

## THE DESCENT OF THE ANGEL.

"THIS is the house. Come, take the keys.  
Romance and travel here must end."  
Out of the clouds, not quite at ease,  
I saw the pretty bride descend;  
With satin sandals, fit alone  
To glide in air, she touched the stone.

A thing to fade through wedding lace,  
From silk and scents, with priest and ring,  
Floated across that earthly place  
Where life must be an earthly thing.  
An earthly voice was in her ears,  
Her eyes awoke to earthly tears.

## WILHELMJ AND REMÉNYI.

ONE summer evening a brilliant company crowded a terrace which overlooked a quaint little German city. Along the straight road below the height stretched a mile of lamps; and in the distance huddled a mass of brick and stone houses, the shabby but pretentious palaces of forgotten margraves, and the towers of a few ugly churches. The scene was the esplanade of Wagner's theater at Bayreuth. The first act of "Siegfried" was just over, and the audience pouring out of the dark and stifling play-house found refreshment in the invigorating breath of the night air, laden with the perfume of the early harvest. Princes, grand-dukes, premiers, generals, beauties of the imperial court, decorated functionaries of the royal households, poets, composers, great artists and humble fiddlers, enthusiasts from Oregon and Boston, jocund dames and cavaliers from Paris, serious Englishmen, fiery Hungarians, Russian cosmopolites (who go everywhere),—they were, indeed, a strangely assorted multitude. It seems to me as I recall the spectacle that three figures showed in bolder relief than any of the others; certainly, by the little knot of strangers among whom I found myself, these three were regarded with the liveliest interest. One was a certain German countess, famed far and wide for her beauty:

"A daughter of the gods, divinely tall,  
And most divinely fair."

The second was Liszt, calm and kindly, diffusing rapture through a circle of ladies. The third was a young and handsome man of noble stature, imposing presence, and quick firm step, with the head of Beethoven lighted by a soft eye and a winning smile,

was August Wilhelmj, principal first violin in the great festival orchestra. When the trumpets called us back to the theater after the hour's intermission, and the play went on, we listened eagerly for the sound of Wilhelmj's violin in the "Forest Music." His pure, strong and beautiful tone, rising out of the unseen abyss of the dark orchestra, with the murmur of interweaving harmonies going on the while,—flutter of leaves, humming of insects, rustling of the soft noonday breeze,—produced an effect hardly to be realized, except by those who have felt the sensations awakened by that unique work of art,—a model Wagner performance.

Perhaps there was not in all Europe a man more exactly fitted than Wilhelmj for the difficult position which this distinguished violinist filled at Bayreuth. The *concertmeister* in all orchestras is the medium of communication between the conductor and the band. On this occasion his functions were specially important. The fine shades of meaning, the niceties of phrasing and accent, the variations of emphasis and rhythm which it was his business to catch from the conductor and transmit to those who sat below him, were extremely subtle, and moreover, were really essential to the interpretation. For the orchestra in this opera was not an accompaniment, but a chief actor, and the first player was a person of hardly less consequence than the first singer. To execute the music needed an artist of the highest ability; to understand it required a musician of acute perceptions, strong feeling, and close sympathy with the composer. Wilhelmj, besides, had a great share in the long and arduous preliminary work. The conductor, Hans Richter, left to him the superintend-

ence of many of the string rehearsals, and it was from him that the performers—virtuosi, selected from the principal theaters of Germany—learned how to overcome the enormous difficulties that filled the score. "The Ride of the Valkyries," as Wagner wrote it, was found to be impracticable for most of the violins, until Wilhelmj made certain modifications in order to avoid too frequent and perilous shifts. (It is worthy of remark, however, that this piece was always played by the Thomas orchestra in its original form, and even played a little faster than at Bayreuth, the speed being very properly increased to compensate for the absence of the scenic illusions and accompanying action.) Wilhelmj had long been an enthusiastic student of the new school of music, and he entertained for Wagner a sentiment of warm friendship as well as profound admiration.

The violinist at this time was in his thirty-first year. He was born September 21, 1845, at Usingen, an old town in the duchy of Nassau, about twenty miles from Frankfurt-on-the-Main. His father, a barrister and doctor-at-law, now living at Wiesbaden, has an extended reputation as one of the most important wine-growers of the Rhine country. His mother was formerly a distinguished singer and pianist, and a pupil of Chopin. His first master was Conrad Fischer, of Wiesbaden, under whom he made extraordinary progress. He could play almost before he could talk. He began to use the violin at the age of four. At seven he exhibited his accomplishments for the entertainment of Henrietta Sontag, who was on a visit to his family, and she was so charmed with the exactness of his execution and the purity and beauty of his tone that she embraced and kissed him, and predicted for him a splendid future. At the age of eight he played in quartets of Haydn, showing already a natural talent for chamber music, which he has since cultivated with rich results. In his ninth year he appeared for the first time in public. In March, 1856, he played at a charity concert in the theater at Wiesbaden, and is said to have made a great popular sensation. Notwithstanding the evident bent of his genius, his father insisted upon training him for the law. August remonstrated for a long time in vain. At length Dr. Wilhelmj agreed that the boy should devote himself to the violin, provided some high authority found in him the promise not merely of a clever musician but of a great artist. And so in the spring of 1861,

young August set out for Weimar to submit himself to the judgment of Franz Liszt.

We can imagine the picture of the handsome bright earnest lad of sixteen, standing beside the piano at which the white-haired master, hero of a thousand triumphs, opened Spohr's Eighth Concerto and began the test. The concerto was followed by Ernst's variations on Hungarian airs, Liszt playing the accompaniment. Then Wilhelmj played some shorter pieces at sight. When he paused, Liszt rose from the piano and exclaimed: "What! they thought of making you a lawyer? You were born for music." A few days later Liszt went with the boy to Leipsic, and placed him under the care of Ferdinand David. Three years at the Leipsic Conservatory laid the solid foundation of his greatness. Hauptmann and Richter gave him a sound training in the theory of music. (Joachim Raff afterward instructed him further in the same branch at Wiesbaden.) David taught him the technique of the violin, and exerted a fortunate influence in the development and fixing of his style. This eminent master was the best pupil of Spohr, who is commonly regarded as the founder of the modern German violin school. The breadth and smoothness of Wilhelmj's cantabile playing might thus seem to have been transmitted to him in a direct line from the famous virtuoso and composer in whom these qualities were so much admired. But in Spohr's case there was a tendency toward the weakness of overrefinement from which Wilhelmj is entirely free.

Our young violinist became a favorite scholar at the Conservatory. He lived in the house of David (whose niece, Baroness Liphardt, he afterward married), and there he must have enjoyed the acquaintance of many distinguished musicians, and the advantages of a refined and cultivated general society. The polished *concertmeister* of the famous Gewandhaus orchestra was a man of excellent education and distinguished manners, and he seems to have found August a congenial member of his pleasant family. David was the leader of a famous string quartet, of whose performances Schumann used to speak with great admiration, and Wilhelmj was not long in manifesting a close sympathy with his master in the cultivation of the highest class of chamber music. As for his progress in technique, David soon declared that there were no difficulties which Wilhelmj could not easily surmount; and of this praise a complete justification was

given when, within a year of his arrival at Leipsic, the lad gave a public performance of Ernst's "Concerto Pathétique." The composition is enormously difficult, not only on account of its brilliant *tours de force*, but

well known in a small circle of musicians, though his reputation had not yet reached the general public or the newspapers. The interest of Jenny Lind procured for him an invitation to play at one of Alfred Mellon's



AUGUST WILHELMJ. (A PEN-SKETCH FROM LIFE, BY W. M. CHASE.)

still more on account of the trying keys (F sharp minor and F sharp major) in which it is written. In November, 1862, August made his first appearance at the Leipsic Gewandhaus concerts, playing Joachim's "Hungarian Concerto"; and thus at the age of seventeen he began his public artistic career.

He made his first concert tour in 1865, visiting Switzerland; then he played in Holland; and in 1866 he was in London, already

Covent Garden concerts. He created an almost unexampled sensation. In January, 1867, he made his *début* in Paris, at one of Padeloup's concerts, and here, too, his success was instantaneous and enormous, the enthusiastic Parisians declaring him to be the most perfect violinist they had ever heard. The next season he was in Italy. In 1868 he visited Russia. At St. Petersburg he was a frequent performer at the *salon* of the art-loving Grand Duchess Helena Paulovna; he

lived with Hector Berlioz, who was then one of the celebrities of the Russian capital. Tours in Switzerland, France and Belgium were followed in 1869-70 by a brilliant expedition in company with Santley through the principal towns of Great Britain and Ireland. Next he traversed North Germany, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark; he was greeted at Leyden with torch-light processions; he conquered Berlin and Vienna; he became a chief favorite of London, and earned recognition everywhere as one of the greatest violinists the world has known.

When he made his first appearance in New York, on the 26th of September, 1878, it is probable that his true rank was but imperfectly appreciated by a public which had caught only vague and occasional reports during the previous four or five years of his career in the cities of Europe. His triumph here was sudden and complete. Before he had played a dozen measures of the Paganini Concerto, it was evident, by indefinable signs which all veterans of the concert-room know how to read, that he had fascinated the whole house. The audience sat spell-bound. He left the stage in the midst of a tempest which was not quelled until he had been recalled five times. This was an unusual demonstration for New York; it was specially remarkable in the case of a performer like Wilhelmj, whose playing has few of the characteristics that easily excite a mixed multitude. Biographers in the foreign journals relate that when Sontag embraced the boy Wilhelmj she predicted that he would be "the German Paganini." They also state that Liszt called him "a second Paganini." They add that when he played in Paris the critics exclaimed with one voice, "*Voilà le nouveau Paganini!*" It is the custom to call every distinguished violinist a second Paganini, without regard to his style. If the term was ever applied to Wilhelmj it must have been by way of prophecy or metaphor, and not of serious description. The qualities by which he makes such an instantaneous impression are in strong contrast with the phenomenal powers of the great Italian. He seeks no display of technical difficulties; he does not amuse us with tricks and eccentricities, nor does he startle us with outbursts of passion. He is neither furious nor sentimental. The beauty of perfect proportion which the connoisseur finds in his music is directly opposed to sensational effects.

The first feeling which he inspires is perhaps a sense of grandeur. His personal appearance predisposes the listener to this impression. His figure is stately; his face and attitude suggest reserved force, and that majestic calm which seems to befit great power. The first touch of his instrument shows an astonishingly large, full, even tone; Berlioz declared that it was the noblest, the most superb, the most enrapturing he had ever heard. The first phrase proves that he has a correspondingly broad and imposing style, and breadth of style implies a complete mastery of the composition,—an intellectual mastery of its meaning, and a mechanical mastery of all the proper agencies of expression. The effect is heightened by an ease, grace, and smoothness which indicate a strength equal to indefinite further demands. Tone and style therefore are alike associated with the idea of power; and power, as Burke explains, is one of the chief attributes of the sublime. Without committing ourselves to an exaggerated estimate of Wilhelmj, we may surely admit that there are elements of grandeur in his playing which must affect the imagination of all sensitive listeners. Nor is the sensuous charm of his playing less remarkable than its power. His tones are so pure, round and mellow, his phrasing is so graceful, his touch is so clean and delicate even in the most difficult passages, that any person with the least sensibility for music must recognize in him an artist not only of rare power but of singularly fine and poetic temper.

A famous philosopher has said that beauty consists in an exact balance between the intellect and the imagination. The violin performance of Wilhelmj exhibits this just proportion more perfectly than the work of any other artist of whom we have personal knowledge. "After all," said he one day, in speaking of the execution of a certain piece of music, "what the people really want is intellectual playing." This was an acute remark. The musician who gives serious thought to the composition before him, and applies all the powers of a trained and vigorous mind to the discovery of its deepest meaning and the unveiling of its inmost charms, becomes filled with the spirit of the mighty dead. He speaks to us with the voice of the old cantor of Leipsic. The great soul of Beethoven looks at us through his transfigured eyes. Under his inspired hand the inimitable elegance of Mendelssohn betrays itself again. There is a popu-

lar belief that "intellectual music" means nothing but fugue and counterpoint. Strange mistake! A clear understanding is the first requisite for a sympathetic interpretation. It has been said that Wilhelmj is neither sentimental nor furious. That is to say, he is not prone to the affectation of excessive tenderness or the indulgence of exaggerated passion. The expression of feeling with him is always regulated by a true appreciation of the meaning of the music; probably it is not that he consciously restrains his own impulses; but the feeling arises naturally out of his sympathy with the composer. Hence he is always greatest in great music, like the Beethoven Concerto, or the Bach Chaconne, or the air from Bach's Suite in D, in which last his expression of deep and simple feeling united with a noble repose is indescribable and inimitable. There are compositions of another class, standing not very far below the highest, in which he exerts a rare charm. In his Chopin transcriptions we find admirable examples of manly grace; and in his arrangement, with orchestral accompaniment, of the Prize Song from Wagner's "Meistersinger von Nürnberg," there is a specimen of cantabile playing which always makes me think of sunshine, and quiet, and fresh air.

In his concerts Wilhelmj uses a Stradivarius violin of extraordinary beauty. For practice, his favorite is an American instrument, made by Gemünder, of Astoria, Long Island, whom he declares to be the greatest violin-maker living. Wilhelmj is extremely careful in the choice of strings, and certain peculiarities in his stringing are supposed to account in some part for the splendor of his tone; but the secret really lies of course in the hand and arm rather than the instrument—the combination of a deft touch with a grand development of the muscles. His compositions for the violin are written in a pure and elevated style; the melody is broad and fluent; the ideas are clear and dignified; and a mastery of the art of scoring is shown in the orchestral accompaniments. It only remains to add that in social intercourse Wilhelmj is genial and animated, he is a good linguist, and his conversation is full of entertainment.

A few weeks after the arrival of Wilhelmj, New York welcomed another violinist who offered the greatest possible contrast to his predecessor. Edouard Reményi is a Hungarian in whom are exhibited to perfection some of the most attractive qualities which

distinguish his dashing and generous people. He studied under Joachim at the Vienna Conservatory. During the Hungarian insurrection of 1848-9 (being then only a lad), he joined the patriot army, and served on the staff of Görgey. The violin was his inseparable companion in the field. Banished by the failure of the national cause, he became a wanderer all over the world. He reached even America at that early day, and figured modestly in New York as a boy-artist. In 1853, we hear of him in company with Johannes Brahms, making a pilgrimage to Liszt at Weimar. The two young men were penniless, and to pay their way they gave concerts on the road, well content if they received five or ten dollars for a performance. Liszt not only received Reményi as a pupil, but offered him a home. It is hardly necessary to say that so rich a privilege was gladly accepted. The genial master, in his book on "The Gypsies and their Music in Hungary," published a little later in Paris, speaks thus of his *protégé*: "While the time seems to be near at hand when the national character of the different schools shall disappear, and Bohemian music become a thing of the past, I have met with lively satisfaction a young Hungarian who has retained sufficient individuality and spontaneity to warrant that he will be written of some day in the same strain as Csermak. Reményi, although not a Romany, has become imbued with Bohemian feeling and art. I have never heard him without experiencing an emotion which revived the recollections left by Bihary. \* \* \* Spite of the applause with which he has invariably been greeted, he appears to be one of the few artists who have a higher object than to make themselves a name by means of which to amass a fortune, and who, throughout their life, are never done with progress, but keep on steadily toward a supreme ideal. \* \* \* To represent Bohemian art as it ruled in Hungary in its brightest days, something very different from the colorless and commonplace imitations of the modern 'artist' is needed. Reményi is gifted with a vivacious, generous, and rather mocking disposition, which rebels against monotony, and whose originality shines through everything, and in spite of everything. This is a token of the vitality of his talent, and insures him a special place in the gallery of men who have given new life to a deserving branch of art."

The career of a virtuoso in Europe is generally a succession of concert tours

through the chief cities of the continent. Reményi, since establishing himself at Paris four years ago, has found abundant occupation in the capital and provincial towns of France. Many accounts have been published of the extraordinary effect of his performance of gypsy music and of the national songs and dances of Hungary, and

rously through the formal divisions of the concerto, capering gently in the allegro and sighing in the andante, with only a brief outbreak in a daring cadenza, or a dashing rondo. To the interpretation of works like the Beethoven Concerto he brings a technical ability which fully answers every demand upon it, a bright and penetrating tone which



EDOUARD REMÉNYI. (A PEN-SKETCH FROM LIFE, BY W. M. CHASE.)

those who have heard him play a *csardas* will not hesitate to credit these exciting reports. But whatever may have been Reményi's favorite style in former years, his preference now is to be recognized as a classical performer. Hungarian folk-music is rarely found on his programmes. He has taught his wild genius to move deco-

lacks the majestic strength, purity and fullness of Wilhelmj's, a style which suggests poetic fancy rather than intellectual repose. A man of general education as well as musical culture, he has undoubtedly a comprehension of the music before him, but his individuality is so strongly marked that he cannot always identify himself with the

spirit of the composition. He is best in works which allow free range to his impatient fancy. In Joachim's great Hungarian Concerto, in some of the brilliant compositions of Ernst, in his own arrangement of Schubert's "Divertissement Hongrois," in certain transcriptions from Chopin, strangely unlike the transcriptions of Wilhelmj from the same poetic composer, he never fails to create a sensation. But those who would know Reményi must hear him, not in a great concert hall, but among a few sympathetic listeners. Fluent in five or six languages, he entertains the company now with droll conceits, now with reminiscences of famous artists and composers. He fondles the Stradivarius which he uses at concerts, or he displays with pride the beautiful violin

just made for him by an amateur in Brooklyn. The mazurka alternates with the merry jest. Field's exquisite "Nocturne of the Rose," or a fairy song of Mendelssohn's interrupts a rattle of anecdote. Suddenly Reményi begins the "Bach Chaconne," so transfigured by variations of expression that we stare in wonder. Or perchance, if the mood seize him, it may be our fortune to listen to some of the stirring melodies of the Hungarian people. In the wild rhythms of the gypsy dance, in the fierce splendor of the patriotic hymn, the player and the audience alike are fired with excitement. The passion rises; the tumult waxes furious; a tremendous sweep of the bow brings the music to an end; and then we can say that we have heard Reményi.

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OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.



STAIR-WAY IN THE OLD HOLMES MANSION.

THE subject of this sketch is a good specimen of the blood and training of New England. The laws of heredity, though they may be often complex and obscure, are as immutable as any of the laws of God; and a grandfather is not merely an ornament upon the family genealogical tree,

but a factor in the problem to be wrought out in the life and character of his descendant. The ancestors for generations back may be represented in the new-born babe of to-day. Each predecessor, considered as a descendant, is complex, having inherited a mixture of traits and tendencies; yet each, as an ancestor, may be considered as a substantial unity,—as yeoman, soldier, philosopher, lawyer, priest or poet.

The genius of American democracy applauds the manly lines of Burns, and despises the ignoble pride that glories in inherited titles and honors. But while it is a mark of weakness to strut through the world with badges of factitious distinction, it cannot be unworthy to trace one's acumen from an ancestor who was the first scholar of his age, one's courage and dignity from a

great captain, one's integrity from a great judge, or one's poetic feeling and power from some lover of beauty. It might seem that at birth all the descendible traits were shaken like dice, and the combination became a personality that never existed before.

It was a "fair conjunction" that produced