

AN AMERICAN COMPOSER: EDWARD A. MACDOWELL.

BOSTON used to be the musical center of America, and has not yet lost all claim to that distinction, for it still enjoys more first-class orchestral concerts than New York, and has for a long time been the home of a larger number of native composers than the metropolis. This latter preëminence was, however, seriously impaired a few months ago by the departure of Mr. MacDowell to New York, where he has accepted the new professorship of music in Columbia University, founded with the gift of \$150,000 made in April by Mrs. Elizabeth Mary Ludlow.¹ The fact that this honor has been bestowed on a young man of thirty-five, taken in connection with his recent triumphs as composer and pianist, and the honors conferred on him last October by Princeton University, seems to indicate that the world has at last taken to heart Schopenhauer's bitter sneer, that mankind never appreciates works of genius fresh, like grapes, but always dead and dried, like raisins. It also marks an exception to the rule that a prophet is without honor in his own country, for Mr. MacDowell has been thus honored in the city of New York, where he was born on December 18, 1861.

What distinguishes this young composer at once from most of his colleagues is the originality and imaginativeness of his work. Considering that he obtained his musical education chiefly in France and Germany, his compositions are, as a rule, remarkably free from definite foreign influences, except such traits as belong to music the world over; and some of them will doubtless mark the beginning of a real American school of music, which, like American literature, will combine the best foreign traits with features indigenous to our soil. Cosmopolitanism is the essence of American life, and cosmopolitanism was the key-note of Mr. MacDowell's musical training. One of his first teachers was the gifted and fascinating Venezuelan pianist Madame Teresa Carreño, who is not only one of the best woman pianists of our time, but

who has the unique distinction, for a woman, of having written the national hymn of her native country, and who is perhaps the only woman that ever managed and conducted an Italian opera company.

In 1876 Mrs. MacDowell took her son to Paris, where, in the following year, he entered the Conservatoire, at the age of fifteen. There was one important moment during his stay in Paris when his life-work came near being diverted into an entirely different channel. One day a well-known painter called on his mother, and offered to take the boy for three years, assuming all responsibility, if he were willing to put his music away, and take painting in its place. At that time he really seemed to have more talent for that art than for music, and, boy-like, he was willing, and even eager, to make the change; but his mother, guided by a correct instinct, opposed his wishes, and made him go on with his music-lessons. He was not entirely satisfied with the atmosphere of the Conservatoire, in which there was too much of that striving for immediate effect which he had also noticed in the other arts. The professors—Marmontel, Mathias, Ambroise Thomas, and others—never hesitated to mutilate a musical work, even inserting measures of their own to make it «effective.» If they played a sonata by Schumann or Weber, and did not like certain parts, they simply left them out. If, in editing one of the classics, Marmontel came across a chord that seemed to him hard or aggressively Teutonic, he placidly altered it to suit his Gallic taste. All these things jarred on the young American's reverence for genius. His increasing dissatisfaction with his situation was brought to a climax by his personal experiences at the July *concours*. He had plenty of applause for his playing of a Weber sonata, but his reading at sight of a manuscript composition by a member of the jury was disastrous for him. He had already played more than half of this piece when the increasing hilarity of the audience (there had

¹The musical chair to which Mr. MacDowell has been called is established upon the Robert Center Fund for Instruction in Music, based on the property of the late Robert Center, given to the trustees by his mother, Mrs. E. Mary Ludlow, with the proviso that the net income shall be «applied either to the payment of the salary of a professor of music or of other instructors

in music, or to fellowships or scholarships in music, or be used in any one or more of these or such other ways as shall, in the judgment of the trustees, tend most effectually to elevate the standard of musical instruction in the United States, and to afford the most favorable opportunity for acquiring instruction of the highest order.»

been several victims before him) made him suddenly aware that he was playing the thing in minor instead of in major. Without transition, he jumped at once into major, «with an effect,» as he remarked to the present writer, «of the sun suddenly shining from a coal-hole. It was like the coping-stone of a joke, and the audience's enthusiasm knew no bounds.» He did not get a prize, for, though he had produced an «effect,» it was evidently not the kind the jury were looking for.

It may be remarked in this place that Mr. MacDowell never was, in any sense of the word, a young prodigy. His genius, like that of Paderewski and several of the old masters, was slow in developing. In his early years he used to be discouraged on finding how much harder he had to work to gain what other boys seemed to get with ease. To this day he is a hard and slow worker. He takes time to write few and short pieces. Voltaire has truly said that a writer who wishes to make the long journey to posterity should pack as little as possible into his trunk, carefully examining each article to see if it could not be spared.

The training in harmony received at the Conservatoire had proved beneficial to young MacDowell, but Paris had become distasteful to him, musically and otherwise, and his mother was at a loss what next to do with him. Some pieces he had heard played at the Exposition suggested Germany to him, and he begged hard to be sent to that country, where he hoped to find a larger horizon. Stuttgart was selected, for no particular reason except, perhaps, because it has a famous old Conservatory. But he soon found that he had got from the frying-pan into the fire. That pedantic institution may be a good training-school for pedagogues, but it is no place for a young genius who needs elbow-room and personal freedom. It took him less than a month to find out that the Lebert method (which seemed to him «to show up one's weakness through repose») was not what he had been looking for. Doubtless his instinct told him, also, that he played really better than his teachers. At this juncture the violinist Sauret, whom Mrs. MacDowell had befriended in America, wrote, advising her son to go to Wiesbaden, where he would find the pianist Carl Heymann, who was just beginning to make his name, and the eminent critic and teacher Louis Ehlert, with whom he might continue his lessons in composition. He found that Heymann was not to begin teaching till the autumn at the Frankfort Conservatory, so he remained with Ehlert at Wiesbaden during the summer.

Ehlert was an eccentric man, tall, with bent shoulders. His gray eyes looked unnaturally large on account of the magnifying-glasses he wore, but they had a shy, almost girlish expression, which was not belied by his conduct toward the young American. He was kind to him, but flatly refused to teach him, adding, however, «I shall be glad to study with you.» So they studied together, and at the same time MacDowell heard a good deal of new music at the Cursaal. His intention was to go to Frankfort in the autumn, but Ehlert thought that Heymann was not the right man for him, and wrote to Hans von Bülow, asking if he would take him as a pupil. The irascible Bülow, without having seen the boy, wrote an insulting letter to Ehlert, asking how he dared to propose such a silly thing to him; he was not a music-teacher, and «could not waste his time on an American boy, anyway.» So, after all, MacDowell went to Frankfort and entered the Conservatory.

Raff was at that time the director of that institution, and among its piano-teachers were Clara Schumann (widow of the great composer) and Heymann. Raff was very conscientious, spending part of every forenoon and afternoon in the class-rooms, besides attending the Sunday rehearsals of chamber-music. In this respect he was a strong contrast to Clara Schumann, who never entered the Conservatory. All her pupils, and those whom she turned over to her daughters, took their lessons at her house. Her pupils followed her example, and looked down on the rest of the world from a lofty height. «Some instances of their patronizing affability to Raff make my blood boil yet when I think of them,» writes MacDowell. «As for poor Heymann, he hardly existed for them. His needing the soft pedal in playing was noted once in a while with a supercilious smile. Heymann was a strange little man—very slightly built, with a large head and rather protruding forehead. His flat nose, dark, almost beady eyes, and high cheek-bones, gave him a Mongolian cast of features. His people were very strict Jews, and, in deference to his father's wishes, he would never eat at a Christian's expense or in a Christian house. I told him I was a Quaker, which seemed to satisfy him completely, and we dined together often at an old restaurant in what I would now call a back slum. Heymann is the only pianist I have ever heard who, get as near the piano as you could, remained a mystery as to how he did the things we heard. The simplest passage turned into a spray of flash-

ing jewels in his hands. A melody seemed to have words when he played it; tone-colors that, like Alpine sun-effects, were inexhaustible, yet each one, fleeting as it was, more beautiful than the last; a technic which, while always of the (convulsive) order in quick passages, seemed mysteriously capable of anything. He was a marvel: he had a poor wrist, and yet sometimes he would sit down to show me a wrist passage; a kind of quiver would run over him—then, behold, the thing would be trilled off in the same supernatural way as all the rest.»

When Heymann left the Conservatory, in 1881, he proposed MacDowell as his successor, and Raff also desired his appointment; but it was opposed by Cossmann and Faelten on account of the American's «youth.» Heymann had not been popular with the professors, partly because, as MacDowell says, he «dared play the classics as if they had actually been written by men with blood in their veins.» While they were always talking about form, he adds, «when Heymann played one forgot the form in the music. A sonata was a poem under his fingers, if it was in the bounds of human possibility to make it so. If it was not possible, and the (bones showed through the flesh,) everywhere the struggle between poetry and prose was evident in his playing.»

More interesting still were MacDowell's relations with Raff—a true genius (think of the «Forest Symphony»!) who was compelled by lifelong poverty to squander many of his ideas on pot-boilers, and whose excessive shyness and modesty prevented him from claiming what was his due. MacDowell's first interview with him was not promising. Heymann had introduced him as having been brought up in the «French school,» which caused Raff to flare up and explain that there was no such thing as «schools» to-day, that all national musical traits were common property, and that every one made use of them according to his attainments and taste. «Raff at first sight seemed rather formidable,» MacDowell continues. «The clear-cut features, closely cropped white mustache, short, military chin-beard; above all, the slightly frowning, penetrating, keen expression in his blue eyes, made one feel as if he might be a bit tigerish. His head, which was entirely bald, save two flat tufts of hair over the ears and a very narrow fringe at the back, in some positions reminded one remarkably of Shakspeare. We always spoke French together. To me, coming from Paris with, I fear, a certain amount of slang, Raff's French

seemed peculiarly antiquated. He retained all the eighteenth-century terminations, and often used *y's* instead of *i's* in writing.»

Having failed to secure Heymann's place at the Frankfort Conservatory, MacDowell took the position as head piano-teacher at the Darmstadt Conservatory. He found it a dreary town, where music was studied with true German placidity. The pupils got all their music from the circulating libraries, which included nothing modern, the name of Saint-Saëns, for instance, being quite unknown. He did not waste much time at this place. His health was undermined by the strain of teaching about forty hours a week, and spending ten or twelve more in railway-trains going to an old feudal castle, where he had some sleepy medieval pupils of noble blood. During these trips he found time to compose nearly the whole of his second piano suite, but he soon came to the conclusion that it would be wiser to return to Frankfort. He did so, continuing with his private pupils, and beginning to devote himself more seriously to composition. He had before this played successfully at concerts in Wiesbaden, Frankfort, Hamburg, Darmstadt; but, as is well known, German orchestral societies never pay young artists a fee. If any one wishes to realize how difficult it is for a pianist to get a start, he should read the two volumes of Hans von Bülow's letters, recently published. After several unsuccessful attempts to earn his living by playing, MacDowell followed Raff's advice, and went to Weimar to see Liszt. The great pianist received him most cordially, and had D'Albert play the second piano to the first MacDowell concerto. He praised it highly, and I have heard a story to the effect that he tapped D'Albert on the shoulder, and told him he must bestir himself if he would keep pace with «the American.» Liszt, who never failed to recognize genius at first sight, was also highly pleased with «the American's» playing—so much so that he invited him to perform his first piano suite at the convention of the Allgemeine Musik-Verein, which was held that year at Zurich. This was very successful, and opened a way to the publication of his works by the leading German house, Breitkopf & Härtel.

«At this Zurich concert,» MacDowell writes to me, «I played my suite with my notes before me, as, until then, I had never waked up to the idea that my compositions could be worth actual study or memorizing. I would not have changed a note in one of them for untold gold, and *inside* I had the greatest love for

them; but the idea that any one else might take them seriously never occurred to me. I had acquired the idea from early boyhood that it was expected of me to become a pianist, and every moment spent in scribbling seemed to be stolen from the more legitimate work of piano practice.)

Raff's sudden death, in 1882, was a terrible shock to his favorite pupil. «I had been with him the afternoon before, and had walked part of the way home with him from the Conservatory. As I shook hands with him it seemed to me his hand was very hot and dry, and his eyes were unusually bright. The next morning, when I went to the café down-stairs for my coffee, I was told that he had been found dead in his bed by the barber who went every morning to shave him. It seemed impossible. Hurrying up to his house, I found others before me, and the poor widow and daughter crying their eyes out.» I am indebted to Mr. MacDowell's first pupil for the sequel of this sad story: «He came to me at the hour for my lesson, looking so white and ill that I was frightened. His voice broke as he said only the words, «Raff is dead.» There was a sweet hero-worship of a shy boy for an almost equally shy man, and for months after Raff's death he was in a morbid condition. He gave me eighteen marks,—all he had at the time,—and said, as I knew more about flowers than he did, would I get some for him to send? So I bought a mass of roses, and, what was unusual for Germany, had them sent not even bound together; and these were put about Raff, nearer than the grand, beautiful floral things sent by the dozen. Raff had been very generous with the Conservatory, and when, in compliment to his having managed even to gain a surplus over expenses for that last year, the trustees voted it to him as a gift (it was about \$275!), he added something to it from his own pocket, and built a stage in the Conservatory hall, fitted for the opera examinations. His salary was about fifteen hundred dollars a year. When he died, they engaged Bernhard Scholz of Breslau for just double! Kistner paid thirty dollars for his (Forest Symphony); Templeton Strong bought the manuscript of it for nearly two hundred and fifty dollars—more than Raff got for the copyright. Raff's modesty and shyness were much to his disadvantage.»

The «first pupil,» to whom I owe this inter-

esting communication, is now Mrs. Edward A. MacDowell. She had gone to Frankfort in 1881, attracted by the famous musicians there. First she applied to Mme. Schumann, who coolly turned her over to Raff, who, in turn, since she spoke but little German, advised her to see a young American who had just finished at the Conservatory—a young man of great talent, who, he said, was bound to make his mark in the world. In reply to her letter, the young American wrote that he was not anxious for the American pupil, who probably did not mean to do serious work, but that he would give her a trial. She was quite indignant at this «condescension,» since she had fancied *she* was «coming down» in going to so inexperienced a teacher. However, he accepted her, and gave her the most tremendously difficult things to play, all the time making her believe that they were quite simple and ordinary, which caused her to practise with truly Teutonic diligence. She is now an excellent pianist and judge of music herself, and is of great assistance to her husband—they were married in 1884—as a sympathetic friend, critic, counselor, and consoler. MacDowell is often very despondent about his work, and needs encouragement. He is sorry his first orchestral works were ever printed, but that does not signify much: Beethoven was ashamed that he had ever written the «Septet» and «Adelaide!»

After Raff's death Frankfort lost its attraction for MacDowell; so he took up his residence at Wiesbaden, where he remained with his wife several years, taking the daring risk of dropping everything but composition. They lived in a tiny suburban cottage overlooking the city on one side, with the Rhine and the Main in the distance, and a forest on the other. A frequent and welcome visitor during those days was Mr. Templeton Strong, for whose compositions MacDowell always finds room on his programs. It was an idyllic, semi-rural life, very pleasant, but ill adapted for the purpose of making material progress in life. It lasted till October, 1889, when they said farewell to Germany,¹ and came home to live in Boston, that city being chosen in preference to New York because it seemed less vast and metropolitan, and therefore a less violent contrast to their German life. Apart from social considerations, a city is to Mr. MacDowell merely a place to earn the

¹ Possibly America is indebted to Liszt for not having lost MacDowell altogether. A London friend had proposed him as examiner in Edinburgh for the Royal Academy of Music. The decision rested really in the hands of Lady Macfarren. Matters seemed to progress

favorably until she asked suddenly, «I hope you have no leaning toward the school of that wild man Liszt?» He had to admit his guilt in that direction, and next morning he received a notice saying the place was not suited for him!

money that will enable him to spend the summer in the country. He is a passionate lover of Nature, and seems to need her for inspiration, for he does almost all his composing in summer. He seldom takes notes, and, as a matter of course, never uses the piano as an aid in composing. He is fond of fishing, hunting, riding, walking, which he calls «living like a human being»; and here we have the key to his music, which is as healthy and as free from any morbid taint as is his robust physique. On seeing him in his habitual golf suit, no one would fancy that his favorite companions are fairies, witches, nymphs, dryads, and other idyllic creatures of the romantic world.

Composers who are at the same time pianists labor under the disadvantage that their creative work is apt to be ignored by those who are most eager to applaud their playing. Paderewski and MacDowell are more lucky in this respect than Liszt and Rubinstein were at their age; the world has evidently learned wisdom, having found out that a pianist is never quite so entrancing as when he plays his own pieces. Mr. MacDowell's first triumph in New York was won in the double capacity of composer and pianist. He had been invited to play his second concerto with the Philharmonic Society on December 17, 1894. The result was a double success such as no American musician had ever achieved before an American audience. The Philharmonic audience, the most critical in the country, can be painfully cold; but the young composer-pianist received an ovation such as is usually accorded only to Paderewski or to a popular prima donna at the opera. The three most noticeable things about the concerto itself were that in its style and treatment of the piano it was as thoroughly *idiomatic* as if it had been written by Chopin, Liszt, or Paderewski; that its orchestration rivaled in richness and brilliancy that of the greatest living foreign masters in that field—Dvořák and Johann Strauss; and, most important of all, that it is brimful of *ideas* such as can come only from a brain born to create new ideas. I have already referred to the rarity of «reminiscences» in his compositions. MacDowell is not an erudite musician; he purposely avoids studying the scores of the great masters. He prefers to spend his time in thinking, and that is one reason why he is not a mere imitator of Chopin, Schumann, Wagner, or Liszt, like most young composers of the present day. Mr. MacDowell's concertos and orchestral pieces (among which are the symphonic poems «Hamlet and Ophelia,»

dedicated to Sir Henry Irving; «Lancelot and Elaine,» «Lamia,» «The Saracens and Lovely Alda,» «In October,» and two suites) have, indeed, been played frequently in most of the foreign musical centers, and acknowledged as the best music that has come from across the ocean, while the committee that offered him the professorship at Columbia University justly stated that they considered him the greatest musical genius America has produced. Anton Seidl has declared him a greater composer than Brahms, and I myself am convinced that, with the exception of Paderewski, none of the young composers now in Europe holds out such brilliant promises of the future as MacDowell, who seems destined to place America musically on a level with Europe.

On January 23, 1896, the Boston Symphony Orchestra paid him the probably unprecedented honor (in the case of an American composer) of placing two of his longest works on the same program. They were the first of his concertos, written when he was only nineteen, and his Indian suite, completed at thirty-four, the latest of his works. The difference between these pieces was not as great as might have been expected. Indeed, this juvenile concerto seemed to me so finished in style, and so ripe in harmonic treatment and modulation, that I suspected it must have been retouched. I found, however, that, with the exception of a few lines near the beginning of the first movement, the score was exactly as it had been printed originally. After all, did not Mendelssohn write his «Midsummer Night's Dream» at nineteen, and Schubert his «Erlkönig» at eighteen? Musical genius is, like Kant's «Ding an Sich,» independent of time and space. Already in this early work do we find the conciseness, the brightness, the avoidance of commonplace and padding, which place its author's works in refreshing contrast to those of most of his contemporaries; he writes «literature,» while they seem to be content with musical «journalism.» The second movement is especially noticeable for its broad melody and dreamy harmonic coloring. The student of his works, be they for orchestra, piano, or voice, will find everywhere amid all the rich harmonic and polyphonic elaboration a broad vein of melody always distinctly marked. He will find, too, that his slow movements are usually the best, which is the surest test of musical genius.

The Indian suite played at this concert was interesting from many points of view, which I can touch on only very briefly. It is based

on genuine American Indian melodies. The introduction has almost a Wagner touch thematically, but it is note for note Indian, and there is also a curious Northern ring in some of the themes. Saint-Saëns once said neatly that Liszt's rhapsodies are «civilized Gipsy music,» adapting which expression, we might say that the MacDowell suite is civilized Indian music. It must be admitted that the themes are less interesting than their elaboration, and that there is much more of the civilizer than of the Indian. However, like Dvořák's «New World» symphony, in which the spirit of negro melodies is introduced, this suite (which was sketched before Dvořák wrote his work) is an interesting contribution to the question, «Is there such a thing as an aboriginal American music?» I believe, however, that the genuine American school of music will be, like the perfect American woman, a mixture of all that is best in European types, transformed by our climate into something resembling the spirit of American literature. The atmosphere of the MacDowell suite is more Slavic than German, and in this fact we may perhaps find a hint as to the future of music in America, which has heretofore shown too exclusively the influence of Germany.

As a pianist, I would rather hear MacDowell than any professional now in Europe, excepting Paderewski. Though he is a virtuoso of the highest rank, he always plays like a composer, putting music and emotion above effect and mere brilliancy of execution. He has the rare gift of bringing tears to the listener's eyes with a single modulation, or a few notes of melody—a gift that is associated, in the minds of educated hearers, with genius only. He has his moods, and is very sensitive to the quality of his audience, playing better in proportion to the sympathy manifested by the hearers. Were he to devote himself to the piano exclusively, Paderewski might have to look to his laurels, but his extreme nervousness makes him prefer composing and teaching.

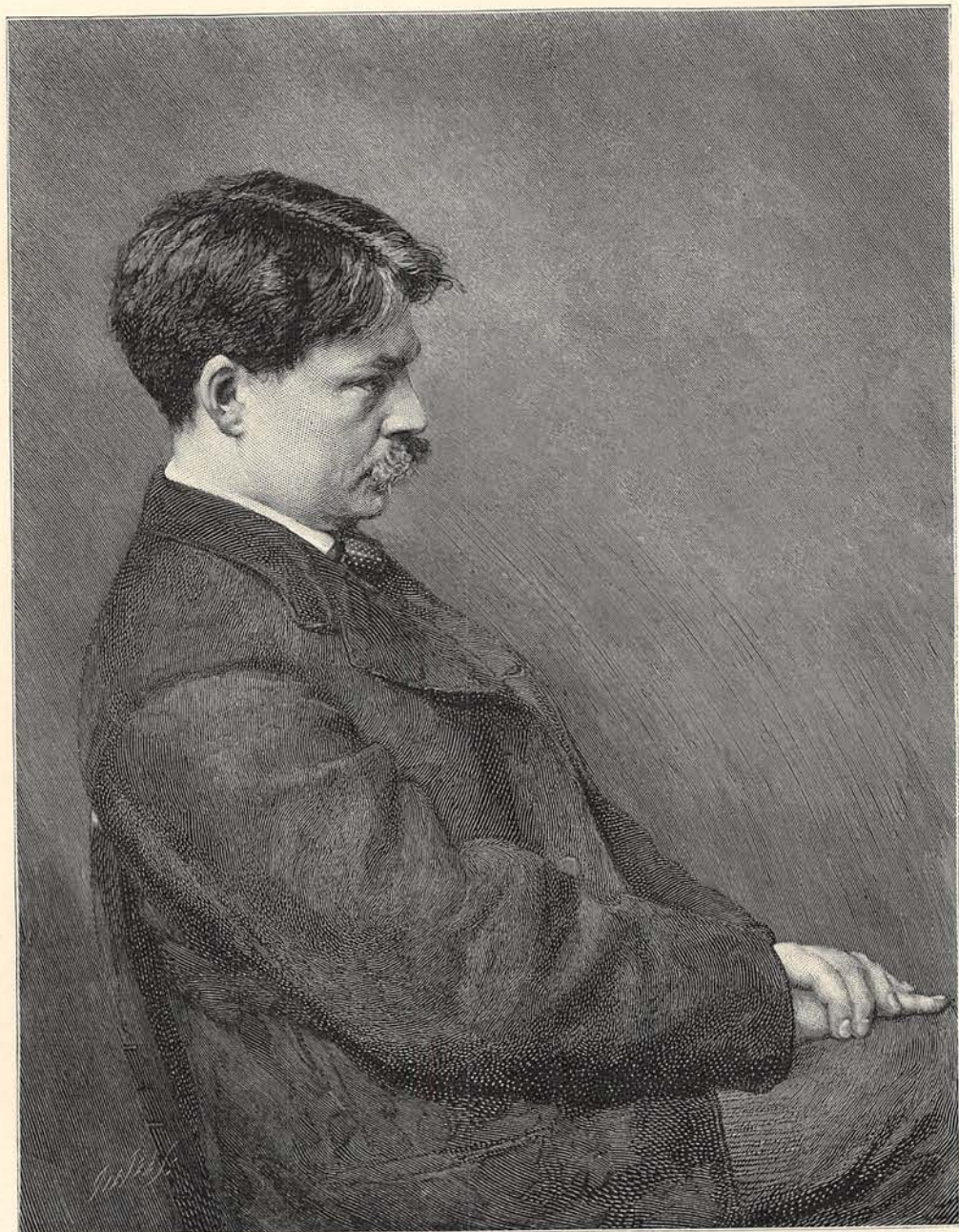
As a composer for the piano, he has twice yielded to the clamor of those who are not happy unless their music is served up in three or four courses, by writing his two sonatas, «Tragica» and «Eroica.» The first of these was played by Dr. William Mason one summer at the Isles of Shoals once a day for two months. The second even more deserves such a compliment. In these works Mr. Mac-

Dowell has shown himself a thorough master of the cyclical form of composition, which at present seems somewhat out of date. But I prefer him in the shorter, romantic forms which he loves so dearly. The essence of romanticism is that, instead of molding music, like gingerbread, into set geometrical forms, it allows the pieces to crystallize into forms of their own, thus insuring endless variety and the absence of formalism and padding for the sake of filling up a mold.

Another romantic trait of his pieces is to be found in the suggestive poetic titles he gives them. For instance, the five pieces entitled «Marionettes» have for separate titles «The Lover,» «Knave,» «Sweet Heart,» «Clown,» «Witch,» while the twelve virtuoso *études* are named «Novelette,» «Moto Perpetuo,» «Wild Chase,» «Improvisation,» «Elfin Dance,» «Valse Triste,» «Burlesque,» «Bluette,» «Träumerei,» «March Wind,» «Impromptu,» «Polonaise.» Most of his piano pieces (there are nearly eighty of them, counting separate movements) have such poetic titles, the advantages of which are fourfold: they stimulate the hearer's imagination like operatic scenery; they excite the composer's imagination; they combine the power of poetry with the charm of music; they make it easier to remember a piece and to talk about it.

I have left myself no space to speak of what perhaps I like best of all his works—the songs. It was the eight songs, Opus 47, that first convinced me that Mr. MacDowell is one of the most original composers of our time; and it was my happy privilege to be the first to call Paderewski's delighted attention to these songs, which Schubert, Franz, or Grieg could not have improved upon. Jewels of the first water are «The Sea» and «Idyl,» the finest songs ever composed in America. There are chords in some of the songs that suggest Grieg; but here we must go cautiously, for, as Mr. Huneker has remarked, «MacDowell's ancestry tells heavily in his music. His coloring reminds me at times of Grieg, but when I tracked the resemblance to its lair, I found only Scotch, as Grieg's grandfolk were Greggs, and from Scotland.» The charm of some of the songs is enhanced for us in some cases by the fact that they are set to verses by American poets, while the thrilling dramatic power of not a few of them suggests that some day, if he can get a worthy libretto, Mr. Edward A. MacDowell will write the first genuine American opera.

Henry T. Finck.



PHOTOGRAPHED BY G. C. COX.

ENGRAVED BY R. G. TIETZE.

EDWARD ALEXANDER MACDOWELL.