated than those of many others who covered a larger space, though the works of the latter may be over and over again played by the full orchestra and over and over again sung by crowds of *prime donne*.

In limiting himself absolutely to the pianoforte, we think Chopin has proved that he possessed one of the most essential qualities of a composer, viz., a first appreciation of the form in which he felt he could excel; and yet this very fact, to which we attach so much importance, has done him an injury

by limiting his fame. It would have been a difficult thing for any other writer gifted with such high harmonic and melodic powers to have resisted the temptation of the singing bow, the liquid sweetness of the flute, or the ear-splitting sounds of the trumpet, which we still persist in believing to be the companion of the antique goddess from whom we seek her sudden and fickle favours. What a firm conviction based on reflection, must have been necessary to induce Chopin to confine himself to a field apparently so much less fruitful than the orchestra; what a warmth of creative genius must have been requisite to force from its apparent aridity a fresh growth of luxuriant bloom, which from such a soil could not have been hoped for! What intuitive penetration is displayed by this choice so exclusive, which, wresting the different effects of the various orchestral instruments from their customary sphere in which the whole foam of sound would have dashed at their feet, transported them to a circle more limited but yet far more idealised! What a confident perception of the future powers of his own instrument must have directed his voluntary renunciation of an empiricism so nearly universal that another man would have

deemed it a blunder or a folly to have taken such thoughts out of the limit of their ordinary interpreters! How entirely should we revere him for a devotion to the Beautiful for its own sake which induced him to resist giving way to the common propensity to sprinkle each light spray of melody over a hundred music desks in the orchestra, and which enabled him to increase the resources of his art by showing how they may be concentrated in a more limited space, elaborated at a less expense of means, and condensed into a much shorter period of time.

Chopin, so far from being solicitous for the noise of an orchestra, was content to see his thoughts integrally produced on the ivory of the keyboard, and to succeed in his effort to lose nothing in power, without claiming any pretension to orchestral effects or to the brush of the scene-painter. Ah! not yet have we studied with sufficient earnestness and attention the designs of his delicate pencil, accustomed as we are in these days to regard as worthy of a great name only those composers who have written at least half-a-dozen operas, as many oratorios, and a number of symphonies, vainly requiring every musician to do all things, or even something more

than that. But however widely diffused this idea may be, the justice of it, to say the least, is highly problematical. We have no desire whatever to dispute the glory, more difficult of achievement, or the real superiority of those epic poets who display their magnificent creations upon so extended a plan, but we wish to see material proportions in music judged by the same standard as that which is applied to mere dimensions in other branches of the fine arts, as, for instance, in painting, where a canvas twenty inches square, as the "Vision of Ezekiel," or "Le Cimitière" by Ruysdael, is ranked amongst the *chefs-d'œuvre*, and is more highly valued than pictures of a far greater bulk, even though they may come from the hands of a Rubens or a Tintoret. In literature, is Beranger to be reckoned a less great poet because he has chosen to condense his thoughts within the narrow sphere of his songs? Does not Petrarch owe his fame to his sonnets? And amongst those who most frequently recite his soothing rhymes, how many are there who know anything at all about the very existence of his long poem on Africa? We cannot doubt the ultimate disappearance of that prejudice which would deny the superiority of an artist, even though he may have produced nothing but such sonatas as those given to us by Franz Schubert, over one who has dealt out the tasteless melodies of many operas which it were useless to mention; or that in music also we shall yet come to take into account the eloquence and ability with which thoughts and feelings are expressed, whatever may be the size of the composition in which they are developed or the means which are employed for their interpretation.

In analysing the works of Chopin we meet with beauties of a high order, expressions which are quite new, and a harmonic tissue which is as original as it is erudite. In his compositions boldness is always justified; his richness, or even exuberance, is never allowed to interfere with clearness; singularity is never permitted to degenerate into an uncouth fantasticality; his sculpturing never wants order; the luxury of his ornamentation is never allowed to overload the chaste eloquence of his leading outlines. His finest works abound in combinations which may be described as forming an epoch in the handling of musical style. They are daring, brilliant, always attractive; but they disguise their profundity by so much grace, and their science is concealed under so many charms, that it is a work

of difficulty to free ourselves from their magical enthralment sufficiently to form in cold blood a judgment of their theoretical value. Their worth, however, has already been admitted; but it will be estimated still more highly when the time arrives for a critical examination of the vast services rendered by them to art during that period of its course which Chopin traversed.

It is to Chopin that we owe extended chords played together in arpeggio or *en batterie;* those chromatic sinuosities such striking samples of which are seen in his pages; those little groups of superadded notes which drop like delicate drops of pearly dew upon the melodic figure. Hitherto this species of adornment had only been modelled on the *fioriture* of the grand old school of Italian song; embellishments for the voice, although they had become stereotyped and had grown monotonous, had been servilely copied by the pianoforte; Chopin endowed them with a charm of novelty, surprise and variety, quite unsuitable for the singer but in perfect keeping with the character of the instrument. It was he who invented those admirable harmonic progressions which have imparted a serious character to pages which, by reason of the lightness of their subjects,

made no pretensions to importance. But what matters about the subject? Is it not rather the idea which the subject develops, the emotion with which it vibrates, and which expands it, elevates it, ennobles it? Although the subjects of La Fontaine's masterpieces, and the titles so modest, how tender is their melancholy, and what subtlety and sagacity do they reveal! Just as unassuming are the titles and the subjects of Chopin's "Studies" and "Preludes," and yet the compositions which are thus modestly named are none the less types of perfection in a mode which he himself created, and stamped, as he did all his other works, with the deep impress of his poetic genius. Written when his career was only just beginning, they are marked by a youthful vigour not found in some of his later works, even when they are more elaborate and finished, and richer in combinations—a vigour which we altogether miss in the subsequent works, which are marked by over-excited sensibility and morbid irritability, and which give painful indications of his own condition of suffering and exhaustion.

It is not our intention to discuss the development of pianoforte music in the language of the schools;

we might dissect his magnificent pages, which furnish so fine a field for scientific observation. We should in the first instance analyse his nocturnes, ballads, impromptus, scherzos, so full of refinements of harmony never before heard, bold and startling in their originality; and we should also examine his polonaises, mazurkas, waltzes and boleros. But this is not the time or place for such an examination, which would only be of interest to adepts in counterpoint and thoroughbass.

His works have become known and popular because of the *feeling* which they contain—feeling of a kind pre-eminently romantic, individual, subjective; peculiar to the composer and yet evoking immediate response and sympathy; appealing not merely to the heart of his country, indebted to him for yet another glory, but to all who are capable of being touched by the misfortunes of exile or touched by the tenderness of love.

Not content with his success in that field in which he was free to fill up with such perfect grace the outlines he had himself selected, Chopin also wished to imprison his thoughts and ideas by classical fetters. His concertos and sonatas are, indeed, beautiful, but they reveal much more effort than

inspiration. His creative genius was imperious, fantastic, impulsive, and the beauties of his work were only fully manifested in absolute freedom. We cannot help thinking that he did violence to the peculiar nature of his genius when he endeavoured to subject it to rules, to classifications and to regulations not of his own making, and which he could not bend into harmony with the requirements of his own mind. He was one of those original souls whose graces are only fully revealed when they have cut themselves adrift from all bondage and float on at their own wild will, controlled only by the ever-changing impulses of their own mobile natures.

Chopin was probably led to desire this double success by the example of his friend Mickiewicz, who, having been the first to bestow romantic poetry upon his native land, forming, as early as the year 1818, by the publication of his "Dziady" and his romantic ballads, a school of his own in Slavic literature, afterwards showed by publishing his "Graznza" and "Wallenrod" that he could triumph over the difficulties opposed to inspiration by classic restrictions, and that, when holding the classic lyre of the ancient poets, he was still a

master. We do not think Chopin's success, in his analogous attempts, was equal to that of Mickiewicz; within the outline of an angular and rigid mould he could not retain that floating and indeterminate contour which so charms us in his graceful conceptions. He could not bend and force to fit those unyielding lines, that shadowy and sketchy indecision which disguises the skeleton and the whole framework of form and yet drapes it in the mists of floating vapours such as surround the white-bosomed maids of Ossian when, from their abode in the changing, drifting, blinding clouds, they permit mortals to catch sight of a vague yet lovely outline. And yet some of Chopin's efforts in the classic sphere are resplendent with rare dignity of style, and among them may be found passages of wondrous interest and of astonishing grandeur. As an example we may cite the adagio of the Second Concerto, which he was fond of playing frequently, and for which he always showed a decided preference. The principal phrase is of admirable breadth, and the accessory details are in his best style. It alternates with a recitative in a minor key, which seems to be its antistrophe. The whole movement is of an almost ideal perfection; its expression is

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Zbiory Stowarzyszenia I.F.C.

now radiant with light and anon full of tender pathos. It is as if one had selected a happy vale of Tempé, a brilliant landscape flooded with the glow and lustre of summer, as the background for the rehearsal of some appalling scene of mortal anguish, even amidst the incomparable magnificence of external nature a bitter and irreparable regret seizes on the fiercely throbbing human heart. This contrast is heightened by a fusion of tones and a softening down of sombre hues which prevent the intrusion of anything rude or brusque which might awaken dissonance in the touching impression produced, which saddens joy and at the same time soothes and softens the bitterness of sorrow.

We cannot pass in silence the Funeral March in the First Sonata which was arranged for the orchestra, and performed for the first time at his own funeral. Could any other accents have been found which would have expressed with like heartbreaking effect the emotions and the tears which should accompany to his last long sleep one who had so sublimely taught how great losses should be mourned? We once heard a native of his own land say: "These pages could only have been written by a Pole!" Everything that the funeral train of a

whole nation lamenting its own ruin and death can be conceived to feel of desolating woe and majestic grief wails in the musical ring of this passing bell, mourns in the toll of this solemn knell, as it escorts the mighty cortège on its journey to the silent city of the dead. The intensity of mysterious hope; the pious appeal to superhuman pity, to infinite mercy, to the stern justice which numbers every cradle and watches every tomb; the lofty resignation which has wreathed halos so luminous around so much grief; the grand endurance of so many and so great disasters with the inspired heroism of christian martyrs who knew not despair—all resound in this melancholy chant which breaks the heart by its suppliant voice. All that is purest, all that is holiest, all that is most trustful and most hopeful in the hearts of children, women and priests, quivers and trembles in that piece with vibrations which are irresistible. We feel that it is not merely that we mourn the death of one single warrior who leaves other warriors to avenge him, rather has a whole race of warriors for ever fallen, leaving only wailing women, weeping children and helpless priests to chant their mournful dirge. And yet this Mélopée, so funereal and so charged with devas-

tating woe, is full of such penetrating sweetness that we can scarcely believe it had its origin upon earth. These sounds, which seem to chill by awe and soften by distance the wild passion of human anguish, induce most profound meditation, as if they were sung by angels and came floating from the heavens—the cry of a nation's anguish appealing at the very throne of the Eternal! It is a wail of human grief attuned by the lyres of countless seraphs! The sublime sorrow of the plaint is never for a moment troubled by either cries, or hoarse groans, or impious blasphemies, or furious imprecations, but falls on the ear gently as the rhythmed sighs of angels. The antique face of grief is altogether shut out; no sound recalls Cassandra's fury, Priam's prostration, Hecuba's fury, or the despair of the Trojan captives. A sublime faith destroys in the survivors of this Christian Ilium the bitterness of anguish and the cowardice of despair, and their sorrow is no longer tinged with any weakness. Lifting itself up from the soil wet with tears and blood, it springs upwards to call upon God; having no more to hope from earth, it supplicates the Supreme Judge of heaven with prayers so poignant that in listening our

very hearts break under the weight of a divine compassion.

If we imagine that all Chopin's compositions are lacking in the feelings which he saw fit to suppress in this great work, we shall be mistaken, for this is not the case. Human nature is probably not able to always maintain this mood of energetic abnegation and courageous submission. There are, in many passages of his writings, breathings of stifled rage and of suppressed anger, many of his studies and scherzos picture a concentrated exasperation and despair, which are at one time manifested in bitter irony, at another in intolerant pride. These gloomy apostrophes of his muse have not been so well understood or attracted so much attention as his more tenderly coloured poems, and the personal character of Chopin no doubt had much to do with this general misconception. Being kind, courteous, affable, and of tranquil and almost joyful manners, he would not allow those secret convulsions which tormented him to be even suspected.

It was not indeed easy to comprehend his character; a thousand subtle shades mingled, crossed, contradicted and disguised each other, and rendered it at first view almost undecipherable. As is

customary with the Slavs, it was difficult to fathom the deep recesses of his mind. With them loyalty, candour, familiarity, or a captivating ease of manner do not by any means imply confidence or impulsive frankness.

Chopin's frail and feeble organisation did not permit him any energetic expression of his passions, and his friends saw only the gentle and affectionate side of his nature.

Almost stifling under the expression of feelings violently kept down, using his art only to repeat and rehearse for himself his own internal tragedy, he first wearied emotion and then began to subtilise it. His melodies are actually tormented; a sensibility which was nervous and restless led him to an obstinate persistence in handling and re-handling them, and to a continuous pursuit of the tortured *motifs*, which produce upon us an impression as painful as the sight of those mental or physical agonies which we know can only be relieved by death itself. Chopin was the victim of a hopeless disease which each year became more envenomed, took him, while he was still young, from those who loved him, and at length laid him in his silent grave. And as in the fair form of some beautiful victim we

may trace the marks of the grasping claws of the fierce bird which has destroyed it, so in the compositions of which we have been speaking we may find the traces of those bitter sufferings by which his heart was devoured.

CHAPTER II.

IT must not be imagined that the subtle suffering and refined tortures which Chopin underwent have left any impress upon those of his works which are most widely known and liked. His polonaises which, on account of their great difficulties, are not nearly so frequently played as they deserve to be, must be reckoned amongst his highest inspirations. They never recall the mincing and tricky "Polonaises à la Pompadour" which have been so widely spread by our ballroom orchestras or our virtuosi at concerts; nor do they at any time remind us of the hackneyed and affected music so frequently heard in drawing-rooms.

The energetic rhythm of Chopin's polonaises galvanises into life all the torpor of our indifference. In them are embodied the noblest traditional feelings of the Poland of a bygone age, through them breathe

the stern resolve and the reflective gravity of the Poles of other days. Usually of a warlike character, bravery and valour are in these polonaises rendered with a simplicity of expression which was a distinctive characteristic of this warlike people. They bring before the imagination with vivid intensity the ancient Poles as they are described in their chronicles, endowed with a powerful organisation, a refined intelligence, unconquerable courage, a piety profound and in every way touching, with all which qualities were combined an innate courtesy and gallantry which never forsook them, whether on the eve of a battle, in the very midst of its exciting scenes, in the flush of victory or in the gloomy pallor of defeat. So much a part of their nature was this chivalric gallantry and courtesy that notwithstanding the restraints which it was their habit to impose upon their women—restraints not unlike those of their neighbours and foes, the infidels of Stamboul, keeping them within the limits of home life and ever reserving legal wardships over them, that those characteristic qualities yet show themselves in their annals, wherein they have known how to glorify and immortalise queens who were saints, peasants who became queens, lovely subjects for

whom some imperilled and others even lost crowns —a terrible Sforza, an intriguing d'Arquien, a coquettish Gurzaga.

Among Poles of olden times, it was this manly firmness coupled with chivalric gallantry which led Sobieski, in the face of the standards of the crescent as numerous as ears in a field of corn, to indite every morning those tender and devoted letters to his wife. The gallantry and devotion of these men to those whom they loved was strongly coloured by their grave bearing, which was noble to a high degree. It was hardly possible they could avoid displaying their stateliness of manner, seeing that they almost always had before them the most beautiful examples of it in the followers of Plam; and while the Poles were repelling the incursions of these invaders, they at the same time appreciated and unconsciously imitated their qualities. They, as well as the sectaries of Islam, knew how to let their actions follow an intelligent deliberation, and the device of Prince Boleslas of Pomerania was ever present to their minds: *Erst wieg's dann wag's!* ("First weigh and then dare"!) This deliberation gave to all their movements a certain graceful import, a certain pompous hauteur, which neverthe-

less did not deprive them of a freedom of spirit amenable to the lightest and most tender cares, the most trivial interests of the moment, the most ephemeral sentiments of the heart. It was, on the one hand, an article of their code of honour to wreak a terrible vengeance upon those who tampered with their more tender interests; on the other hand, they knew how to beautify life, and love and revere those who beautified it and made it more precious to them.

Their chivalric heroism was sanctioned by an exalted dignity and a premeditated conviction. Combining the resources of reason with the energy of virtue, they have been successful in gaining the admiration of all ages and of all minds, even those who were their greatest enemies. They were inspired by a rash wisdom, a risky prudence, and a fanatic fatalism, of which the most prominent and the most celebrated historic development was the expedition of Sobiaski when he saved Vienna and dealt a death-blow to the Ottoman empire, which was at length subjugated in that protracted struggle, sustained on both sides with so much prowess, so much glory, and such mutual deference between antagonists as irreconciliable in their battles

as they were magnanimous in their intercourse when not fighting.

As we listen to some of the polonaises of Chopin, we can almost hear the firm, nay, the heavy and resolute tread of men, who were with the noble pride of unblenching courage, standing up to face all the bitter injustice which could be put upon them by a most cruel and relentless destiny. We can almost see passing before us such magnificent groups as those painted by Paolo Veronese—groups arrayed in the rich costumes of times long gone by: gold brocades, velvets, damasked satins, sables silvery, soft and flexible, hanging sleeves thrown gracefully back on the shoulders, sabres beautifully embossed, boots red like trampled blood or burnished gold, sashes with broad fringes, close chemisettes, rustling trains, stomachers strewn with pearls, headgear ornamented with rubies or glittering with emeralds, light slippers richly adorned with amber, gloves perfumed with the luxurious attar of the harems. These and similar vivid groups stand out from the background of days long gone by; gorgeous Persian carpets are under their feet, filagreed furniture of Constantinople stands around them, and everything is impressed with the measureless

prodigality of the great magnates who quaffed wines from the fountains of Tokay out of ruby goblets richly embossed with medallions, who caused their fleet steeds of Araby to be shod with silver, who topped their escutcheons with the crown which the turn of an election might turn into a royal one—the crown which caused them to despise all other titles, and was won as a token of their glorious equality.

People who saw the polonaise danced even as recently as the early years of the nineteenth century protested that its style was so much changed that it was even almost impossible to divine its original character. Just as the very few national dances have been able to preserve their original purity, so, when we remember the changes which have occurred in Poland, it is not difficult to conclude that the polonaise has greatly degenerated. The polonaise has no rapid movements, nor has it, in the artistic sense, any of those true "steps" which are meant for display rather than for the exhibition of a seductive grace. We can easily understand that when those who dance it are deprived of all those accessories which are requisite to enable them to give life to its simple form by dignified yet vivid gestures, and by appropriate and

expressive pantomime, the polonaise must of necessity lose all its haughty import and all its pompous self-sufficiency. It has thus become altogether monotonous, a mere ambling promenade, and awakens but little interest. We cannot see it danced under the old regime by men and women clad in the ancient costumes, nor can we listen while they describe it; and we can therefore form no notion of the numerous incidents and the scenic pantomime which once made it so effective. This dance is one of those rare exceptions designed to show off, not the women but the men, to exhibit manly beauty, to set off noble and dignified deportment and martial yet courtly bearing. And do not these two epithets, "martial yet courtly," wellnigh define the Polish character? The very name of the dance is, in the Polish tongue, of the masculine gender, and it is only through a complete misconception of the purpose and character of the dance that its name has in some other languages been transformed into a feminine noun.

The "Kontusz," which is the robe of the Orientals, was in Poland a sort of western Kaftan, modified to suit the customs of an active life which was not fettered by the passive resignation taught by

Eastern fatalism; it was a sort of "feredgi," frequently trimmed with fur, and compelled its wearer to make frequent movements full of grace and courtesy, by which the flowing sleeves were thrown backward. Those who have never seen it worn can scarcely conceive the bearing of its wearer, the slow bending forward, the quick recovery of the upright position, the finesse of the delicate motions displayed by the ancient Poles as they threaded through the mazes of the polonaise as though it were a military promenade, their fingers at the same time not idle, but now playing with the long moustache, now toying with the handle of the sword. Both the moustache and the sword were necessary parts of the equipment, as indeed they have been the objects of vanity in all ages. Diamonds and sapphires often sparkled all over the arms they wore, which were suspended from cashmere belts, or from gold-embroidered sashes of silk, so arranged as to display to the best advantage forms always tending to corpulence; the moustache often served to veil, though it did not always conceal, scars which were far more effective than the most brilliant adornment of gems. The men rivalled the women in the luxurious material of the clothing

they wore, in the value of the jewels they displayed, and in the variety of vivid colours in which they appeared. This love of adornment is also a characteristic feature of the Hungarians,* as we may see in their jewelled buttons, the rings which form an essential part of their dress, the elegantly worked neck-clasps, and the aigrettes and plumes worn in their brilliant-hued velvet caps. To know how to take off the cap, to put it on, to manœuvre it with all possible grace, constituted with the Poles almost an art. During the course of a polonaise the treatment of the cap became the object of special remark, because the cavalier of the foremost couple, who was the commander of the file, gave by the cap the silent word of command, which was at once obeyed and his movements imitated by the rest of the train.

The master of the house always himself opened the ball by leading off in the polonaise. His partner was not chosen for her youth or her beauty, but the choice always fell upon the lady who bore the highest honours. Every fête was opened by this phalanx,

* The Hungarian costume worn by Prince Nicolas Esterhazy at the Coronation of George IV was estimated to be worth several million florins, and is still remembered in England.

which consisted not merely of the young, but included the most distinguished as well as the most beautiful. A grand review and a dazzling display of all persons of distinction present was offered as the supreme pleasure of every festival. Next to the host came in order the guests of the greatest consideration, who having chosen their partners, some from love, some from friendship, some from motives of policy and the desire of advancement, followed closely in their leader's footsteps. The leader of the polonaise had then a far more complicated performance to superintend than now. He was looked to to lead those who folowed him through a thousand capricious meanderings, through long suites of *salons* crowded with guests who later on would join the brilliant cortège. The dancers preferred to be conducted through the far-off galleries, amongst the parterres of illuminated gardens, and through leafy groves where the ear could catch but a faint echo of that music which, as though to avenge itself for temporary neglect, greeted them with redoubled power and the blowing of trumpets on their return to the chief apartment. The crowds of onlookers, who lined the path on either side like a dense hedgerow and did not for a moment cease to scru-

tinise every motion, were thus never long the same to the moving dancers, who therefore did not at any stage of their progress forget the dignified bearing and stately address which the women admired and the men envied. The host and leader, full of vanity and of joyful feelings, would have believed himself lacking in courtesy to his guests if he had not shown them—with a quaint *naïveté*, his pride at beholding himself surrounded by so many noble and illustrious friends, all of whom by the splendour of the attire in which they visited him, strove to manifest the high honour in which they held him.

Led by their host in the first round, they were conducted through long windings in which unexpected turnings, views and openings, had been previously arranged with the express object of creating surprise, and where architectural deceptions, decorations, and moving scenes had been designed with scrupulous care for the purpose of enhancing the delight of the guests at the festival. If along the extended line of route any suitable monument or inscription was found which could be made the fountain of complimentary homage to "the most valiant or the most beautiful," the host gracefully did the honours of the occasion. The more sudden

were these surprises arranged for these wanderings of the dancers, the greater the imagination shown in their design, the louder would be the applause and the more enthusiastic the expressions of the delight of the younger members of the procession, and the merrier the sounds of the silvery laughter which came pleasantly to the ears of the host, who, having thus won his reputation, became at once a leader *par excellence* and a privileged Coryphæus. If he was a man of mature age, he would be met on his return from the circuit by frequent troops of young ladies who, in the name of all present, came to thank him and to congratulate him on his success. The vivid descriptions of these lovely wanderers would excite the curiosity of the other guests, and increase their eagerness to form subsequent polonaises amongst those who, though not forming part of the first procession had yet, in breathless attention, watched its passage as though they had been gazing on the flashing trail of some brilliant meteor.

In that land of aristocratic democracy there were many dependents of the great seigniorial houses who were too poor to take part in these fêtes, though they, if excluded, it was only by their

own choice. Some of these were even more noble than their lords; and when they were present it was thought highly desirable to dazzle them; and the flowing chain of many-hued and gorgeous light, like a huge serpent without its rings, sometimes compressed its folds, while at others it uncoiled its whole length so as to display its brilliancy throughout the entire line of its waving animated extent, and this with the most vivid scintillations, the ever-changing colours being accompanied by the sounds of chains of gold, like the ringing of muffled bells, by the rustling of the majestic sweep of gorgeous damasks, or by the trailing of jewelled swords along the ground. The approach of this animated, variegated, glittering life-stream was also heralded by the murmuring tones of many voices.

The genius of hospitality, never lacking in high-born courtesy, while it preserved in Poland the touching simplicity of primitive customs, at the same time inspired all the refinements of the most highly cultured civilisation; how therefore could it be severed from the details of a dance which is so eminently Polish? When the host had himself inaugurated the fête, and by that act

rendered due homage to all present, any guest had the right to claim his place by the side of the lady whom that host had honoured by his choice. The new claimant would clap his hands to arrest for one brief space the ever-moving cortège, bow before the host's fair partner, and beg her graciously to accept the proffered change; while the host who was giving her up would make a similar appeal to the lady who came next in the procession. The example was followed by the entire train. Thus, while constantly changing their partners as often as a new leader claimed the lady first led out by the host, the ladies themselves remained in the same order during the complete evolutions of the dance, while, on the contrary, each gentleman was continuously replaced by another, and he who had been the first in the dance would as it went on become the last, even if he were not altogether excluded before it ended.

As each gentleman placed himself in turn at the head of the cavalcade, he endeavoured to out-do those who had gone before him in the novelty of the combinations with which he opened, and in the complicated evolutions through which he was to lead his expectant followers; and even when the

course to be gone over was limited to the space of a single saloon, it was quite possible to make that course noteworthy by the graceful arabesques which he could design or the involved and enigmatical cyphers which he could invent. He established his claim to the position for which he had asked, and at the same time manifested his skill, by inventing figures of close and almost inextricable forms; by describing those figures with such accuracy and certainty that the living ribbon, however turned and twisted, was never broken in the untying of its wreathed knots; and by leading with such skill that no confused and graceless jumble might result from the complicated twistings of the procession. The couples who followed, who had only to repeat the patterns already set them, and thus continue the impulse imparted to them, were not allowed to drag along the parquet with lazy or listless footsteps. A rhythmical, regularly cadenced, undulating step was secured, and the entire form of each dancer swayed with graceful wavings and harmonious poisings. The dancers were very careful not to go forward with too much haste, or to take each other's places as if urged on by some relentless necessity. On they went like swans gliding down a slow and

tranquil stream, their flexible forms swayed to and fro as by the ebb and flow of unseen and gentle waves. Now the cavalier would offer his right hand to his fair partner, now his left; touching but the tips of her fingers, or slightly clasping her delicate hand within his own, he would pass first to her right and then to her left, without loosing his touch of the hand held within his own. These complicated motions were instantly copied by every pair, and ran like an electric thrill along the entire length of the gigantic and serpentlike body. Though seemingly occupied and taken up by these multiplied manœuvres, the cavalier yet found opportunities to bend to his lady and, if she were young, to whisper sweet and tender flatteries in her ear, or, if she chanced to be no longer young, to impart confidences, to urge requests, or to tell her the news of the hour. Then haughtily lifting himself to an erect position, he would cause the metal of his arms to ring, caress his thick moustache, and compel the lady to respond to the animation of his countenance by that of her own.

It was thus no mere hackneyed or senseless promenade which was formally gone through, rather was it a parade exhibiting the entire splendour of a

company gratified with its own admiration and fully conscious of its own elegance, brilliancy and noble courtesy. It was a continuous display of lustre, glory and renown. Men who had grown gray on the battle-field or in the strife of courtly eloquence; generals oftener arrayed in warlike armour than in the garments of peace; prelates and others holding high positions in the Church; state dignitaries; aged senators; warlike palatines; ambitious castellans—such were the partners who were looked for, eagerly welcomed, sought and disputed for by the youngest, gayest and most brilliant ladies of the brilliant throng. Honour and glory made all ages equal, and in this dance years were forgotten, nay, years had an advantage over love. It was while we listened to the animated descriptions of the almost forgotten evolutions and dignified capabilities of this really national dance, from the lips of those who would not abandon the ancient "Zupan" and "Kontusz," and who still followed the example of their ancestors by wearing their hair closely cut round the temples, that we first fully comprehended in what an exalted degree this haughty people possessed the inborn instinct of self-exhibition, and how entirely, by means of its own natural grace and genius, it had

succeeded in poetising its love of ostentatious display by draping it with the charms of noble emotions, and swathing it in the glittering robes of martial glory.

When we visited the native land of Chopin, whose memory ever accompanied us as a faithful guide who continuously keeps our interest on the qui vive, we were fortunate enough to fall in with some of the peculiar characters of the nation—characters becoming daily rarer, because European civilisation, even where it fails to modify the basis of character, yet effaces asperities and changes external forms. There we met with some of those men gifted with superior intellect, cultivated and forcibly developed by a life of incessant action, and yet whose horizon is bounded by the limits of their own land, their own society and their own traditions. During our intercourse through an interpreter with these men of bygone days, we were enabled to study them closely and to understand the secret of their greatness. It was in reality curious to note the inimitable originality engendered by the utter exclusiveness of their views. This limited cultivation, while it vastly diminishes the value of their ideas upon many topics, yet bestows upon the mind a peculiar force which nearly resembles the keen scent and acute per-

ceptions of the savage for everything near and dear to him. It is only from a mind trained in this peculiar way, and marked by that concentrative energy which nothing can turn from its course and to which everything outside the circle of its own nationality remained strange, that we can hope to obtain an exact picture of the past; for, like a faithful mirror, it reflects it in all its original colours, conserves its proper light and shade, and reproduces it with all its varied and picturesque accompaniments. It is only from such minds as these that not merely the ritual of customs is fast becoming extinct, but the very spirit which gave rise to them. Chopin was born too late, and left his home too soon, to be himself the possessor of this spirit, but he had known many who did possess it; and by means of the memories which surrounded the days of his childhood, even more than from the literature and history of his native land, he intuitively discovered the secrets of its ancient prestige, which he first called forth from the dim and dark region of forgotten things, and then by the magic of his poetic art endowed it with immortal youth. Poets are far better understood by those who have become familiar with the countries by which their songs were inspired;

Pindar is better comprehended when his readers have seen the Parthenon bathed in the soft radiance of its limpid atmosphere; Ossian by readers familiar with the mist-wreathed mountains of Scotland. The feelings by which the creations of Chopin were inspired can only be fully comprehended by those who have visited the land which gave him birth. It is necessary to have seen the gaunt shadows of past centuries gradually increasing and darkening the ground as the gloomy night of despair crept on; it is necessary to have felt the electric and mysterious influence of that weird "phantom of glory" which for ever haunts martyred Poland, and which, even in their gayest and most festive hours, appals and saddens all hearts. So often as a story of past renown is told, a commemoration of slaughtered heroes held, or an allusion to national prowess made, does this phantom of departed glory instantly come forth from its grave to take its place in the hall of feasting, spread an electric terror mingled with an intense admiration, and evoke a shudder as wild and mystic as that which seizes on the peasants of Ukrainâ when the "Beautiful Virgin," pale as death, with her crimson girdle, is suddenly beheld, gliding through their peaceful village as her

shadowy hand marks with blood the door of each house which she dooms to destruction.

For many hundreds of years the civilisation of Poland was altogether peculiar and aboriginal; it resembled that of no other country, and would seem destined to remain for ever unique of its kind. While differing from the German feudalism which bordered it on the west as much as from the conquering spirit of the Turks which disturbed it on the east, it resembled the rest of Europe in the chivalry of its Christianity, in its eagerness to fight the infidel even while it received instruction in sagacious policy, in military manœuvres, and in sententious reasoning from the Byzantine masters. It took on at the same time the heroic qualities of Mussulman fanaticism and the sublime virtues of Christian sanctity and humility:* and thus,

* It is well known that Poland has enriched with many glorious names the martyrology of the Church. In memory of the numberless martyrs it had offered up, the Romish Church granted to the order of the Trinitarians, or the Redemptionist Brothers, whose work it was to redeem from slavery those Christians who had fallen into the hands of the infidels, the distinction of wearing a crimson belt—a distinction only granted to this people. These victims to benevolence generally come from establishments near the frontiers, like those of Kamieniec-Podolski.

mingling the most heterogeneous elements, it planted in its own breast the seeds of decay and ruin.

The general culture of Latin literature, and the knowledge and love of the literatures of Italy and France, added a classical polish and lustre to the startling contrasts which we have tried to describe. Such a civilisation must of necessity stamp all its manifestations with its own peculiar impress. A nation always engaged in war, and compelled to reserve its prowess and its valour for its enemies on the battle-field, it was not noted for the romances of knight-errantry or for tournaments and jousts; the excitement and splendour of these playings at war were replaced by characteristic fêtes in which the principal feature was the gorgeousness of personal display.

There is, of course, nothing new in the statement that the character of a nation is to some extent revealed by its dances; but we think there are no national dances in which the creative impulses can be so easily seen, or the ensemble read with such facility, as in the polonaise. By means of the varying episodes which each leader of the dance was expected to introduce into the general frame-

work, the national intuitions were revealed in the utmost diversity. After these distinctive features had disappeared, when the original fire burned no longer, when none made up new scenes for the intermediate pauses, and when all that was required was to accomplish in a perfunctory manner the round of a saloon, there was nothing remaining but the bare skeleton of departed glory.

After the delighted verses which Mickiewicz has consecrated to the polonaise, and the excellent description of it which he has given in the last canto of his "Pan Tadensz," we should have hesitated to speak of this dance, but for the fact that his description is only to be found in a book not translated and therefore only known to that poet's fellow-countrymen.*

It would have appeared nothing less than presumption to venture on a topic already sketched and coloured by a master hand in his romantic epic, where beauties of the first order are set in such a picture as Ruysdael liked to paint, in which a ray of sunlight, passing between heavy storm clouds, fall upon one of those curious trees which

* We believe it has since Liszt wrote been translated into German.—*Translator.*

are never lacking in his works—a birch shattered by lightning, while its snowy bark is deeply stained as though with its own blood flowing from its new and gaping wounds. The scenes of "Pan Tadensz" are laid in the beginning of our century when many were yet living who retained the profound feelings and the grave deportment of the ancient Poles, and at the same time mingled with those who even then were swayed by graceful but giddying passions of modern origin. At that time these striking and contrasted types existed together but they are now swiftly disappearing before that universal conventionalism which is seizing upon and moulding the upper classes in all cities and in all lands. It is beyond doubt that Chopin often drew new inspiration from this noble poem, the scenes of which so powerfully portray the emotions which he best loved to reproduce.

The primitive music of the polonaise, of which we possess no example more than a century old, is of little value for art. Those polonaises which have no author's name, but are frequently called by the name of some great hero, by which their date is indicated, are usually grave and sweet. That polonaise called "de Kosciuszko" is most widely

known, and it is linked so closely with the memories which cluster around his epoch, that we have known ladies who could not listen to it without sobbing. The Princess F. L., who had been loved by Kosciuszko, was, in her extreme old age, when years had enfeebled all her faculties, only sensible to the chords of this polonaise, which her trembling fingers could still find on the keyboard, though her dim and aged eyes could no longer see the keys of the instrument. Some of the polonaises of that era are so sad in character that they may readily be supposed to accompany a funeral procession.

The polonaises of Count Oginski,* which appeared next in order, soon attained wide popularity through the introduction of an air of seductive languor into the melancholy melody. Though full of gloom, they soothe by their delicious tenderness and their naïve and mournful grace. The warlike rhythm grows more feeble; the march of the stately train no longer rustles in its pride of state, but is

* Amongst Count Oginski's polonaises the one in F major has specially maintained its celebrity. When published it appeared with a vignette showing the composer in the act of blowing out his brains with a pistol. This was for a long while taken to be a fact, though it was in reality only a romantic commentary.

hushed in reverential silence and solemn thought, as though the dancers wended their way amongst graves, the very sight of which extinguishes their smiles and humiliates their pride. Love alone survives as the mourners thread their way amongst the heaps of earth so newly piled up that the grass has not yet grown upon them, and repeating the mournful refrain caught by the bard of Erin from the wild sea breezes:

"Love born of sorrow like sorrow is true!"

In Oginski's well-known pages is to be found the sighing of analogous thoughts; even the breath of love is sad, and only reveals itself through the melancholy lustre of tear-stained eyes.

At a yet later stage the graves and grass-covered mounds were all passed, and are seen only in the depth of the shadowy background. The living cannot be ever weeping; life and vigour again appear, and mournful thoughts, now turned into soothing memories, fall on the ear as sweet as distant echoes. The saddened train of living men and women no longer glides on with bated breath and silent caution, as if they would not disturb the sleep of those just departed, and on whose graves the grass is not yet green; the imagination ceases to

evolve only the gloomy shades of the past. In Lipinski's polonaises the music of pleasure-loving hearts once more beats joyfully, gaily, happily, just as it did before the days of disaster and defeat. The melodies breathe more and more the perfume of happy youth, and young love sighs around. Expanding into expressive airs of a vague and dreamy nature, they speak only to youthful hearts and cradle them in poetic fictions and tender illusions. Being no longer destined to measure the steps of the high and grave dignitaries who had ceased to take part in these dances,* they address themselves rather to romantic imaginations which dream of rapture rather than of renown. Mayseder travelled on this downward grade, and his dances, full of lively coquetry, reflect only the magic charms of youth and beauty. His numerous imitators have given us an abundance of pieces called polonaises, though they lack all the characteristics which alone can justify the name.

The pristine and brilliant vigour of the polonaise was once more suddenly imparted to it by a composer of real genius. Weber made of it a Dithy-

* Bishops and primates once assisted in the polonaise, but at a later date Church dignitaries ceased to take any part in the dance.

rambic in which the glittering display of departed splendour again appeared in its ancient glory. He combined all the resources of his art to ennoble and fill with the spirit of the past the formula which had been so debased and misrepresented; without seeking to recall the characteristics of the ancient music, he imparted to his music the characteristics of the ancient Poland. Using the melody as a recitative, he accentuated the rhythm, and through his modulations coloured his music with a profusion of lines which were not merely suitable to the subject but were imperatively demanded by it. Life, warmth, passion breathed in his polonaises, while he did not deprive them of that haughty charm, that ceremonious and masterly dignity, that natural but elaborate majesty, which are essential features of their character. The cadences are emphasised by chords which fall on the ear like the clanking of swords drawn from their scabbards. The tender, warm pleadings of womanly love give place to the murmuring of full and deep bass voices emanating from manly breasts accustomed to command; we can almost hear in reply the distant neighings of the steeds of the desert, as they fling their long manes

around their haughty heads, impatiently pawing the ground while their lustrous eyes glow with intelligence and fire, and they bear the flowing caparisons, embroidered with turquoises and rubies, with which the Poles loved to adorn their horses.* How did Weber apprehend the Poland of other days? Had he verily the power to call up from the grave of the

* Amongst the treasures gathered by Prince Radziwill at Niewirz were to be seen in the days of bygone splendour, twelve sets of horse trappings, each of a different colour, encrusted with precious gems. The twelve apostles were also to be seen there, in massive silver, life-size. This luxury need not astonish us if we remember that the Radziwill family was descended from the last Grand Pontiff of Lithuania, to whom were given, when he embraced Christianity, all the forests and plains which before were consecrated to the worship of the heathen deities, and that near the close of the last century, although the riches of the family were considerably diminished, they still possessed 800,000 serfs. Amongst the collection of treasures to which we refer was an extremely curious relic which is yet in existence. It is a picture of John the Baptist, surrounded by a bannerol thus inscribed: "John, in the name of the Lord thou shalt be conqueror." This picture was found by Jean Sobreski himself, after his victory, under the walls of Vienna, in the tent of the Wazir Kara Mustafa, and it was after his death presented by Marie d'Arquin to a Prince Radziwill, with an inscription in her own handwriting indicating its origin and the presentation of it which she makes. The autograph, sealed with the royal seal, is on the reverse side of the canvas.

past those scenes we have now been contemplating, to clothe them with life, to renew their former associations? How vain are such questions! Genius is ever endowed with its own sacred intuitions, and poetry ever reveals to her chosen ones the secrets of her wild domain.

The poetry contained in the polonaises was, like rich sap, so fully expressed from them by Weber's genius, and they were by him handled with such absolute mastery, that it was not only difficult but dangerous to attempt to write more with any hope of producing a similar effect. And yet even Weber has been outdone in this species of composition by Chopin, not merely in the number and variety of his works of this genre, but also in the more touching style of handling, and in the new and varied resources of harmony. Chopin's Polonaises in A and A flat major very much resemble, both in construction and in spirit, Weber's in E major. In others Chopin relinquished this broad style—shall we say always with more decisive success? Decision on such a point were a thorny thing. Who shall restrain the poet in his rights over the various phases of his subject? May he not be allowed, even in the midst of his joy, to be gloomy and oppressed?

Having sung of the splendours of glory, may he not afterwards sing of grief? When he has rejoiced with the victor, may he not then mourn with the vanquished? We may state without fear of contradiction, that it is not Chopin's least merit that he sees consecutively all the phases of which the theme is capable; that he has been successful in bringing out of it all its brilliancy and in awakening from it all its sadness. He was aided in his comprehension and reproduction of such manifold aspects by the variety of the moods of which he was himself the subject. It would be impossible to follow out the multiform transformations occurring in these compositions, with their ever present melancholy, without admiring the fecundity of his creative power, even when that power is not fully sustained by the more exalted power of his imagination. When his imagination and his memory presented pictures before him, he did not always limit himself to the consideration of those pictures *en masse* and as a united whole. More than once, when contemplating the brilliant throngs and groups moving before him, he has yielded himself to the strange charm of some isolated figure, arrested it in its course by the power of his gaze, suffered the gay crowd to pass on, and

given himself up in delight to the task of divining its mystic revelations, while he continued to weave his incantations and spells only for the entranced sibyl of his song.

His grand Polonaise in F sharp minor must be classed amongst his most energetic writings, and in it he has put a mazurka. Had he not alarmed the frivolous world of fashion by the gloomy grotesqueness with which he placed this mazurka in so fantastic an incantation, that mode might have grown into an ingenious caprice for the ball-room. The whole production is one of great originality. and excites us like the story of some broken dream told after a night of restless wakefulness in the first dull gray, cold, leaden rays of a winter sunrise. It is a dream poem in which impressions and objects follow each other with startling incoherence and with the wildest transitions, reminding us of the lines in Byron's "Dream":

> "....Dreams in their developments have breath,
> And tears and tortures and the touch of joy;
> They leave a weight upon our waking thoughts.
> . . . . . .
> And look like heralds of Eternity."

The chief *motif* is a weird air, as dark as the lurid hour before a hurricane, when we catch the fierce

exclamations of exasperation mingled with bold defiance recklessly hurled at the stormy elements. The prolonged reiteration of the tonic at the beginning of each measure reminds us of the repeated roar of cannon—just as if we caught the sounds from some fierce contest raging afar off. When this note has terminated, a series of the most unusual chords succeed each other bar after bar. In the works of the great masters we know of nothing analogous to the striking effect produced by this passage, which is suddenly interrupted by a *scène champêtre*, a mazurka in the style of an idyl, full of the scent of lavender and sweet marjoram; but which, so far from effacing the memory of the deep grief which has gone before, serves by its bitter irony of contrast to augment our painful emotions to such a degree that we feel almost a sensation of comfort at the return of the original phrase, and now, freed from the contradiction of a naïve, simple and inglorious happiness, we can once more sympathise with the noble and imposing love of a noble yet fatal struggle. This improvisation ends like a dream, with no other conclusion than a sort of convulsive shudder, and leaves the soul the subject of the strangest, wildest and most subduing impressions.

The "Polonaise-Fantaisie" must be reckoned amongst the works which belong to Chopin's latest period, and which are all more or less characterised by a restless, feverish anxiety. Here we look in vain for bold or brilliant pictures; we no longer hear the loud tramp of cavalry accustomed to victory; those heroic chants and bold tones suited to the audacity of men ever victorious, songs not muffled by visions of defeat, no longer resound in our ears. Instead of these there reigns everywhere a deep melancholy, for ever broken by startled movements, sudden alarms, disturbed rest, stifled sighs. We are surrounded by such feelings and scenes as we may suppose to arise among men who are surprised and encompassed by an ambuscade, for whom the whole horizon is bereft of any vestige of hope, whose brain is giddied by despair, as by a draught of that Cyprus wine which imparts to all our gestures a more instructive rapidity, gives to our words a keener point, heats our emotions with a more subtle flame, and excites our mind to a pitch of irritability which is closely akin to insanity.

Such pictures as these are of little value to art. They only serve to torture the soul, like all descriptions of extreme moments, of agonies, of death

rattles, of contractions of the muscles where all elasticity is lost, nerves cease to be the organs of the human will, and man is reduced to the condition of a passive victim of despair! Such visions are deplorable, and the artist should use extreme circumspection in admitting them within the graceful sphere of his charmed realm.

CHAPTER III.

IN everything that concerns expression, Chopin's mazurkas differ widely from his polonaises; indeed, in character they are totally unlike. In the mazurka the bold and vigorous colouring of the polonaise gives place to the most delicate, tender and evanescent shades; it is not the nation as a whole, in a united, single and characteristic impetus, which is brought before us, but the character and the impressions become purely personal, and are always individualised and divided. The feminine and effeminate element is no longer driven into the background, but is on the contrary brought out into the very boldest relief, and comes into a position of such importance that all else which remains only serves as its accompaniment. The days are long since gone when to say that a woman was "charming" was to call her *grateful (wdzieczna)*; the very word "charm" is derived from *wdzieki* (gratitude). Woman now appears not as a protégée but as a queen; she does not merely form the better part of life, but entirely fills it; man, while still proud, ardent, presumptuous, yet yields himself up to a delirium of pleasure, though even his very pleasure is always impressed with melancholy. Not only the music of the national airs, but the words, which are nearly always united with the music, express mingled feelings of grief and joy. This strange yet attractive contrast was caused by the necessity of "consoling misery" *(cieszyc bide)*, and this necessity led the people to seek the magical distractions and transient delusions of the mazurka. The words sung to these melodies endowed them with the power of linking themselves with the sacred associations of memory to a far greater extent than is usual with the ordinary dance music. They were sung and resung a thousand times by fresh and sonorous voices in youthful days, in the hours of solitude or of happy idleness. The most varied associations were linked with the melodies, and they hummed them again and again when travelling through the forests or ploughing the deep on board ship; they

might be carelessly on the lips when some startling emotion suddenly surprised the singer, when an unexpected meeting, a long-desired gathering, or an unhoped-for word threw an undying light on the heart and consecrated hours destined to live for ever and to shine on for ever in the memory, even through the most distant and gloomy depths of the constantly darkening future.

Such inspirations as these were used in the happiest manner by Chopin, who greatly enriched them by the treasures of his handling and style. He so cut these diamonds as to present a thousand facets and bring to light all their latent fire; reuniting even their glittering dust, he mounted the gems in gorgeous caskets. What settings could he possibly have chosen better adapted to add to the value of his early memories, or which could have more efficiently aided him in creating poems, in arranging scenes, in painting episodes, in forming romances? These associations and national memories owe to him a reign far more extensive than the land which gave them birth; for by placing them amongst those idealised types which have been touched and consecrated by the resplendent lustre of art, he has endowed them with immortality.

It is only in Poland that it is possible to catch the haughty, yet tender and alluring character of the mazurka; and in order to understand to the full how perfectly Chopin's setting suited the varying emotions which he succeeded in displaying in all the magic of their rainbow lines, it is necessary to have seen that dance performed on its native soil. The cavalier, who is always selected by the lady, seizes her as a conquest of which he is proud, and strives to show off her loveliness to the admiration of all his rivals before he whirls her off in an entrancing and ardent embrace, through the tenderness of which his defiant expression as a victor yet gleams, while, it mingles with the blushing but gratified vanity of the prize whose beauty constitutes the glory of his triumph. Few more delightful scenes can be witnessed than a ball in Poland. When the mazurka has once begun, the attention is not distracted by a crowd of dancers jostling each other without grace or order, but is instead fascinated by one couple of equal beauty, who, like twin stars, dart forth into free and measureless space. The cavalier accentuates his steps as if in the pride of defiance, quits his partner for a moment as though he would contemplate her

with renewed delight, then rejoins her with passionate zeal, or whirls himself rapidly round as if overcome with sudden joy and yielding himself to the delicious giddiness of his rapture. Sometimes two couples will start together, after which a change of partners may take place between them; or again, a third cavalier may come forward, clap his hands, and claim one of the fair ladies for his partner. The queens of the festival are in their turn claimed by the most brilliant of the gentlemen, who zealously court the honour of leading them through the mazes of the dance.

While in waltz and galop the dancers are isolated, and only confused scenes are offered to the onlookers; while the quadrille is only a sort of passage-at-arms in which attack and defence go on indifferently, and where the most nonchalant show of grace is answered with equal nonchalance; while the vivacity of the polka (which we confess is charming) may easily become equivocal; while fandangos, tarantulas and minuets are simply little love-dramas, only interesting to the dancers of them, in which the gentleman has only to display his partner, and the spectators have nothing to do but follow, tediously enough, coquetries whose

obligatory motions are not addressed to them—on the contrary, in the mazurka the lady also has her part, and the rôle of the cavalier surpasses neither in grace nor importance that of his fair partner.

The long intervals which elapse between the successive appearances of the pairs are reserved for conversation among the dancers, and when their turn comes round again the scene no longer passes wholly amongst themselves, but extends also to the spectators. It is to the spectators that the cavalier exhibits the pride he feels in having been able to attract the preference of the lady who has selected him; it is in their presence that she has condescended to put this honour upon him; she tries to please them because the triumph of pleasing them is reflected upon her partner, and the applause of the spectators may be made a part of the most flattering and insinuating coquetry. Indeed at the end of the dance she appears to make him a formal offering of their suffrages in her favour; she bounds quickly towards him and leans on his arm—a movement which is susceptible of a thousand shades which female tact and subtle feeling very well know how to modify, ringing all the changes from the most

passionate and impulsive warmth of manner to an air of the most complete *abandon*.

How varied are the movements which succeed each other in the course round the ball-room! Beginning with a sort of timid hesitation, the lady sways about like a bird just about to take the wing; for some time gliding on one foot alone, she skims the ice of the polished floor like a skater; then like a sportive child she runs forward and suddenly takes wing. Lifting her lowered eyelids, with her head erect and her bosom swelling, with elastic bounds she cleaves the air as the light barque cleaves the waves, and seems to sport with space like an agile wood-nymph. Once again she begins her timid and graceful gliding, looks around at the spectators, sends words and sighs to those most highly favoured, and then, extending her lovely white arms to the partner who comes to rejoin her, she again begins those vigorous steps which convey her with the rapidity of magic from one end of the ball-room to the other. She glides, runs, flies; emotion colours her cheek and adds brilliance to her eye; fatigue bends her supple form and retards her winged feet, until, panting and exhausted, she gently falls into the arms of her partner, who, taking hold of her

with his vigorous arm, lifts her a moment in the air ere he finishes with her the final intoxicating whirl.

Many changes occur in the figures during this triumphal course, in which may be seen a thousand Atalantas as beauteous as in the dreams of Ovid. In the first chain the couples commence by giving each other the hand; then forming themselves into a circle the rapid gyrations of which dazzle the eye, they wreathe a living crown in which each lady is the only flower of her kind, while at the same time these glowing and varied colours are heightened in effect by the uniform dress of the gentleman, the result resembling that of the dark green foliage with which nature relieves her brilliant buds and fragrant blossoms. All then dart forward with sparkling animation and jealous emulation, passing before the spectators as in a review—a description of which would hardly yield in interest to those given us by Homer Basso of armies about to range themselves in the forefront of the battle! After an hour or two the same circle again forms to close the dance; and on some days, when pleasure and amusement fill everyone with an excited gaiety which glitters and sparkles through those irrepressible temperaments like an aurora in a midnight sky, a general

promenade is reformed, in the accelerated movements of which we can detect no symptom of fatigue amongst all these delicate yet enduring women, who dance as if their light limbs were endowed with the flexible tenacity and elasticity of steel.

The Polish all understand intuitively the subtle science of this dance, and even the least richly gifted among them knows how to draw new charms from it. If the graceful ease and noble dignity of those who are conscious of their own power are full of attraction in the mazurka, timidity and modesty are equally full of interest, because of all modern dances this breathes most of pure love. As the dancers are at all times conscious that they are exposed to the closest inspection of the onlookers, and constantly address themselves to them, so there reigns in the every essence of this dance a mingling of innate tenderness and mutual vanity which is as full of delicacy and propriety as it is of allurement.

That latent and unknown poetry which in the original Polish mazurkas was only indicated, was by Chopin divined, developed and brought to the light of day. While he preserved the rhythm of the dance he ennobled its melody and enlarged its proportions; and in order to paint more completely in

these productions, which he loved to hear us speak of as "pictures from the easel," the innumerable and widely-varying emotions which agitate the soul during the progress of this dance, above all in those long intervals during which the cavalier has the right to retain his place at the side of the lady whom he never quits—Chopin wove into their tissues harmonic lights and shades which were as new in themselves as the themes to which he adapted them.

Coquetries, vanities, fancies, inclinations, elegies, vague emotions, passions, conquests, struggles on which the favour or the safety of others depends—all, all meet in the mazurka. How nearly impossible it is to form a complete notion of the infinite gradations of passion—now staying, now going on—sometimes pleading, sometimes commanding! In the land where the mazurka rules from palace to cottage these gradations are followed, for a longer or shorter time, with as much ardour or enthusiasm as malicious trifling. The good and bad qualities of men are amongst the Poles distributed in a fashion so fantastic that, although essential characteristics may be nearly the same in all, they vary and shade off into each other in a way so very extraordinary that it is almost impossible to recognise or distin-

guish them. In natures amalgamated so capriciously there is a wondrous diversity, affording to the investigations of the curious a spur unknown in other lands; every new relation becomes a stimulating study, and the smallest incident is thus invested with unwonted interest. Here nothing passes unnoticed, nothing is indifferent, nothing is hackneyed! Striking contrasts constantly occur amongst these mobile and susceptible natures, endowed with intellects, keen, vivid and subtle, and their acute sensibilities made still more acute by suffering and misfortune—contrasts which illuminate hearts with a livid light as the blaze of a conflagration illumines and reveals the gloom of midnight. Here chance may bring into contrast those who a few hours before were perfect strangers to each other. The ordeal of a single moment, a single word, may separate long united hearts; necessity often forces sudden confidences and invincible suspicions kept close in the mind. As a witty woman once said: "They often play a comedy to avoid a tragedy!" That which has never been spoken is yet often surmised and understood. Vague generalities are often made use of to quicken interrogation, while hiding its drift, and evasive replies are closely listened to,

like the ringing of a coin, as a test of quality. The suitor is often pleading his own cause when he seems to be pleading for others, and the most graceful flattery is at times the veil which disguises exactions.

But at length caution and attention grow wearisome to natures which are expansive and candid, and a wearisome frivolity, surprising enough until the secret of its careless indifference has been found out, mixes itself with the most spiritual refinement and the most poetic sentiments very real causes for intense suffering, as though it would mock and jeer at all reality. It is not easy to analyse or justly appreciate this frivolity, for it is at times real and at times only assumed. To conceal the myth it uses confusing replies and strange resources. Sometimes it is justly and sometimes wrongly regarded as a sort of veil of motley, the light tissue whereof needs only to be a little torn to reveal, under the variegated folds of gossamer, more than one hidden or dormant quality. It often happens from such causes that eloquence grows into a sort of grave badinage sparkling like fireworks, though there may be nothing earnest in the heart of the discourse; while the lightest raillery seemingly flung off at

random, may probably be very sadly serious. The most tempestuous gaiety is followed closely by bitter and intense thoughts, and though nothing is presented without artificial polish, nothing remains altogether superficial. In the conversations ever going on in that country where the art of talking is cultivated to the highest degree and occupies much time, there are always those present who turn in a moment from smiles to tears, from joy to sorrow, whether the subject described is grave or gay, leaving the most acute observer doubting which is the more real, so difficult is it to discern what is fiction from what is truth.

In such varying moods of thought, where ideas change like quicksands on the seashore, they are but seldom found again at the exact place where they were left. This fact is alone quite sufficient to impart interest to interviews which otherwise would be of no import. We in Paris have been taught this fact by certain natives of Poland, who astounded the Parisians by their skill at "fencing in paradox," an art in which every Pole is more or less skilled in proportion as he has taken more or less interest or amusement in its cultivation. But the inimitable skill with which they are constantly able to inter-

change the garbs of truth and fiction (like touchstones, most certain when least suspected, the one always hidden under the cloak of the other) and the force which expends a great amount of intellect on the least important occasions (just as Gil Blas used up as much intelligence in finding the means of subsistence for one day as the King of Spain did to govern his whole dominions), at last make upon us an impression as painful as that produced by the jugglers of India in their exhibitions of wonderful skill, where sharp and deadly weapons fly glittering in the air, which the smallest error or the least lack of perfect mastery would convert into bright and swift messengers of instant death! Such skill is fraught with concealed terror, anxiety and anguish. From a complication of circumstances danger may lurk behind the slightest inadvertence, in the smallest imprudence, in possible accidents, while on the other hand powerful help may be suddenly rendered by the most obscure and forgotten individual. A dramatic interest may immediately arise from apparently the most trivial interviews giving to every relation an unsuspected phase. A hazy uncertainty hovers over every meeting, through which it is difficult to seize the contours and fix the

outlines, or to ascertain the present and future influence, so rendering intercourse vague and indefinite, filling it with an undefinable and hidden dread but at the same time with an insinuating flattery. From the weight of his repression from outside the strong currents of genuine sympathy are always struggling to find a way of escape. The varying impulses of vanity, love, patriotism, in their triple motives of action, are ever hustling against each other in every heart, leading to inextricable confusion of thought and feeling.

What mingled emotions are concentrated in the meetings of the mazurka! It is able to surround the lightest emotion of the heart with its own enchantment. While through its magic, the most reserved, momentary and trivial *rencontre* appeals to the imagination. How could it be otherwise in the society of the women who impart to this dance that inimitable grace and sweetness, which in less happy countries are struggled for in vain? In very truth, are not the Slavic women utterly incomparable? There are amongst them some whose qualities and virtues, so absolute, so undeniable, that they are acknowledged by all ages and

all countries. Such apparitions are always and everywhere rare. The women of Poland are usually distinguished by an originality which is full of fire; they are Parisians in grace and fire, and Eastern dancing girls in their languid fire, and have perhaps preserved among them and handed down from the mother to daughter the secrets of those burning love-philtres possessed in the seraglios. Their charms are full of the mystic spell of Asiatic languor; and with the flames of spiritual and intellectual houris in their brilliant eyes are combined the luxurious indolence of the Sultana. Their manners are caressing without boldness; they intoxicate by the grace of their languid movements; they allure by a flexibility of body which knows no restraint but that of perfect modesty, and which all the restraints of etiquette have not robbed of its willowy and supple grace. They attract us by those winning intonations of voice which touch our hearts, and fill our eyes with tender tears, as well as by those quick and graceful impulses which remind us of the spontaneous and beauteous timidity of the gazelle. While they are cultivated, intelligent, quick in comprehension, skilful in the use of their requisitions, they are at the same time as fastidious and as full

of superstition as the beautiful but ignorant women adored by the Arabian prophet. Generous, devout, loving danger, and living on that love from which they ask much but to which they give little, they prize glory and renown above all else, and heroism of all kinds they hold dear. Probably there is not one of them who would think it possible to pay too great a price for a brilliant action; and yet, we say it in all reverence, many of them hide in obscurity their holiest virtues and their sublimest sacrifices. And yet, exemplary as are those quiet virtues of the homely life, neither the miseries of domestic life nor the secret sorrows which prey upon souls too ardent not to be often wounded can lessen the wondrous vivacity of their emotions, which they can communicate with the unmistakable rapidity and sureness of the electric spark. By nature and position discreet, they manage with incredible dexterity their great weapon of dissimulation, and skilfully read the souls of others without allowing the secrets of their own to be read. Having that strange pride which disdains to exhibit characteristic and individual qualities, they frequently conceal their most noble virtues. They feel an inward contempt for those who cannot read them, and this confers upon

them that superiority which enables them to exert an absolute sway over those whom they have enthralled, flattered, charmed and conquered, until at length the moment comes when, loving with all the capabilities of their ardent souls, they are ready to brave and share the bitterest suffering, imprisonment, exile, and even death itself, with the object of their love —always faithful, consoling, tender and changeless in the intensity of their generous devotion. They are irresistible woman, who fascinate and charm, and demand earnest and devoted esteem. M. Balzac, in that precious incense of praise which he burned "in honour of that daughter of an alien soil," has thus sketched,* in colours composed entirely of antithesis, the Polish woman: "An angel by love, a demon by phantasy, a child by faith, a sage by experience, a man in brain, a woman in heart, a giant through hope, a mother by sorrow, a poet by dreams."

Fervent homage is always inspired by the women of Poland. All of them possess a poetic conception of an ideal which shines through their intercourse like a figure constantly passing before a mirror, to

* In the Dedication of his "Modeste Mignon."

comprehend and seize on which they impose upon themselves as a task. To be merely able to please is an insipid pleasure which they despise; they require that the being to whom they give their love shall be able to demand their esteem. This romantic temperament sometimes keeps them long hesitating between the world and the cloister, and, in truth, there are amongst them few who have not at some time or other seriously and bitterly contemplated taking refuge behind convent walls.

Where women like these reign as queens, what fevered words, what hope, what despair, what enthralling enchantments must be manifested in the delicious mazes of that mazurka, every cadence of which trembles in the ear of the Polish lady like the echo of a vanished passion or the whisper of a tender declaration! Who among them has ever danced through a mazurka without her cheeks burning more from the excitement of emotion than from mere physical fatigue? What unexpected and endearing ties have been formed during the long *tête-à-tête* in the very midst of crowds, while the sounds of music, which usually recalled the name of some hero or some treasured historical remembrance connected with the words, floated around them,

the associations of love and heroism thus becoming forever attached both to words and music! What ardent vows were exchanged, what wild and despairing farewells spoken! What brief attachments have been linked and as quickly unlinked by those who had never before met and would never, never meet again, and yet to whom forgetfulness was now for ever impossible! What hopeless love might have revealed itself during those brief moments, so rare in this world, when beauty is of more value than wealth, and a noble bearing of greater consequence than rank! What sombre destinies severed for all time by the tyranny of wealth and rank may in those fleeting moments have been once again united, happy in the glamour of passing triumphs, revelling in concealed and unexpected joy! What interviews opened in indifference, carried on in jest, interrupted with emotion, renewed with the secret knowledge of mutual understanding (Slavic delicacy and finesse especially excel in all that concerns subtle intuition) have terminated in the strongest attachments! What sacred confidences were exchanged in that generous spirit of frankness which circulates among those who are unknown, when once the noble are set free from the tyranny of en-

forced conventionalism! What deceitfully bland words, what vows, what desires, what vague hopes, must have been negligently flung on the air, thrown as the delicate handkerchief of the fair dancer in the mazurka, and which the maladroit knew not how to take up!

We have before said that it is necessary to have personally known Polish women in order to acquire the full and intuitive comprehension of their feelings with which Chopin has impregnated not only his mazurkas but many of his other compositions. Around them, like an ambient fluid, floats a subtle vapour of love; in his preludes, nocturnes, impromptus and mazurkas we can trace step by step every phase of which passion is capable. The playful tunes of coquetry; the gradual and insensible yielding of inclination; the capricious festoons of phantasy; the sadness of sickly joys born dying; flowers of mourning like the black roses the very perfume of whose gloomy leaves is depressing, and whose petals are so frail that the faintest breath will sever them from the fragile stem; sudden thoughtless flames, like the false shining of decayed and dead wood which only gleams in obscurity and crumbles at the touch; pleasures with no past and

no future, and snatched from accidental meetings; deceptions and inexplicable excitements, inducing adventure just as the sharp taste of half-ripe fruit stimulates and pleases the palate at the same time as it sets the teeth on edge; emotions having no memory and no hope; vague and shadowy feelings of interminable chromatic shades; all these are found in these works, endowed as they are by the innate nobility, the beauty, the distinction, the surpassing elegance of those who experience them.

In the compositions just referred to, and also in most of his ballades, waltzes and etudes, may be found embalmed the rendering of some of those poetical themes to which we have made reference. So idealised are these fugitive poems, so fragile and attenuated are they rendered, that they hardly seem to belong to human nature, but rather to some fairy realm, unveiling the indiscreet confidences of Peris, of Titanias, of Ariels, of Queen Mabs, of the Genii of the Air, Water and Fire—subject like us to bitter disappointments and to unconquerable disgusts.

Some of these works are as gay and fantastic as the wiles of an enamoured but mischief-making sylph; some are soft, playing in undulations of light like the hues of a salamander; some are full of the

deepest discouragement, as though their notes breathed the sighings of souls in pain who can find no one to offer up the charitable prayers requisite for their deliverance. Sometimes an inconsolable despair is so palpably stamped on them that we feel we are present at some Byronic tragedy, oppressed by the anguish of a Jacopo Foscari unable to outlive the agony of his exile. Some again, which are played altogether on the black keys, are acute and subtle, reminding us of the character of Chopin's own gaiety, lover of atticism as he was, played upon only by the more exalted emotions, shrinking from all vulgar mirth, coarse laughter and low enjoyments, as we shrink from those animals which are more abject than venomous, and the very sight of which causes in tender and sensitive natures the most nauseating repulsion.

In the greater part of the mazurkas we meet with a great variety of subjects and impressions. Sometimes we think we hear the manly sound of the clanking of spurs, though it is usually the almost inaudible rustling of crape and gauze under the light breath of the dancers, or the tinkling of chains of gold and diamonds, that may be distinguished. Some of them appear to portray the

defiant pleasure of a ball on the eve of a battle, tortured by anxiety, for we hear, through the rhythm of the dance, the sighs and despairing farewells of hearts compelled to suppress their tears; others reveal to us the uneasiness and secret ennui of those guests at a fête who find it is vain to expect that gay sounds can muffle up the sharp cries of spirits in anguish. We sometimes hear the gasping breath of terror and of stifled fear; we sometimes divine the indistinct presentiments of a love doomed to a perpetual struggle and destined to outlive all hope —a love which, though consumed by jealousy and conscious that it can never conquer, yet disdains to curse, and hides itself in a soul-subduing pity. In other compositions we feel a strange madness as though we were carried into the heart of a whirlwind, and in the midst of the mysterious confusion a sudden melody passes and repasses, panting, palpitating, like the throbbing of a heart sick with longing, gasping in despair, breaking with anguish, dying of a love at once hopeless and indignant. In some we listen to the distant flourish of trumpets like fading memories of departed glories; in others the rhythm is as fleeting, as undetermined, as vague and shadowy, as the feeling with which two young

lovers gaze upon the first star of evening while it is yet alone in the dim heavens.

One afternoon there were only three persons in the room, and Chopin had been playing for a long time. In the small company was one of the most distinguished women in Paris, and she remarked that when he played she always felt more and more filled with a solemn resignation, such as that which might be awakened in the presence of the grave-stones strewing those grounds in Turkey where the shady recesses and bright flower-beds seem only to offer a gay garden to the startled wanderer. She asked him what caused that involuntary but sad veneration by which her soul was subdued, while he was playing those pieces which apparently only presented sweet and graceful themes, and what name he gave to that strange emotion which permeates his compositions? Overcome by the appealing tears which moistened her lovely eyes, he replied, with a candour which was indeed rare with this artist, who was so susceptible upon all that related to the secrets of those sacred relics entombed in the gorgeous shrine of his music: That her heart had not deceived her in the gloom which she felt stealing over her, for whatever his transitory

pleasures may have been, he was never free from a feeling which might almost be said to form the soil of his heart, and for which he could find no fitting expression except a word in his own language, as no other tongue possessed a term which was the exact equivalent of the Polish word "*Zal!*" He repeated the word over and over again, as though his ear thirsted for the sound of that word, which expresses the entire range of emotions engendered by intense regret, through every shade of feeling from hatred to repentance.

Zal! Strange word, embracing a strange diversity and a strange philosophy! Susceptible of different interpretations, it includes within itself all the deep humility of a regret borne with resignation and without murmuring, while bowing before the stern fiat of necessity and the inscrutable decrees of Providence; but changing its character as soon as it is spoken to man, and assuming an indirect meaning, it signifies agitation, excitement, rancour, revolt filled with reproach, vengeance premeditated, never-ceasing menace and threatening if retaliation ever becomes possible, and meanwhile feeding itself upon a bitter even if fruitless hatred.

Zal! Truth to say, it colours all Chopin's com-

positions, sometimes wrought like threads of silver through their elaborate tissue, sometimes colouring them with tints of greater passion. In his sweetest reveries it may be found, even in those which Berlioz, that Shakespearean genius comprehending all extremes, has so well described as "divine coquetries" —coquetries only understood in Oriental climes; coquetries in which mothers cradle their boys, with which men are tortured by their sisters and enchanted by their lovers, and which make the coquetries of other women seem coarse and insipid in their eyes, leading them to exclaim, with what looks like boasting though it is entirely justified by truth, *Niema iak Polki!*—"Nothing equals the Polish women!"* By means of the secrets of these "divine coquetries" are those adorable beings formed who alone are capable of fulfilling the impassioned ideals of poets, like M. de Chateaubriand, who in the feverish restlessness of their adolescence create for themselves visions of "an Eve innocent yet fallen; ignorant of all yet knowing all; mistress yet virgin."† The

* The ancient custom of drinking, in her own shoe, the health of the woman they loved, is one of the most highly original traditions of the enthusiastic gallantry of the men of Poland.

† Chateaubriand, "Memoires d'Outre Tombe"; Vol. I. *Incantation.*

only being ever found to resemble this dream was a Polish girl of seventeen, "a mixture of the Odalisque and Valkyria . . . . realisation of the ancient sylph, now Flora, freed from the chain of the seasons,"* and whom even M. de Chateaubriand feared to meet again. "Divine coquetries," at once generous and avaricious, impressing upon the charmed and intoxicated soul the floating, waving, rocking, undecided motion of a boat without rigging or oars!

By his peculiar style of playing, Chopin imparted with the most fascinating effect this constant rocking, making the melody undulate to and fro like a skiff driven over the bosom of tossing waves. This manner of execution, which set so peculiar a seal upon his own style of performance, was first indicated by the words *tempo rubato* affixed to his works; a *tempo* broken, agitated, interrupted; a movement flexible while it was abrupt and languishing, and as vacillating as the flame under the fluctuating breath which agitates it. This direction is no longer found in his later productions; he was persuaded that if the player understood them he would divine this regular irregularity. All his compositions ought to be played with this accentuated and measured

* "Atala." Vol. III.

swaying and rocking, though it is difficult for those who never heard him play to catch hold of this secret of their proper execution. He was desirous to impart this style to his many pupils, especially those of his own land. His countrymen, or rather his countrywomen, seized upon it with that facility with which they comprehend everything relating to poetry or the emotions—an innate, intuitive grasping of his meaning aided them in following all the fluctuations of his depths of ethereal and spiritual azure.

CHAPTER IV.

WE have tried to describe those compositions, palpitating with emotion, in which genius struggles with grief—that terrible reality, which Art must seek to reconcile with heaven—confronting it sometimes as the conqueror and sometimes as the conquered; compositions in which all the memories of Chopin's youth, all the affections of his heart, all the mysteries of his desires, all the secrets of his unspoken passions, are collected like tears in a lachrymatory; compositions in which, overstepping the limits of human sensations, which are too dull for his eager fancy and too obtuse for his keen perceptions, he makes incursions into the realms of Dryads, Oreads and Oceanides. We might now be naturally expected to treat Chopin's talent for execution, but this task we cannot attempt, seeing that we cannot command the melancholy

courage necessary to exhume emotions which are linked with our fondest memories and our dearest personal recollections, nor can we compel ourselves to make the mournful effort to colour, with those brilliant hues which they would require from our hands, the gloomy shrouds which now cover the skill we once loved. We feel our loss too keenly to attempt any such analysis. And, with all our efforts, what result could we attain? To those who have not heard him, we could never hope to convey any first conception of that fascination so ineffably poetic, that charm as subtle and penetrating as the delicate perfume of the vervain or the Ethiopian calla, which, shrinking and exclusive, will not diffuse its exquisite aroma in the noisome atmosphere of crowds, the heavy air of which can only retain the ranker odour of the tuberose or the incense of burning resin.

By the purity of his handling, by its elation with "La Fée aux miettes" and "Les Lutins d'Argail," by its *rencontres* with the "Seraphins" and "Dianes" who murmured in his ear their most confidential complaints and their most secret dreams, Chopin's style and manner of conception remind us of Nodier. He knew he would have no effect

on the masses, that he could not rouse the multitude, which is like a leaden sea and as heavy to set in motion, and which though heat may melt its waves and render them malleable, requires the powerful arm of an athletic Cyclops to handle, fuse and pour into moulds where the sluggish metal, glowing and seething under the electric fire, becomes thought and feeling under the new form into which it has been forced. He knew that he was only imperfectly appreciated in those meetings, unfortunately all too few—where *all* his hearers were ready to ascend with him into those magic spheres which the ancients thought could only be entered through a gate of ivory, and to be surrounded by pillars of diamond and surmounted by a dome arched with fawn-coloured crystals on which played the varying hues of the prism; spheres like the Mexican opal, whose kaleidoscopic foci are dimmed by olive-coloured mists veiling and unveiling their internal glories, spheres in which everything is magical and super-natural, reminding us of the wonderful world of realised dreams. In such spheres as these Chopin delighted. He remarked once to a friend, an artist who has since that time been often heard: "I am not suited for concert-giving; the public frightens

me; their looks, stimulated by nothing but curiosity, paralyse me; their strange faces oppress me; their breath stifles me; but *you*—you are destined for it, for when you do not win your public you have the power to assault, overwhelm, control, compel them."

Conscious of how much was necessary, in order to apprehend his peculiar talent, he rarely played in public; and excepting some concerts given at his debut in Vienna and Munich in 1831, he gave no more save in Paris, being indeed unable to travel on account of his health, which was so precarious that for whole months he would seem to be in an almost dying state. During the only excursion he made in the hope that the mildness of a southern clime would be more conducive to his health, his state was frequently so alarming that more than once the keepers of the hotels at which he stayed demanded payment for the bed and mattress on which he slept so that they might have them burned, for they regarded him as already at that stage of consumption at which it becomes so highly contagious.

If we may be allowed to say so, we believe his concerts did not fatigue his physical constitution as much as his artistic susceptibility. We believe his

voluntary abnegation of public applause covered an internal wound. He knew very well his own superiority, and it is probable that it did not meet with sufficient reverberation and echo from without to give him what he required, viz., the calm assurance that he was perfectly appreciated. In the absence of popular applause he no doubt asked himself how far a selected audience could by the enthusiasm of its applause replace the greater public which he freely gave up. There were few who understood him—did those few *rightly* understand him? A feeling of discontent gnawed at his heart and secretly undermined him, though he himself scarcely understood the cause of it. We have seen him wellnigh shocked by praise; the praise to which he was justly entitled did not come to him *en masse*, and he regarded isolated commendation almost as a wound. That he felt himself not merely slightly but badly applauded was quite evident enough by the polished phrases with which he shook off such praises like troublesome dust, making it quite plain that he would much rather be left undisturbed in the enjoyment of his solitary feelings than listen to injudicious commendation.

He was too fine a connoisseur in raillery and too

clever a satirist ever to expose himself to sarcasm; he never pretended to be a "misunderstood genius." He so entirely concealed the wound given to his just pride, with such good grace, and with such apparent satisfaction, that its very existence was hardly suspected. But not without some show of reason might the gradually increasing intervals between his concerts* be put down rather to the wish he felt to avoid occasions which failed to bring him the tribute he deserved than to physical incapacity. Indeed his strength was put to a severe test by the numerous lessons he always gave, and by the many hours he spent at his own piano.

It is to be regretted that the undoubted advantage which results to an artist from the cultivation of none but select audiences should be so sensibly diminished by the rare and cold expression of its sympathy. The reserve which conceals the grace of the élite just as *glacé* covers their fruit at dessert, and the imperturbable calm of even their most earnest enthusiasm, could not be otherwise than unsatisfactory to Chopin. The poet torn from

* He sometimes allowed years to go by without giving a single concert. We believe the one he gave in 1844, in Pleyel's room, was after an interval of nearly ten years.

his solitary inspiration can only find it again when his audience manifests an interest not merely attentive but vivid and animated; he can never hope to regain it in the cold glances of an Areopagiticus assembled merely to judge him. He must *feel* that he is moving them, that he is agitating his hearers, that in them his emotions find the responsive sympathies of like intuitions, that in his flight towards the infinite he carries them with him, just as the leader of a winged train on giving the signal for departure in search of milder shores is immediately followed by the entire flock.

But if it had been otherwise; if Chopin had everywhere received that exalted homage and admiration which he so richly deserved; if, like so many others, he had been heard by all nations and in all climes; if he had everywhere obtained those brilliant ovations which constitute a Capitol in which the people salute merit or honour genius; if instead of the hundreds who did acknowledge him he had been known and recognised by thousands—we would not in this part of his career stay to enumerate such triumphs. To those whose brows claim the laurel of immortality, what are the fading garlands of an hour? Mere ephemeral sympathies and transitory

praises are not to be named in the presence of the august Dead who are crowned with higher glories. The joys, the consolations, the soothing feelings which the creations of real art evoke in the weary, suffering, thirsting or persevering and believing hearts to whom they are dedicated, are destined to be carried by the sacred works of Chopin into far lands and distant times. Thus an indissoluble bond will be established between exalted natures, enabling them, wherever be their dwelling on the face of the earth, or whatever the epoch when they live, to understand and to appreciate each other. Such natures are commonly but ill understood by their contemporaries when they remain silent, and are frequently misunderstood when their speech is the most eloquent!

"There are," Goethe says, "different crowns, and there are some that may easily be gathered while out for a walk." The balmy freshness of such crowns as these may for a moment charm us by their very freshness, but who could dream of comparing these with those gained so laboriously by Chopin's constant and exemplary effort, by his earnest love of art, and by his own painful experience of the emotions so faithfully depicted by him?

As Chopin did not with mean avidity seek those crowns so easily won, and of which more than one amongst ourselves has the modesty to feel proud; as he was a pure, good, generous, compassionate soul, filled with one single sentiment—the love of country, which is one of the noblest of feelings; as he moved in our midst as a spirit consecrated by all of poetry that Poland possesses—let us draw near to his sacred tomb with fitting reverence! Let us not adorn it with artificial wreaths! Let us not cast upon it any trivial crowns! Let us, in presence of this consecrated shroud, nobly lift up our thoughts! Let us learn from him how to repel all ambitions but the very highest, and to concentrate our labours upon efforts which will produce effects more lasting than the vain leading of the fashion of the fleeting hour! Let us reject the corrupt spirit of the times in which we live, together with all that is unworthy of art, all that is perishable, all that does not enfold within itself some germ of that eternal and immaterial beauty which it is the mission of art to reveal and unveil as a condition of its own glory! Let us bear in mind the prayer of the ancient Dorians, that simple formula so redolent of pious poetry, and only asking their gods "to give them

the Good in return for the Beautiful"! Let us, like Chopin, aim at leaving a celestial and immortal echo of what we have felt, loved, suffered, rather than labour so persistently to attract auditors whom we strive to please at any sacrifice! Let us from his revered memory learn to demand from ourselves work which shall entitle us to some true rank in the sacred city of art! Let us not without regard to the future exact from the present those light and fleeting wreaths which are faded and forgotten almost before they are woven!

Instead of receiving such crowns, his *illustrious compeers* have placed in Chopin's hands the most glorious palms it is possible for any artist to receive during his lifetime. Enthusiastic admiration was accorded to him by a public still smaller than the musical aristocracy which assembled at his concerts. This narrower public was formed of men of the most distinguished names, who bowed before him as the rulers of various empires bend before the monarch whom they have come together to honour Such men individually rendered to him true homage. How could it have been different in France, where a truly national hospitality discerns with such perfect taste the rank and the claims of its guests?

In Chopin's saloon were often found the most eminent minds in Paris—not in *réunions* of studious periodicity such as have been arranged by the dull imaginations of ceremonious and wearisome circles, and which they never succeed in realising in accordance with their desires, because enjoyment, ease, enthusiasm, animation, never come at any predetermined hour. Artists can command them even less than other men can, for artists are struck more or less by some sacred disease the paralysing torpor of which has to be got rid of, the benumbing pain of which has to be shaken off, before they can be joyous and amused by those pyrotechnic fires by which the bewildered guests are startled when they see from time to time a Roman candle, a cascade of fiery waters, or a terrible but quite innocent dragon! It is unfortunately only by accident that gaiety and the strength necessary for joy are met with among poets and artists! True enough, some of the more privileged amongst them have the happy gift of conquering inward pain so that they can always bear their burden lightly, and are able to join their companions in laughing over the toils of the way, or at least, are always able to maintain a calm and gentle serenity which, like a mute pledge of hope

and consolation, animates, elevates and inspires their companions, imparting to them while they remain under the influence of this placid atmosphere, a freedom of spirit which appears to them so much the more vivid as it the more strongly contrasts with their usual ennui, abstraction, natural gloom and indifference.

Chopin did not belong to either of the classes just referred to; he possessed the inborn graces of a Polish welcome, by which the host is bound not merely to fulfil the common duties and obligations of hospitality, but to relinquish all thoughts of himself and bring all his powers to bear on the promotion of the enjoyment of his guests. To visit him was always a pleasure, and those who visited him were always charmed; he could at once put them at their ease, place everything at their disposal, and make them masters of everything. Even the simple peasant of Slavic race, in doing the honours of his humble cabin, never departs from this rule of munificence; he is more joyously eager in his welcome than the Arab in his tent, and compensates for any splendour that may be lacking in his reception by repeating without fail an adage which is also spoken by the grand seignior after the most

luxurious repasts served under gilded canopies; *Czym bohat tym rad*, which for foreigners may be thus paraphrased: "Deign graciously to forgive whatever is unworthy of you; I place my humble riches at your disposal." This formula* is even yet uttered, with truly national dignity and grace, by all heads of families who preserve the picturesque customs by which the ancient Polish manners were distinguished.

Now that we have described something of the habits of hospitality usual in his country, it will not be difficult to understand the ease which prevailed at all our *réunions* with Chopin. The flow of thought and entire freedom from restraint were so pure in character that no insipidity or bitterness ever resulted and no ill humour was ever provoked. He usually avoided society, but once his saloon was invaded, the kindness of his attention was delight-

* The Polish formulas of courtesy all retain the strong impress of the hyperbolical expressions of Eastern tongues. The titles of "very powerful and very enlightened seigniors" are still compulsory. In conversation the Poles constantly call each other "benefactor" *(Dobrodzij)*. The ordinary salutation between men, as well as from men to women, is *Padam do Rog:* "I fall at your feet." There is an ancient solemnity and simplicity about the common greeting of the people: *Slawa Bohu*—"Glory to God."

ful; without seeming to be occupied with any particular individual he was successful in finding for all that which was most agreeable to them, and while neglecting none, he extended the most gracious courtesy to all.

It was not without an effort, not without a slightly misanthropic repugnance, that Chopin could be persuaded to open his doors and his piano, even to those whose respectful and faithful friendship gave them some claim to urge with eagerness such a request. No doubt more than one of us can still recollect our first improvised evening with him, in spite of his refusal, when he lived in the Chaussée d'Antin. His apartment, which was invaded by surprise, was only lit up by some wax candles grouped around one of Pleyel's pianos, which he very much liked on account of their slightly veiled but silvery sonority and easy touch, permitting him to draw forth tones which one might almost have thought proceeded from one of those harmonicas, so ingeniously constructed by old German masters by the union of crystal and water, and of which Germany has preserved a monopoly. The corners of the room were left in obscurity so that all idea of limit was lost, and there seemed to be no boundary

save the darkness of space around. Some tall piece of furniture draped in white would reveal itself in this dim light—a form indistinct, lifting itself like a spectre to listen to the tones which had called it forth. The light concentrated round the piano, and falling on the floor, glided on like a spreading wave until it reached and mingled with the fitful flashes from the fire, from which orange-lined plumes rose and fell, like shifting gnomes attracted to the spot by mystic incantations in their own language. A single portrait of a pianist, who was an admiring and sympathising friend, seemed as if it were invited to be a constant auditor of the ebbing and flowing tide of sound which sighed, moaned, murmured, broke and died upon the instrument near to which it always hung. By a curious coincidence, the polished surface of the mirror only reflected, in such manner as to double it to our vision, that beautiful oval with silky curls which so many pencils have drawn, and which has just been reproduced by the engraver for all who are charmed by works of such peculiar eloquence.

Grouped in the luminous zone immediately around the piano were several men of brilliant renown, Heine, that saddest of all humorists, listened with

the eagerness of a fellow-countryman to the stories told him by Chopin of that mysterious country which also haunted his ethereal fancy, and the beautiful shores he too had explored. Chopin and Heine comprehended each other at a word, a tone, or a glance; the player responded to the questions which the poet murmured in his ear, and gave in tones the most astonishing revelations from those unknown realms respecting that "laughing nymph"* about whom he inquired: "Whether she still continued, with a coquetry so enticing, to wrap her silvery veil around the flowing locks of her green hair?" Familiar with all the love tales and gossip of those distant lands, he asked: "Whether the old marine god with the long white beard still pursued this mischievous naiad with his ridiculous love?" Full of information, too, as to all the exquisite fairy scenes to be beheld "down there—down there," he asked: "Whether the roses always glowed there with so triumphant a flame? Whether trees at moonlight always sang so harmoniously?" When Chopin had replied, and they had conversed together for a long time about that ærial clime, they would relapse into gloomy silence, seized with that

* Heine: "Saloon-Chopin."

mal du pays which afflicted Heine when he likened himself to the Dutch captain of the phantom ship, eternally driven about with his crew upon the chilly waves, and "in vain sighing for the spices, the tulips, the hyacinths, the sea-foam pipes, the porcelain cups of Holland. . . . 'Amsterdam! Amsterdam! when shall we ever again see Amsterdam?' they cry from the deck, while the tempest howls through the rigging, and for ever dashes them to and fro in this watery hell!" Heine also says: "I quite understand the passion which once led the unfortunate captain to exclaim: 'Oh! if I *should* ever again see Amsterdam I would rather be for ever chained at the corner of one of its streets than be forced to leave it again!' Poor Van der Decken!"

Heine knew well enough what "poor Van der Decken" had suffered in his terrific and never ending course upon the ocean which had gripped his indestructible vessel, and held it fast bound to the waves of its restless bosom by an invisible anchor, the chain of which he could not find, and therefore could not break. When he chose Heine could describe to us the hope, the despair, the torture of the miserable wretches who peopled this unhappy ship, for he had climbed up on to its accursed deck,

lured and guided by the hand of some enamoured Undine, who, when the guest of her forests of coral and palaces of pearl rose from a meal more bitter, more satirical, more morose than usual, attempted to dissipate his ill humour between the repasts by some spectacle worthy of a lover who, even in his dreams, could create more marvels than were contained in her whole kingdom. Heine had travelled all over the globe in this vessel that would not be wrecked; he had watched the aurora borealis, the brilliant visitor of the long nights, mirror herself in the immense stalactites of eternal ice, exulting in the play of the colours which alternated with each other in the folds of her glowing scarf. He had sailed to the tropics where during the brief nights the burning rays of an exhausting sun were replaced by the celestial light of the zodiacal triangle. He had traversed the latitudes where life becomes agony, and advanced into those where it is a living death, and on the long way had familiarised himself with the heavenly miracles which strew the path of those wild mariners who make for no port! Seated on the poop of a vessel without a helm, his eye had ranged over the two Bears majestically overhanging the North, had scanned the Southern

Cross, had gazed on the blank Antarctic deserts stretching themselves over the empty space of the heavens above, and over the dreary waves beneath, where the despairing vision finds nothing to contemplate in the murky depths of a sky without a star vainly arched over a sea without a bottom and without a shore! He had for long followed the glittering but evanescent tracks of the meteors through the depths of space; he had traced the mystic and incalculable orbits of the comets flashing along their wandering paths, everywhere feared for their ominous magnificence, and yet harmless and inoffensive. He had gazed upon the lustre of the distant Aldebaran, which, like the sullen glitter and glow in the eye of a vengeful enemy, fiercely glares on the globe without daring to come near it. He had watched the gleaming planets shedding a consoling and friendly light upon the restless eye which seeks them, like the weird and cabalistic words of a hopeful but enigmatical promise. All these things Heine had beheld under the varying aspects which they assume in different latitudes, and much more also had he seen, and would entertain us with the recital of it under strange similitudes. He had assisted at the furious cavalcade of the "Herodiad";

he had also the entrée at the court of the King Aulues in the gardens of the Hesperides; and, indeed, he had obtained an entrance into all those places inaccessible to mortals who have not had a fairy godmother who would take upon herself the task of counteracting all the evils known to life by showering upon her adopted son the entire store of fairy treasures.

On the evening we are now endeavouring to describe, Meyerbeer sat next to Heine—Meyerbeer, for whom the whole string of interjections of admiration has long since been counted! Creator as he was of Cyclopean harmonies, he spent his hours in delight when following those detailed arabesques, woven in transparent gauze, which wound in filmy veils around Chopin's delicate conceptions.

Adolphe Nourris, a noble artist, ascetic and passionate, was also present. He was a sincere and almost devout Catholic, who dreamed of the future with the fervour of the Middle Ages, and who during the later years of his life refused to lend his talent to any scene of merely superficial sentiment. He served art with exalted and enthusiastic respect, for he regarded it in all its manifestations as a holy tabernacle, "the Beauty of which formed the splendour of the True." His melancholy passion for the Beautiful had already undermined him and under the domination of this haunting feeling his brow seemed to be turning into stone—a feeling always explained by the breaking out of despair too late for man to remedy it—man, who is so eager to explore the secrets of the heart but so slow to understand them!

Another friend, whose talent was so closely allied to that of Chopin, with whom he was most intimate, was also there—Hiller, who had written some pieces for the piano before those great works he afterwards published and among which was his remarkable oratorio, "The Destruction of Jerusalem." Among these piano pieces those known as "Etudes," though they were vigorous sketches of most finished design, recall those studies of trees where the painter gives us a whole short poem of light and shade, with but one tree, one branch, a single *motif*, happily and boldly treated.

In the midst of those spectres which crowded the air, whose rustling could almost be heard, Eugène Delacroix sat absorbed and silent. What were his thoughts? Was he wondering what palette, brushes, canvas he must use in order to give, through his art,

visible life to those spectres? Did he set his mind to discover canvas woven by Aracture, pencils fabricated from the long eyelashes of fairies, a palette spread over with the vaporous colours of the rainbow, that such a sketch might become possible? Did he first smile at these fancies, and then yield to the impressions from which they had sprung—for is not great talent always drawn towards that power which is in direct contrast to its own?

The aged Niemceviez, who seemed to be nearer to the grave than any of us, listened while Chopin translated into dramatic execution the "Historic Songs" for this survivor of days long since gone by. Under the Polish artist's fingers were again heard, side by side with the popular descriptions of the Polish bard, the clash of arms, the songs of conquerors, the plaints of illustrious captives, and the wails over departed heroes. Together these two memorised the long course of national glory, of victory, of kings, queens and warriors, and so life-like were these phantoms that the old man believed the present to be an illusion, and thought the olden days were fully resuscitated.

Apart from all the rest, dark and silent, rested the motionless profile of Mickiewicz; the Dante of

the north, he always seemed to find the stranger's salt bitter, and his stairs hard to mount.

Buried in a fauteuil, her arms resting on a table, sat Georges Sand, curiously attentive and gracefully subdued. Endowed with that very rare faculty which is only given to a few of the elect—the power to recognise the Beautiful under whatsoever shape of nature or art it assumes, she sat and listened with the whole power of her ardent genius. The existence of "second sight" in highly gifted women has been acknowledged by all nations, and the faculty of at once recognising Beauty may perhaps be that "second sight." It is a kind of mystic gaze which causes the outer bark, the mask, the grosser envelope of form, to fall off, and permit a clear contemplation of the invisible essence, the soul incarnated within, and thus enable the ideal which artist or poet has vivified in the torrent of notes, the passionate veil of colour, the cold chiselled marble, or the mysterious rhythms of strophes, to be fully discerned. This faculty is much less common than is generally supposed; it is usually felt only vaguely, yet in its highest developments it manifests itself as a divining oracle knowing the Past and foretelling the Future. It is

a power by which the happy organisation it illumines is exempted from bearing the heavy burden of those technicalities which drag on the merely scientific towards that mystic realm of inner life which the gifted reach at one single bound. It is a faculty which springs not so much from a knowledge of the sciences as from a familiarity with nature.

The great fascination and value of life in the country consists in the long *tête-à-tête* with nature. In these long and solitary interviews may best be caught the words of revelation which are hidden beneath the infinite harmonies of form, of sound, of light and shadow, of tones and warblings, of terror and delight. At a first view such infinite variety may appear crushing or distracting; but if it is faced with that courage which no mystery can appal, if it is sounded with a resolution which no length of time can tire, this very variety may furnish the clue to analogies, conformities and relations between sense and our sentiment, and help us to trace the hidden links which bind things apparently dissimilar, identical oppositions and equivalent antitheses, and teach us the secrets of those chasms which separate by narrow but impassable spaces

things destined ever to draw near yet never to join, ever to resemble yet never to blend. It is the necessary appanage of the poet to awaken early, as did Madame Sand, to those dim whisperings with which Nature ever initiates her chosen into her mystic rites. It requires a yet more subtle power to have learned from Nature how to penetrate the dreams of man when he, in his turn, creates and uses in his works her tones, warblings, terrors and delights. This power Madame Sand possesses by a double right—by the intuitions of her heart as well as by the vigour of her genius. After naming Madame Sand—whose energetic personality and electric genius inspired Chopin's frail and delicate organisation with an admiration so intense as to consume him, just as a wine too vigorous will shatter the fragile vessel—we cannot now call up other names from that dim vista of the past in which so many indistinct figures, so many doubtful sympathies, so many indefinite projects and uncertain beliefs, are for ever surging and hurtling to and fro. Probably there is not one among us who, looking down that long vista, would not behold the ghost of some feeling the shadowy form of which he would find it im-

possible to pass! Amongst the various interests, the burning desires, the restless tendencies surging through that epoch in which so many exalted souls and brilliant intellects were thrown fortuitously together, how few of them there were, alas! which contained sufficient vitality to enable them to resist the innumerable causes of death surrounding every idea, every feeling, and every individual life from the cradle to the grave. Even during the moments of the troubled life of the emotions now past, how few of them could escape that saddest of all human judgments: "Happy, happy, if it were dead! Far happier if it had never been born!" And amongst those varied feelings which caused so many noble hearts to beat high, were there many which have never incurred this fearful malediction? Like the lover-suicide in Mickiewicz's poem, who returned to life in the realms of the dead only to renew the frightful sufferings of his life on earth, probably of all the emotions then so vividly felt there is not a single one which, if it could live again, would reappear without the disfigurements, the brandings, the bruisings, the mutilations, inflicted upon its early beauty, and which so deeply marred its pristine innocence! And should we insist upon

recalling from the heavy shroud these melancholy goblins of thoughts dead and feelings buried? Would they not really appal us because so few of them would possess enough of purity and celestial radiance to redeem them from the shame of being utterly disowned and altogether repudiated by those whose bliss or agony they formed during the passionate hours of their tyrannical rule? In very pity, refrain from asking us to call up from the dead ghosts whose recollections would be so full of pain! Who could endure the ghastly, sepulchral array? Who would voluntarily recall them from their sheeted slumber? Were our ideas and thoughts and feelings to be really aroused suddenly from the unquiet tomb where they lie buried, and were an account to be demanded from them of the good or evil effect they have severally wrought in the hearts where they found so generous an asylum, hearts which, as chance or destiny willed, they have confused, overwhelmed, illuminated, devastated, ruined, or broken—who of us could hope to endure the replies which would be made to such searching questions?

If, of all the group of which we speak, and every member of which has in its turn commanded the

attention of many human hearts, and must consequently bear in his conscience the sharp sting of multiplied responsibilities—if, I say, among that group should be found *one* who has not permitted to fall into utter forgetfulness aught that was pure in the natural attraction which bound them in this chain of glittering links; one who has allowed his memories to be embittered by no breath of the fermentation which lingers around even the most delicate perfumes; one who has transfigured, and bequeaths to the immortality of art, nothing but the unblemished inheritance of all that was noblest in their enthusiasm and all that was most pure and most durable in their joys—if there be such an one, let us bow before him as one of the Elect! Let us regard him as one of those whom the popular belief sets aside as "good genii"! The ascription of superior power to beings believed to be beneficent to mankind has received a sublime confirmation from a great poet of Italy who defines genius as "a stronger impress of Divinity." Let us bow before all those who have been sealed with this mystic seal; but let us, with the deepest and truest tenderness, venerate those who have used their wondrous

supremacy for no other purpose than to give life and utterance to the highest and most exquisite feelings! And amongst the pure and beneficent genii of earth we must beyond all question rank the artist Chopin!

CHAPTER V.

A NATURAL curiosity is commonly felt to know some details of the lives of those men who have consecrated their genius to adorn noble feelings by means of works of art, through which, in the eyes of the astonished and delighted crowd, they gleam like brilliant meteors. The sympathy and admiration aroused by the compositions of these men attach directly to them their own names, which are at once exalted as symbols of nobility and greatness, because the world is loth to believe that those can themselves experience ignoble feelings who can forcibly express high sentiments. The objects of this benevolent prejudice and favourable presumption are expected, by the high kind of life they are required to lead, to justify such suppositions. When the people see that the poet feels with such exquisite delicacy all

that it is so sweet to inspire; that he beholds with rapid intuition everything that pride, timidity or weariness tries so hard to hide; that he can portray love just as youth dreams of it, but as riper years despair of realising it; when these sublime situations appear to be governed by his genius, which so calmly lifts itself above the calamities of human destiny, and always finds the leading thread by which the most complicated knots in the tangled skein of life may be proudly and victoriously loosened; when it is known that the secret modulations of the most exquisite tenderness, the most noble courage, the most sublime simplicity, are subject to his command—it is very natural that an inquiry should be put whether this wondrous power of divination springs from a genuine faith in the reality of the noble feelings which are thus portrayed, or whether the source of that power is not rather to be found in an acute intellectual perception or an abstract comprehension of logical reason.

Then are asked the questions: In what respects does the life led by men so enamoured of beauty differ from the life led by the common herd? How does this high poetic disdain conduct itself when

it is struggling with material interests? How were these ineffable emotions of ethereal love guarded from the bitterness of paltry cares and from that rapidly growing and corroding mildew which usually stifles or poisons those emotions? How many of such feelings did these men preserve from that subtle evaporation which robs them of their perfume, and from that gradually growing inconstancy which lulls us until we forget to call these dying emotions to account? Were these men always just, who felt such holy indignation? Were they always equitable while they exalted integrity? Did they never stoop while they sang of honour? Have the men who so greatly admired fortitude never compromised with their own weakness?

Deep interest is also felt in learning how those to whom has been entrusted the task of sustaining by art our faith in the nobler sentiments, have behaved themselves in external affairs where pecuniary profit is only to be gained at the expense of delicacy, loyalty, or honour. Many state that it is only in works of art that the nobler feelings exist. When some unfortunate event seems to give a regrettable colour to the words of these mockers, with what readiness they assert that the poet's

most exquisite conceptions are only "vain phantoms"! How readily they pride themselves on their own wisdom in advocating the politic doctrine of an astute but honeyed hypocrisy; how they delight to talk of the continual contradiction between words and deeds! What cruel pleasure do they feel in detailing such occurrences, and quoting such examples, in the presence of those unstable and restless souls who are induced, by their own youthful aspirations and by the awful depression and complete loss of happy confidence which such a conviction would entail upon them, to struggle against so blighting a doubt! When these wavering souls are carrying on the bitter combat with the harsh alternatives of life, or are at every turn tempted by its insinuating seductions, what profound discouragement takes hold upon them when they are made to believe that the hearts given up to the most sublime thoughts, most deeply initiated in the most delicate susceptibilities, most charmed by the beauty of innocence, have by their actions denied the sincerity of their worship for those noble themes which as poets they have sung! With what agonising doubts are the minds of these waverers filled by such flagrant contradictions!

How greatly is their anguish increased by those jeering mockers who cry out that "Poetry is only that which might have been," and who take delight in blaspheming it by their guilty negations! Ah! whatever may be the human failings of gifted souls, believe the truths they sing! Poetry is much more than a gigantic shadow of our own imagination immeasurably extended and projected upon the flying plane of the Impossible. *Poetry* and *Reality* are not incompatible elements destined to travel side by side without ever commingling. Goethe himself admits this, and, speaking of a contemporary writer, he says: *Er lebte dichtend, und dichtete lebend* ("He lived to create poems, and poetised his life"). Goethe himself was too truly a poet not to know that Poetry only exists because its eternal Reality throbs in the noblest emotions of the human heart.

We have elsewhere remarked that "genius imposes its own obligations."* If examples of cold austerity and rigid disinterestedness are enough to arouse admiration in calm and reflective minds, whence shall the more passionate and mobile minds, who find the dullness of mediocrity insipid, who

* With reference to Paganini, after his death.

naturally seek honour or pleasure, and are willing to purchase what they desire at any price—whence shall they find their models? Such temperaments free themselves without difficulty from the authority of their seniors, whose competency to decide they deny. They accuse those seniors of desiring to use the world only for the sake of their own dead passions, of seeking to turn everything to their own advantage, of pronouncing on effects the causes of which they fail to understand, of wishing to promulgate laws in realms which nature has forbidden them to enter. They will not take answers from the lips of those seniors, but try to resolve their doubts by turning to others, and address their questions to those who have drunk deeply of the hot springs of grief bursting from the riven clefts of the steep rocks on whose summit alone the soul seeks rest and light. They pass by in silence the still and cold gravity of those who practise the good but have no enthusiasm for the beautiful. What leisure has youth to interpret that gravity or to solve those chill problems? Its heart throbs too rapidly, too impetuously, to permit it to examine into the concealed sufferings, the mystic combats, the lonely struggles which are to be detected even in the

placid eye of the man who practises only the good. Souls which are in a state of continuous agitation seldom rightly interpret the calm simplicity of the just or the confident smiles of the stoic; for such souls, emotion and enthusiasm are necessities of their existence. A bold image will persuade them, a metaphor will lead them, a tear will convince them; they would rather accept the conclusions of impulse and intuition than undergo the fatigue of logical argument. So they turn with keen curiosity to the poets and the artists who have moved them by their images, allured them by their metaphors, excited them by their enthusiasm—they ask from them the explanation, the purpose of this enthusiasm, the secret of this beauty!

Who is there that has not—when distracted with heart-rending events, when undergoing the tortures of intense suffering, when feeling and enthusiasm have only seemed to be a heavy and burdensome load which would upset life's boat if not thrown overboard into the depths of forgetfulness, when threatened with utter shipwreck after a long struggle with peril—who is there, I say, who under such circumstances has not evoked the glorious memory of men who have conquered, whose thoughts glow

with a noble ardour, and asked them how far their aspirations were sincere and to what period they preserved their vitality and truth? Who has not exercised an ingenious discernment to find out how much of the generous feeling portrayed was only a speculation and merely for amusement, or how much of it had really been incorporated with the actions of everyday life? In such cases detraction is never idle; it omits nothing, but seizes eagerly upon the faults, the foibles, the neglects of those who have been degraded by any weakness! It hunts its prey, it accumulates and distorts facts, it takes upon itself the right to despise the inspiration to which it will grant neither any authority nor any aim but to amuse, denying that it has the least claim to guide our actions, our resolutions, our consents or our refusals! Ah! detraction well knows how to winnow history! It casts out all the good grain and carefully gathers the tares, so that it may scatter the black seed over those brilliant pages in which are found the heart's purest desires and the imagination's noblest dreams; and with the irony of an assured victory, it demands what is the value of that grain which brings forth only dearth and famine? Of what use are vain words which

only nourish unfruitful feelings? What is the profit of excursions into regions where no real fruit is to be garnered? What possible importance can be attached to emotions and enthusiasms which always end in calculations based on profit, and which only cover with a brilliant veil what are really hidden strivings of egotism and self-interest?

When men once give up their minds to detraction, with what arrogant derision do they contrast a poet's noble thoughts with his ignoble acts, and the artist's exalted compositions with his guilty frivolity! What a haughty superiority do they assume over the hard-working merit of men of guileness honesty, upon whom they look as a sort of crustacea protected from temptation by the immobility of weak organisations, as well as over the pride of men who, thinking themselves to be superior to such temptations, do not, as these revilers say, succeed as well as they do in repudiating the pursuit of material benefits, the gratification of their vanity, or the pleasure of immediate enjoyment! How easy it is to these detractors to triumph over the hesitation, the doubt, the repugnance of men who try to cling to a belief in the possible reunion of vivid feelings, passionate impressions, intellectual

powers, imaginative temperaments, with high integrity, purity of living, and conduct in complete accord with poetic ideals!

It is impossible, consequently, that we should not experience feelings of the deepest sadness when we encounter any fact which shows the poet to be disobedient to the inspiration of the Muses, those guardian angels of the genius, who would gladly show him how to make his own life the most beautiful poem. What devastating doubts, what profound discouragements, what melancholy apostasies do the faltering steps of the man of genius induce in the minds of others! And yet it would be almost profanity to include his errors in the same anathema as is hurled against the baser vices of meanness and the unblushing effrontery of low crime—nay, it would be sacrilege. If the poet's deeds have at times denied the spirit of his song, have not his songs yet more strenuously denied his deeds? May it not be that the narrow influence of his private life has been far more than counterbalanced by those germs of creative virtues which are profusely scattered throughout his eloquent writings? How contagious is evil, and how fruitful is the truly good! The poet, even while he forces

his inner convictions to yield to his personal interest, acknowledges and ennobles the sentiments by which he is condemned; and those sentiments exert a far wider influence through his writings than can ever be exercised by his acts as an individual. Are not a greater number of spirits calmed, consoled, edified by his works than are injured by the errors of his private life? His art is more powerful than the artist; his creations have a vitality that is independent of his vacillating will, for they are revelations of the "immutable beauty." They are more durable than he is himself, and pass on from one generation to another, and let us hope that through the blessings of their widely spread influence they may contain a virtual power of redemption for the frequent wrongdoing of their gifted authors.

If it is really true that many men who have immortalised their sensibility and their aspirations, by clothing them in the garb of surpassing eloquence have nevertheless stifled these noble aspirations and abused these quick sensibilties, how many souls have they not strengthened and confirmed in pursuing a noble course through the works which their genius has created! Surely, it would be only

justice to display towards them a generous indulgence. It is unfair to be compelled to claim for them even simple justice; it is not pleasant to be obliged to defend those whom we desire should be admired and to offer excuses for those whom we wish to be venerated!

With what feelings of exultant and just pride may the friend and artist recollect a career in which there are no jarring discords, no contradictions which compel him to ask for indulgence, no errors the source of which must be found in order to palliate their very existence, no extremes to be accounted for as the consequences of an "excess of cause." How sweet it is to be in a position to mention one who has completely proved that it is not merely apathetic souls who can be attracted by no fascination, betrayed by no illusion, who are able to confine themselves within the strict limits of honoured and honourable laws, and who can justly lay claim to that elevation of soul which is subdued by no reverses and is never found in contradiction to its better self! In this respect the memory of Chopin must ever remain doubly dear and doubly honoured—dear to the artists and friends who knew him while living, dear to those

unknown friends who will learn to love him for his poetic strains as well as to those artists who, in following him, shall find their great glory in being worthy of him!

Chopin's character did not conceal, in any of its numerous folds, a single movement or a single impulse which was not dictated by the purest sense of honour and the most delicate appreciation; and yet no nature was ever framed which could furnish more justification for eccentricities, whims and abrupt caprices. With an ardent imagination and feelings almost violent he had a weak, sickly and irritable physical organisation. Who can estimate the amount of suffering arising from such contrasted conditions? It must of necessity have been bitter, yet he never permitted it to be seen, but kept the secret of his torments, and veiled them from every eye under the impenetrable serenity of haughty resignation.

His delicate constitution and tender heart laid upon him woman's torture of enduring agonies never to be confessed, and thus imparted to his fate some of the darker hues of woman's destiny. Excluded by his weak health from the exciting arena of ordinary activity, and without the least

taste for that useless buzzing in which a few bees and many wasps expend their superfluous strength, he kept apart from all noisy and frequented ways, and built a secluded cell for himself. His life was marked by neither adventures, embarrassments, nor episodes, and although that life was surrounded by circumstances which made such a result difficult of attainment, he yet succeeded in simplifying it. His events were his own feelings, and his own impressions, which were more important in his esteem than the changes and chances of external life. He gave lessons constantly, and with regularity and assiduity; these were daily domestic tasks, which were done conscientiously and satisfactorily. As the devout pour out their souls in prayer, so he poured out his in his compositions, and in them expressed those passions of the heart and those untold sorrows to which the pious give utterance in their communion with God. What they never say but on their knees, he never said but in his palpitating works, wherein he uttered in tone-language those mysteries of passion and grief which man can understand without words, because there are no words in which they can be adequately expressed.

His own life was deprived of incidents by the

great pains he took to avoid life's zigzags, to weed out from it all that was useless, and to prevent it from crumbling into formless masses. The vague lines and suggestions which surround his figure would vanish at our touch if we attempted to follow out or trace their outlines. He takes part in no action, no drama, no entanglement, no *dénouement*, he exercised no decisive influence upon any human being; his will never trenched on another's desires; he never constrained other spirits, or crushed them by the domination of his own; he never exercised tyranny over any other heart; he never laid a conquering hand on the destiny of a single human being; he sought nothing and would have scorned to make any demands. Like Tasso he could say:

Brama assai, poco spera, e nulla chiede.

As some compensation he escaped from all ties and from those affections which would have had an influence over him and led him into more tumultuous scenes. He was ready to yield everything, but never gave himself. Probably he knew well enough what exclusive devotion, what love without limit, he was worthy of inspiring, comprehending, sharing! Like other ardent and ambitious natures he may have felt that love and friendship are nothing unless they

are everything. Perhaps he would have found it more painful to accept a part, to take anything less than all, than to relinquish all and thus remain at least faithful to his impossible ideal. Whether these things were so or not, none ever knew, for he seldom spoke of love or friendship. He was not exacting, as those are whose large claims and demands outnumber all that we have to offer them. His most intimate acquaintance never penetrated as far as that lonely fortress where, shut out from his common life, his soul dwelt apart—a fortress which he so skilfully concealed that its very existence was hardly dreamed of.

In his relations and intercourse with others, it was what interested them which always seemed to occupy him; he took care never to draw them away from the sphere of their own personality lest they should intrude upon his. He gave up to others but little of his time; yet that little was devoted to them unreservedly. None ever asked him for an account of his dreams, his hopes, his wishes; none seemed to desire to know what he sighed for or what he might have conquered if his white and tapering fingers had found it possible to link the brazen chords of life to the golden wires of his

enchanted lyre! In his presence none had leisure to think of these things. He rarely conversed on topics of any deep interest, but glided lightly over all subjects; and as he gave little time to conversation, that little was easily filled up with the details of the day. He took care never to allow his talk to wander into digressions of which he might himself be the subject. His individuality rarely excited the investigations of curiosity or evoked close scrutiny; he pleased too much to awaken much reflection. The combined effect of his personality was harmonious, and did not call for any special comment. His blue eyes were more spiritual than dreamy, and his bland smile never writhed into bitterness. The transparent delicacy of his complexion pleased the eye, his fair hair was soft and silky, and his nose slightly aquiline; and his bearing was so distinguished and his manners were stamped with so much high breeding, that he was involuntarily always treated *en prince*. His gestures were numerous and full of grace; his voice was in tone somewhat veiled, often stifled; he was of low stature, and his limbs were but slight. He always put us in the mind of a convolvulus balancing its azure-hued cup upon a very slight stem, the tissue

of which is so vaporus that the slightest contact wounds and tears the delicate corolla.

In society his manners possessed that serenity of mood which distinguishes those whom no ennui can annoy because they look for no interest. He was usually gay; his caustic spirit quickly appreciated the ridiculous, and he caught it far below the surface where it usually strikes the eye. In pantomime he displayed a rich vein of drollery, and he often amused himself by reproducing the musical formulæ and peculiar tricks of virtuosos in burlesque and most comical improvisations, imitating their gestures and movements, and counterfeiting their faces, with a cleverness which at once depicted their entire personality. At such times his own features were scarcely recognisable, as he could impose on them the strangest metamorphoses. But he never lost his own native grace while he was mimicking the ugly and the grotesque, and his grimaces were never such as to disfigure him. His gaiety was the more piquant seeing that he always kept it within the limits of perfect good taste, and held at a suspicious distance everything that could wound the most fastidious delicacy. He was never known, even in moments of the greatest familiarity, to make

use of an inelegant word, and improper merriment or coarse jesting would have been repulsive to him.

By means of a strict exclusion from conversation of all topics relating to himself, and by a constant reserve with respect to his own feelings, he was always successful in leaving behind him a happy impression. People usually like those who charm them without leading them to fear that they will be called upon to give anything in return for the amusement afforded, or that pleasing excitement will be followed by the gloom of melancholy confidences, the sight of mournful faces, or the inevitable reactions which take place in susceptible natures, of which we say *Ubi mel ibi fel.* People generally prefer to keep these "susceptible natures" at a distance; they prefer not to be brought into contact with their melancholy moods, though at the same time they do not withhold a sort of respect for the mournful feelings caused by these subtle reactions. Indeed, such changes have for them the attraction of the unknown, and they are as willing to feel delight in a description of these changing caprices as they are to avoid their reality. Chopin's presence was always fêted. He took such a vivid interest in everything that was not himself that his

own personality remained intact, unapproached, unapproachable, under a polished glassy surface on which it was impossible to obtain a footing.

We have on some occasions, though only rarely, seen him deeply agitated. We have observed him grow so pale and wan that he actually looked like a corpse; but even in the moments of the most intense emotion he remained entirely concentrated within himself. One instant in which to recover himself was always enough to enable him to hide the secret of his first impression. Whatever spontaniety his bearing might afterwards seem to show, it was instantaneously the effect of reflection, and of a will which controlled the strange conflict of emotional and moral energy with conscious physical weakness—a conflict the strange contrasts of which were ever at war within. The dominion which he exercised over the natural violence of his nature reminded us of the melancholy power of those beings who seek strength in isolation and absolute self-control, conscious of the vainness of their vivid vexation and indignation, and too jealous of the mysteries of their passions to gratuitously betray them.

He could forgive in the noblest manner. Towards

those by whom he was wounded no rancour remained in his heart, though these wounds penetrated deeply, and fermented in his soul in vague pain and internal suffering, so that he continued to undergo the secret torture long after the exciting cause had been effaced from his memory. By dint of unceasing effort, and in spite of his keen and tormenting sensibilities, he subjected his feelings not so much to the rule of what is as of what should be; and he was thus grateful for services which proceeded from good intentions rather than from a knowledge of what would be agreeable to him—from friendship which wounded him through ignorance of his acute but concealed susceptibility. It is at the same time true that the wounds caused by this awkward want of comprehension are the most difficult for a nervous temperament to endure. Such natures, condemned for ever to conceal their vexation, are by degrees excited to a state of constantly gnawing irritation which they can never ascribe to the real cause. It would be a great mistake to suppose that in Chopin this irritation existed without any provocation; but seeing that a dereliction from what he regarded as the most honourable course of conduct was a

temptation which he never had to resist, because probably it never presented itself to him, so he never, in the presence of more vigorous and therefore more brusque individualities than his own, betrayed the shudder (if repulsion is too strong a word) produced by contact or association with them.

His treatment of all subjects to which the fanaticism of opinion can attach was characterised by the reserve which marked his intercourse with others, who could only estimate his sentiments by that which he did not do within the narrow limits of his own activity. His patriotism manifested itself in the course taken by his genius, in the choice of his friends, in the preferences shown to his pupils, and in the many and great services which he rendered to his fellow-countrymen; yet we do not remember that he took any delight in the expression of this feeling. If he sometimes entered the region of politics, which in France were so often discussed, so fiercely attacked, and so warmly defended, it was only to point out what he thought to be dangerous or wrong in the opinions of others, seldom to draw attention to his own. Though he was in constant intercourse with some of the most

brilliant politicians of his day, he knew how to confine the relations between them to a personal attachment which was entirely independent of any political interests.

Democracy never won his sympathies, as it presented to his view an agglomeration of elements too heterogeneous, too restless, and wielding too much brute power. The entrance of social and political questions into the realm of popular discussion was many years ago compared to a new and bold incursion of barbarians; and the terror which this comparison awakened in Chopin's mind made upon him a peculiar and most painful impression. He despaired of defending the safety of Rome from these modern Attilas; he dreaded the destruction of Art and its monuments, its refinements, and its civilisation—in a word, he dreaded the loss of the elegant and cultivated though somewhat indolent ease so well described by Horace. Was it possible that in the rough and devastating hands of these new barbarians there could be any safety for the high culture of the arts or for the graceful elegancies of life? He watched at a distance the progress of events, and his acuteness of perception, a quality with which he would scarcely have been credited,

often enabled him to foretell events which even the best informed did not anticipate. But though observations of this nature now and then escaped his lips, he never developed them, and his concise remarks attracted no attention until time had demonstrated their accuracy. His acute good sense had early convinced him of the emptiness of the majority of the political ovations, theological discussions and philosophic digressions of his day. He early began to put into practice the favourite maxim of a man of great distinction, from whom we have often heard fall a remark dictated by the misanthropic wisdom of age, which at the time startled our inexperienced impetuosity, but which has since frequently impressed us by its melancholy truth: "You will one day be persuaded, as I am" (said the Marquis de Noailles to the young spirits whom he honoured by his attention, and who were growing warm in some naïve discussions of various opinions) "that it is hardly possible to talk to anybody about anything."

Chopin was sincerely religious and attached to Catholicism, but he held his faith without calling attention to it, and never touched upon this subject. It was possible to be acquainted with him a long

time without knowing what were his religious views. Perhaps, in order to console his listless hand and reconcile it with his lute, he persuaded himself to think—*Il mondo va da se.* We have often watched him during long, animated, stormy discussions in which he would not take part. The speakers forgot him in the excitement of the debate; but we have frequently neglected to follow the thread of the argument in order to fix our attention upon Chopin's features, which were almost imperceptibly contracted while topics touching upon the most momentous conditions of our existence were discussed with so much eagerness and zeal that we might have thought our fates were to be at once decided by the result of the debate. At such times he reminded us of a passenger on board a vessel driven and tossed on the stormy seas by a tempest, thinking of his far distant country, watching the horizon and the stars, seeing the manœuvres of the sailors and noting their fatal blunders without possessing in himself enough force to seize a rope or sufficient energy to haul in a fluttering sail.

On one subject only did he relinquish his premeditated silence and his determinate neutrality—in the cause of art he cast away all his reserve,

and never permitted anything to hinder the explicit enunciation of his opinions. He took great pains and showed much perseverance in extending the limits of his influence on this subject. It was tacitly confessed that he considered himself to be legitimately possessed of the authority of a great artist. In questions which he dignified by being competent upon them, he never left any room for doubt as to the nature of his opinions. During many years his appeals were full of impassioned fire, but later on, when his opinions had triumphed, the interest of his rôle became less, and he no longer sought for occasion to place himself as a leader or to bear any special banner. On the only occasion when he took any part in the conflict of parties, he proved that he held opinions which were as absolute, as tenacious, and as inflexible as those usually are which seldom come to the light.

Soon after his arrival in Paris, in 1832, a new school both in literature and music was started, and youthful talent came forward and shook off with *éclat* the yoke of old-fashioned formulæ. The political effervescence of the first years of the revolution of July had scarcely died down, when questions were raised on art and letters which aroused atten-

tion and interest in all minds. The order of the day was *Romanticism*, and the battle was obstinately fought both for and against. How could there possibly be any truce between those who on the one side would not admit the possibility of writing in any form other than that already established, and those who on the other side contended that an artist should be allowed to select such forms as he thought best suited for the expression of his ideas, and that the rule of form should be found in the fitness of the form chosen for the sentiments to be expressed, every varying shade of emotion demanding of course a different mode of expression? The former pinned their faith to a permanent form, the perfection of which represented absolute beauty. But in admitting that the greatest masters had attained to the utmost limits in art, or had, in other words, reached supreme perfection, they left succeeding artists no other glory than that of hoping to more or less closely approach these models of imitation, and thus destroyed for ever all hope of equalling them because the merit of perfecting of a process can never equal the merit of inventing it. The opposite party, on the other hand, denied that immaterial Beauty could have any fixed and absolute form; the different forms which ap-

peared in the history seemed to them to be tents strewn along the interminable road of the Ideal, mere brief halting places which genius had reached from epoch to epoch, and beyond which the heirs of the ages should ever strive to advance. The one wanted to restrict, within the lines of the same symmetrical frame, the creations of times and of natures in every way dissimilar; the other claimed that all writers should have liberty to create their own mode, obeying no rules but those which are the result of the direct relation of sentiment and form, only requiring from the form that it should be adequate for the expression of the sentiment; however great their admiration for existing models, these did not to them seem to have exhausted all the range of these sentiments which art might select, or all the forms which it might use with advantage. These latter were not content with mere excellence of form as such, and sought form only so far as its perfection is indispensable for the complete manifestation of the idea, for they were not forgetful of the fact that the sentiment is maimed if the form remains imperfect, any imperfection in it intercepting like an opaque veil the raging forth of the pure idea. They thus elevated into the sphere of poetic

inspiration what had otherwise been the work of a handicraft; they gave to genius and patience the task of inventing a form which would meet the exactions of the inspiration. They approached their adversaries with the attempt to tie down inspiration on a Procrustean bed because they refused to admit that there are sentiments which cannot be expressed in predetermined forms, and of thus robbing art, even in advance of their own creation, of all works which may try to introduce newly awakened ideas, newly clad in new forms, both forms and ideas arising naturally from the natural and progressive development of the human mind, the improvements in instruments, and the consequent expansion of the material resources of art.

Those who saw the flames of Genius devouring the old worm-eaten, crumbling skeletons, attached themselves to that school of which Berlioz was the most gifted, the most brilliant, and the most daring representative. This school Chopin joined. He insisted most strenuously on setting himself free from the servile forms of the conventional style, and at the same time he earnestly repudiated that kind of charlatanism which sought to

replace old abuses merely by the introduction of new ones.

During the years in which this campaign of Romanticism was going on, in which some of the trial blows were nothing less than master-strokes, Chopin remained unchangeable both in his predilections and in his repulsions. He would not admit any compromise whatever with those who in his opinion did not sufficiently represent progress, and who, in refusing to relinquish the desire to display art for the profit of trade, in their pursuit of transitory effects and of success gained only from the astonishment of their audiences, gave no proof at all of any sincere devotion to progress. Where he had contracted ties with respect, he broke them when he felt that they restricted him or bound him too closely to the shore by cordage which he knew was rotten. On the other hand he obstinately refused to form ties whose success he deemed exaggerated, and which elevated too highly a certain kind of merit. He never bestowed any praise on anything which he did not regard as a real conquest for art or which did not show a serious conception of an artist's work. He did not desire the praises of any party, or to receive aid from the manœuvres of any

party, or from the concessions made by any school in the person of its chief. In the midst of jealousies, encroachments, forfeitures, and invasions of various branches of art, negotiations, treaties and contracts have been introduced, like the means and appliances of diplomacy, with all those tricks which are inseparable from such a course. In refusing for his productions the support of any accessory aid, Chopin proved that he confidently believed their own beauty would win for them appreciation, and that he was not anxious to facilitate their immediate reception.

At a time so full of uncertainty he gave his support to our own struggles with his calm and unalterable conviction—a time when we met fewer glorious adversaries than old wiseacres shaking their heads. He helped us with opinions so firmly fixed that neither weariness nor artifice could alter them, with a rare immutability of will, and with that efficient help which the creation of meritorious works will always give to a struggling cause when it can claim them as its own. He mingled with his daring innovations so many charms and such large moderation and knowledge, that the prompt admiration they inspired justified fully his confidence in his own genius. The solid studies he

had gone through, the reflective habits of his youth, the worship for the classic models in which he was educated, guarded him against that loss of strength in blind gropings or doubtful triumphs which has happened to more than one partisan of the new ideas. His studious patience and care in elaborating his works saved him from the critics, who envenomed dissensions by taking hold on those easy and insignificant victories owing to omissions and the negligence of inadvertence. Trained as he had been to the exactions and restrictions of rigid rules, and having produced compositions full of beauty even when bound by all their fetters, he never cast aside those rules without appropriate cause and after due reflection. By virtue of his principles he was always progressing, though without being led by exaggeration or enticed by compromise; he gladly gave up theoretical formulæ in order that he might pursue their consequences. He was fortunate enough to avoid personal enmities and vexing accommodations because he was occupied, not so much with the disputes and the terms of the schools, as with the production of finished work, which he looked upon as the best argument.

Chopin worshipped art with that reverence which

characterised the greatest masters of the Middle Ages, but his expression and bearing were more simple, more modern, and less ecstatic. For him, as for them, art was a high and holy vacation; like them he took pride in his election to it, and honoured it with devout piety. This feeling was manifested in his dying hour in a way which cannot be understood without some explanation of a custom prevalent in Poland. By that custom, which still exists, though it is now falling somewhat into desuetude, it was frequent among the Poles to select the garments in which they desired to be buried, and which were often prepared a long time before death occurred.* They thus expressed for the last time their dearest wishes, and showed their inmost feelings at the hour of death. Worldly men often chose monastic robes, and official costumes were often selected or rejected according as glorious or painful memories were associated with them. Of all contemporary artists, Chopin gave the fewest concerts, although he was

* General K——, author of "Julie and Adolphe" (a romance which was an imitation of the "New Heloïse"), much read at the time of its publication, and who, though over eighty years of age, was still living when we visited Poland, had in conformity with the custom above referred to, had his coffin made, and for more than thirty years it stood at his bedroom door.

in the very front rank; but yet he desired to be carried to the grave in the clothes he had worn on those few occasions. It was doubtless a natural and profound feeling, springing from the inexhaustible sources of art, which dictated this dying request, when, having scrupulously discharged the last duties of a Christian, he was about to leave everything of earth that he could not carry with him to the heavens. His love for art and his faith in art had been linked with immortality long prior to the approach of death, and as he clothed himself for his long sleep in the tomb, he gave by a mute symbol, as was his custom, the last affecting proof of a conviction which during his whole life he had preserved intact. Faithful to himself, he died as he had lived, adoring art in its mystic greatness and its highest revelations.

In leaving behind him the turmoil of society, Chopin confined his cares and affections to his early acquaintances and his own family circle. With them he preserved close and uninterrupted relations, which he never ceased to keep up with the greatest care. Especially dear to him was his sister Louise, the two being closely bound to each other by a resemblance in their mental characteristics and the

bent of their feelings. Louise often travelled from Warsaw to Paris to see him, and for the last three months of his life she was with the brother she loved, watching over him with undying solicitude.

With the members of his own family he kept up a regular correspondence, but with no one else. It was one of Chopin's peculiarities that he would write letters to no one else, and it might have been supposed that he had vowed he would never write to strangers. It was very curious to see him adopt all sorts of expedients to avoid writing only a short note. Many and many a time has he walked from one end of Paris to the other to decline an invitation to dinner or to afford some trifling information rather than write a line or two which would have saved all this trouble and waste of time. The great majority of his friends did not even know what his handwriting was like. It has been said that he occasionally departed from this custom in favour of some of the beautiful women of his country, and some of his notes written in Polish are still in their possession. This breach of what was with him a law may be set down to the pleasure he felt in the use of his native tongue. With the people of his own nation he always used it, and he loved to trans-

late its most expressive phrases. Like most of the Sclaves, he was an excellent French scholar, and in consequence of his French origin he had been taught that tongue with special care; but he did not care for it, he thought it was not sufficiently sonorous, and he deemed its genius cold. Poles commonly hold this opinion, for although they speak it with great fluency, often better, indeed, than their native tongue, and frequently adopt it in their intercourse one with another, yet to those who do not speak Polish they complain of the impossibility of rendering in any other idiom than the Polish the thousand and one ethereal and varying modes of thought. They think that sometimes dignity, sometimes grace, sometimes passion, are wanting in the French language. If you ask them the meaning of a word of Polish which they may have used, they will invariably reply: "Oh, that cannot be translated!" Then will follow explanations, in the shape of comments on that *dictum*, of all the delicacies, subtleties and shades of meaning in the words which "cannot be translated." We have given some examples which, combined with others, lead us to believe that the Polish tongue has the advantage of making images of abstract nouns,

and that in the progress of its development through the poetic genius of the people it has been able to establish striking and just relations between ideas by etymology, derivation and synonym. Coloured reflections of light and shade are thus brought to bear upon all expressions, so that by mental association they necessarily set vibrating the corresponding tone of a third, which modulates the thought into the major or minor mode as the case may be. The richness of the language allows a choice of mode, but this very wealth may create a difficulty. It is quite possible that the general proficiency in foreign tongues in Poland may be attributed to mental indolence or want of application, and traced to a desire to evade the labour necessary to acquire that mastery of diction which is indispensable in a language so full of sudden depths and of laconic energy that it is difficult, if not impossible, to support that labour in using the language for commonplace purposes. The vague agreements of ideas poorly defined cannot be compressed into the nervous framework of its grammatical forms; if the thought be really low, it cannot be lifted out of its poverty and debasement; if it soars really above the commonplace, it requires rare precision of terms

to prevent it from seeming uncouth or fantastic. As a consequence of this feature, Polish literature should be able to show, in proportion to the quantity of works published, a greater number of *chefs d'œuvre* than any other language. He who decides on risking himself in Polish must feel himself already to be a master of it.*

* Polish cannot be charged with want of harmony or musical charm. The harshness of a language does not depend always and altogether upon the number of its consonants but rather upon the manner of their association. We might even say that some languages are dull and cold because they lack well-determined and strongly-marked sounds. It is the frequent repetition of certain consonants which imparts body, rhythm and vigour to a language, the vowels giving only a sort of light and clear colour, which requires to be thrown up by deeper shades. It is the sharp, uncouth, or inharmonious clashing of heterogeneous consonants which gives so much pain to the sensitive ear. True, the Slavic tongues use many consonants, but their connection is generally sonorous, sometimes even pleasant to the ear, and scarcely ever altogether discordant, even when the combinations happen to be more striking than agreeable. The quality of the sounds is varied, full, and rich; they are not straitened and confined as though produced in narrow limits, but extend through a considerable range of register and cover a variety of intonations. The letter *L*, which is nearly impossible of pronunciation to those who do not acquire it in infancy, has nothing harsh in its sound; the ear receives from it an impression resembling that produced on the fingers by the touch of thick velvet—rough but at the same time yielding. As the union of jarring consonants is

Chopin mingled with the intercourse he held with his relatives a most charming grace; he was not content to limit to them alone his entire correspondence, but made good use of his stay in Paris to procure for them the thousand pleasant surprises afforded by the novelties, the bagatelles, the little

rare, and the consonances easily multiplied, the same comparison may be employed to the *ensemble* of the effect which these idioms produce on foreigners. In Polish, many words occur which imitate the sound of the thing they designate. The frequent repetition of *ch* (*h* aspirated), *sz* (the French *ch*), *rz* and *cz*, so terrible to a profane eye, have nevertheless nothing barbaric in their respective sounds, as they are pronounced like *geai* and *tche*, and much facilitate imitations of sense by sound. The word *dzwick*, pronounced *dzwiinque*, meaning "sound," gives a characteristic example of this; it would be difficult to select a word which could more accurately reproduce the sensation made on the ear by a diapason. Among those consonants met with in groups, which produce very different sounds, metallic, buzzing, hissing, or rumbling, are mingled many diphthongs and vowels which sometimes become slightly nasal, the *a* and *e*, when accompanied by a cedilla, being pronounced like the French *on* and *in*. In juxtaposition with the *é (tse)*, which is uttered with great softness, sometimes *c (tsie)*, the accented *s* is almost warbled. The *z* has three sounds—*z (jais)*, *z (zed)*, and *z (zied)*. The *y* forms a vowel of muffled tone, which, like *L*, cannot be represented by any equivalent sound in French, and, like the *L*, gives to the language a variety of ineffable sounds. These fine and light elements enable Polish women to assume a lingering, singing accent, which they usually transplant to other tongues. When subjects are serious and

gifts which charm by their beauty or attract by the fact of being the first of their kind ever seen. Everything which he had any reason to believe would give pleasure to his friends in Warsaw he eagerly sought for, and to his many letters he added constant presents. He desired that his gifts

melancholy, they adopt, after such recitatives or improvised lamentations, a sort of lisping infantine mode of speaking, which they vary by light and silvery laughs, little cries or interjections, and short musical pauses on the higher tones, from which they descend, by one knows not what chromatic scale of half and quarter tones, till they rest on some low note, and again pursue the varied, brusque, and original modulations which surprise the ear not accustomed to these lovely warblings, to which they at times give that air of caressing irony and cunning mockery peculiar to the songs of certain birds. They love to *zinziluler*; and charming varieties, piquant intervals, and unexpected cadences find place in this fond prattle, rendering the language, in the mouths of women, far more sweet and caressing than in the mouths of men. Indeed, the men pride themselves on speaking it elegantly, giving to it a masculine sonority peculiarly adapted to the energetic motions of that manly eloquence which in former times was so much cultivated in Poland. Poetry deals with so great a diversity of prosodies, rhymes, and rhythms, and with such an abundance of assonances from these rich and varied materials, that it is nearly possible to follow musically the feelings and scenes depicted by it, not merely in those expressions where the sound repeats the sense, but in long declamations too. The analogy between Polish and Russian has been likened to that between Latin and Italian. The Russian language is, in truth, more

should be preserved, in order that by the memories connected with them he might himself be frequently remembered by those to whom the gifts were sent. On his side he attached the highest importance to all the proofs of their love for himself, and to receive news from them, or some token that they remembered him, was always for him the occasion of a festival. This pleasure he never shared with another person, but his conduct made it plainly visible. He set the greatest possible store by everything that came from his friends at a distance, and the least of their gifts was so precious in his sight that he never permitted others to make

mellifluous, more lingering, more caressing, and more full of sighs than the Polish, and its cadencing is peculiarly adapted for melody. In the finer poems, like those of Zukowski and Poushkin, there appears to be a melody already designated in the metre of the verses; and as an example it would seem to be quite possible to deduce an *arioso* or a sweet *cantabile* from some of the stanzas of "La Châle Noir" or the "Talisman." There is great majesty in the ancient Slavonic, the language of the Eastern Church; it is severe and monotonous, more guttural than those idioms which have sprung from it; yet it is of great dignity, like those Byzantine paintings which are preserved in the worship to which it is consecrated. It has, all through, the characteristics of a sacred language which has been devoted to the expression of one feeling, and has never been lowered to the level of profane requirements.

use of them, and was visibly uneasy even if they touched them.

Elegance in material things was to him as natural as in mental things, and this was manifested not only in the aristocratic grace of his manners but in the objects by which he loved to be surrounded. Of flowers he was passionately fond, and without aiming at the brilliant luxury in this respect with which some of the Parisian celebrities adorned their rooms, yet both on this point and in his style of dress he knew instinctively how to keep within the limits of perfect propriety.

He did not wish that his time, his thoughts, or the course of his life should be in any way associated with or shackled by the pursuits of others, and he preferred the society of ladies as being less likely to force him into subsequent relations. He would willingly spend whole evenings in playing blind man's buff with young folks, and would tell them little tales to make them break forth into that silvery laughter of youth which is sweeter than the nightingale's song. He loved country life, or the life of the château, and was ingenious in varying its amusements

and in multiplying its pleasures. He also liked to compose there, and many of his best works, written at such moments, probably embalm and hallow the recollections of his happiest days.

CHAPTER VI.

CHOPIN was born at Zelazowa-Wola, near Warsaw, in the year 1810. During his childhood he was unlike most other children in one respect—he could not remember his own age, and the year of his birth was only fixed in his mind by a watch which Madame Catalani gave him in 1820, and which bore this inscription: "Madame Catalani to Frederic Chopin, aged ten years." Perhaps the artist's presentiments gave him a foresight of his future! The course of his boyhood was not marked by anything extraordinary; his internal development had but few phases and afforded but few manifestations. He was sickly and delicate, and the attention of his family was concentrated upon his health. No doubt it was from this cause that he gained his affable habits, his patience under suffering, and his power of enduring every annoy-

ance with a good grace—qualities which he early acquired from his desire to quell the constant anxiety which was felt about him. His early years indicated no precocity of faculties and no precursory token of remarkable development which might have foreshadowed his future superiority of soul, mind, or capacity. The little fellow was indeed seen to be suffering, but always trying to smile, patient, and, to all seeming, happy; and on this account his friends were so pleased that he did not grow moody or morose that they were content to cherish his good qualities, thinking he unreservedly opened his heart to them and gave them all his inmost thoughts. But there are to be found amongst us souls who resemble those rich travellers who, thrown amongst simple herdsmen, load them with generous gifts during their sojourn with them—gifts really not at all as large as their wealth would justify, but which are ample enough to astonish their poor hosts and to scatter comparative riches and much happiness in the midst of habits so simple. Such souls give as much affection as those who surround them, and perhaps more; everyone is delighted with them, and they are supposed to have been generous, whereas the real truth is that when their boundless

wealth is taken into account they have not been at all liberal, and have given very little of their store of internal treasure.

The habits in which Chopin grew up, and in which he was, so to speak, rocked as in a form-bracing cradle, were of a nature peculiar to calm, occupied, tranquil characters. Those early examples of simple piety and integrity always remained nearest and dearest to his heart. Domestic virtues, religious habits, pious charities and strict modesty, encompassed him from childhood with that pure and limpid atmosphere in which his fertile imagination attained that velvety tenderness which characterises those plants which have never been exposed to the dust of the beaten highways.

He began studying music early, being only nine years of age when he commenced to learn it. He was soon after entrusted to Ziwna, a passionate disciple of Sebastian Bach, who during many years directed the boy's studies in accordance with strictly classical models. It must not for a moment be imagined that when Chopin embraced a musician's career the hopes of his family were excited or his own eyes dazzled by any fantastic perspective or any prestige of empty glory. He studied seriously

and conscientiously that he might become a skilful and able master, without ever dreaming of the greater or lesser amount of fame he would be able to attain as the fruit of his lesson-giving and his arduous labours.

Through the generous and discriminating protection which was always accorded by Prince Antoine Radziwill to the arts and to genius, which he had the faculty of recognising both as an intellectual man and a distinguished artist, Chopin was early placed at one of the leading colleges in Warsaw. Prince Radziwill did not cultivate music merely as a dilettante, but he was himself a remarkable composer. His beautiful setting of "Faust," published some years ago, and performed at fixed intervals by the Berlin Academy of Singing, seems to us, by its close internal appropriateness to the special genius of the poem, to be far superior to any other attempts which have been made to transport it into the sphere of music.

By thus assisting the limited means of the Chopin family, the Prince bestowed upon Frederic the inestimable gift of a complete education of which no single department was neglected. Through the medium of M. Antoine Korzukowski, a friend whose

own elevated intellect enabled him to comprehend the requirements of an artistic career, the Prince regularly paid Chopin's pension from his first entrance into the college until his studies were completed. From that time until the death of Chopin, M. Antoine Korzukowski always stood on terms of the closest intimacy and friendship with him.

In treating of this period of the life of Chopin, it affords us pleasure to quote some charming lines which may be more justly applied to him than some other pages where his character is supposed to have been traced, but where we find it only distorted and given in such false proportions as are found in a profile drawn upon elastic tissue, which has afterwards been stretched out of shape, and biassed by contrary movements during the entire progress of the sketch.*

"Gentle, sensitive and very lovely, he united at the age of fifteen the charms of adolescence with the gravity of maturer years. He was delicate in both

* This and many succeeding extracts in which Chopin's character is described are from Madame Sand's "Lucrezia Floriana," a novel in which the leading characters are believed to represent Liszt, Chopin and herself.—*Translator.*

body and mind. Through lack of muscular development he retained a peculiar beauty and an exceptional physiognomy, which had, so to speak, neither age nor sex. He had neither the bold masculine air of the descendant of a race of magnates who knew nothing beyond the arts of drinking, hunting and making war, nor the effeminate loveliness of a cherub *couleur de rose.* He was more like the ideal creations with which the poetry of mediæval times adorned Christian temples; a lovely angel with a form as pure and slight as that of a young Olympian god, with a face like that of a noble woman filled with a divine sorrow, and, to crown all, an expression both tender and severe, both chaste and impassioned.

"This expression it was which revealed the depths of his being. Nothing could have been purer than his thoughts; nothing more tenacious, exclusive, intensely devoted than his affections. . . . . But he could only comprehend that which was greatly like himself . . . . all besides existed only for him as a sort of annoying dream which he tried to shake off while living with the remainder of the world. He was always plunged in reveries, and realities displeased him. When a child he

never could touch a sharp instrument without hurting himself with it; and when he grew up to manhood he never came face to face with a being unlike himself without feeling wounded by the living contradiction . . . .

"He was shielded from constant antagonism by a voluntary and almost universal habit of not seeing or hearing anything likely to be disagreeable to him unless it touched upon his personal affections. People who did not think as he did were in his eyes nothing but phantoms. His manners being graceful and polished, it was easy to mistake for benevolent courtesy what was in reality cold disdain or insurmountable aversion.

"If ever he passed an hour in open-hearted expansiveness, a season of reserve always compensated for it. The moral causes which led to such reserve were too slight and subtle to be discerned by the naked eye. So little of the light of the living ever penetrated into his soul, that a microscope was requisite to read its mysterious contents . . . .

"With a character of that nature it is strange he should have had friends, and yet he had them—not merely his mother's friends, who esteemed him

as the noble son of a noble mother, but those of his own age, who ardently loved him and were by him loved in return. . . . . He had a noble ideal of friendship; in the age of his early illusions he loved to think that neither his friends nor himself, brought up with the same principles and nearly in the same way, would ever alter their opinions and that no formal disagreement could ever take place between them. . . . .

"Externally he was so affectionate, his education was so finished, and he possessed such an abundance of natural grace, that he had a gift of pleasing even those to whom he was not personally known. His great loveliness was at once prepossessing; to women he was made most interesting because of his delicate constitution; and the attention of the most enlightened men was attracted to him by the full and graceful cultivation of his mind and the sweet and captivating originality of his conversation. He was liked for his exquisite courtesy of manner by men less highly cultivated, who were so much the more pleased with this because they never imagined in their simplicity that it was the graceful result of a sense of duty into which no real sympathy ever entered. If such a people could have divined

the secrets of his mystic character they would have said he was more amiable than loving, which so far as they were concerned was quite true; but they could never have known that his real attachments, which were so rare, were so vivid, profound and undying. . . . .

"In all the details of life association with him was delightful. He complied with the demands of friendship with an unaccustomed charm, and when he did express his gratitude it was with that deep emotion which repays kindness with usury. He readily imagined that he felt himself to be dying every day; he accepted the care of a friend, and lest it should make that friend unhappy, hid from him how short a time he expected to profit by that care. He was endued with great physical courage; and though he did not accept with the heroic hardihood of youth the notion of approaching death, yet he cherished the expectation of that event with a sort of bitter pleasure."

The attachment he felt for a young lady who never ceased to regard him with reverential homage can be traced to his early youth. The storm which by one of its sudden gusts tore him from his native soil, as a bird, dreamy and abstracted, is

surprised on the branches of a tree by the tempest, rent asunder the ties of this first love, and not only disinherited the exile of his country but robbed him of a faithful and devoted wife. He won glory which he had never anticipated, but he never found the realisation of that happiness with her of which he had once dreamed. This young girl was sweet and beautiful, like the Madonnas of Luini, whose looks are so full of earnest tenderness. She lived calmly but sadly on, and doubtless the sadness of her pure soul increased when she knew that no devotion as tender as her own ever came to sweeten the life of him whom she had adored with that ingenuous submission, that exclusive devotion, that entire self-abnegation, naïve, yet sublime, which turns a woman into an angel.

Those who have been gifted by nature with the beautiful but fatal energies of genius, and who are therefore forbidden to sacrifice the care of their glory to the exactions of their love, are no doubt right in setting bounds to the abnegation of their own personality; but those divine emotions which are due to absolute devotion are to be regretted in the presence even of the most brilliant endowments of genius. The entire submission and disinterestedness of love in absorbing the existence, the will, the very name even of the woman in that of the man she loves, alone can entitle him to believe that he has really shared his life with her, and that his honourable love for her has conferred upon her that which no chance lover accidentally met could have given to her—peace of heart and the honour of his name.

This young Polish lady, who was thus unfortunately separated from Chopin, remained faithful to his memory—which was all that was left to her. She devoted herself to his parents. In the days of hope she had drawn a portrait of him, and Chopin's father would never allow this to be replaced by another, though it may have been by a far more skilful artist. Many years afterwards we saw the pale cheeks of this melancholy woman glow as alabaster glows when a light shines through it, when, gazing upon this picture, she met the eyes of his father.

Chopin's amiable character won for him at college the love of all his fellow-students, and more particularly that of Prince Czetwertznska and his brothers. With them he often spent the vacations and festival days at the house of their mother, the Princess

Louise Czetwertznska, who cultivated music with true feeling for its beauties, and who soon discovered the poet in the musician. This lady was probably the first who made Chopin feel the charm of being understood as well as heard. The Princess was still beautiful, and combined with many other high qualities was a sympathetic soul. Her *salon* was one of the most brilliant and select in Warsaw, and there Chopin often met the most distinguished ladies of the city; he there became acquainted with those fascinating beauties who, at a time when Warsaw was so famous for the brilliance, grace and elegance of its society, had acquired European celebrity. The Princess Czetwertznska introduced him to the Princess Lowicz, by whom he was presented to the Countess Zamozska, the Princess Radziwill, the Princess Jablouowska—all of them enchantresses, who were surrounded by many other beauties little less illustrious.

When he was yet very young he had often cadenced their steps to his playing. At those meetings, which may well be likened to gatherings of fairies, he may frequently have discovered, when unveiled in the excitement of the dance, the secrets of some of those enthusiastic and tender souls. He

could readily read those hearts which were attracted to him by friendship and by the graces of his youth, and was thus early able to learn of what a strange mixture of leaven and cream of roses, gunpowder and angels' tears, the poetic ideal of his nation is composed. When his fingers wandered over the keys and suddenly touched some moving chord, he could see the furtive tears coursing down the cheek of the loving girl or the young neglected wife, and how they moistened the eyes of the young men who were enamoured of glory and eager for it. Is it not easy to picture some young beauty asking him to play a simple prelude, and then, softened by his tones, leaning her rounded arm on the instrument to support her dreamy head, while she allowed the young artist to read, in the dewy glitter of her lustrous eyes, the song which was sung by her youthful heart? Did not groups of sportive nymphs throng around him, and while they begged from him some waltz of giddying rapidity, smile upon him with such bewildering joyousness that he was at once brought into unison with the gay spirit of their dance? He there beheld the chaste grace of his brilliant young countrywomen displayed in the mazurka, and the memories of their witching

fascinations and their winning reserve could never be effaced from his soul.

With a manner seemingly careless, but with that involuntary yet subdued emotion which always accompanies the remembrance of our early delights, he would sometimes say that he first understood the entire meaning of the feeling contained in the melodies and rhythms of national dances when he first saw these exquisite women at some magic fête, adorned with that brilliant coquetry which dazzles like electric fire, flashes from heart to heart, heightens love, and yet blinds it or robs it of every hope. And when the gauzes of India, which the Greeks would have declared to be woven of air, were replaced by heavier folds of Venetian velvet, and the perfume of roses and the sculptured petals of hot-house camellias were supplanted by gorgeous bouquets from jewel caskets, it often appeared to Chopin that however fine the orchestra may be, the dancers glided over the floor with less rapidity, their laugh was less sonorous, their eyes less luminous, than on the evenings when the dance was suddenly improvised, because he had been able to electrify his audience by the magic of his playing. If he did electrify them it was because he repeated, perhaps in tones that

were hieroglyphics but were yet readily understood by the initiated, those secret whispers which his delicate ear caught from reserved but passionate hearts, which truly resemble the Fraxinella, that plant so full of vivid and burning life that its flowers are always surrounded by a gas which is as subtle as it is inflammable. He had seen in this sublimated air the glitter of celestial visions, and the fading of illusory phantoms; he had divined the meaning of the burning passions which ever swarm therein; he knew how these hurtling emotions flutter across reckless human souls, and how in spite of their ceaseless excitement and agitation, they could intermingle, intertwine, intercept each other without ever once disturbing the exquisite proportion of exterior grace or the imposing and classic charm of manner. Thus did he learn to prize so highly the noble and measured manners which prevent delicacy from growing insipid, preserve petty cares from wearisome trifling, conventionality from tyranny, and good taste from coldness, and which never permit the passions —as is but too often the case where careful culture does not rule—to resemble those stony and calcareous vegetables whose hard and brittle growth bears a name so full of sad contrast—flowers of iron.

His early introduction into such society, where regularity of form was not the outward result of petrifaction of heart, led Chopin to conclude that *convenances* and courtesies of manner, instead of being only a uniform mask which represses the character of every individual under the mould of the same lines, serve rather to contain the passions without stifling them, colouring only that empty crudity of tone so injurious to their beauty, elevating the materialism which debases them, robbing them of the license which vulgarises them, lowering the vehemence which vitiates them, pruning the exuberance which exhausts them, and teaching lovers of the ideal to unite the virtues which spring from a knowledge of evil with those which make its very existence forgotten in talking with those they love. As these visions of his youth deepened in the long vista of memories they gained in his eyes in grace, in charm and in delight, and fascinated him so greatly that no reality was able to destroy their secret power over his imagination—a power which rendered more and more unconquerable his repugnance to that license of allurement, that brutal tyranny of caprice, that avidity to drink to the very dregs the cup of fantasy, that stormy hunting up

of all life's changes and incongruities, which rule in that strange mode of existence known as *La Bohême.*

It has happened more than once in the history of literature and art that a poet has arisen who has embodied in himself the poetic sense of an entire nation and an entire epoch, representing in his works in an absolute manner the types which his contemporaries pursue and strive to realise. For his country, as well as for the epoch in which he was born, Chopin was such a poet. Those poetic sentiments which were most widely spread and were yet the most intimate of and inherent in his nation, were embodied and combined in his imagination and represented by his brilliant genius. Poland has produced many bards, and some of them rank among the world's finest poets. Its writers are at the present time making great efforts to display in the strongest light the most glorious and interesting facts in its history and the most peculiar and picturesque aspects of its manners and customs. Chopin differs from them in that he had formed no premeditated design and yet surpasses them all in his originality. He did not seek or determine upon such a result; he did not create an ideal a priori. Without deciding beforehand to

transplant himself into the past; he constantly remembered his country's glories; without having analysed in advance the loves and the tears of his contemporaries, he understood them and sung them. He did not set himself the task of becoming a national musician, nor did he study to be one, but like all really national poets he sang spontaneously, and without any preconceived design or premeditated choice, whatever was dictated to him by inspiration, and in his songs we hear it gushing forth without labour and without effort. Those emotions which animated and adorned his youth were repeated by him in the most idealised form. The magic delicacy of his pen displayed the Ideal, which is, if we may so say, among his people, the Real—an Ideal which has an actual existence in their midst, which everybody in general and each in particular approaches from one or other of its many sides. He did not assume or attempt to do so, but he did actually collect in luminous sheaves those impressions which everywhere throughout his own country were felt —vaguely, perhaps, but in fragments, some of which were in every heart. Is it not this power of reproducing in poetic formulas, which are enchanting to the hearts and imaginations of all

peoples, those indefinite shades of feeling which are so widely scattered, but are so frequently met with amongst their fellow-countrymen, that distinguishes artists who are truly national?

It is not without reason that the task of collecting the melodies indigenous to every country has been undertaken. It seems to us that it would be still more interesting to trace those influences which form and fashion the characteristic powers of the authors most deeply inspired by the genius of their own nation. Up to the present time we have had very few distinctive compositions which stand out from those two great divisions, the German and Italian schools of music. But with the enormous development this art seems destined to attain, perhaps renewing for our day the glorious era of the painters of the Cinquecento, it appears to be highly probable that composers will arise whose works will be characterised by originality springing from differences in organisation, race and climate. It may be assumed that we shall be able to recognise the influences of the land wherein they were born on great masters in music as well as in the other arts, that we shall be able to discern the peculiar and predominant traits of their national

genius more thoroughly developed, more poetically true, more interesting to study, in the pages of their works than in the crude, incorrect, uncertain, vague and structureless sketches of uncultured peoples.

We must rank Chopin amongst the first musicians who thus individualised in themselves the poetic sense of a whole nation—not, however, simply because he adopted the rhythm of polonaises, mazurkas and cracoviennes, and called many of his compositions by these names. In so doing he would have confined himself to the multiplication of these works only, and would constantly have given us the same style and the remembrance of the same thing, and such reproduction would soon have become wearisome and served but to multiply works of like form, which must soon have grown monotonous. No; it is for the reason that he imbued these forms with the feelings peculiar to his nation, and because the heart of that nation has found expression in all the forms in which he has written, that he is entitled to be considered essentially a Polish poet. His preludes, nocturnes, scherzos, concertos—his shortest as well as his longest compositions, are all full of the national sensibility, expressed, it may be, in

different degrees, and in a thousand ways varied and modified, but ever bearing the same character. Chopin was an eminently subjective writer, and has given the same life to all his works, and animated with his own spirit all his productions. Thus all his writings are linked together by a distinctive unity; their beauties and their defects may alike be traced to the same order of emotions and to peculiar modes of feeling. The reproduction of the feelings of his countrymen, idealised and elevated by his own subjective genius, is an essential requisite for that national poet who wishes his country's heart to vibrate in unison with his own strains.

Would that we were able, by analogies of words and images, to make it possible for our readers to comprehend that exquisite yet irritable sensitiveness which is peculiar to ardent but susceptible hearts and haughty but deeply wounded souls. We cannot flatter ourselves so much as to believe that through the cold medium of words we have been able to convey any idea of these ethereal, odorous fires. Words always seem poor, cold and dry when compared with the vivid and delightful excitement which the other arts produce, so that the statement seems just which says that "of all modes of express-

ing sentiments words are the very poorest." We do not flatter ourselves that we have by our descriptions been able to attain that exceeding delicacy of touch which is so necessary to sketch what Chopin has painted in such ethereal hues. In his compositions everything, even the source of passion and excitement, is subtle; all impressions which are open, frank and primitive there disappear; before these impressions meet the eye they have passed through the prism of an exacting, ingenious, fertile imagination, and it becomes difficult, if not altogether impossible, again to resolve them into their primary elements. Acute discernment is requisite to understand them, refined delicacy is necessary to describe them. In seizing these refined impressions with the keenest discrimination, and in embodying them with inexhaustible art, Chopin has proved himself to be an artist of the highest rank. Only after long and patient study, only after pursuing his sublimated ideas through their manifold ramifications, are we able to learn to admire sufficiently and to comprehend rightly the genius with which he has made his subtle thoughts visible and palpable, without ever once blunting their keen edge or congealing their fiery flow.

So entirely was he filled with the sentiments the most perfect types of which he believed he had known in his youth and with the ideas which alone it pleased him to confide to his art, and so invariably did he look upon that art from the same point of view, that his artistic preferences could not possibly escape the influence of his early impressions. He only sought in the great classic models and *chefs d'œuvre* that which was in harmony with his own soul; he was pleased by all that stood in relation to that, while that which did not resemble it scarcely received justice from him; uniting as he did in himself those qualities of passion and grace which are so often incompatible, he possessed great accuracy of judgment and was preserved from petty partiality, but he was only slightly attracted by the greatest beauties or the highest merits if they happened to wound any phase of his own poetic conceptions. In spite of the high admiration he felt for Beethoven's works, certain parts of them always appeared to him to be too rudely sculptured; their structure was too robust to please him, their wrath was too tempestuous and their passion too overwhelming, the lion-marrow which fills Beethoven's every phase was matter too substantial for the taste of Chopin, and

to him the Raphaelic and seraphic profiles wrought into the nervous and powerful creations of that great genius were almost painful from the cutting force of the contrast in which they are so often set.

Notwithstanding the charm which he admittedly found in some of Schubert's melodies, Chopin would not willingly listen to those in which the contours were too rugged for his refined ear, those where the suffering lies exposed, where we can almost feel the flesh palpitate and hear the bones crash and crack beneath the rude grasp of sorrow. Savage wildness was always repulsive to him. In music and in literature, as in the affairs of life, everything that approached the melodramatic gave him pain. The frantic and despairing aspects of exaggerated romanticism repelled him, and he could not endure the struggle for wondrous effects or delicious excesses. "He loved Shakespeare but subject to many conditions. He thought his characters drawn too closely to life, and that their language had in it too much of truth. He liked best those epic and lyric syntheses which left the poorer details of humanity out of sight. For the same reason he said little and listened less; he did not wish either to express his own thoughts or to hear the thoughts of others until

they had attained a certain pitch of elevation." A nature which had such complete mastery over itself, which liked to divine by glimpses, presentiments and suppositions all that was left unsaid—a sort of divination always dear to those poets who can so eloquently complete the interrupted sentence—would naturally feel annoyed and almost scandalised by that audacity which expresses all and leaves nothing to be surmised. If he had been asked to express his views on this subject, we believe he would have admitted that, in harmony with his taste, he was only permitted to express his feelings on conditions of allowing much to remain concealed or only to be discovered under those rich veils of embroidery in which he wrapped his emotions. If what we agree in naming the classic in art seemed to him to be too full of methodical restraints, if he declined to allow himself to be strangled in the manacles and frozen in the conventions of systems, if he disliked confinement even though shut up in the safe symmetry of a gilded cage, it was not because he chose the license of disorder or the confusion of irregularity; rather was it that he might, like a lark, soar into the deep azure of the unclouded sky. It was once on a time

believed that the bird of paradise never slept only while resting on wings extended and rocked only by the breath of boundless space at the sublime height where it reposed; and like that bird, Chopin obstinately refused to come down and bury himself in the thick gloom of the forest or to surround himself with the howlings and screechings with which it is filled. He declined to quit the azure depths for the desert wastes, or to attempt to find pathways over treacherous waves of sand which the winds in their exultant irony love to fling over the footprints of the rash mortal who seeks to mark the traces of his wanderings over the drifting and blinding swells.

He evinced a strong distaste for that style of Italian art which is so open, so plain, and so lacking in the attractions of mystery or science, and also for everything in German art which bears the stamp of vulgar but powerful energy. About Schubert he once said that "the sublime is desecrated when it is succeeded by the trivial or the commonplace." Among composers for the piano Hummel was one of those whom he read and re-read with most pleasure. In Chopin's eyes Mozart was the ideal type, the poet *par excellence*, because he con-

descended more rarely than any other composer to go down the inclined plane leading from what is beautiful to what is commonplace. Mozart's father was once present at a performance of "Idomeneo," and afterwards thus reproached his son: "You are wrong in putting in it nothing for the long-eared ones"; but it was precisely for such omissions that he was admired by Chopin.

Professor Joseph Elsner, with whom he studied harmony, imparted to him the secret, so seldom known, of being exacting towards himself, and placing proper value on those advantages which are only to be secured by much patience and labour. When he had completed his college course, his parents desired that he should travel, so that he might become familiar with the best works under conditions of perfect execution. With this object he visited many German cities. He had left Warsaw on one of these short expeditions when the revolution of November 29, 1830, broke out.

Compelled to stay in Vienna, he was heard there at some concerts, but the public there, who are so cultivated, and generally so prompt to seize the most delicate shades of execution and the finest subtleties of thought, were during that winter dis-

turbed and abstracted, and the artist did not produce the effect which he had a perfect right to expect. He left Vienna intending to go to London, but first went to Paris, where he only meant to stay a short time. In his passport for England he had inserted—"passing through Paris." Those words were, as it were, his destiny. Many years after, when he seemed not only acclimatised but naturalised in France, he would say with a smile—"I am '*passing through Paris.*'"

On reaching Paris he gave several concerts, and was not only at once received and admired in the choicest circles of the élite, but was also warmly welcomed by the young artists. We remember the first time he appeared in the Pleyel saloons, where the most enthusiastic applause, again and again renewed, scarcely sufficed to express our enchantment by the genius which had brought out new phases of poetic feeling, and made such bold and yet such happy innovations in the form of musical art.

Chopin differed from the great majority of young debutants, for he was not for a moment either dazzled or intoxicated by his triumph, but accepted it without false modesty or pride, and showed

none of that childish enjoyment or gratified vanity exhibited by the parvenus of success. He had a most enthusiastic reception from his countrymen then in Paris. He was intimate at the houses of Prince Czartorzski, the Countess Plater, Madame de Komar, and at the homes of her daughters the Princess de Beauveau and the Countess Delphine Potocka, whose combined beauty and spiritual grace made her one of the most admired queens of Parisian society. To her he dedicated his Second Concerto, of the adagio of which we have before had something to say. The ethereal beauty and enchanting voice of the Countess enthralled him by a fascination which was full of respectful admiration. Her voice was destined to be the latest to vibrate upon his heart; and perhaps the sweetest of earth's sounds accompanied his parting soul until they mingled with the first chords of the angelic lyres.

He was much in evidence with the Polish circle in Paris—with Orda, who appeared as if he was born to command the future, but was killed at Algiers at the age of twenty; with Counts Plater, Grzymala, Ostrowski and Szenbeck; with Prince Lubomirski and many others. Seeing that those Polish families who afterwards came to Paris were

all anxious to know him, he continued to mingle chiefly with his own people, and through them he kept himself not only *au courant* with regard to what was going on in his own country, but kept up a sort of musical correspondence with it. He liked his country-people who visited Paris to show him the new airs or songs they brought with them, and if the words of the airs struck him he would frequently write a new melody for them, thus rapidly making them popular in his own country, though before the name of their author might be scarcely known. The number of these melodies, which were due only to the inspiration of the heart, grew to be considerable, and he often thought of collecting and publishing them. But he thought of this too late, and they remain scattered and apart, like the perfume of scented flowers blessing the wilderness and sweetening the "desert air" in the track of some wandering traveller whom chance has led in their direction. When in Poland we heard some of the melodies which are attributed to him, and which are in every sense worthy of him; but who would at this late hour have the audacity to make an uncertain choice between the inspiration of a national poet and the dreams of his people?

For a long time Chopin held himself aloof from the celebrities of Paris; he was repelled by their glitter and display. He inspired less curiosity than they did, because his character and habits had more real originality than apparent eccentricity. The meshes of their net were to him a prison, where he felt strangled by the cords saturated with their venom; their corrosive exudations could never restrain his genius though they consumed his life; and all too soon he was lost to the world, to his country, and to art.

CHAPTER VII.

MADAME SAND had, in 1836, not only published "Indiana," "Valentine" and "Jacques," but also "Lélia," that poem in prose of which she said later on: "If I feel any regret for having written it, it is because I am no longer able to write it. If I were in the same state of mind now as I was when I wrote that book, it would indeed be a great consolation to me to be able to commence it." The mere painting of romances in chill water colours must beyond doubt have seemed but dull work to Madame Sand, after so boldly handling the sculptor's hammer and chisel in modelling the grand lines of that semi-colossal statue, in carving those sinewy muscles which even in their statuesque immobility are full of bewildering and seductive charm. If we continue to gaze long upon it, it excites the most painful emotions.

"Lélia" seems to be a living Galatea, in striking contrast to Pygmalion's miracle, for it is rich in feeling and full of love, a Galatea whom the deeply enamoured artist has tried to bury alive in his exquisitely sculptured marble, stifling the palpitating breath and congealing the warm blood in the vain hope of elevating and immortalising that beauty which he adores. Standing before this vivid nature which art has petrified, we do not feel that admiration is kindled into love—rather do we feel saddened and chilled, as we are bound to acknowledge that love may be frozen into mere admiration.

Brown, beauteous olive-skinned Lélia; dark as Lara, as full of despair as Manfred, as rebellious as Cain, thou hast ranged through all the dark depths of solitude! Yet thou art more ferocious, more savage, more inconsolable than they, because thou hast never found a man's heart womanly enough to love thee as they were loved, to pay thee the homage of a blind and confiding submission to thy charms, to offer thee a mute though ardent, devotion, to permit its obedience to be shielded and protected by thy Amazonian power! O woman hero! Like the Amazons, thou hast been valiant and eager for combats; like them thou

hast not been afraid to expose the exquisite loveliness of thy countenance to the fierceness of the suns of summer or the bitterness of the rude blasts of winter! By thy endurance of fatigue thou hast hardened thy fragile limbs, and thus robbed them of the subtle power of their weakness. Thou hast covered thy throbbing breast with a heavy cuirass which has pressed it, torn it, dyed its snowy whiteness in blood—that gentle woman's breast, charming as life, discreet as death, which is always adored by man when his own heart is permitted to form its sole, impenetrable buckler!

When Madame Sand had blunted her chisel in polishing this statue—which by its noble majesty, its haughty disdain, its glance of hopeless anguish shadowed by the frowning of the pure brow and by the long and loose locks shimmering with electric life, reminds us of those antique cameos in which we still admire the perfect features, the beauteous yet fatal forehead, the haughty smile of the Medusa whose gaze paralysed the human heart and stopped the beating of its pulses—she sought in vain another form in which she might express the emotions which tortured her unsatiated soul. After she had draped this figure with the most consummate art, and accumulated upon it every sort of masculine greatness in order to compensate it for the lack of the highest of all qualities, that grandeur of "utter self-abnegation for love" which the many-sided poet had exalted to the empyrean and named "The Eternal Feminine" *(das Ewigweibliche)*, a greatness which is love existing before any of its joys and outliving all its sorrows; after she had caused Don Juan to be cursed, and a divine hymn to be sung to Desire by Lélia, who, like Don Juan, had repulsed the only delight which crowns desire, the luxury of self-abnegation; after she had completely revenged Elvira by creating Stenio; after she had scorned man far more than Don Juan had degraded woman—after doing all these, Madame Sand, in her "Lettres d'un Voyageur," portrays the shivering palsy and the painful lethargy which seizes upon the artist who has incorporated in his work the emotion which inspired him, and then finds that his imagination still remains under the spell of his unsatisfied ideal without being able to find another form in which he can incarnate it. Poetic miseries like these were well enough understood by Byron when he makes Tasso shed his bitterest tears, not for his fetters,

not for his physical agonies, not for the ignominy which was heaped on him, but for his finished Epic, for the ideal world which his own thought had created but which was now about to close its doors upon him, and by shutting him out from its enchanted realm, render him at last but too sensible of the gloomy realities by which he was surrounded:

"But this is o'er—my pleasant task is done,—
My long-sustaining friend of many years;
If I do blot thy final page with tears,
Know that my sorrows have wrung from me none.
But thou my young creation! my soul's child!
Which ever playing round me came and smiled,
And woo'd me from myself with thy sweet sight,
Thou too art gone—and so is my delight!"

BYRON'S "Lament of Tasso."

About this period a friend of Madame Sand, a musician who had greeted Chopin with the most enthusiastic joy when he arrived in Paris, often spoke to her of the Polish pianist, and in speaking of him he would praise his poetic genius in even more laudatory phrases than those in which he alluded to his artistic talent. She was acquainted with Chopin's compositions, and their graceful tenderness won her admiration; she was struck by the wonderful emotion revealed in his poems, and

by the effusions of so noble and dignified a heart. Some of Chopin's fellow-countrymen spoke to her of the women of their land with an enthusiasm which on such a topic was but natural to them—an enthusiasm which at that period was much enhanced by the recollection of the sublime sacrifices those women had made during the latest war. By means of these descriptions, aided by the poetic inspiration of the Polish artist, she conceived an ideal of love which assumed the form of worship for woman. She dreamed that, once guaranteed from dependence and preserved from inferiority, her rôle might be like the fairy power of the Peri—that of an ethereal intelligence and the friend of man. Probably she did not fully understand what innumerable links of suffering, of patience, of silence, of gentleness, of indulgence, of persevering courage, were necessary for the formation of the worship of this imperious but resigned ideal, which was indeed beautiful yet sad to look upon, like those plants with rose-coloured corollos, whose stems, intertwisting and interlacing in a network of long and manifold branches, give to ruins the semblance of life, destined for ever to adorn decay, to grow on old walls, to hide only crumbling stones! Beautiful

veils which beneficent Nature weaves, from her ingenious and inexhaustible riches, to cover the constant decay of human things!

As Madame Sand came to understand that this artist, instead of giving body to his fantasies in porphyry and marble or defining his thoughts by creating immense caryatides, preferred to efface the contour of his works, and could, if necessary, have elevated his architecture itself from the soil, to suspend it, like the floating palaces of Fata Morgana, in the clouds by his impalpable forms of ærial buoyancy, she was attracted more and more by that mystic ideal which she perceived to be glowing within them. Though she had a sufficiently powerful arm to sculpture the round shield, she also had a hand delicate enough to trace those faint relievos in which the shadows of ineffaceable profiles have been thrown upon the stone and entrusted to a surface above which they were scarcely raised. She was not a stranger to the supernatural world—she, to whom Nature, as to a spoiled child, has loosened her girdle and unveiled all the delights, the caprices, the allurements she can lend to beauty. Of the lightest graces she was not unmindful; and though her eye could take in proportions so vast, she had stooped to

examine the glowing pictures painted on the wing of the ephemeral butterfly. She had traced the symmetrical and wondrous network extended by the fern as a canopy over the wood strawberry; she had heard the streams murmur through the long reeds and stems of water-grass, where the hissings of the "amorous viper" can be heard; she had followed the will-o'-the-wisp in his wild leaps as he bounds over the surface of the meadows and marshes; she had pictured to herself the imaginary dwelling-places towards which it so perfidiously allures the belated traveller; she had listened to the concerts given by the cicada and their friends in the stubble; she had learned to name the denizens of the winged republic of the woods, and could distinguish them as easily by their plumed robes as by their playful roulades or plaintive cries. She knew the lily's secret tenderness in the splendour of its hues; she had heard the sighs of Geneviève,* the maiden enamoured of flowers.

She saw in her dreams those "unknown friends" who came and rejoined her "when she was seized with distress upon a desolate shore, brought by a rapid stream . . . . in a large and full barque . . . ."

* "André."

into which she leaped to leave the unknown shores, "the land of chimeras which cause real life to seem like a half-effaced dream to those who, enamoured of large pearl shells from infancy, mount them to sail to those isles where all are young and beautiful . . . . where men and women are crowned with flowers, their long locks floating around their shoulders . . . . holding vases and harps of strange shapes . . . . singing songs with voices not of this world . . . . loving each other equally with a divine love . . . . a land where crystal fountains cast perfumed water into basins of silver . . . . where blue roses bloom in alabaster vases . . . . where every perspective is enchanted . . . . where the people all walk with naked feet upon thick green moss as soft as velvet carpets . . . . where all sing while they wander through fragrant groves."*

So well did she know these unknown friends, that after having seen them again she "could not dream about them without making her heart palpitate during the entire day." She had been initiated into the Hoffmanic world—"she who had surprised smiles ineffable on the portraits of the dead,"† who

* "Lettres d'un Voyageur."

† "Spiridion."

had beheld the sun's rays falling through the stained glass of a Gothic window so as to form a halo round loved heads, luminous and impalpable like the arm of God, surrounded by a vortex of atoms; she who had seen such glorious apparitions clothed with the purple and golden glory of the setting sun. She was familiar with every myth of the realm of fantasy!

Thus she was naturally most desirous of making the acquaintance of one who had on rapid wing fled "to those scenes impossible to describe, but which must exist, either in this world or in some of the planets whose light we love to contemplate in the forests when the moon has set."* She had prayed that she may never be forced to desert such scenes, and did not wish to bring back her heart and imagination to this dreary world, too much resembling the gloomy coasts of Finland, where the miry slime and slough can only be escaped by scaling the naked granite face of the solitary rock. Fatigued with that ponderous statue of the Amazonian Lélia which her hands had sculptured; tired of the grandeur of an ideal which cannot possibly be moulded from the gross materials of this earth—

* "Lettres d'un Voyageur."

she desired to form an acquaintance with the artist who was "the lover of an Impossible so shadowy and so near the stellar regions." Alas! those regions may be free from the poisonous miasmas of our lower atmosphere, but they are not exempt from its desolating melancholy! Perchance those who have been transplanted there may adore the shining of new suns, but none the less they must see extinguished the light of others not less dear! Will not the most glorious star in the glorious constellation of the Pleiades disappear? Like drops of luminous dew, the stars will one by one fall into the emptiness of a yawning abyss the bottomless depths of which no plummet has ever sounded, and the soul that contemplates these fields of ether, this blue Sahara desert with its wandering and vanishing oases, is stricken with so hopeless and profound a grief that it can never again be soothed by either love or enthusiasm. This bottomless abyss engulfs and absorbs all emotions, and is no more agitated by them than the still waters of some placid lake, which reflects from its polished surface the moving images crowding its banks, are disturbed by the various motions and eager life of the numerous objects mirrored in its glassy bosom. Not thus can the

drowsy waters be awakened from their drowsy lethargy; even the highest joy is dimmed by this profound melancholy. "Through the exhaustion which always accompanies such tension as strains the soul beyond the region which it naturally inhabits . . . . the inadequacy of speech is for the first time felt by those who have studied speech so much and used it so well—we are carried away from all active and militant instincts to journey through boundless space to be lost in the immensity of adventurous ways, far, far beyond the clouds, where we can no longer see the earth in its beauty, because our gaze is fastened on the heavens, where reality is no longer draped with poetry as it has so skilfully been draped by the author of 'Waverley,' but where in idealising poetry itself, the infinite is peopled with spirits which belong only to its mystic realm, as has been done by Byron in his 'Manfred.'"

Is it possible that Madame Sand could have divined that incurable melancholy, that will which cannot blend with other wills, that imperious exclusiveness, which always take hold upon imaginations delighting in the pursuit of dreams the realities of which are nowhere to be found—or at least are

never to be found in the matter-of-fact world where the dreamers are constrained to dwell? Did she foresee the shape which for such dreamers devoted attachment assumes? Had she calculated the entire and absolute absorption which alone they will accept as the synonym of tenderness? In order to understand the hidden depths of characters so concentrated, it is necessary to be in some measure as shy, and as shrinking and secretive as they are themselves. Like those sensitive flowers which close their susceptible petals at the first breath of the north wind, such characters veil their exacting souls in the shrouds of self concentration, and only unfold themselves under the generous rays of a propitious sun. Such natures have been described as "rich by exclusiveness" in opposition to others which are "rich by expansiveness." "If these varying temperaments should approach and meet each other" (says the writer whom we have so often quoted) "they can never mingle or melt one into the other, but the one must consume the other, leaving behind nothing but ashes." Alas! it is such natures as that of the fragile musician whose days we are now commemorating which perish by consuming themselves, having neither the wish nor the

power to live any life but that one which conforms to their own exclusive Ideal.

Chopin appeared to dread Madame Sand more than he did any other woman—that modern Sibyl who, like the Pythoness of old, had said so many things which other women had neither the knowledge nor the courage to say. He put off and avoided all opportunities of being introduced to her, though of this Madame Sand had no knowledge. By reason of that captivating simplicity which is one of her noblest charms, she did not divine his fear of the Delphic priestess. At length, however, she was presented to him, and an acquaintance with her soon scattered to the winds those prejudices which he had obstinately cherished against female authors.

In the autumn of 1837 Chopin was seized by an alarming illness, which left him almost without the power of supporting life. He was compelled by dangerous symptoms to travel southward to avoid the rigours of winter. Madame Sand, who was ever watchful over those whom she loved, and so full of compassion for their sufferings, saw that his state of health required great care, and she would not permit him to set out alone, but decided to go with

him. They fixed upon the island of Majorca for a residence, because the sea air combined with the mild climate prevalent there is particularly salubrious for sufferers from lung disease. Though when he left Paris he was so weak that we had no hope he would ever return, and though he was long and dangerously ill after his arrival in Majorca, yet he derived so much benefit from the change that for several years his health was improved.

Was it the balmy climate alone which called him back to life, or was it not rather because his life was so blissful that he found strength to live? Did he not there regain strength simply because he so strongly desired to live? Who can tell the extent of the influence of the will upon the bodily frame? Who can say what subtle internal aroma the will has the power of setting free to preserve the sinking frame from decay, or what vital force it can breathe into the bodily organs? Who can tell where the dominion of mind over matter ceases, or how far our senses are dominated by our imagination, to what extent their powers may be augmented or their extinction accelerated by will power? It is of no moment *how* the imagination obtains its strange extension of power, whether it is by long and bitter

exercise or whether it collects spontaneously its forgotten strength and concentrates its force in some new and decisive moment of destiny as the rays of the sun can kindle a flame of celestial origin when they are concentrated in the focus of the burning-glass, brittle and fragile though that medium may be.

Upon this epoch in Chopin's life all the long-scattered rays of happiness were concentrated; is it then to be wondered at that they should have rekindled the flame of life, and that it should at this period have burned with the most intense lustre? The solitude, surrounded by the blue waves of the Mediterranean, and shaded by orange groves, seemed by its exceeding loveliness to be exactly adapted to the ardent vows of youthful lovers who still believed in their sweet and naïve illusions, and sighed for happiness in "some desert isle." Chopin there breathed that air for which natures unfit for the world, and who never feel happy in it, long with such painful home-sickness; that air which we can find in every place where there is a sympathetic soul to breathe it with us, and which, without such a soul, can be found nowhere; the air which pervades our dreamland; the air which, in spite of all obstacles

and of all bitter realities is very easily found when two souls seek it together! It is the balmy air of that ideal land to which we so gladly lead the being we cherish, repeating with poor Mignon—"*Dahin! Dahin! . . . . lasset uns ziehn!*"

While his illness continued Madame Sand never left his pillow. He loved her even unto death, with a clinging attachment which lost none of its intensity when it had lost all its joy, and which remained faithful to her even when all its memories had turned to pain; for it seemed as though this fragile being was absorbed and consumed by the strength of his love. . . . . Some seek happiness in their attachments, and when they can find it no longer, the attraction gradually vanishes. In this they only resemble the rest of the world. But Chopin loved for the sake of loving; no amount of suffering could discourage him. "He could arrive at a new phase—that of woe; but he could never reach the phase of coldness. That would indeed have been a phase of physical agony; his love was his life; and whether it was sweet or bitter, he could not for one moment withdraw himself from its dominion."* Madame Sand remained till Chopin's last moment, that

* "Lucrezia Floriana."

woman of magic spells who had plucked him from the valley of the shadow of death, whose power over him had converted his physical agony into love's delicious languor.

She battled courageously with his disease to save him from death and bring him back to life. She surrounded him with those instinctive cares which love divines, and which are a thousand times more effectual than all the material remedies known to science. While she was nursing him she felt neither fatigue, weariness nor discouragement; neither her strength nor her patience gave way before the task. She nursed her precious charge into new life, like mothers in robust health who seem to impart some of their own force to the sickly child constantly needing their care and having their preference. Before the efforts of love the disease gave way: "the funereal oppression which had secretly undermined Chopin's spirit, corroding and eating away all his contentment, gradually vanished. He allowed the amiable character and the cheerful serenity of his friend to chase away all his sad thoughts and mournful presentiments and to breathe new force into his intellectual being."

Gloomy fears were now succeeded by happiness

like the gradual progress of a beautiful day after a night filled with obscurity and terror, when so dense and massive is the vault of darkness which weighs upon us overhead that we are ready for any sudden and fatal catastrophe, and we dare not even dream of deliverance; but the despairing eye suddenly sees a bright spot where the mists are clearing and the clouds are opening like the parting of flocks of heavy wool, even while the edges grow more dense under the pressure of the hand which rends them. At such a moment the first ray of hope enters the soul and we breathe more freely, like people lost in the windings of a cavern when they think they see a light, though its existence may still be doubtful. This faint light is the dawn of day, though its rays are so devoid of colour that it more resembles the extinction of the fading twilight and the falling of the shroud of night upon the earth. Yet it is in truth the dawn; we recognise it by the pure and vivid breath of the young zephyrs which it sends out, like *avant-couriers*, to bring to us the assurance of morning and of safety. The balmy scent of flowers pervades the air like the thrill of an encouraging hope. A stray bird begins to chirrup his song sooner than is his wont, and it soothes the soul like

a coming consolation, and is accepted as a promise for the future. As these almost invisible but progressive and sure indications multiply, we become convinced that in this struggle between the powers of light and darkness it is the powers of night which will ultimately yield. Lifting our eyes to the leaden dome above us we feel that it already weighs upon us less, and has already lost its fatal stability.

Slowly and by small degrees the long gray lines of light increase, and spread themselves along the horizon like clefts in a brighter world. Suddenly they enlarge and gain upon their dark boundaries; now they break through them, just as the waters which bound the edge of a lake wash the arid banks in irregular waves. Then a fierce opposition arises, and banks and long dikes accumulate to arrest the progress. Clouds are piled up like sand-banks, and toss and surge to and fro in obstructing masses; but the light breaks through like the impetuous rush of irresistible waters, demolishing and devouring them, and the rolling waves of purple mist glow into crimson as the rays ascend. At this moment the young dawn appears to shine with a timid yet victorious grace, while the knee bends before it in admiration and gratitude, for the last terror has

vanished, and we feel as if newly born. New objects meet the gaze, as just evolved from chaos. A veil of uniform rose-colour covers all things, but as the light increases in intensity, the thin gauze is draped and folded in shades of pale carnation, while the advancing plains stand out clear in white and dazzling splendour. At length the god of day bursts forth! His blazing forehead is adorned with long luminous locks of floating hair. He seems at first to rise slowly; but scarcely has he fully unveiled himself than he darts forward, disengages himself from all around him, and, leaving the earth far below, takes immediate possession of the vaulted heavens. . . . .

The memory of those days passed in the lovely isle of Majorca remained to the last dear to Chopin's heart, like the recollection of an entrancing ecstasy, which fate only grants once in a lifetime even to her most favoured children. "He was no longer on earth; he was in an empyrean of golden clouds and perfumes. His imagination, so filled with exquisite beauty, seemed as if it were holding a monologue with God himself; and when upon the radiant prism, in the contemplation of which he forgot everything else, the phantasmagoria of the world

would cast even its disturbing shadow he was deeply pained, as if in the midst of a classical concert a shrieking old woman, in shrill and broken tones, should blend her vulgar musical motivo with the divine thoughts of the great masters."* He never could speak of this period without deep emotion and profound gratitude, as though its happiness had sufficed for a lifetime, without any hope that it could ever again be possible to find a felicity in which the lapse of time was only marked by the tender love of woman and the brilliant coruscations of true genius. Thus did the clock of Linnæus note the course of time, indicating the hours by the successive waking and sleeping of the flowers, distinguishing each by a different perfume, and a display of forever changing beauty as each variegated calyx opened out in constantly varying yet ever lovely shapes!

The beauty of the countries through which they travelled together seemed to make a more distinct impression on the brain of the Poet than on that of the Musician. Chopin was impressed by the loveliness of nature in a way less definite but not less powerful. His soul was touched by the external

* "Lucrezia Floriana."

enchantment, and immediately harmonised with it, yet his intellect did not feel it necessary to analyse or classify that enchantment. His heart beat in unison with the exquisite scenery through which they passed, though at the moment he could not have assigned the precise source whence his blissful tranquility proceeded. Like a true musician, he was content to seize the sentiment of scenes which he visited, and seemed to give but very little attention to the plastic material, the picturesque frame, which was not in accord with the form of his art, and did not belong to the more spiritualised sphere in which he wrought. However—and a similar fact has often been observed in connection with organisations like his—when time and distance had removed him from those scenes in which emotion had obscured his vision just as the clouds from the burning incense envelop the censer, the forms and beauties of those scenes stood out the more vividly in his memory; and in after years he frequently talked about them as though the remembrance gave him great pleasure. But at the moment when he was so thoroughly happy he did not pause to make an inventory of his bliss—he simply enjoyed it, just as we all do in childhood's sweet years, when we are

deeply impressed by the scenery around us but never think of its details, and yet we find in our memory long afterwards an exact image of each object, though we are only able to recall and describe its forms when our eyes have ceased to behold them.

Moreover, there was no necessity for him to task himself to scrutinise those beautiful sights which in Spain formed so appropriate a setting to his poetic happiness. Could he not at any time find them again by the descriptions of his inspired companion? As all tangible things, and even the atmosphere itself, become flame-coloured when viewed through a glass stained with crimson, so he could contemplate those delightful sights through the medium of those glowing hues in which they were bathed by the impassioned genius of the woman he loved. She was his nurse in sickness; was she not at the same time a great artist? Oh rare and beautiful combination! If to those depths of devotion and tenderness in which woman's true and irresistible empire must begin, and without which she is an enigma without any possible solution, nature should join genius's most brilliant gifts, the marvellous spectacle of the Greek fire would be renewed, the glittering flames

would once more sport over the ocean's abyss without being extinguished or submerged in the chilly depths, and, as the living hues were thrown upon the surging waters, the glowing dyes of the purple fire would be added to the celestial azure of the sea in which heaven was reflected!

Has genius ever achieved that entire self-abnegation, that sublime humility of soul which confers the power to make those strange sacrifices of the whole Past and the whole Future; those self-immolations which are as full of courage as of mystery; those mystic and entire holocausts of self, not temporary and changing, but permanent and monotonous in their constancy—through the might of which alone tenderness may rightfully claim the higher title of devotion? Does not the power of genius make its own legitimate and exclusive exactions, and does not the force of woman consist in the abdication of all exactions? Can the royal purple and burning flames of genius possibly float upon the spotless azure of a woman's destiny?

CHAPTER VIII.

CHOPIN'S health, already affected by many changes, visibly declined from the year 1840 onwards. For some years he passed at Nohaut his most tranquil hours, and he seemed to suffer less there than elsewhere. While there he took pleasure in composition, and every year brought with him to Paris several new works; every winter, however, brought with it increased sufferings. At first motion became difficult, and then almost impossible. In 1846 and 1847 he did scarcely any walking at all, he could not go upstairs without a most painful sensation of suffocation, and it was only by continuous care and the greatest precautions that his life could be prolonged.

About the spring of 1847 his health grew more precarious from day to day, and he was attacked by an illness, from which his friends believed he could

not possibly recover. For the last time he was brought through; but this period was marked by a calamity so agonising to his soul that he at once pronounced it mortal. His rupture with Madame Sand took place about this time, and he did not long survive that blow. Madame de Staël, who notwithstanding her generous and passionate heart, and her subtle and vivid intellect, sometimes committed the fault of making her sentences heavy by a sort of pedantry which robbed them of grace and *abandon*, remarked once, when the force of her feelings made her for a moment lay aside her solemn Genoese stiffness!—"*In love there are only beginnings!*" This exclamation was founded upon the bitter experience of the powerlessness of the human heart to accomplish the glorious and blissful dreams of the imagination. And if some grand examples of human devotion did not now and then occur to contradict Madame de Staël's melancholy words, the truth of which many facts, both illustrious and obscure, would seem to bear out, our suspicions would cause us to be guilty of much ingratitude and want of confidence; we might be led to question the sincerity of the hearts by which we are surrounded, and might see only the allegorical symbols of human

love in the antique train of the beautiful Canephoroe who bore those fragile and perfumed flowers destined to adorn some hapless victim for the altar.

Chopin talked often, and from choice, of Madame Sand, but without any bitterness or recrimination. When he named her his eyes always filled with tears, and yet it was with a sort of bitter-sweet feeling that he yielded himself to the memories of past days, which, alas, were now stripped of their varied significance! His friends resorted to many devices to divert him from dwelling on recollections which always brought with them a dangerous excitement, but he loved to revert to those recollections, just as though he diligently sought, by means of those very feelings which were once the life of his life, to destroy that life by assiduously stifling its powers by means of the vapour of this subtle poison. His latest pleasure seemed to be the memory of the blasting of his latest hope; and he hugged to himself the bitter knowledge that under this fatal spell his life was rapidly ebbing away. Every effort to fix his attention on other themes was fruitless, for he refused to be comforted, and would constantly talk on this one all-

grossing topic. And even if he had ceased to talk of it, would he not have constantly thought of it? He seemed to inhale the poison with rapidity and eagerness for the very purpose of shortening the time that he was forced to breathe it.

Though the exceeding frailness of his physical constitution would not under any circumstances have permitted him long to linger upon earth, yet he might at least have been spared the bitter agonies which beclouded his latest hours. Possessing a tender but ardent soul, which was the more exacting by reason of its very fastidiousness and excessive delicacy, he could not live unless he was surrounded by the radiant phantoms which he had himself created, and he found it impossible to expel the profound sorrow which his soul cherished as the sole remaining vestige of the blissful past. He was yet one more great and illustrious victim to those transitory attachments formed between persons of differing characters, who mistake for a durable feeling the surprise and delight felt at the first meeting, and build upon it hopes and illusions fated never to be realised; and it is always that nature which is most deeply stirred, which is the most absolute in its hopes and attachments, and for which any trans-

plantation is a thing impossible, that is destroyed and for ever ruined by the bitter awakening from the all-absorbing dream. Such is the awful power exercised by man over the most exquisite feelings of the soul! That power is like the coursers of the sun when Phaeton's hand, instead of guiding them in their beneficent career, allows them to wander at random, and they throw into confusion the beautiful structure of the celestial spheres and carry fire and devastation in their train. Chopin felt, and often said, that the rending asunder of this long connection, the rupturing of this strong tie, severed all the cords which bound him to life.

During the attack already referred to, his life was for some days despaired of. M. Gutman, who was his most distinguished pupil, and also during the latest years of his life his most intimate friend, bestowed upon his beloved master every possible proof of tender attachment. To Chopin, Gutman's care and attention were most agreeable. With that timidity which to invalids seems to be natural, and with that tender delicacy so peculiar to himself, Chopin on one occasion asked the Princess Czartorzska (who visited him every day and often feared that each visit would be the last): "Whether

Gutman was not greatly fatigued, and whether she thought he would be able to continue his care of him," adding that Gutman's presence was "dearer to him than that of any other person." His convalescence was slow and painful, and, indeed, only left him the shadow of life. At this time his appearance changed to such an extent that he could with difficulty be recognised.

The following summer brought with it that illusory abatement of suffering which summer sometimes grants to the dying, and he refused to leave Paris, thus depriving himself of the pure country air and all the benefits of that vivifying element. The winter of 1847-8 was full of a painful and continuous series of improvements and relapses; but in spite of this he made up his mind, as the spring came on, to carry into effect his old idea of visiting London. He was still confined to his bed at the time of the breaking out of the revolution of February, 1848, but with melancholy effort he appeared to interest himself in what was going on, and spoke more than was his wont of the events of the day. M. Gutman still continued to be his most constant and most intimate visitor, and Chopin accepted and preferred his attentions to the end.

In April of that year he felt better, and thought of trying his contemplated journey and visiting that country to which he had intended to travel at the time when youth and life were opening out in bright perspective before him. He accordingly set out for England, where his compositions were generally known and admired, and had already found an intelligent and appreciative public.* He

* Chopin's compositions were even at that time known and greatly liked in England, and the most distinguished *virtuosi* frequently played them. We find, in a pamphlet published in London by Messrs. Wessel and Stapleton, entitled "An Essay on the Works of F. Chopin," some lines marked by a just criticism. The two lines from Shelley selected as the epigraph of this little pamphlet were ingeniously chosen, and could hardly have been better applied than to Chopin—

"He was a mighty poet, and
A subtle souled psychologist."

The author of this pamphlet writes enthusiastically of the "original genius untrammelled by conventionalities, unfettered by pedantry . . . . the outpourings of an unworldly and trustful soul—those musical floods of tears and gushes of pure joyfulness—those exquisite embodiments of fugitive thoughts—those infinitesimal delicacies, which give so much value to the lightest sketch of Chopin." Our English author again says: "One thing is certain, viz., to play with proper feeling and correct execution, the 'Preludes' and 'Studies' of Chopin, is to be neither more nor less than a finished pianist, and, moreover, to comprehend them thoroughly; to give a life and tongue to their infinite and most eloquent subtleties of expression, involves the necessity of being in no less

quitted France in that frame of mind which the English call "low spirits." The momentary interest he had tried to take in political changes speedily disappeared, and he grew more taciturn than ever. If from forgetfulness a few words escaped him, they were only exclamations of regret. His affection for the small number of his friends whom he continued to see was tinged by that heart-

a degree a poet than a pianist, a thinker than a musician. Commonplace is instinctively avoided in all the works of Chopin; a stale cadence or a trite progression, a humdrum subject or a hackneyed sequence, a vulgar twist of the melody or a worn-out passage, a meagre harmony or an unskilful counterpoint, may in vain be looked for throughout the entire range of his compositions; the remaining characteristics of which are, a feeling as uncommon as beautiful, a treatment as original as felicitous, a melody and a harmony as new, fresh, vigorous, and striking, as they are utterly unexpected and out of the common track. In taking up one of the works of Chopin, you are entering, as it were, a fairy land, untrodden by human footsteps, a path hitherto unfrequented but by the great composer himself; and a faith, a devotion, a desire to appreciate and a determination to understand are absolutely necessary to do it anything like adequate justice. . . . . Chopin in his 'Polonaises' and in his 'Mazurkas' has aimed at those characteristics which distinguish the national music of his country so markedly from that of all others, that quaint idiosyncrasy, that identical wildness and fantasticality, that delicious mingling of the sad and the cheerful, which invariably and forcibly individualise the music of those northern nations, whose language delights in combinations of consonants. . . . ."

breaking emotion which precedes eternal farewells. Only art retained its absolute power over him; music absorbed him during the time (now rapidly growing briefer) he was able to occupy himself with it, as thoroughly as it had done at a time when he was brimming over with life and hope. Before leaving Paris he gave a concert in the saloon of M. Pleyel, one of the friends with whom his intercourse had been the most constant, the most frequent, the most affectionate—a friend who is even now rendering worthy homage to his memory, and occupying himself with zeal and activity in the erection of a monument for his tomb. At that concert he was for the last time heard by his own chosen and faithful audience.

In London he was received with an eagerness which helped him to shake off his sadness and dissipate his mournful depression of soul. Perhaps he fondly imagined that he could cast off his melancholy by burying all his old habits in oblivion; but at any rate he neglected all the prescriptions of his physicians and all those precautions which served to remind him of his wretched state of health. Twice he played in public, and frequently at private concerts; he went a great deal into society, sat up late

at night, and exposed himself to great fatigue without allowing himself to be deterred by any care for his health.

The Duchess of Sutherland presented him to the Queen, and the élite of London society sought the pleasure of his acquaintance. He travelled to Edinburgh, the climate of which was particularly distressful to him; on his return to London he was much debilitated, and his physicians wished him to leave England at once, but he put off his departure for some time. Who can divine the feelings which prompted this delay? He played again, at a concert given for the Poles, and it was the last token of his love for his beloved land—the last look—the last sigh—the last regret! He was surrounded, fêted, applauded by his own people, and he bade them all adieu—little did they dream it was his eternal farewell! What appalling thoughts must have crowded into his sad heart as he crossed the Channel to return to Paris—that Paris which for him was now so different from that which, without seeking, he had found in 1831!

On his arrival there he was met by a shocking and painful surprise—Dr. Molin, the physician by whose advice and prescriptions his life had been

saved in the winter of 1847, and to whom alone he attributed the prolongation of his life, was dead. This loss brought with it a most profound feeling of discouragement, and he felt it painfully; at a period when the mind exerts so great an influence over the progress of disease he persuaded himself that his trusted physician could never be replaced, and he had no confidence in any other. He was dissatisfied with them all, and without any hope of benefiting by their skill, he constantly changed them. He was seized by a superstitious depression of soul. No tie stronger than life, no love stronger than death, came now to his help in the struggle against his bitter apathy. Ever since the winter of 1848 he had been in no condition for continuous labour, though from time to time he added a few touches to some scattered leaves, but without succeeding in ordering his thoughts in accordance with his designs. A respectful regard for his fame led him to wish that these desultory sketches should be destroyed so that they could not possibly be mutilated, disfigured and transformed into posthumous works which might be unworthy of him. With the exception of a short waltz and a last nocturne, written as parting memories, he left behind him no

finished manuscripts. In the latter part of his life he had some idea of writing a "Method for the Piano," in which he purposed giving his views on the theory and practice of his art, the results of his long and patient study, his intelligent experience, and his happy innovations. The task was a difficult one and called for redoubled exertion, even from one who worked so hard as did Chopin. Perhaps by taking refuge in so barren a region, he desired to escape from the emotions of his art, which affect those who reproduce them in serenity of spirit so differently from others who repeat them in their own desolation of heart. In this employment he only sought an uniform and absorbing occupation, and only asked from it that "forgetfulness" which Manfred in vain demanded from the powers of magic—that forgetfulness which neither the gaiety of amusement nor the lethargy of torpor can give! On the contrary, with venomous power, the renewed intensity of the woe they benumb always more than compensates for the time during which they succeed in benumbing it. Without doubt Chopin sought forgetfulness in that daily labour which "calms the storms of the soul," that forgetfulness which occupation sometimes procures by rendering the memory

torpid, though it cannot altogether destroy the sense of pain. At the close of that fine elegy, which Schiller has named "The Ideal," the poet who was himself the victim of an inconsolable melancholy appeals to labour for consolation, when a prey to bitter regrets; while looking for early death he invokes occupation as a last resource against the unceasing anguish of life:

"And thou, so pleased, with her uniting,
To charm the soul-storm into peace,
Sweet toil, in toil itself delighting,
That more it laboured, less could cease,
Though but by grains thou aid'st the pile
The vast eternity uprears,
At least thou strik'st from *time* the while
Life's debt—the minutes, days and years."

Bulwer's Translation of SCHILLER'S *"Ideal."*

Chopin's strength, however, was not equal to carrying his intention into effect—the occupation was too abstract, too tiring. He thought over the form of his project and at different times spoke of it, but to execute it was impossible. Only a few pages of it were ever written and these were destroyed with the rest of his unfinished works.

At length his disease augmented so rapidly that the fears of his friends took the hue of despair; he rarely spoke, and hardly ever left his bed. On hearing this his sister travelled from Warsaw to

take her place at his bedside, which she never left while he lived. He saw the anguish, the fears, the increased sadness of those around him, without showing that any impression was made upon him. With Christian calmness and resignation he looked forward to death, and yet did not cease to prepare for the morrow. Once more he showed a desire to change his place of abode, took another lodging, arranged for the furnishing of it, and occupied himself in its minutest details. Having taken no steps to recall the orders he had given for the arrangement of his new abode, it happened that on the very day of his death his furniture was being carried into the rooms he was destined never to occupy.

Did he fear that death would fail to fulfil his plighted promise? Did he dread that, having touched him with his hand of ice, death would still allow him to linger on earth? Did he feel that life would be wellnigh unbearable when its fondest ties were broken and its closest links severed? A duplex influence is sometimes felt by gifted temperaments when they are on the eve of some decisive event in their history; the eager heart, urged onwards by a desire to unravel the dark secrets of the unknown future, contradicts the colder and more

timid intellect which fears to leap into the uncertain abyss of the approaching fate. This lack of harmony between the simultaneous previsions of head and heart often causes the firmest souls to make statements which their acts would seem to contradict, and yet both statements and acts proceed from a like conviction, though by different channels. Did Chopin suffer from this inevitable dissimilarity between the thronging doubts of the questioning head and the prophetic whispers of the heart?

The cold shadow of death gained upon him from week to week, and soon from day to day. His end was quickly drawing near; his sufferings grew more and more terrible; the crises became more frequent, and at every accelerated advent they more and more resembled a mortal agony. During their intermission he retained until the last his presence of mind and his power of will, neither losing the precision of his ideas nor the clear perception of his intentions. In his brief moments of respite he gave utterance to wishes which prove the calm solemnity with which he regarded the approach of death. He had been intimately acquainted with Bellini during that composer's residence in Paris, and by his side Chopin wished to be buried. The grave of Bellini

is in the cemetery of Père Lachaise, next to that of Cherubini. The desire of becoming acquainted with that great master, whom he had been trained to admire, was one of the motives which led him to pass through Paris when he left Vienna to go to London in 1831, though at the time he did not know that his destiny would fix him in the French capital. Chopin now sleeps between Bellini and Cherubini—two men of very dissimilar genius, and to both of whom he was allied in an equal degree, for he attached as great a value to the respect he felt for the science of the one as to the sympathy he avowed for the creations of the other. He was, like the composer of "Norma," full of melodic feeling, and was yet ambitious to reach the harmonic depth of the learned old master, being desirous of uniting, in a large and elevated style, the dreamy vagueness of spontaneous emotions with the learning of the most consummate masters of the science.

Chopin maintained to the last his reserved manner, and did not ask to see anyone for the last time, though he evinced the most touching gratitude to all who came to see him. The early days of October left no room for doubt or for hope, and the next day, or even the next hour was not to be depended upon.

His sister and M. Gutman attended on him without intermission, never leaving him for one moment. The Countess Delphine Potocka was absent from Paris, but returned as soon as she was told of his imminent danger. None who approached the bedside of the dying artist could tear themselves away from the spectacle of this great and gifted soul in the hours of his mortal anguish.

However violent or frivolous may be the passions which agitate our hearts, whatever strength or indifference we may display in confronting those unforeseen and sudden accidents which would necessarily appear overwhelming in their effects, it is impossible to escape from the impression made upon us by the imposing majesty of a lingering and beautiful death, which touches and softens, fascinates and elevates, even those souls which are the least prepared for such sublime and holy emotions. The gradual but lingering departure of one among us for that unknown shore, the mysterious solemnity of his hidden visions, his memory of past facts and passing ideas while breathing upon that narrow neck of land which separates time from eternity, produce upon us a deeper effect than anything else in this world. Sudden calamities, the dire alterna-

tions forced upon the shuddering and fragile vessel, tossed like a toy by the wild blast of the tempest; the blood of the battle-field and the lurid smoke of artillery; the horrible charnel-house into which our own home is changed by a contagious pestilence; those conflagrations which wrap entire cities in their greedy flames; the fathomless abysses which yawn at our feet—none of these things remove us so sensibly from all the fleeting attractions "which pass, which can be broken, which cease," as the prolonged view of a soul, conscious of its position, silently gazing upon the multiplied aspects of time and the mute portal of eternity. The courage, the exaltation, the resignation, the emotion which reconcile it to that inevitable dissolution which is so repulsive to all our instincts, certainly impress the onlookers far more profoundly than the most fearful catastrophes, which, by the very confusion they create, rob the scene of all its silent anguish and its solemn meditation.

Some of Chopin's friends constantly occupied the parlour which adjoined his chamber, and one by one in turn they approached him to receive a token of recognition or a look of affection when he was no longer able to speak to them. On Sunday, October

15, the attacks became more frequent and more violent, lasting for several hours in succession. The Countess Delphine Potocka, who was present, was greatly distressed; her tears were flowing quickly when he noticed her standing at the foot of his bed, tall, slight, clad in white, resembling the beautiful angels evolved from the imagination of the most devout of the painters. Without doubt he believed her to be a celestial apparition, and when a moment of repose occurred in one of his paroxysms, he asked her to sing. At first the bystanders thought he was seized with delirium, but he eagerly repeated his request. Who could have resisted his wish? The piano was brought from the parlour to his chamber door, and his gifted countrywoman sang, though sobs choked her utterance and scalding tears coursed down her cheeks. Her delightful voice had never before attained such an expression of profound pathos. As he listened, he seemed to suffer less. She sang that famous song to the Virgin, which we are told once saved the life of Stradella. "How beautiful it is!" he exclaimed; "my God, how very beautiful—again, again!" Though the Countess was overpowered by emotion, she yet had the noble courage to gratify the last wish of her

friend and compatriot; again she sat down to the piano, and sung a hymn by Marcello. Chopin again became worse, and everyone was seized with fright; all present fell by a spontaneous impulse on their knees; none ventured to speak; the sacred silence was broken only by the voice of the Countess, which like a heaven-born melody, floated above the heavy sighs and mournful sobs which constituted its earthly accompaniment. It was at the mystic hour of twilight; the dying light of day lent its sombre shadows to the sad scene; Chopin's sister, prostrate near his bed, wept and prayed, never quitting her attitude of supplication while life remained with the brother whom she had so fondly cherished.

During Sunday night his condition changed for the worse, but on Monday morning he felt more tranquil, and, as though he had known beforehand the appointed and propitious moment, he asked that he might at once receive the last sacraments. In the absence of the Abbé ———, with whom he had been closely intimate since their common expatriation, he requested that the Abbé Jelowicki, one of the most distinguished of the Polish *émigrés*, should be sent for. When the holy *Viaticum* was administered to him, he received it with great devotion,

surrounded by those who loved him. A little while after he called his friends one by one to his bedside to give to each his last earnest blessing, fervently calling down the grace of God upon them, their affections and hopes; every knee was bent, every head was bowed, every eye was heavy with tears, every heart was oppressed with woe, every soul was lifted up.

During the day attacks more and more painful returned and continued; from Monday night to Tuesday he never spoke a word. He did not appear to be able to distinguish those who were around him. About eleven on Tuesday night he seemed to revive a little. The Abbé Jelowicki had never left him, and no sooner had he recovered his power of speech than he requested the Abbé to repeat with him the prayers and litanies for the dying, and was able to accompany the Abbé in an audible and intelligible voice. From that moment until his death, his head lay on the shoulder of M. Gutman, who had devoted his days and nights to him during the whole course of his illness.

A convulsive sleep came over him, and lasted till October 17, 1849. The last agony began about two o'clock; a cold sweat ran profusely from his brow; after a brief fit of drowsiness he asked in

an almost inaudible voice, "Who is near me?" On receiving an answer, he bent his head to kiss the hand of M. Gutman, who still supported him, and while giving this last tender proof of his love and gratitude, the artist's soul escaped from the fragile clay which had held it. As he had lived, so he died—loving.

When the door of the parlour was opened, his friends, unable to suppress their rushing tears, threw themselves around the beloved corpse.

His love for flowers was well known, and the next day they were brought in such large quantities that the bed on which they had laid him, and indeed, the entire room almost disappeared from sight, hidden by the varied and beautiful hues of these floral offerings. He seemed to sleep in a garden of roses. After death his face regained its youthful beauty, its pure expression, and that serenity to which it had now long been unaccustomed. His youthful loveliness, so long dimmed by bitter sufferings, was restored by death, and, among the flowers he loved, he slept his long, last, dreamless sleep!

M. Clesinger reproduced, their early beauty now restored by death, those delicate traits in a sketch which he immediately modelled, and which he afterwards sculptured in marble for his tomb.

Chopin had always felt respectful admiration for the genius of Mozart, and as he had asked that the immortal "Requiem" of that composer should be performed at his obsequies, the wish was complied with. The funeral ceremonies took place in the Madeliene Church on October 30, 1849. They were delayed until that date to enable the execution of the "Requiem" to be worthy of the master and his disciple, the principal artists then in Paris being anxious to take part. Chopin's own "Funeral March," arranged for the instruments on the occasion by M. Reber, was played at the Introit. At the Offertory M. Lefèbure-Wély played on the organ his admirable Preludes in B and E minor. The solos in the "Requiem" were sung by Madame Viardot and Madame Castalan. Lablache, who had sung the "Tuba mirum" from Mozart's "Requiem" at the funeral of Beethoven in 1827, sang it again on this occasion. M. Meyerbeer and Prince Adam Czartoryski led the train of mourners; the pall-bearers were M. Delacroix, M. Franchomme, M. Gutman and Prince Alexander Czartoryski.

However inadequate these pages may be to speak of Chopin as we could have desired, we trust that whatever may be lacking in them will be compensated

for by the attraction which so justly surrounds his name. These lines are consecrated to the commemoration of his works and of all that he held dear, and can only be gifted with persuasive and sympathetic power by sincere esteem, enthusiastic regard, and intense sorrow for his loss; and if to these pages it were necessary to add some of those thoughts aroused in every man when death robs him of the contemporaries of his youth, and thus breaks the first ties linked by the confiding and deluded heart with all the greater pain if they are strong enough to outlive that bright period of young life, we would say that in the same year we lost the two dearest friends we have ever known on earth. One —unfortunate and valiant hero—perished in the wild course of civil war; he fell with his burning courage unsubdued, his intrepid calmness undisturbed, his chivalric temerity unabated by the endurance of the horrible tortures of a fearful death. He was a Prince of fine intelligence, of great activity, and of eminent faculties, and through whose veins the young blood coursed with the glittering ardour of some subtle gas. By his own untiring energy he had just succeeded in removing the difficulties which blocked his path, and in

creating an arena where his faculties might have displayed themselves as successfully in debates and the management of civil affairs as they had already done by brilliant feats of arms. The other friend, Chopin, died slowly, consumed by the fires of his own genius. His life was unconnected with public affairs, and was like some truth which has never been incorporated in a material body; the traces of his existence are only to be found in the works he has left behind him. He ended his days on a foreign soil and in a land which he had never regarded as his country, as he remained faithful in his devoted affections to the eternal widowhood of his own. He was a mournful-souled poet, full of reserve, intricate mystery, and familiar with the stern countenance of sorrow. The immediate interest he had felt in the movements of the parties in which was bound up the life of Prince Felix Lichnowsky was broken by his death; the death of Chopin has deprived us of all the consolations of an intelligent and comprehensive friendship. His affectionate sympathy with our feelings and with our way of understanding art, a sympathy of which this exclusive artist has given us so many proofs, while it strengthened us in our earliest tendencies and confirmed us in our first

essays, would have equally softened the disappointment and the weariness which yet lie before us. But since it has fallen to our lot to survive them, we desire at least to express the sincere regret which we feel for their loss. We feel ourselves bound to offer the homage of our deep and respectful sorrow upon the grave of the remarkable musician who has just passed from our midst. Music is now the subject of a great and widespread development that reminds us of that which occurred in painting in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when even those artists who confined the products of their genius to the margins of parchments painted their miniatures with so happy an inspiration that, having broken through the Byzantine stiffness, they left the most exquisite types, which the Francias, the Peruginos, and the Raphaels yet to come were to transplant to their frescoes and introduce in their canvases.

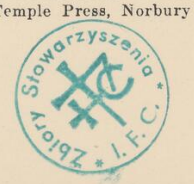
There have been people whose custom it was, in order to preserve the memory of their great men or the leading events in their history, to build pyramids of the stones which each passer-by was expected to bring to the pile, until, from the anonymous contributions of all, the pyramid slowly rose to an unlooked-for height. Monuments are even now erected by an analogous proceeding, but instead of building only a rude and unformed hillock, a fortunate combination of the contributions of all leads to the creation of some work of art which is not merely destined to perpetuate the mute remembrance to which they desire to honour, but which may also have power in coming ages to awaken emotions and feelings similar to those which gave birth to such a creation. In this design have originated those subscriptions opened to erect statues and noble memorials to men who have rendered illustrious their epoch or their country. M. Camille Pleyel conceived a project of this kind directly after Chopin's death, and commenced a subscription to have the monument modelled by M. Clesinger executed in marble and erected in Père Lachaise; and that subscription, as was generally expected, amounted to a very considerable sum. In pondering upon our long friendship with Chopin and on the exceptional admiration we have always felt for him from the day of his first appearance in the world of music; remembering that, being like him an artist, we have on frequent occasions been the interpreter of his

inspirations—an interpreter, we can safely venture to say, loved and chosen by himself; remembering, too, that we have more often than others received from his own lips the spirit of his style, and that we were to some extent identified with his artistic creations and with the feelings which he confided to them, through that long and constant process of assimilation which becomes established between a writer and his interpreter—we have fondly imagined that these connecting circumstances imposed upon us a nearer and dearer duty than that of simply adding an unformed and anonymous stone to the growing pyramid of homage which his contemporaries are building in his honour. We believed that the claims of an intimate and tender friendship for our illustrious associate required from us a more particular expression of our deep regret and of our high admiration. It seemed to us that we could not be true to ourselves unless we courted the honour of inscribing upon his sepulchral stone our name and our profound feeling of affliction! Surely this much may be granted to those who can never hope to fill the void left in their hearts by an irreparable loss! . . . .

THE END.

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CHOPIN.

LIFE OF CHOPIN

BY FRANZ LISZT

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