

# LOUIS MOREAU GOTTSCHALK, AS PORTRAYED BY HIMSELF

By JOHN TASKER HOWARD

**A**UTOBIOGRAPHICAL writings are sometimes revelatory, and then again, they often prove the opposite. When a man knows that he is writing about himself for publication, he is likely to paint the picture he wishes his reader to see, and to manipulate light and shadow to gain a desired effect. It is seldom necessary to turn to deliberate untruth; interpretations of fact, rather than its denial, are generally sufficient.

Under such conditions it is essential that we season our reading with the traditional grain of salt, and draw our conclusions from the way in which statements are made, rather than from what is actually said. Often the manner of writing is fully as illuminating as the actual subject matter, for vanity, self-consciousness, or perhaps an eagerness to overemphasis will unwittingly reveal themselves to the student who reads between the lines.

In my opinion, the diary of Louis Moreau Gottschalk<sup>1</sup> has few of these faults. While the author undoubtedly intended some day to publish an account of his travels, the notes were written chiefly to amuse himself during his long railway journeys, and to provide a record through which he himself could re-live the past. The absence of self-consciousness is singularly refreshing; the author is often introspective, but rarely self-analytical. The reader is allowed to do his own reading, and to draw his own conclusions.

The book is little known today and out of print, which is to be regretted, for it undoubtedly shows the real Gottschalk, instead of the precious creature of shadowy tradition, the morbidly sentimental composer of *The Last Hope*; and we find that the supposed Gottschalk and the real man are indeed two distinct persons. The book also offers a contrast to the absurd paragon of all virtues that Octavia Hensel painted a year after Gottschalk's death,<sup>2</sup> and we may be sure that the author of the diary would have demanded the suppression of the wax puppet created by his too well-intentioned champion. In his notes Gottschalk wrote down exactly what he thought about everything and everybody that passed his way.

<sup>1</sup>*Notes of a Pianist*, by Louis Moreau Gottschalk, edited by Clara Gottschalk, translated from the French by Robert E. Peterson: 1881, J. B. Lippincott & Co.

<sup>2</sup>*Life and Letters of Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, by Octavia Hensel: 1870, Oliver Ditson Co.

If he liked what he saw, he said so without hesitation; if he was displeased, he was equally frank. His susceptibility to feminine charms was openly confessed, despite the reticence demanded by nineteenth-century conventions.

The book also shows that Gottschalk, as a man, possessed a trait apparent to the discriminating student of his music. Superficially the piano-pieces of Gottschalk are trivial, showy, and frothy, a reflection of the Herz type of elaboration and embellishment. But they are really considerably more than that. Although Gottschalk was a forerunner of Ethelbert Nevin, his work was marked by a far deeper poignancy, an aristocratic flair that was elegant in the true meaning of the word.

And so it was with Gottschalk himself, as he is revealed in his own pages. An aristocrat by birth and person, he acquired a continental background which made him a rare figure in mid-century America, and laid him open to thrusts that caused real suffering. He was proud of being an American, and he believed that his countrymen were superior to Europeans in many directions, yet he felt their shortcomings keenly.

Gottschalk is an important figure in our musical history, for he was the first American musician to win fame abroad, to be equipped with talents and training that ranked him with the virtuosi and salon composers of Europe. He was born in the same year as William Mason (1829), but he was a more spectacular figure than Mason, more the man of the world, both as musician and human being.

Gottschalk spent so many of his early years abroad that when he made his *début* in New York in 1853 many Americans regarded him as a foreigner. In spite of his American birth he had acquired a European label, and he was accordingly successful in attracting audiences to his concerts. His heritage, too, smacked of the continent, for he was born in New Orleans, from its beginnings one of our most cosmopolitan cities, the son of an English Jew who had studied medicine in Leipsic, and Aimée Marie de Braslé, a Creole.

When he went to Paris at thirteen, to study with Hallé, Stamaty and Maleden, and later with Berlioz, he came under the wing of his aunt, the Comtesse de Lagrange, who took him to the inner social circles of Paris. He became a favorite with royalty and the aristocracy of several countries.

After eleven years abroad he returned to make his *début* in New York, and although his first concerts were not too successful financially, he created a sensation comparable to Jenny Lind's reception a year and a half before. Barnum offered him a contract

of \$20,000 a year and all expenses, but Gottschalk's father would not allow him to accept it. In the Winter of 1855-6 he gave eighty concerts in New York alone. Then he went to the West Indies for six years.

It is at this period that the published diary begins, and the reader finds his hero where he really belongs, in the tropics, enjoying what he terms "six years foolishly spent, thrown to the wind, as if life were infinite, and youth eternal; six years, during which I have roamed at random under the blue skies of the tropics, indolently permitting myself to be carried away by chance, giving a concert wherever I found a piano, sleeping wherever the night overtook me—on the grass of the savanna, or under the palm-leaf roof of a 'veguero' . . ."

The account continues:

When I became tired of the same horizon, I crossed an arm of the sea, and landed on a neighboring island, or on the Spanish Main. . . . Sometimes the idol of an ignorant 'pueblo,' to whom I have played some of their simple ballads, I have stopped for five, six or eight months among them, putting off my departure from day to day, and have at last seriously resolved to go no further; or detained in a hamlet where the piano was still unknown, by the ties of an affection with which my fingers had nothing to do (O rare and blest affections!) I forgot the world, and lived only for two large black eyes, which veiled themselves with tears whenever I spoke of beginning again my vagabond course, again living as the bird sings, as the flower expands, as the brook flows, forgetful of the past, careless of the future. . . .

Then, seized with a profound disgust of the world and of myself, tired, discouraged, suspecting men (and women), I hastened to conceal myself in a desert on the extinguished volcano of N——, where I lived for many months like a cenobite, with no other companion than a poor fool I had met on a small island, who attached himself to me, followed me everywhere, and loved me with that absurd and touching constancy which one only meets with in dogs and madmen. . . . In the midst of this intellectual ruin one thing only survived—his love for music. He played upon the violin, and, a singular thing, although insane, he understood nothing of the music of the future!

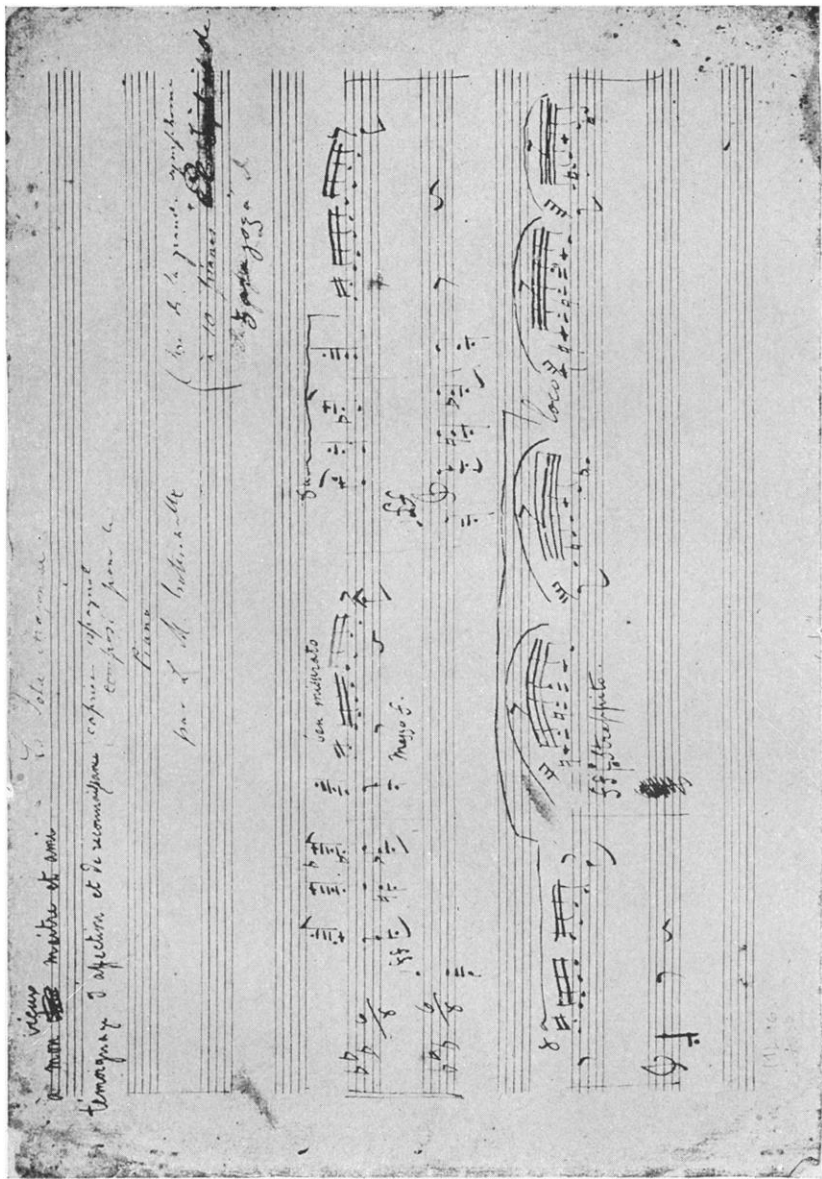
Perched upon the edge of the crater, on the very top of the mountain, my cabin overlooked the whole country. . . . Every evening I moved my piano upon the terrace, and there, in view of the most beautiful scenery in the world, which was bathed by the serene and limpid atmosphere of the tropics, I played, *for myself alone*, everything that the scene which opened before me inspired. . . .

It was there that I composed 'Réponds moi,' 'La Marche des Gibbarros,' 'Polonia,' 'Columbia,' 'Pastorella e Cavaliere,' 'Jeunesse,' and other unpublished works. I let my fingers run over the keyboard, wrapped in contemplation of these marvels, whilst my poor friend, to whom I did not listen, divulged to me, with childish loquacity, the high destiny to which he proposed to elevate humanity. . . . I was cured of



Title-page of Gottschalk's "Pastorella e Cavalliere" (New York, Wm. Hall & Son, 1862), with a lithograph portrait of Gottschalk by Sarony, Major & Knapp

(By courtesy of the Library of Congress)



Facsimile of the first page in the autograph of Gottschalk's "Jota Aragonesa, Caprice espagnol,"  
 part of a composition originally written for ten pianos  
 (By courtesy of the Library of Congress)

my wounds, my despair vanished, and soon the sun of the tropics, which gilds all things, dreams as well as fruit, gave me back my vagabond life, strong and confident.

I again began to live according to the customs of these primitive countries, which, if they are not strictly virtuous, are, in retaliation, terribly attractive. I saw again those beautiful "Triguenas," with red lips, and brown bosoms, ignorant of evil, sinning with frankness, without fearing the bitterness of remorse. All this is frightfully immoral, I know it; but life in the savannas of the tropics, in the midst of a half-civilized and voluptuous race, cannot be that of a London cockney, a Parisian idler, or an American Presbyterian.

In the depths of my conscience I heard sometimes a voice which recalled me to what I was, to what I ought to be, and imperiously commanded me to return to healthy and active life. But I had permitted myself to become by the languor—the *far niente*—morally benumbed, so far that the idea of again appearing before a polished audience seemed to me very honestly absurd. For what good? I said to myself. And besides it is too late; and I continued to live, to sleep, to awaken, to run over the savannas on horseback, to listen to the female parrots coquet in the guava-trees at sunrise, to the crickets chirp in the fields of sugar-cane at nightfall, to smoke my cigar, to cradle myself in my hammock—finally to enjoy all the pleasures beyond which the 'Guogiro' sees only death, or, what is still worse, the feverish agitation of northern society. Here is the secret of the atrophy of the Spanish colonies. . . .

The moralists, I well know, condemn all this; and they are right. But poetry is often in antagonism with virtue; and now that I am shivering under the icy wind and gray sky of the North, that I hear discussions on Erie, Prairie du Chien, Harlem and Cumberland, that I read in the newspapers the lists of dead and wounded, the devastation of incendiaries, the abductions and assassinations which are committed on both sides [of the Civil War] under the name of retaliation, I find myself excusing the demi-savages of the savannas who prefer their poetic barbarism to our barbarous progress.

The spell was finally broken, by the voice of a concert-manager, Strakosch, who offered Gottschalk an engagement for a tour of the United States:

I hesitated an instant, cast a last glance at the past, gave a sigh, and signed. The dream was finished—I was saved; but who shall say if in this salvage youth and poesy had not been wrecked? Poesy and youth are by nature vagabonds; they are butterflies. Shut them up in the cage of reason and their transparent wings are broken against the bars of their prison. Regulate their flight and you take from them their scope and boldness—two qualities which are often found in experience, and whose loss is not always compensated by maturity of talent.

So this was the child of the tropics who returned to New York in February, 1862, "rescued" from a life of languor and indolence, to mingle among the pioneers in the West, to travel amid all the hardships of the early railroads, to endure the jibes of the coarse,

and to play for people who were interested chiefly in how fast his fingers could move on the keyboard!

He gave so many concerts that he felt the danger of becoming an automaton, and he was always frank in noting in his diary his opinion of his playing on each occasion. At the end of the first season (December, 1862) he wrote:

I have just finished my last tour of concerts for this season. I have given eighty-five concerts in four months and a half. I have travelled fifteen thousand miles on the railroad. . . . A few weeks more in this way and I should have become an idiot! Eighteen hours a day on the railroad! Arrive at seven o'clock in the evening, eat with all speed, appear at eight o'clock before the public. The last note finished, rush quickly for my luggage, and *en route* until next day to recommence always the same thing! I have become stupid with it. I have the appearance of an automaton under the influence of a voltaic pile. My fingers move on the keyboard with feverish heat. . . . The sight of a piano sets my hair on end like the victim in presence of the wheel on which he is to be tortured. Whilst my fingers are moving my thought is elsewhere. Happier than my poor machine, it traverses the field, and sees again those dear Antilles, where I gave tranquilly a little concert every two or three months comfortably, without fatiguing myself, where I slept for weeks the sleep of the spirit, so delicious, so poetical, in the midst of the voluptuous and enervating atmosphere of those happy lands of the 'Dolce far niente,' whose lazy breezes murmuring softly bear on their wings the languid and distant harmonies of the country, and whose quiet and dreamy birds seem never to arouse from the contemplation of all the marvels of this terrestrial paradise except to love and to sleep. . . .

After a concert in Washington, attended by Lincoln, he remarked:

I played very badly, and was furious against myself, which, however, did not prevent many of my friends from coming to congratulate me on my success. One of them who was present at the first concert (at which, bye-the-bye, I played very well) said to me, "Well and good, you are in the vein tonight, for at the first concert one saw that you were badly prepared."

If he felt he had played well, he was equally frank in saying so:

*Portland, Maine:* A magnificent concert—the most beautiful I have had for many years. I played admirably. Encored; recalled.

Gottschalk's comments on the behavior of his audiences is excellent material for the student of American history, especially for one who is studying the degree of culture in the America of Civil War times. Here is first-hand observation on the tastes of the public both in urban centers, and along the frontiers. He considered matters somewhat improved since his first tours in the 'fifties:

## Louis Moreau Gottschalk, as Portrayed by Himself 125

I am daily astonished at the rapidity with which the taste for music is developed and is developing in the United States. At the time of my first return from Europe I was constantly deploring the want of public interest for pieces purely sentimental; the public listened with indifference; to interest it, it became necessary to strike it with astonishment; grand movements, *tours de force*, and noise had alone the privilege in piano music, not of pleasing, but of making it patient with it. I was the *first* American pianist, not by my artistic worth, but in chronological order. Before me, there were no piano concerts except in peculiar cases, that is to say, when a very great name arriving from Europe, placed itself by its celebrity before the public, which, willing or unwilling, through curiosity, and fashion rather than from taste, made it a duty to go and see the lion. Now, piano concerts are chronic, they have even become epidemic; like all good things they are abused. From whatever cause, the American taste is becoming purer, and with that remarkable rapidity which we cite through our whole progress. For ten years a whole generation of young girls have played my pieces. 'Last Hope,' 'Marche de Nuit,' 'Murmures Éoliens,' 'Pastorale et Cavalier,' 'Cradle Song,' have become so popular that it is difficult for me to find an audience indisposed to listen to me with interest since the majority has played or studied the pieces which compose the programme.

Individual comments tell of his reception in various localities:

Arrived at Kalamazoo at noon, Thursday. Excellent hotel, quite new. Charming concert and respectable audience. No cries, or whistling. All the pieces encored.

All audiences were not so "respectable":

At this evening's concert, Lockport, faithful to its tradition, furnishes us with a Lockport audience—that is to say one hundred persons gaping for their money. "The scalded cat dreads cold water." At the first concert which I gave here, there were three hundred persons. They had never seen such an entertainment, and swore that no one should take them in again. Since then I have tried my fortune here four or five times, but always with the same result. This evening, however, they have varied the monotony a little by hissing.

Gottschalk held theories on the psychology of applause:

Syracuse is cold. I have never obtained there a large audience. The last concert was a "chilly affair." That is what the newspapers say. It [sic] rightly adds, that the audience and the artist parted mutually disgusted with each other. It is true, at least, as regards one of them, the audience, if I might judge from its behaviour. Not one applause from the beginning to the end. I nevertheless did my best, and I am certain that this audience, under the spur of three or four claqueurs, would have warmed up, and would have found charming that which to-day is found wearisome. The commencement of a concert may be compared to the first stage of a grand dinner, before the ice is broken, when every one is afraid to break the silence, and we hardly dare speak to our neighbour but below our breath. If among the guests there is one who breaks the ice, immediately all speak at once, and the conversation having



become general, each one tries to keep it up. In a concert, if there is a knot of determined persons who, bold enough, dare to give the signal, the crowd immediately follows the current. It warms up, the nerves are affected by it; the excitement causes them to discover points which otherwise would have passed unperceived.

He played in the far West, even in the mining towns which were little more than camps. Here is an account of his experience in Dayton, Nevada:

A small village, seven miles from Virginia City. Sitting before the door of the inn, I am tranquilly smoking my cigar, awaiting the hour for my concert. All at once I hear at some distance the noise of a large drum. "What is that?" to the landlord. "Why," says he, looking at me, "is not your concert for tonight? Well now, they are drumming to call the crowd." A ragamuffin rushed through the street ringing a bell from door to door "to call the crowd"; but the finest part of the affair is that for ten minutes the drums and the big drum are quiet. At the moment of taking my way towards the theatre I am surrounded by two drums, the ringer of the bell, and the big drum, who have come for a "run up to the show." I contrive to escape, and fly like a hare from fear of these cursed drums.

The hall of the theatre is lighted (?) by three or four smoking Argand lamps. The stage is so dark that our concert has rather the look of an exhibition of the stereopticon. Our audience consists of a few females, ten or twelve boys, including therein the two drums, the bass drum and the bell. The balance are miners in large flannel shirts, with pantaloons turned up over their large boots. Their large California hats are of gray felt with broad rims. Do not hasten to conclude from this that they were turbulent. They listen attentively, and their decent and tranquil demeanor would cause shame to many audiences that pretend to the refinements of civilization. It is not, besides, the first time that I have had the opportunity of taking notice of this fact in a California audience. Their pretended rudeness, which I have so often heard spoken of, goes back to the times of the primitive miner-colonists. They are now much more refined, better educated than the "Far West." I repeat it, I have rarely seen a more peaceful population. It is true that I make my programmes as simple as possible. It would be as absurd to play for them pieces very difficult to understand, or classical music, as to give beefsteaks to a newly-born infant. They have never heard the piano, and of all instruments, it is the most difficult to render comprehensive to an audience who have almost or never [sic] heard music. Every instrument which from its nature embraces multiple combinations of sounds, is obscure to an ear that is not accustomed to it. Scarcely is the concert ended, than a young girl of the audience mounts the platform and quietly turns out the only Argand that gave light, whether poorly or well, to this part of the exhibition. I suppose she is the daughter of the proprietor, and I would wager that she will be a precious acquisition to the husband who shall marry her.

It was probably even more difficult in Gottschalk's time than it is today, to give various elements of the public what each demanded. The following comment was written in Canada:

## Louis Moreau Gottschalk, as Portrayed by Himself 127

The taste for music is not well developed. An officer very candidly said to me after the concert that the people were not satisfied. I ought to have played themes from the operas 'La Sonnambula,' 'La Lucia,' in short, a London repertory; "that is," said he, "some true music." "You should have played some themes without ornament." Let us never listen to the public. We should hang ourselves in despair. At St. Louis, the wife of a judge said to me that I was deficient in charm; that my music was too learned (I had just played a transcription of the 'Miserere'); that I ought to play national airs—'Yankee Doodle,' 'Hail Columbia,' 'Dixie's Land,' etc. At Havana, Count O'Reilley discovered that I played too loud. At New York, H——— said that I played too soft.

In spite of his sense of humor, and his ability to discount unfavorable conditions, Gottschalk was nevertheless sensitive to adverse criticism. In his own time he was attacked for the same reasons for which he is generally dismissed today, principally for appearing as a showman rather than an artist, for being a sentimentalist, and for playing salon music instead of the classics. John S. Dwight of Boston, editor of *Dwight's Journal of Music*, was the sharpest thorn in Gottschalk's flesh, for Dwight had appointed himself the American guardian of German classicists and romanticists up to and including Schumann and Mendelssohn—no further. For Gottschalk he had little use:

. . . Skillful, graceful, brilliant, wonderful, we own his playing was. But players less wonderful have given far deeper satisfaction . . . of what use were all these difficulties? . . . Why all that rapid tossing of handfuls of chords from the middle to the highest octaves, lifting the hand with such conscious appeal to our eyes? To what end all those rapid octave passages? since, in the intervals of easy execution, in the seemingly quiet impromptu passages, the music grew so monotonous and commonplace: the same little figure repeated and repeated, after listless pauses, in a way which conveyed no meaning, no sense of musical progress, but only the appearance of fastidiously critical scale-practising.

It is evident that Dwight missed the point when he listened to Gottschalk, for the Creole knew and could play the best in music literature. A conversation reported by George Upton sheds light on this matter:<sup>1</sup>

I remember asking him [Gottschalk] why he didn't play that class of music [Beethoven, Mendelssohn, etc.] in his concerts. He replied: "Because the dear public don't want to hear me play it. People would rather hear my 'Banjo' or 'Ojos Creollos,' or 'Last Hope.' Besides, there are plenty of pianists who can play that music as well or better than I can, but none of them can play my music half so well as I can. And what difference will it make a thousand years hence, anyway?"

In his diary Gottschalk makes a number of comments on hostile critics. One of them possibly refers, first to Dwight, and

<sup>1</sup>*Musical Memories*, by Geo. P. Upton: 1903, A. C. McClurg & Co.

second to Richard Storrs Willis (brother of Nathaniel), who edited the *Musical World*:

Thus far the press of the United States have treated me with great kindness, with the exception of two newspaper writers, one of them an old minister, who does not understand music [Dwight was originally a Unitarian minister], and the other an obscure writer, who uses his pen in the service of his personal antipathies. If they had used the one-hundredth part of the efforts which they have employed to prove that I am a fool, in acquiring, the one a knowledge of the art of which he pretends to be a luminary, and the other in correcting one or two pieces for the piano which he has published, they might have succeeded in arriving at an honest mediocrity, instead of remaining malicious nobodies.

Another comment tells of discouragements in New England, and of resisting the temptation of returning to Europe:

Throughout all New England (where, I am anxious to say, some years later I found the most sympathetic reception), there was but a succession of losses. Mr. S., in a newspaper, devoted a whole column to my kid gloves, another to my handsome appearance, and my French manners. [Gottschalk always wore white gloves to his concerts, and never took them off until he was on the platform, facing his audience.] At P——, after my first concert, at which there were seventeen persons, one editor gave a facetious account, in which he asserted that he hated music, but that mine was less insupportable to him, because, in the noise that I drew from my piano, there was no music. Be that as it may, I lost sixteen hundred dollars in a few months.

Killed by the gross attacks of which I had been the object . . . disgusted at a career which, even among my own countrymen, did not promise the means of providing for the wants of my family and myself, I returned to New York.

My compositions continued to have a large sale in Paris. Then it was that I received a letter from one of my old friends and patrons, the respectable and old Countess de Flavigny, who afterwards was appointed lady of honour to the Empress Eugénie. She exhorted me to return to Paris, and held out to me the probability of my being soon appointed pianist to the Court. But I was withheld through bashfulness. It was painful for me to return to Paris, first theatre of my great success, and confess that I had not succeeded in my own country, America, which at this period was the Eldorado, the dream of artists, and which from the exaggerated accounts of the money which Jenny Lind had made there, rendered my ill success more striking.

Gottschalk was particularly sensitive to the charge that he played only his own compositions:

“He never plays but his own music.” Of all the criticisms of which I am the object on the part of the impotent and jealous who, like the thorns and barren bushes, encumber every avenue of art in America, I avow, that this is the one I am the least disposed to accept. If I had never been able to compose, no doubt the poorest of musical pretenders

who had manufactured a polka or a valse, would have thrown it in my face that I played only the music of others. If my compositions had failed in originality, "they are copies," would not have failed to have been said; but I compose, and what I compose is unfortunately my own, and further, the public seem to like my music; hence their rage. . . . I begin to regret having received from God the afflicting gift of being able to create. . . . If Thackeray was lecturing to you would you complain that he gave you Thackeray, and would it not be absurd if he recounted to you the passages of Hamlet or Othello which any actor could recite to you? . . .

Another criticism may interest piano manufacturers:

A newspaper attacks me because I play exclusively on Chickering's pianos, and thinks it shocking that I place the maker's name on a plate that decorates the side exposed to public view. He adds facetiously that it is asserted that I intend to wear, suspended to my neck, a placard, upon which will be inscribed the name of my favorite maker. This honest editor, who does not appear to be *au fait* in the matter of concerts, ought to know that no piano, here or in Europe, is placed upon the platform without having on it the name of its maker. Then he also should know that Thalberg, for the twenty-five years he has given concerts in Europe, has never played but upon Erard's pianos. That Chopin has never laid his fingers upon any others than those of Pleyel. That Liszt, in France, in Switzerland, in England, in Italy, in Germany, in Turkey, has always played Erard's to the exclusion of all other pianos.

On one occasion he turned the laugh on those who deplored his neglect of the classics:

I was playing at the concert the Kreutzer sonata of Beethoven. The audience had greatly the appearance of going to sleep. The next morning a newspaper says: "We could ourselves have done very well without the long piece for the piano and violin." It was notwithstanding the same paper that last year was complaining that we did not give classical music.

Another reference to his reputed inability to play the music of the masters, this time from California:

A small newspaper gives an account of my concert. It has discovered that I shake with the thumb and the fourth finger, and thence concludes that I do not know how to play the piano, and that I am a charlatan incapable of playing Beethoven. The same nonsense still!

Gottschalk felt that Beethoven had many limitations as a composer for the piano:

Beethoven, taken as a symphonist, is the most inspired among composers, and the one who composes best for the orchestra. . . . As a composer for the piano he falls below mediocrity. . . . The piano is an instrument which Beethoven knew but imperfectly well, and which besides at the period he wrote was but the embryo of the piano which is made by modern manufacturers. . . . The ideas so beautifully and so marvelously clothed in all the splendour or all the tenderness which the orchestra affords him in his profoundest researches are clumsy and often tame when he adapts them to the piano.

He had only scorn for Chopin's imitators:

Since Liszt has given the word of command to the Germans, Chopin has all at once become classical. His forms, which before they treated, without understanding them, as whimsical, his harmonies, so worked up, have become so many perfect models. I do not complain for my part, having been one of the old Chopinists, but what I deplore is the frightful abuse which is made of Chopin's formulas. There is not a small pianist composer who does not think himself called upon to make Chopin nocturnes, Chopin mazurkas, Chopin polonaises—it has become an epidemic in the United States. . . .

Gottschalk hated Puritanism, and the stern, forbidding bleakness of an American Sabbath appalled and oppressed him. Here is a comment written in Toledo:

The rage of conversion, the fever of proselytism, which constitutes one of the characteristic traits of Americans, is discovered at every step where we travel. At the hotels we found framed placards in which the Reverend So-and-So very cordially invited his brother travellers to visit his church. . . . It is to an American a great satisfaction to take to church his friend whose faith is doubtful. To him the excellence of his own religion is so clear that he has no doubt about the conversion of any one whom he takes to his church.

This from Cleveland:

Sunday is always a splenetic day in all Protestant countries, but in Cleveland it is enough to make you commit suicide.

From Elmira:

This morning, after breakfast, I took a nap. Then I went down into the parlour, where I found two ladies with their Sunday faces on—that is, looking as dismal as possible. . . . Every one knows how strictly Sunday is observed in all Puritanical countries. To judge from appearances, it is a day devoted to lamenting the irreparable affliction which God has inflicted on us by the gift of existence. . . . I do not know if God in his goodness ever thinks of us; but if he thinks of casting his eyes, on a Sunday, upon his creation in America, it is very doubtful whether he rejoices in his work, on seeing so many disheartened faces.

According to tradition Gottschalk was a *matinée* idol, a *beau idéal*, and there are stories of ladies in the audience rushing to the platform, seizing his gloves and fighting for fragments as souvenirs. Probably this was going a little too far to please even Gottschalk, but he nevertheless enjoyed the fair sex. They sometimes distracted him while he played:

[Harrisburg, Pa.] The audience is charming. I observe in it some of those rose and lily complexions of which our ladies have the privilege, and which I denounce to the artists who follow me, as being those which trouble the soul while you are playing. They make you play false notes,

## Louis Moreau Gottschalk, as Portrayed by Himself 131

and give a suppressed sigh every time that your imagination evokes their charming images.

And again in Auburn:

Concert magnificent, all the pieces encored. In the hall a charming battalion of young girls, of those who cause wrong notes, and the remembrance of whom is accompanied with a deep sigh heaved by the old bachelors who have the pleasure or the misfortune of meeting them on their way.

In Hartford:

Fine concert. Kind audience. *Faces to make one play false notes* in the front row. I got along, nevertheless, passably.

From a hotel in Buffalo:

My God! what features! I have never seen anything more artistic or a more striking harmony of contour than in this young face white as polished ivory, set off by a crown of ebon hair. There is there perhaps the stuff for a great artist or for a superior intelligence. Halt there, my imagination! do not build up a romance, but pay your dollar to the collector who comes to snatch you from your admiration by asking you to pay for your dinner. As for my Sappho, she is at this moment handing a plate of pork and beans to a traveller.

It has often been assumed that Gottschalk was vain, that as a ladies' man he was precious in appearance, ever thoughtful of the impression he would make. In his whole diary there is but one reference to such matters, and that on the occasion of his arrival in San Francisco, after a distressing sea voyage from Panama. He is pointed out to the crowd on the wharf:

I submit to this exhibition with regret. My looks, considerably deteriorated by sea-sickness, present the most wretched appearance, and offer nothing but what is disappointing to those who always associate the idea of a celebrity of any kind with a certain physical majesty. Of over one hundred persons who know my name without ever having seen me, I have invariably read from their looks that they were quite disappointed in finding me thin and of ordinary height. . . . Form always seduces the masses, and the people in their youth become enraptured with the form to the exclusion of the mind.

The offensive manners of the coarse were always repulsive to his sensitive nature, and he had to endure many mental tortures on his travels:

Our civilization has some singular deficiencies. The comforts which we possess in the interior of our houses and in our hotels disappear as soon as we travel. Might we not have many seats so arranged that by paying a little more a lady and gentleman might be certain of finding during their journey the security and repose which the laws of our country give us a right to demand? Is it proper that your daughter, your sister, should be exposed without intermission to the gross and profane language

and to the obscene songs of a mixed society which the want of a division of seats forces you to submit to? You will tell me that our republican institutions are opposed to these divisions. I do not think so. You would have as much right to force all citizens to have their hands callous and not to wear gloves. . . . One can be a republican and not like the society of those who drink every five minutes, pick their teeth with a pen-knife, use their fingers for handkerchiefs and eat sausage and keep you in remembrance of it through its odour a long time after the sausage has disappeared. . . . I am far from claiming an aristocratic privilege in favour of the rich . . . but I demand in the name of civilization an end of some kind to the abuse which turbulent and gross majorities exercise toward intelligent and polished minorities, whether it be in railroad cars or in the field of politics.

One of the most interesting features of Gottschalk's diary is his account of Civil War events. Although he was a native of New Orleans his sympathies were with the North:

I have solemnly taken the oath of allegiance to the government at Washington. My horror of slavery made me emancipate, ten years since, three slaves that belonged to me. Although born in the South, I recognize but one principle—that of the Constitution. . . . Besides, the South whose courage and heroism I honour, whilst deploring the blindness which has precipitated them into a war without issue—the South leans upon two political errors. In the nineteenth century nationalities are no longer broken—the general movement tends to unification. No one fraction of the people has the right to reclaim its autonomy, if it does not carry with it greater guarantees of progress and civilization than that of the majority who is enslaving it. But the South in wishing to destroy one of the most beautiful monuments of modern times—the American Union—carries with it only slavery. It is, indeed, unbecoming my fellow-citizens of the South to ask for the liberty of reclaiming their independence, when this independence is only to be made use of for the conservation of the most odious of abuses and the most flagrant outrage upon liberty. I do not have any illusions regarding the negro. I believe him very inferior morally to the white. No race so maltreated as this has been by chance could have remained as——— [The remainder of this paragraph was missing from the original MS.]

Gottschalk travelled in the midst of the Civil War days, and he witnessed many stormy scenes. Wounded soldiers, grieving friends and relatives—all were among his associates on his journeys. He arrived in Harrisburg for a concert when the Confederates were threatening the Pennsylvania capital, before they were definitely repulsed at Gettysburg. Yet the perseverance of his manager compelled him to continue, and I doubt whether Gottschalk regretted it, for he loved adventure.

It has been a pleasant task to select from Gottschalk's diary a few passages to illustrate the man in his own words. It has been a difficult selection, for every page is filled with colorful and

illuminating material. Combined, they show that Gottschalk was far more than musician—he was a man who observed, and who interpreted shrewdly and appraisingly all that he saw and heard.

And so it was with his music; it was definitely of his time, dated, yet it showed the broad background behind the American of cosmopolitan environment and heritage who composed it. Gottschalk of the nineteenth century should not be undervalued as a factor in the development of American music.