

ФЕРЕНЦ ЛИСТ

LIFE OF CHOPIN

Ференц Лист
Life of Chopin

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Life of Chopin:

Содержание

PREFACE	5
CHAPTER I	11
CHAPTER II	27
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	51

Franz Liszt

Life of Chopin

DEDICATION OF THE TRANSLATION TO JAN
PYCHOWSKI

Without your consent or knowledge, I have ventured to dedicate this translation to you!

As the countryman of Chopin, and filled with the same earnest patriotism which distinguished him; as an impassioned and perfect Pianist, capable, of reproducing his difficult compositions in all the subtle tenderness, fire, energy, melancholy, despair, caprice, hope, delicacy and startling vigor which they imperiously exact; as thorough master of the complicated instrument to which he devoted his best powers; as an erudite and experienced possessor of that abstruse and difficult science, music; as a composer of true, deep, and highly original genius,—this dedication is justly made to you!

Even though I may have wounded your characteristically haughty, shrinking, and Slavick susceptibilities in rendering so public a tribute to your artistic skill, forgive me! The high moral worth and manly rectitude which distinguish you, and which alone render even the most sublime genius truly illustrious in the eyes of woman, almost force these inadequate and imperfect words from the heart of the translator.

M.W.C.

PREFACE

To a people, always prompt in its recognition of genius, and ready to sympathize in the joys and woes of a truly great artist, this work will be one of exceeding interest. It is a short, glowing, and generous sketch, from the hand of Franz Liszt, (who, considered in the double light of composer and performer, has no living equal,) of the original and romantic Chopin; the most ethereal, subtle, and delicate among our modern tone-poets. It is a rare thing for a great artist to write on art, to leave the passionate worlds of sounds or colors for the colder realm of words; rarer still for him to abdicate, even temporarily, his own throne, to stand patiently and hold aloft the blazing torch of his own genius, to illumine the gloomy grave of another: yet this has Liszt done through love for Chopin.

It is a matter of considerable interest to note how the nervous and agile fingers, accustomed to sovereign rule over the keys, handle the pen; how the musician feels as a man; how he estimates art and artists. Liszt is a man of extensive culture, vivid imagination, and great knowledge of the world; and, in addition to their high artistic value, his lines glow with poetic fervor, with impassioned eloquence. His musical criticisms are refined and acute, but without repulsive technicalities or scientific terms, ever sparkling with the poetic ardor of the generous soul through which the discriminating, yet appreciative awards were poured.

Ah! in these days of degenerate rivalries and bitter jealousies, let us welcome a proof of affection so tender as his "Life of Chopin"!

It would be impossible for the reader of this book to remain ignorant of the exactions of art. While, through its eloquence and subtle analysis of character, it appeals to the cultivated literary tastes of our people, it opens for them a dazzling perspective into that strange world of tones, of whose magical realm they know, comparatively speaking, so little. It is intelligible to all who think or feel; requiring no knowledge of music for its comprehension.

The compositions of Chopin are now the mode, the rage. Every one asks for them, every one tries to play them. We have, however, but few remarks upon the peculiarities of his style, or the proper manner of producing his works. His compositions, generally perfect in form, are never abstract conceptions, but had their birth in his soul, sprang from the events of his life, and are full of individual and national idiosyncrasies, of psychological interest. Liszt knew Chopin both as man and artist; Chopin loved to hear him interpret his music, and himself taught the great Pianist the mysteries of his undulating rhythm and original motifs. The broad and noble criticisms contained in this book are absolutely essential for the musical culture of the thousands now laboriously but vainly struggling to perform his elaborate works, and who, having no key to their multiplied complexities of expression, frequently fail in rendering them aright.

And the masses in this country, full of vivid perception and

intelligent curiosity, who, not playing themselves, would yet fain follow with the heart compositions which they are told are of so much artistic value, will here find a key to guide them through the tuneful labyrinth. Some of Chopin's best works are analyzed herein. He wrote for the HEART OF HIS PEOPLE; their joys, sorrows, and caprices are immortalized by the power of his art. He was a strictly national tone-poet, and to understand him fully, something must be known of the brave and haughty, but unhappy country which he so loved. Liszt felt this, and has been exceedingly happy in the short sketch given of Poland. We actually know more of its picturesque and characteristic customs after a perusal of his graphic pages, than after a long course of dry historical details. His remarks on the Polonaise and Mazourka are full of the philosophy and essence of history. These dances grew directly from the heart of the Polish people; repeating the martial valor and haughty love of noble exhibition of their men; the tenderness, devotion, and subtle coquetry of their women—they were of course favorite forms with Chopin; their national character made them dear to the national poet. The remarks of Liszt on these dances are given with a knowledge so acute of the traits of the nation in which they originated, with such a gorgeousness of description and correctness of detail, that they rather resemble a highly finished picture, than a colder work of words only. They have all the splendor of a brilliant painting. He seizes the secrets of the nationality of these forms, traces them through the heart of the Polish people, follows them

through their marvelous transfiguration in the pages of the Polish artist, and reads by their light much of the sensitive and exclusive character of Chopin, analyzing it with the skill of love, while depicting it with romantic eloquence.

To those who can produce the compositions of Chopin in the spirit of their author, no words are necessary. They follow with the heart the poetic and palpitating emotions so exquisitely wrought through the aerial tissue of the tones by this "subtle-souled Psychologist," this bold and original explorer in the invisible world of sound;—all honor to their genius:

"Oh, happy! and of many millions, they
The purest chosen, whom Art's service pure
Hallows and claims—whose hearts are made her throne,
Whose lips her oracle, ordained secure,
To lead a priestly life, and feed the ray
Of her eternal shrine, to them alone
Her glorious countenance unveiled is shown:
Ye, the high brotherhood she links, rejoice
In the great rank allotted by her choice!
The loftiest rank the spiritual world sublime,
Rich with its starry thrones, gives to the sons of Time!"

Schiller.

Short but glowing sketches of Heine, Meyerbeer, Adolphe Nourrit, Hiller, Eugene Delacroix, Niemcewicz, Mickiewicz, and Madame Sand, occur in the book. The description of the last

days of poor Chopin's melancholy life, with the untiring devotion of those around him, including the beautiful countess, Delphine Potocka; his cherished sister, Louise; his devoted friend and pupil, M. Gutman, with the great Liszt himself, is full of tragic interest.

No pains have been spared by the translator to make the translation acceptable, for the task was truly a labor of love. No motives of interest induced the lingering over the careful rendering of the charmed pages, but an intense desire that our people should know more of musical art; that while acknowledging the generosity and eloquence of Liszt, they should learn to appreciate and love the more subtle fire, the more creative genius of the unfortunate, but honorable and honored artist, Chopin.

Perchance Liszt may yet visit us; we may yet hear the matchless Pianist call from their graves in the white keys, the delicate arabesques, the undulating and varied melodies, of Chopin. We should be prepared to appreciate the great Artist in his enthusiastic rendering of the master-pieces of the man he loved; prepared to greet him when he electrifies us with his wonderful Cyclopean harmonies, written for his own Herculean grasp, sparkling with his own Promethean fire, which no meaner hand can ever hope to master! "Hear Liszt and die," has been said by some of his enthusiastic admirers—understand him and live, were the wiser advice!

In gratitude then to Chopin for the multiplied sources of high

and pure pleasure which he has revealed to humanity in his creations, that human woe and sorrow become pure beauty when his magic spell is on them, the translator calls upon all lovers of the beautiful "to contribute a stone to the pyramid now rapidly erecting in honor of the great modern composer"—ay, the living stone of appreciation, crystalized in the enlightened gratitude of the heart.

"So works this music upon earth
God so admits it, sends it forth.
To add another worth to worth—

A new creation-bloom that rounds
The old creation, and expounds
His Beautiful in tuneful sounds."

CHAPTER I

Chopin—Style and Improvements—The Adagio of the Second Concerto—Funeral March—Psychological Character of the Compositions of Chopin, &c., &c.

Deeply regretted as he may be by the whole body of artists, lamented by all who have ever known him, we must still be permitted to doubt if the time has even yet arrived in which he, whose loss is so peculiarly deplored by ourselves, can be appreciated in accordance with his just value, or occupy that high rank which in all probability will be assigned him in the future.

If it has been often proved that "no one is a prophet in his own country;" is it not equally true that the prophets, the men of the future, who feel its life in advance, and prefigure it in their works, are never recognized as prophets in their own times? It would be presumptuous to assert that it can ever be otherwise. In vain may the young generations of artists protest against the "Anti-progressives," whose invariable custom it is to assault and beat down the living with the dead: time alone can test the real value, or reveal the hidden beauties, either of musical compositions, or of kindred efforts in the sister arts.

As the manifold forms of art are but different incantations, charged with electricity from the soul of the artist, and destined to evoke the latent emotions and passions in order to render them sensible, intelligible, and, in some degree, tangible; so genius

may be manifested in the invention of new forms, adapted, it may be, to the expression of feelings which have not yet surged within the limits of common experience, and are indeed first evoked within the magic circle by the creative power of artistic intuition. In arts in which sensation is linked to emotion, without the intermediate assistance of thought and reflection, the mere introduction of unaccustomed forms, of unused modes, must present an obstacle to the immediate comprehension of any very original composition. The surprise, nay, the fatigue, caused by the novelty of the singular impressions which it awakens, will make it appear to many as if written in a language of which they were ignorant, and which that reason will in itself be sufficient to induce them to pronounce a barbarous dialect. The trouble of accustoming the ear to it will repel many who will, in consequence, refuse to make a study of it. Through the more vivid and youthful organizations, less enthralled by the chains of habit; through the more ardent spirits, won first by curiosity, then filled with passion for the new idiom, must it penetrate and win the resisting and opposing public, which will finally catch the meaning, the aim, the construction, and at last render justice to its qualities, and acknowledge whatever beauty it may contain. Musicians who do not restrict themselves within the limits of conventional routine, have, consequently, more need than other artists of the aid of time. They cannot hope that death will bring that instantaneous plus-value to their works which it gives to those of the painters. No musician could renew, to the profit

of his manuscripts, the deception practiced by one of the great Flemish painters, who, wishing in his lifetime to benefit by his future glory, directed his wife to spread abroad the news of his death, in order that the pictures with which he had taken care to cover the walls of his studio, might suddenly increase in value!

Whatever may be the present popularity of any part of the productions of one, broken, by suffering long before taken by death, it is nevertheless to be presumed that posterity will award to his works an estimation of a far higher character, of a much more earnest nature, than has hitherto been awarded them. A high rank must be assigned by the future historians of music to one who distinguished himself in art by a genius for melody so rare, by such graceful and remarkable enlargements of the harmonic tissue; and his triumph will be justly preferred to many of far more extended surface, though the works of such victors may be played and replayed by the greatest number of instruments, and be sung and resung by passing crowds of Prime Donne.

In confining himself exclusively to the Piano, Chopin has, in our opinion, given proof of one of the most essential qualities of a composer—a just appreciation of the form in which he possessed the power to excel; yet this very fact, to which we attach so much importance, has been injurious to the extent of his fame. It would have been most difficult for any other writer, gifted with such high harmonic and melodic powers, to have resisted the temptation of the SINGING of the bow,

the liquid sweetness of the flute, or the deafening swells of the trumpet, which we still persist in believing the only forerunner of the antique goddess from whom we woo the sudden favors. What strong conviction, based upon reflection, must have been requisite to have induced him to restrict himself to a circle apparently so much more barren; what warmth of creative genius must have been necessary to have forced from its apparent aridity a fresh growth of luxuriant bloom, un hoped for in such a soil! What intuitive penetration is repealed by this exclusive choice, which, wresting the different effects of the various instruments from their habitual domain, where the whole foam of sound would have broken at their feet, transported them into a sphere, more limited, indeed, but far more idealized! What confident perception of the future powers of his instrument must have presided over his voluntary renunciation of an empiricism, so widely spread, that another would have thought it a mistake, a folly, to have wrested such great thoughts from their ordinary interpreters! How sincerely should we revere him for this devotion to the Beautiful for its own sake, which induced him not to yield to the general propensity to scatter each light spray of melody over a hundred orchestral desks, and enabled him to augment the resources of art, in teaching how they may be concentrated in a more limited space, elaborated at less expense of means, and condensed in time!

Far from being ambitious of the uproar of an orchestra, Chopin was satisfied to see his thought integrally produced upon

the ivory of the key-board; succeeding in his aim of losing nothing in power, without pretending to orchestral effects, or to the brush of the scene-painter. Oh! we have not yet studied with sufficient earnestness and attention the designs of his delicate pencil, habituated as we are, in these days, to consider only those composers worthy of a great name, who have written at least half-a-dozen Operas, as many Oratorios, and various Symphonies: vainly requiring every musician to do every thing, nay, a little more than every thing. However widely diffused this idea may be, its justice is, to say the least, highly problematical. We are far from contesting the glory more difficult of attainment, or the real superiority of the Epic poets, who display their splendid creations upon so large a plan; but we desire that material proportion in music should be estimated by the same measure which is applied to dimension in other branches of the fine arts; as, for example, in painting, where a canvas of twenty inches square, as the *Vision of Ezekiel*, or *Le Cimetiere* by Ruysdael, is placed among the chefs d'oeuvre, and is more highly valued than pictures of a far larger size, even though they might be from the hands of a Rubens or a Tintoret. In literature, is Beranger less a great poet, because he has condensed his thoughts within the narrow limits of his songs? Does not Petrarch owe his fame to his Sonnets? and among those who most frequently repeat their soothing rhymes, how many know any thing of the existence of his long poem on Africa? We cannot doubt that the prejudice which would deny the superiority of an artist—

though he should have produced nothing but such Sonatas as Franz Schubert has given us—over one who has portioned out the insipid melodies of many Operas, which it were useless to cite, will disappear; and that in music, also, we will yet take into account the eloquence and ability with which the thoughts and feelings are expressed, whatever may be the size of the composition in which they are developed, or the means employed to interpret them.

In making an analysis of the works of Chopin, we meet with beauties of a high order, expressions entirely new, and a harmonic tissue as original as erudite. In his compositions, boldness is always justified; richness, even exuberance, never interferes with clearness; singularity never degenerates into uncouth fantasticalness; the sculpturing is never disorderly; the luxury of ornament never overloads the chaste eloquence of the principal lines. His best works abound in combinations which may be said to form an epoch in the handling of musical style. Daring, brilliant and attractive, they disguise their profundity under so much grace, their science under so many charms, that it is with difficulty we free ourselves sufficiently from their magical enthrallment, to judge coldly of their theoretical value. Their worth has, however, already been felt; but it will be more highly estimated when the time arrives for a critical examination of the services rendered by them to art during that period of its course traversed by Chopin.

It is to him we owe the extension of chords, struck together

in arpeggio, or en batterie; the chromatic sinuosities of which his pages offer such striking examples; the little groups of superadded notes, falling like light drops of pearly dew upon the melodic figure. This species of adornment had hitherto been modeled only upon the Fioritures of the great Old School of Italian song; the embellishments for the voice had been servilely copied by the Piano, although become stereotyped and monotonous: he imparted to them the charm of novelty, surprise and variety, unsuited for the vocalist, but in perfect keeping with the character of the instrument. He invented the admirable harmonic progressions which have given a serious character to pages, which, in consequence of the lightness of their subject, made no pretension to any importance. But of what consequence is the subject? Is it not the idea which is developed through it, the emotion with which it vibrates, which expands, elevates and ennobles it? What tender melancholy, what subtlety, what sagacity in the master-pieces of *La Fontaine*, although the subjects are so familiar, the titles so modest? Equally unassuming are the titles and subjects of the *Studies* and *Preludes*; yet the compositions of Chopin, so modestly named, are not the less types of perfection in a mode created by himself, and stamped, like all his other works, with the high impress of his poetic genius. Written in the commencement of his career, they are characterized by a youthful vigor not to be found in some of his subsequent works, even when more elaborate, finished, and richer in combinations; a vigor, which is entirely lost in his latest

productions, marked by an over-excited sensibility, a morbid irritability, and giving painful intimations of his own state of suffering and exhaustion.

If it were our intention to discuss the development of Piano music in the language of the Schools, we would dissect his magnificent pages, which afford so rich a field for scientific observation. We would, in the first place, analyze his Nocturnes, Ballades, Impromptus, Scherzos, which are full of refinements of harmony never heard before; bold, and of startling originality. We would also examine his Polonaises, Mazourkas, Waltzes and Boleros. But this is not the time or place for such a study, which would be interesting only to the adepts in Counterpoint and Thoroughbass.

It is the feeling which overflows in all his works, which has rendered them known and popular; feeling of a character eminently romantic, subjective individual, peculiar to their author, yet awakening immediate sympathy; appealing not alone to the heart of that country indebted to him for yet one glory more, but to all who can be touched by the misfortunes of exile, or moved by the tenderness of love. Not content with success in the field in which he was free to design, with such perfect grace, the contours chosen by himself, Chopin also wished to fetter his ideal thoughts with classic chains. His Concertos and Sonatas are beautiful indeed, but we may discern in them more effort than inspiration. His creative genius was imperious, fantastic and impulsive. His beauties were only manifested fully in entire

freedom. We believe he offered violence to the character of his genius whenever he sought to subject it to rules, to classifications, to regulations not his own, and which he could not force into harmony with the exactions of his own mind. He was one of those original beings, whose graces are only fully displayed when they have cut themselves adrift from all bondage, and float on at their own wild will, swayed only by the ever undulating impulses of their own mobile natures.

He was, perhaps, induced to desire this double success through the example of his friend, Mickiewicz, who, having been the first to gift his country with romantic poetry, forming a school in Sclavic literature by the publication of his *Dziady*, and his romantic Ballads, as early as 1818, proved afterwards, by the publication at his *Grazyna* and *Wallenrod*, that he could triumph over the difficulties that classic restrictions oppose to inspiration, and that, when holding the classic lyre of the ancient poets, he was still master. In making analogous attempts, we do not think Chopin has been equally successful. He could not retain, within the square of an angular and rigid mould, that floating and indeterminate contour which so fascinates us in his graceful conceptions. He could not introduce in its unyielding lines that shadowy and sketchy indecision, which, disguising the skeleton, the whole frame-work of form, drapes it in the mist of floating vapors, such as surround the white-bosomed maids of Ossian, when they permit mortals to catch some vague, yet lovely outline, from their home in the changing, drifting, blinding clouds.

Some of these efforts, however, are resplendent with a rare dignity of style; and passages of exceeding interest, of surprising grandeur, may be found among them. As an example of this, we cite the Adagio of the Second Concerto, for which he evinced a decided preference, and which he liked to repeat frequently. The accessory designs are in his best manner, while the principal phrase is of an admirable breadth. It alternates with a Recitative, which assumes a minor key, and which seems to be its Antistrophe. The whole of this piece is of a perfection almost ideal; its expression, now radiant with light, now full of tender pathos. It seems as if one had chosen a happy vale of Tempe, a magnificent landscape flooded with summer glow and lustre, as a background for the rehearsal of some dire scene of mortal anguish. A bitter and irreparable regret seizes the wildly-throbbing human heart, even in the midst of the incomparable splendor of external nature. This contrast is sustained by a fusion of tones, a softening of gloomy hues, which prevent the intrusion of aught rude or brusque that might awaken a dissonance in the touching impression produced, which, while saddening joy, soothes and softens the bitterness of sorrow.

It would be impossible to pass in silence the Funeral March inserted in the first Sonata, which was arranged for the orchestra, and performed, for the first time, at his own obsequies. What other accents could have been found capable of expressing, with the same heart-breaking effect, the emotions, the tears, which should accompany to the last long sleep, one who had taught in

a manner so sublime, how great losses should be mourned? We once heard it remarked by a native of his own country: "these pages could only have been written by a Pole." All that the funeral train of an entire nation weeping its own ruin and death can be imagined to feel of desolating woe, of majestic sorrow, wails in the musical ringing of this passing bell, mourns in the tolling of this solemn knell, as it accompanies the mighty escort on its way to the still city of the Dead. The intensity of mystic hope; the devout appeal to superhuman pity, to infinite mercy, to a dread justice, which numbers every cradle and watches every tomb; the exalted resignation which has wreathed so much grief with halos so luminous; the noble endurance of so many disasters with the inspired heroism of Christian martyrs who know not to despair;—resound in this melancholy chant, whose voice of supplication breaks the heart. All of most pure, of most holy, of most believing, of most hopeful in the hearts of children, women, and priests, resounds, quivers and trembles there with irresistible vibrations. We feel it is not the death of a single warrior we mourn, while other heroes live to avenge him, but that a whole generation of warriors has forever fallen, leaving the death song to be chanted but by wailing women, weeping children and helpless priests. Yet this Melopée so funereal, so full of desolating woe, is of such penetrating sweetness, that we can scarcely deem it of this earth. These sounds, in which the wild passion of human anguish seems chilled by awe and softened by distance, impose a profound meditation, as if, chanted by angels,

they floated already in the heavens: the cry of a nation's anguish mounting to the very throne of God! The appeal of human grief from the lyre of seraphs! Neither cries, nor hoarse groans, nor impious blasphemies, nor furious imprecations, trouble for a moment the sublime sorrow of the plaint: it breathes upon the ear like the rhythmed sighs of angels. The antique face of grief is entirely excluded. Nothing recalls the fury of Cassandra, the prostration of Priam, the frenzy of Hecuba, the despair of the Trojan captives. A sublime faith destroying in the survivors of this Christian Ilion the bitterness of anguish and the cowardice of despair, their sorrow is no longer marked by earthly weakness. Raising itself from the soil wet with blood and tears, it springs forward to implore God; and, having nothing more to hope from earth, it supplicates the Supreme Judge with prayers so poignant, that our hearts, in listening, break under the weight of an august compassion! It would be a mistake to suppose that all the compositions of Chopin are deprived of the feelings which he has deemed best to suppress in this great work. Not so. Perhaps human nature is not capable of maintaining always this mood of energetic abnegation, of courageous submission. We meet with breathings of stifled rage, of suppressed anger, in many passages of his writings: and many of his Studies, as well as his Scherzos, depict a concentrated exasperation and despair, which are sometimes manifested in bitter irony, sometimes in intolerant hauteur. These dark apostrophes of his muse have attracted less attention, have been less fully understood, than his poems

of more tender coloring. The personal character of Chopin had something to do with this general misconception. Kind, courteous, and affable, of tranquil and almost joyous manners, he would not suffer the secret convulsions which agitated him to be even suspected.

His character was indeed not easily understood. A thousand subtle shades, mingling, crossing, contradicting and disguising each other, rendered it almost undecipherable at a first view. As is usually the case with the Slaves, it was difficult to read the recesses of his mind. With them, loyalty and candor, familiarity and the most captivating ease of manner, by no means imply confidence, or impulsive frankness. Like the twisted folds of a serpent rolled upon itself, their feelings are half hidden, half revealed. It requires a most attentive examination to follow the coiled linking of the glittering rings. It would be naive to interpret literally their courtesy full of compliment, their assumed humility. The forms of this politeness, this modesty, have their solution in their manners, in which their ancient connection with the East may be strangely traced. Without having in the least degree acquired the taciturnity of the Mussulman, they have yet learned from it a distrustful reserve upon all subjects which touch upon the more delicate and personal chords of the heart. When they speak of themselves, we may almost always be certain that they keep some concealment in reserve, which assures them the advantage in intellect, or feeling. They suffer their interrogator to remain in ignorance of

some circumstance, some mobile secret, through the unveiling of which they would be more admired, or less esteemed, and which they well know how to hide under the subtle smile of an almost imperceptible mockery. Delighting in the pleasure of mystification, from the most spiritual or comic to the most bitter and melancholy, they may perhaps find in this deceptive raillery an external formula of disdain for the veiled expression of the superiority which they internally claim, but which claim they veil with the caution and astuteness natural to the oppressed.

The frail and sickly organization of Chopin, not permitting him the energetic expression of his passions, he gave to his friends only the gentle and affectionate phase of his nature. In the busy, eager life of large cities, where no one has time to study the destiny of another, where every one is judged by his external activity, very few think it worth while to attempt to penetrate the enigma of individual character. Those who enjoyed familiar intercourse with Chopin, could not be blind to the impatience and ennui he experienced in being, upon the calm character of his manners, so promptly believed. And may not the artist revenge the man? As his health was too frail to permit him to give vent to his impatience through the vehemence of his execution, he sought to compensate himself by pouring this bitterness over those pages which he loved to hear performed with a vigor [Footnote: It was his delight to hear them executed by the great Liszt himself.—Translator.] which he could not himself always command: pages which are indeed full of the

impassioned feelings of a man suffering deeply from wounds which he does not choose to avow. Thus around a gaily flagged, yet sinking ship, float the fallen spars and scattered fragments, torn by warring winds and surging waves from its shattered sides.

Such emotions have been of so much the more importance in the life of Chopin, because they have deeply influenced the character of his compositions. Among the pages published under such influences, may be traced much analogous to the wire-drawn subtleties of Jean Paul, who found it necessary, in order to move hearts macerated by passion, blazes through suffering, to make use of the surprises caused by natural and physical phenomena; to evoke the sensations of luxurious terrors arising from occurrences not to be foreseen in the natural order of things; to awaken the morbid excitements of a dreamy brain. Step by step the tortured mind of Chopin arrived at a state of sickly irritability; his emotions increased to a feverish tremor, producing that involution, that tortuosity of thought, which mark his latest works. Almost suffocating under the oppression of repressed feelings, using art only to repeat and rehearse for himself his own internal tragedy, after having wearied emotion, he began to subtilize it. His melodies are actually tormented; a nervous and restless sensibility leads to an obstinate persistence in the handling and rehandling and a reiterated pursuit of the tortured motifs, which impress us as painfully as the sight of those physical or mental agonies which we know can find relief only in death. Chopin was a victim to a disease without hope,

which growing more envenomed from year to year, took him, while yet young, from those who loved him, and laid him in his still grave. As in the fair form of some beautiful victim, the marks of the grasping claws of the fierce bird of prey which has destroyed it, may be found; so, in the productions of which we have just spoken, the traces of the bitter sufferings which devoured his heart, are painfully visible.

CHAPTER II

National Character of the Polonaise—Oginski—Meyseder—Weber—Chopin—His Polonaise in F Sharp, Minor—Polonaise—Fantaisie.

It must not be supposed that the tortured aberrations of feeling to which we have just alluded, ever injure the harmonic tissue in the works of Chopin on the contrary, they only render it a more curious subject for analysis. Such eccentricities rarely occur in his more generally known and admired compositions. His Polonaises, which are less studied than they merit, on account of the difficulties presented by their perfect execution, are to be classed among his highest inspirations. They never remind us of the mincing and affected "Polonaises a la Pompadour," which our orchestras have introduced into ball-rooms, our virtuosi in concerts, or of those to be found in our "Parlor Repertories," filled, as they invariably are, with hackneyed collections of music, marked by insipidity and mannerism.

His Polonaises, characterized by an energetic rhythm, galvanize and electrify the torpor of indifference. The most noble traditional feelings of ancient Poland are embodied in them. The firm resolve and calm gravity of its men of other days, breathe through these compositions. Generally of a martial character, courage and daring are rendered with that simplicity of expression, said to be a distinctive trait of this warlike people.

They bring vividly before the imagination, the ancient Poles, as we find them described in their chronicles; gifted with powerful organizations, subtle intellects, indomitable courage and earnest piety, mingled with high-born courtesy and a gallantry which never deserted them, whether on the eve of battle, during its exciting course, in the triumph of victory, or amidst the gloom of defeat. So inherent was this gallantry and chivalric courtesy in their nature, that in spite of the restraint which their customs (resembling those of their neighbours and enemies, the infidels of Stamboul) induced them to exercise upon their women, confining them in the limits of domestic life and always holding them under legal wardship, they still manifest themselves in their annals, in which they have glorified and immortalized queens who were saints; vassals who became queens, beautiful subjects for whose sake some periled, while others lost, crowns: a terrible Sforza; an intriguing d'Arquien; and a coquettish Gonzaga.

The Poles of olden times united a manly firmness with this peculiar chivalric devotion to the objects of their love. A characteristic example of this may be seen in the letters of Jean Sobieski to his wife. They were dictated in face of the standards of the Crescent, "numerous as the ears in a grain-field," tender and devoted as is their character. Such traits caught a singular and imposing hue from the grave deportment of these men, so dignified that they might almost be accused of pomposity. It was next to impossible that they should not contract a taste for this stateliness, when we consider that they had almost always

before them the most exquisite type of gravity of manner in the followers of Islam, whose qualities they appreciated and appropriated, even while engaged in repelling their invasions. Like the infidel, they knew how to preface their acts by an intelligent deliberation, so that the device of Prince Boleslas of Pomerania, was always present to them: "First weigh it; then dare." Erst wieg's: dann wag's! Such deliberation imparted a kind of stately pride to their movements, while it left them in possession of an ease and freedom of spirit accessible to the lightest cares of tenderness, to the most trivial interests of the passing hour, to the most transient feelings of the heart. As it made part of their code of honor to make those who interfered with them, in their more tender interests, pay dearly for it; so they knew how to beautify life, and, better still, they knew how to love those who embellished it; to revere those who rendered it precious to them.

Their chivalric heroism was sanctioned by their grave and haughty dignity; an intelligent and premeditated conviction added the force of reason to the energy of impulsive virtue; thus they have succeeded in winning the admiration of all ages, of all minds, even that of their most determined adversaries. They were characterized by qualities rarely found together, the description of which would appear almost paradoxical: reckless wisdom, daring prudence, and fanatic fatalism. The most marked and celebrated historic manifestation of these properties is to be found in the expedition of Sobieski when he

saved Vienna, and gave a mortal blow to the Ottoman Empire, which was at last conquered in the long struggle, sustained on both sides with so much prowess and glory, with so much mutual deference between opponents as magnanimous in their truces as irreconcilable in their combats.

While listening to some of the POLONAISES of Chopin, we can almost catch the firm, nay, the more than firm, the heavy, resolute tread of men bravely facing all the bitter injustice which the most cruel and relentless destiny can offer, with the manly pride of unblenching courage. The progress of the music suggests to our imagination such magnificent groups as were designed by Paul Veronese, robed in the rich costume of days long past: we see passing at intervals before us, brocades of gold, velvets, damasked satins, silvery soft and flexile sables, hanging sleeves gracefully thrown back upon the shoulders, embossed sabres, boots yellow as gold or red with trampled blood, sashes with long and undulating fringes, close chemisettes, rustling trains, stomachers embroidered with pearls, head dresses glittering with rubies or leafy with emeralds, light slippers rich with amber, gloves perfumed with the luxurious attar from the harems. From the faded background of times long passed these vivid groups start forth; gorgeous carpets from Persia lie at their feet, filigreed furniture from Constantinople stands around; all is marked by the sumptuous prodigality of the Magnates who drew, in ruby goblets embossed with medallions, wine from the fountains of Tokay, and shod their fleet Arabian steeds with silver, who surmounted

all their escutcheons with the same crown which the fate of an election might render a royal one, and which, causing them to despise all other titles, was alone worn as INSIGNE of their glorious equality.

Those who have seen the Polonaise danced even as late as the beginning of the present century, declare that its style has changed so much, that it is now almost impossible to divine its primitive character. As very few national dances have succeeded in preserving their racy originality, we may imagine, when we take into consideration the changes which have occurred, to what a degree this has degenerated. The Polonaise is without rapid movements, without any true steps in the artistic sense of the word, intended rather for display than for the exhibition of seductive grace; so we may readily conceive it must lose all its haughty importance, its pompous self-sufficiency, when the dancers are deprived of the accessories necessary to enable them to animate its simple form by dignified, yet vivid gestures, by appropriate and expressive pantomime, and when the costume peculiarly fitted for it is no longer worn. It has indeed become decidedly monotonous, a mere circulating promenade, exciting but little interest. Unless we could see it danced by some of the old regime who still wear the ancient costume, or listen to their animated descriptions of it, we can form no conception of the numerous incidents, the scenic pantomime, which once rendered it so effective. By a rare exception this dance was designed to exhibit the men, to display manly beauty, to set

off noble and dignified deportment, martial yet courtly bearing. "Martial yet courtly:" do not these two epithets almost define the Polish character? In the original the very name of the dance is masculine; it is only in consequence of a misconception that it has been translated in other tongues into the feminine gender.

Those who have never seen the KONTUSZ worn, (it is a kind of Occidental kaftan, as it is the robe of the Orientals, modified to suit the customs of an active life, unfettered by the stagnant resignation taught by fatalism,) a sort of FEREDGI, often trimmed with fur, forcing the wearer to make frequent movements susceptible of grace and coquetry, by which the flowing sleeves are thrown backward, can scarcely imagine the bearing, the slow bending, the quick rising, the finesse of the delicate pantomime displayed by the Ancients, as they defiled in a Polonaise, as though in a military parade, not suffering their fingers to remain idle, but sometimes occupying them in playing with the long moustache, sometimes with the handle of the sword. Both moustache and sword were essential parts of the costume, and were indeed objects of vanity with all ages. Diamonds and sapphires frequently sparkled upon the arms, worn suspended from belts of cashmere, or from sashes of silk embroidered with gold, displaying to advantage forms always slightly corpulent; the moustache often veiled, without quite hiding, some scar, far more effective than the most brilliant array of jewels. The dress of the men rivaled that of the women in the luxury of the material worn, in the value of the precious

stones, and in the variety of vivid colors. This love of adornment is also found among the Hungarians,¹ as may be seen in their buttons made of jewels, the rings forming a necessary part of their dress, the wrought clasps for the neck, the aigrettes and plumes adorning the cap made of velvet of some brilliant hue. To know how to take off, to put on, to manoeuvre the cap with all possible grace, constituted almost an art. During the progress of a Polonaise, this became an object of especial remark, because the cavalier of the leading pair, as commandant of the file, gave the mute word of command, which was immediately obeyed and imitated by the rest of the train.

The master of the house in which the ball was given, always opened it himself by leading off in this dance. His partner was selected neither for her beauty, nor youth; the most highly honored lady present was always chosen. This phalanx, by whose evolutions every fete was commenced, was not formed only of the young: it was composed of the most distinguished, as well as of the most beautiful. A grand review, a dazzling exhibition of all the distinction present, was offered as the highest pleasure of the festival. After the host, came next in order the guests of the greatest consideration, who, choosing their partners, some from friendship, some from policy or from desire of advancement, some from love,—followed closely his steps. His task was a far

¹ The Hungarian costume worn by Prince Nicholas Esterhazy at the coronation of George the Fourth, is still remembered in England. It was valued at several millions of florins.

more complicated one than it is at present. He was expected to conduct the files under his guidance through a thousand capricious meanderings, through long suites of apartments lined by guests, who were to take a later part in this brilliant cortege. They liked to be conducted through distant galleries, through the parterres of illuminated gardens, through the groves of shrubbery, where distant echoes of the music alone reached the ear, which, as if in revenge, greeted them with redoubled sound and blowing of trumpets upon their return to the principal saloon. As the spectators, ranged like rows of hedges along the route, were continually changing, and never ceased for a moment to observe all their movements, the dancers never forgot that dignity of bearing and address which won for them the admiration of women, and excited the jealousy of men. Vain and joyous, the host would have deemed himself wanting in courtesy to his guests, had he not evinced to them, which he did sometimes with a piquant naivete, the pride he felt in seeing himself surrounded by persons so illustrious, and partisans so noble, all striving through the splendor of the attire chosen to visit him, to show their high sense of the honor in which they held him.

Guided by him in their first circuit, they were led through long windings, where unexpected turns, views, and openings had been arranged beforehand to cause surprise; where architectural deceptions, decorations and shifting scenes had been studiously adapted to increase the pleasure of the festival. If any monument or inscription, fitted for the occasion, lay upon the long line

of route, from which some complimentary homage might be drawn to the "most valiant or the most beautiful," the honors were gracefully done by the host. The more unexpected the surprises arranged for these excursions, the more imagination evinced in their invention, the louder were the applauses from the younger part of the society, the more ardent the exclamations of delight; and silvery sounds of merry laughter greeted pleasantly the ears of the conductor-in-chief, who, having thus succeeded in achieving his reputation, became a privileged Corypheus, a leader par excellence. If he had already attained a certain age, he was greeted on his return from such circuits by frequent deputations of young ladies, who came, in the name of all present, to thank and congratulate him. Through their vivid descriptions, these pretty wanderers excited the curiosity of the guests, and increased the eagerness for the formation of the succeeding Polonaises among those who, though they did not make part of the procession, still watched its passage in motionless attention, as if gazing upon the flashing line of light of some brilliant meteor.

In this land of aristocratic democracy, the numerous dependents of the great seigniorial houses, (too poor, indeed, to take part in the fete, yet only excluded from it by their own volition, all, however noble, some even more noble than their lords,) being all present, it was considered highly desirable to dazzle them; and this flowing chain of rainbow-hued and gorgeous light, like an immense serpent with its glittering rings,

sometimes wreathed its linked folds, sometimes uncoiled its entire length, to display its brilliancy through the whole line of its undulating animated surface, in the most vivid scintillations; accompanying the shifting hues with the silvery sounds of chains of gold, ringing like muffled bells; with the rustling of the heavy sweep of gorgeous damasks and with the dragging of jewelled swords upon the floor. The murmuring sound of many voices announced the approach of this animated, varied, and glittering life-stream.

But the genius of hospitality, never deficient in high-born courtesy, and which, even while preserving the touching simplicity of primitive manners, inspired in Poland all the refinements of the most advanced state of civilization,—how could it be exiled from the details of a dance so eminently Polish? After the host had, by inaugurating the fete, rendered due homage to all who were present, any one of his guests had the right to claim his place with the lady whom he had honored by his choice. The new claimant, clapping his hands, to arrest for a moment the ever moving cortege, bowed before the partner of the host, begging her graciously to accept the change; while the host, from whom she had been taken, made the same appeal to the lady next in course. This example was followed by the whole train. Constantly changing partners, whenever a new cavalier claimed the honor of leading the one first chosen by the host, the ladies remained in the same succession during the whole course; while, on the contrary, as the gentlemen continually replaced

each other, he who had commenced the dance, would, in its progress, become the last, if not indeed entirely excluded before its close.

Each cavalier who placed himself in turn at the head of the column, tried to surpass his predecessors in the novelty of the combinations of his opening, in the complications of the windings through which he led the expectant cortege; and this course, even when restricted to a single saloon, might be made remarkable by the designing of graceful arabesques, or the involved tracing of enigmatical ciphers. He made good his claim to the place he had solicited, and displayed his skill, by inventing close, complicated and inextricable figures; by describing them with so much certainty and accuracy, that the living ribbon, turned and twisted as it might be, was never broken in the loosing of its wreathed knots; and by so leading, that no confusion or graceless jostling should result from the complicated torsion. The succeeding couples, who had only to follow the figures already given, and thus continue the impulsion, were not permitted to drag themselves lazily and listlessly along the parquet. The step was rhythmic, cadenced, and undulating; the whole form swayed by graceful wavings and harmonious balancings. They were careful never to advance with too much haste, nor to replace each other as if driven on by some urgent necessity. On they glided, like swans descending a tranquil stream, their flexile forms swayed by the ebb and swell of unseen and gentle waves. Sometimes, the gentleman offered the right, sometimes, the left

hand to his partner; touching only the points of her fingers, or clasping the slight hand within his own, he passed now to her right, now to her left, without yielding the snowy treasure. These complicated movements, being instantaneously imitated by every pair, ran, like an electric shiver, through the whole length of this gigantic serpent. Although apparently occupied and absorbed by these multiplied manoeuvres, the cavalier yet found time to bend to his lady and whisper sweet flatteries in her ear, if she were young; if young no longer, to repose confidence, to urge requests, or to repeat to her the news of the hour. Then, haughtily raising himself, he would make the metal of his arms ring, caress his thick moustache, giving to all his features an expression so vivid, that the lady was forced to respond by the animation of her own countenance.

Thus, it was no hackneyed and senseless promenade which they executed; it was, rather, a parade in which the whole splendor of the society was exhibited, gratified with its own admiration, conscious of its own elegance, brilliancy, nobility and courtesy. It was a constant display of its lustre, its glory, its renown. Men grown gray in camps, or in the strife of courtly eloquence; generals more often seen in the cuirass than in the robes of peace; prelates and persons high in the Church; dignitaries of State aged senators; warlike palatines; ambitious castellans;—were the partners who were expected, welcomed, disputed and sought for, by the youngest, gayest, and most brilliant women present. Honor and glory rendered ages equal,

and caused years to be forgotten in this dance; nay, more, they gave an advantage even over love. It was while listening to the animated descriptions of the almost forgotten evolutions and dignified capabilities of this truly national dance, from the lips of those who would never abandon the ancient Zupan and Kontusz, and who still wore their hair closely cut round their temples, as it had been worn by their ancestors, that we first fully understood in what a high degree this haughty nation possessed the innate instinct of its own exhibition, and how entirely it had succeeded, through its natural grace and genius, in poetizing its love of ostentation by draping it in the charms of noble emotions, and wrapping round it the glittering robes of martial glory.

When we visited the country of Chopin, whose memory always accompanied us like a faithful guide who constantly keeps our interest excited, we were fortunate enough to meet with some of the peculiar characters, daily growing more rare, because European civilization, even where it does not modify the basis of character, effaces asperities, and moulds exterior forms. We there encountered some of those men gifted with superior intellect, cultivated and strongly developed by a life of incessant action, yet whose horizon does not extend beyond the limits of their own country, their own society, their own traditions. During our intercourse, facilitated by an interpreter, with these men of past days, we were able to study them and to understand the secret of their greatness. It was really curious to observe the inimitable originality caused by the utter

exclusiveness of the view taken by them. This limited cultivation, while it greatly diminishes the value of their ideas upon many subjects, at the same time gifts the mind with a peculiar force, almost resembling the keen scent and the acute perceptions of the savage, for all the things near and dear to it. Only from a mind of this peculiar training, marked by a concentrative energy that nothing can distract from its course, every thing beyond the circle of its own nationality remaining alien to it, can we hope to obtain an exact picture of the past; for it alone, like a faithful mirror, reflects it in its primal coloring, preserves its proper lights and shades, and gives it with its varied and picturesque accompaniments. From such minds alone can we obtain, with the ritual of customs which are rapidly becoming extinct, the spirit from which they emanated. Chopin was born too late, and left the domestic hearth too early, to be himself in possession of this spirit; but he had known many examples of it, and, through the memories which surrounded his childhood, even more fully than through the literature and history of his country, he found by induction the secrets of its ancient prestige, which he evoked from the dim and dark land of forgetfulness, and, through the magic of his poetic art, endowed with immortal youth. Poets are better comprehended and appreciated by those who have made themselves familiar with the countries which inspired their songs. Pindar is more fully understood by those who have seen the Parthenon bathed in the radiance of its limpid atmosphere; Ossian, by those familiar with the mountains of Scotland, with

their heavy veils and long wreaths of mist. The feelings which inspired the creations of Chopin can only be fully appreciated by those who have visited his country. They must have seen the giant shadows of past centuries gradually increasing, and veiling the ground as the gloomy night of despair rolled on, they must have felt the electric and mystic influence of that strange "phantom of glory" forever haunting martyred Poland. Even in the gayest hours of festival, it appalls and saddens all hearts. Whenever a tale of past renown, a commemoration of slaughtered heroes is given, an allusion to national prowess is made, its resurrection from the grave is instantaneous; it takes its place in the banquet-hall, spreading an electric terror mingled with intense admiration; a shudder, wild and mystic as that which seizes upon the peasants of Ukraine, when the "Beautiful Virgin," white as Death, with her girdle of crimson, is suddenly seen gliding through their tranquil village, while her shadowy hand marks with blood the door of each cottage doomed to destruction.

During many centuries, the civilization of Poland was entirely peculiar and aboriginal; it did not resemble that of any other country; and, indeed, it seems destined to remain forever unique in its kind. As different from the German feudalism which neighboured it upon the West, as from the conquering spirit of the Turks which disquieted it on the East, it resembled Europe in its chivalric Christianity, in its eagerness to attack the infidel, even while receiving instruction in sagacious policy,

in military tactics, and sententious reasoning, from the masters of Byzantium. By the assumption, at the same time, of the heroic qualities of Mussulman fanaticism and the sublime virtues of Christian sanctity and humility, [Footnote: It is well known with how many glorious names Poland has enriched the martyrology of the Church. In memorial of the countless martyrs it had offered, the Roman Church granted to the order of Trinitarians, or Redemptorist Brothers, whose duty it was to redeem from slavery the Christians who had fallen into the hands of the Infidels, the distinction, only granted to this nation, of wearing a crimson belt. These victims to benevolence were generally from the establishments near the frontiers, such as those of Kamieniec-Podolski.] it mingled the most heterogeneous elements, and thus planted in its very bosom the seeds of ruin and decay.

The general culture of Latin letters, the knowledge of and love for Italian and French literature gave a lustre and classical polish to the startling contrasts we have attempted to describe. Such a civilization must necessarily impress all its manifestations with its own seal. As was natural for a nation always engaged in war, forced to reserve its deeds of prowess and valor for its enemies upon the field of battle, it was not famed for the romances of knight-errantry, for tournaments or jousts; it replaced the excitement and splendor of the mimic war by characteristic fetes, in which the gorgeousness of personal display formed the principal feature.

There is certainly nothing new in the assertion, that national character is, in some degree, revealed by national dances. We believe, however, there are none in which the creative impulses can be so readily deciphered, or the ensemble traced with so much simplicity, as in the Polonaise. In consequence of the varied episodes which each individual was expected to insert in the general frame, the national intuitions were revealed with the greatest diversity. When these distinctive marks disappeared, when the original flame no longer burned, when no one invented scenes for the intermediary pauses, when to accomplish mechanically the obligatory circuit of a saloon, was all that was requisite, nothing but the skeleton of departed glory remained.

We would certainly have hesitated to speak of the Polonaise, after the exquisite verses which Mickiewicz has consecrated to it, and the admirable description which he has given of it in the last Canto of the "*Pan Tadeusz*," but that this description is to be found only in a work not yet translated, and, consequently, only known to the compatriots of the Poet.² It would have been presumptuous, even under another form, to have ventured upon a subject already sketched and colored by such a hand, in his romantic Epic, in which beauties of the highest order are set in such a scene as Ruysdael loved to paint; where a ray of sunshine, thrown through heavy storm-clouds, falls upon one of those strange trees never wanting in his pictures, a birch shattered by lightning, while its snowy bark is deeply stained, as if dyed

² It has been translated into German.—T.

in the blood flowing from its fresh and gaping wounds. The scenes of "Pan Tadeusz" are laid at the beginning of the present century, when many still lived who retained the profound feeling and grave deportment of the ancient Poles, mingled with those who were even then under the sway of the graceful or giddy passions of modern origin. These striking and contrasting types existing together at that period, are now rapidly disappearing before that universal conventionalism which is at present seizing and moulding the higher classes in all cities and in all countries. Without doubt, Chopin frequently drew fresh inspiration from this noble poem, whose scenes so forcibly depict the emotions he best loved to reproduce.

The primitive music of the Polonaise, of which we have no example of greater age than a century, possesses but little value for art. Those Polonaises which do not bear the names of their authors, but are frequently marked with the name of some hero, thus indicating their date, are generally grave and sweet. The Polonaise styled "de Kosciuszko," is the most universally known, and is so closely linked with the memories of his epoch, that we have known ladies who could not hear it without breaking into sobs. The Princess F. L., who had been loved by Kosciuszko, in her last days, when age had enfeebled all her faculties, was only sensible to the chords of this piece, which her trembling hands could still find upon the key-board, though the dim and aged eye could no longer see the keys. Some contemporary Polonaises are of a character so sad, that they might almost be supposed to

accompany a funeral train.

The Polonaises of Count Oginski [Footnote: Among the Polonaises of Count Oginski, the one in F Major has especially retained its celebrity. It was published with a vignette, representing the author in the act of blowing his brains out with a pistol. This was merely a romantic commentary, which was for a long time mistaken for a fact.] which next appeared, soon attained great popularity through the introduction of an air of seductive languor into the melancholy strains. Full of gloom as they still are, they soothe by their delicious tenderness, by their naive and mournful grace. The martial rhythm grows more feeble; the march of the stately train, no longer rustling in its pride of state, is hushed in reverential silence, in solemn thought, as if its course wound on through graves, whose sad swells extinguish smiles and humiliate pride. Love alone survives, as the mourners wander among the mounds of earth so freshly heaped that the grass has not yet grown upon them, repeating the sad refrain which the Bard of Erin caught from the wild breezes of the sea:

"Love born of sorrow, like sorrow is true!"

In the well known pages of Oginski may be found the sighing of analogous thoughts: the very breath of love is sad, and only revealed through the melancholy lustre of eyes bathed in tears.

At a somewhat later stage, the graves and grassy mounds were all passed, they are seen only in the distance of the shadowy background. The living cannot always weep; life

and animation again appear, mournful thoughts changed into soothing memories, return on the ear, sweet as distant echoes. The saddened train of the living no longer hush their breath as they glide on with noiseless precaution, as if not to disturb the sleep of those who have just departed, over whose graves the turf is not yet green; the imagination no longer evokes only the gloomy shadows of the past. In the Polonaises of Lipinski we hear the music of the pleasure-loving heart once more beating joyously, giddily, happily, as it had done before the days of disaster and defeat. The melodies breathe more and more the perfume of happy youth; love, young love, sighs around. Expanding into expressive songs of vague and dreamy character, they speak but to youthful hearts, cradling them in poetic fictions, in soft illusions. No longer destined to cadence the steps of the high and grave personages who ceased to bear their part in these dances, [Footnote: Bishops and Primates formerly assisted in these dances; at a later date the Church dignitaries took no part in them.] they are addressed to romantic imaginations, dreaming rather of rapture than of renown. Meyseder advanced upon this descending path; his dances, full of lively coquetry, reflect only the magic charms of youth and beauty. His numerous imitations have inundated us with pieces of music, called Polonaises, out which have no characteristics to justify the name.

The pristine and vigorous brilliancy of the Polonaise was again suddenly given to it by a composer of true genius. Weber made of it a Dithyrambic, in which the glittering display of

vanished magnificence again appeared in its ancient glory. He united all the resources of his art to ennoble the formula which had been so misrepresented and debased, to fill it with the spirit of the past; not seeking to recall the character of ancient music, he transported into music the characteristics of ancient Poland. Using the melody as a recital, he accentuated the rhythm, he colored his composition, through his modulations, with a profusion of hues not only suitable to his subject, but imperiously demanded by it. Life, warmth, and passion again circulated in his Polonaises, yet he did not deprive them of the haughty charm, the ceremonious and magisterial dignity, the natural yet elaborate majesty, which are essential parts of their character. The cadences are marked by chords, which fall upon the ear like the rattling of swords drawn from their scabbards. The soft, warm, effeminate pleadings of love give place to the murmuring of deep, full, bass voices, proceeding from manly breasts used to command; we may almost hear, in reply, the wild and distant neighings of the steeds of the desert, as they toss the long manes around their haughty heads, impatiently pawing the ground, with their lustrous eye beaming with intelligence and full of fire, while they bear with stately grace the trailing caparisons embroidered with turquoise and rubies, with which the Polish Seigneurs loved to adorn them. [Footnote: Among the treasures of Prince radziwill at Nieswirz were to be seen, in the days of former splendor, twelve sets of horse trappings, each of a different color, incrustated with precious stones. The twelve Apostles, life size, in

massive silver, were also to be seen there. This luxury will cease to astonish us when we consider that the family of Radziwill was descended from the last Grand Pontiff of Lithuania, to whom, when he embraced Christianity, were given all the forests and plains which had before been consecrated to the worship of the heathen Deities; and that toward the close of the last century, the family still possessed eight hundred thousand serfs, although its riches had then considerably diminished. Among the collection of treasures of which we speak, was an exceedingly curious relic, which is still in existence. It is a picture of St. John the Baptist, surrounded by a Bannerol bearing the inscription: "In the name of the Lord, John, thou shalt be Conqueror." It was found by Jean Sobieski himself, after the victory which he had won, under the walls of Vienna, in the tent of the Vizier Kara Mustapha. It was presented after his death, by Marie d'Arquin, to a Prince Radziwill, with an inscription in her own hand-writing which indicates its origin, and the presentation which she makes of it. The autograph, with the royal seal, is on the reverse side of the canvas.] How did Weber divine the Poland of other days? Had he indeed the power to call from the grave of the past, the scenes which we have just contemplated, that he was thus able to clothe them with life, to renew their earlier associations? Vain questions! Genius is always endowed with its own sacred intuitions! Poetry ever reveals to her chosen the secrets of her wild domain!

All the poetry contained in the Polonaises had, like a rich

sap, been so fully expressed from them by the genius of Weber, they had been handled with a mastery so absolute, that it was, indeed, a dangerous and difficult thing to attempt them, with the slightest hope of producing the same effect. He has, however, been surpassed in this species of composition by Chopin, not only in the number and variety of works in this style, but also in the more touching character of the handling, and the new and varied processes of harmony. Both in construction and spirit, Chopin's Polonaise In A, with the one in A flat major, resembles very much the one of Weber's in E Major. In others he relinquished this broad style: Shall we say always with a more decided success? In such a question, decision were a thorny thing. Who shall restrict the rights of a poet over the various phases of his subject? Even in the midst of joy, may he not be permitted to be gloomy and oppressed? After having chanted the splendor of glory, may he not sing of grief? After having rejoiced with the victorious, may he not mourn with the vanquished? We may, without any fear of contradiction, assert, that it is not one of the least merits of Chopin, that he has, consecutively, embraced ALL the phases of which the theme is susceptible, that he has succeeded in eliciting from it all its brilliancy, in awakening from it all its sadness. The variety of the moods of feeling to which he was himself subject, aided him in the reproduction and comprehension of such a multiplicity of views. It would be impossible to follow the varied transformations occurring in these compositions, with

their pervading melancholy, without admiring the fecundity of his creative force, even when not fully sustained by the higher powers of his inspiration. He did not always confine himself to the consideration of the pictures presented to him by his imagination and memory, taken en masse, or as a united whole. More than once, while contemplating the brilliant groups and throngs flowing on before him, has he yielded to the strange charm of some isolated figure, arresting it in its course by the magic of his gaze, and, suffering the gay crowds to pass on, he has given himself up with delight to the divination of 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 ranked among his most energetic compositions. He has inserted in it a MAZOURKA. Had he not frightened the frivolous world of fashionable life, by the gloomy grotesqueness with which he introduced it in an incantation so fantastic, this mode might have become an ingenious caprice for the ball-room. It is a most original production, exciting us like the recital of some broken dream, made, after a night of restlessness, by the first dull, gray, cold, leaden rays of a winter's sunrise. It is a dream-poem, in which the impressions and objects succeed each other with startling incoherency and with the wildest transitions, reminding us of what Byron says in his "DREAM:"

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