#### MUSICAL AMERICA

# H. T. BURLEIGH: COMPOSER BY DIVINE RIGHT AND "THE AMERICAN COLERIDGE-TAYLOR"

Remarkable Career of This Singer Who Is a Musician, and Musician Who Is a Seeker After Cosmic Truth-As a Boy He Stood in the Snow for Hours to Hear Joseffy Play in the House of the People to Whom the Lad's Family Were in Service

 $Y^{OU}$  have surely heard, or heard of, Harry Burleigh. Perhaps you have been present at one of Kitty Cheatham's delightful afternoons, when she has brought him out to assist her in the presentation of negro spirituals? Or you have heard him sing at St. George's Church, New York, or at the Temple Emanu-El? Again in your vocal studies you have learned his song "Jean," a song which though simple in its structure has a note of sincerity in it that has won it the approval of thousands upon thousands.

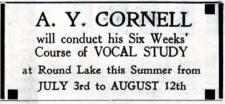
If you have met with his work you will wish to know his unique career. For unique it is. Whether there are a halfdozen musicians in this country to-day dozen musicians in this country to-day who have risen to prominence in as un-conventional a manner as he has I doubt very much. Merit, and merit alone, has lifted him from obscurity to his present position. He has lived and suffered and to-day he is coming into his own, he is winning praise from musicians who withheld it, until he showed that he had in him not the average attainment of in him not the average attainment of a composer of singable songs, but the extraordinary gifts to which his present output in the department of the art-song testifies.

## A Self-Made Musician

The self-made business man is in America no rara avis; I am inclined to think that the self-made musician still is. Almost everybody who has forged his way to the front in music has had the aid of some person, who has inter-ested himself in his behalf. H. T. Bur-leigh has worked his way forward, al-most without aid. That is, he had, of course, the assistance of musicians who taught him, but his own salvation he has looked after himself. His was not the task of the average American, nor was it that of a poor boy. He had a handicap that to a poor boy. He had a handcap that twenty years ago loomed up much larger than it does to-day. For the color-line was drawn far more sharply. And Harry Burleigh was a negro boy from Erie, Pa. That he is a man in whom the pursuit

of a fine art has made its impress is certain. For he conceals nothing in his ca-reer, is ashamed of no past performance. I talked with him recently in the editorial rooms of the New York branch of the Ricordis. Many an artist—singer, pian-ist, composer, violinist, what not—has as-sumed a modesty in talking to me, know-ing that I was going to write my impresing that I was going to write my impres-sions, but I have never met with so sincere a modesty as that which is part and parcel of this gifted musician.

He argued with me over a space of time that he was not a composer, that he was a singer, for it was by singing that he earned his daily bread. Did not, he said, composers devote their days to creative work? Did not Sir Edward El-gar, Coleridge-Taylor, or our own Victor Herbert, give time daily to the writing of music and were not their incomes derived from their music? I agreed that they were. But to my question "With what would you occupy yourself daily, were you not obliged to sing to earn your living?" he could not escape the answer "Composition." So whether he likes it or not Living that he is a composed index not I insist that he is a composer, judging him worthy of the appellation by vir-tue of the quality of his output.





#### -Mishkin Photo.

"H. T. Burleigh Is Contributing to American Art-Song Examples of Creative Music That Deserve World-Wide Attention and Respect"

#### **His Modest Estimate**

He advanced, too, that he had written no symphony, no string quartet, no ora-torio. We might call him a "composer of torio. We might call him a "composer of songs," he was willing to admit, but sure-ly not more than that. Then I cited to him that a man might write a dozen academic string quartets and symphonies and a hundred preludes and fugues and he would be far less worthy of the title "composer" than a man who had done a half-dozen individual songs or short piano pieces. Was not the little E Minor Prelude of Chopin worth a million sym-phonies by Bargiel or a thousand cham-ber music works by Hummel? That closed the argument and we proceeded unhindered.

Music, like murder, will out. The ex-amples would fill columns. The boy Bur-leigh loved it and up in Erie, where his family was, he heard some remarkable music. He told me about it as eagerly as I listened to his narration. It appeared that his family had for years been asso-ciated in service to the family of a Mrs. Elizabeth Russell in Erie, where the re-nowned musical artists of the day played when they visited that Pennsylvania city. The boy heard that Rafael Joseffy was coming to give a concert there. He would hear it at any cost; so he stood in the snow up to his knees outside the window of the drawing-room of the Russell house. of the drawing-room of the Russell house. There he heard the great Joseffy in his fullest powers. The lad was taken ill, pneumonia threatened, and in answer to his mother's inquiries, he told of the hours in the deep snow. The mother, re-alizing that such a happening ought to be prevented for the future, went to Mrs. Russell and asked if Harry might not help in the house when artists performed. help in the house when artists performed. Mrs. Russell was moved by this plea and arranged that he might "open the door" at the next visit of a concert artist to

#### **Opened Door for Carreño**

At the next concert Teresa Carreño was the visiting artist. In those days she was making her early American tours. With her was a kindly lady, of whose identity the boy had no knowledge. But she played an important part in his musical life. The day Mme. Carreño played Harry Burleigh opened the door of the Russell home for the arriving and depart-ing guests and helped the maids wait upon them. He saw the kindly lady and remembered her He saw pothing more remembered her. He saw nothing more of her until 1892. It was then that he came down from Erie to New York—he said nothing about his mission to his family—for he had heard of the scholarships that the National Conservatory of Music was offering. He had studied voice in Erie and had sung in the churches there. The examinations were on and he entered the lists in voice. He told me how he sang before a jury, among whom were the late Joseffy, Romualdo Sapio, Adele Margulies and a number of others. Anton Dvorak was the director of the conservatory, which then had a famous faculty. Harry Burleigh was not at first awarded the scholarship. He had fallen a bit be-

low the mark required for one. The kindly lady, whom he had seen with Mme. Carreño in Erie, was registrar at the conservatory and it was to her he

How a Chance Meeting with MacDowell's Mother Helped His Life in a Crisis—Dvorak's Views of "New World" Symphony as Expressed to His Young Protégé — Burleigh's Consistent Progress as a Composer, from Ballads to the Most Significant Art Songs

went to learn of his success or failure. She sympathized with him and in conversation learned that he came from Erie. Almost immediately he remembered her and taking a letter of recommendation from Mrs. Russell from his pocket he told that he was the boy who some years be-fore had opened the door when Mme. Carreño played at Mrs. Russell's. The lady told him to come back after a few days, that his case would be reconsidered. He did and when he returned he was awarded a scholarship. The lady was none other than the mother of our Ed-ward MacDowell, one of the finest spirits that this country has produced, a woman loved and cherished by all who knew her. The young man Burleigh helped her with the writing of class-books, with address-ing letters, sending out circulars and kindred clerical matters.

### **His Teachers**

There at the conservatory he studied voice with Christian Fritsch, harmony with Rubin Goldmark, counterpoint with John White and Max Spicker. He played double bass and later tympani in the Conservatory Orchestra under Frank van der Stucken and Gustav Hinrichs and was librarian of the orchestra, as well. And there he met Dvorak. I asked him about the best of Bohemian

composers and he told me that, although he was never really a pupil of the master, he was never really a pupil of the master, he knew him better and saw perhaps more of him than some of his regularly enrolled pupils. "I copied many of the orchestral parts of the 'New World' Sym-phony from his original *partitur*," he said, "getting it ready for its first per-formance by the Philharmonic. Did Dvorak know the tunes of the negro, our spirituals? Of course, he did, and he knew 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,' which the second theme of his first movement the second theme of his first movement of the 'New World' resembles so strongly. remember asking him one day which movement of this symphony he liked best. He answered 'I love them all alike; are they not all my children?' I used to play and sing these songs for him and he was keenly interested in them, finding their beauty distinct and individual."

Such testimony as this is indeed val-uable, for it gives the lie to the charge of a Hamburg clarinet-player when the "New World" was first played in that city many years ago, who claimed that it was an early work, composed by Dvorak in Europe and retouched for American con-sumption, dubbed "New World" by him to please this country's public.

#### How He Worked His Way

Obstacles confronted the young man who was getting his musical education at the conservatory. His tuition was free, to be sure, but his living expenses were an item that caused much concern. During the summer following his first year at the conservatory he went to Saratoga, then the American summer resort par excellence, and served wine at the leading hotel. But the second summer he had ad-vanced; this time he went to Saratoga as baritone soloist at the Bethesda Episcopal Church. And from that time things went better.

In 1894, competing with sixty applicants, he won the position of baritone soloist at St. George's Church in New York (where the famous Rev. Dr. Rainsford preached and made an interna-tional reputation for himself). That po-sition H. T. Burleigh has held for twenty-two years. Shortly after, he was engaged at the Temple Emanu-El, a post which he has occurring for all of seventeen years he has occupied for all of seventeen years. He has toured in Europe and in this country as a concert baritone and has won much praise for his gifts as a singer. "My compositions-well, if I must talk about them, I always felt like composing. But I had no time. At the conservatory, where I was for four years, I worked very hard with my studies and my cleri-cal work, assisting Mrs. MacDowell. For

two years I taught voice and solfeggio there, too. I always had a sense for har-monies, but of actual composition I had When done little. I wrote a few songs. about twelve years ago the William Max-well Music Company was founded I met William Maxwell on the street one day. I told him I was writing a song and he suggested that I complete it and bring it in. He was building his catalog and was generous enough to be willing to give me a chance. That song, which he published, was 'Love's Garden.' Then I urrote 'Loan' and when it are are out it wrote 'Jean' and when it came out it somehow or other 'caught on' immediate-ly. I have only a little time for composi-tion, even now." And he went on to tell me again that singing was his profession.

#### **His Best Art Songs**

I knew well his cycle of "Saracen Songs," his Five Laurence Hope Set-tings, his "Passionale," his deeply felt musical tone-paintings of Arthur Sy-mons's "Memory," "A Prayer," the scena "The Grey Wolf," his superb setting of Walt Whitman's "Ethiopia Saluting the Colors" and his "One Year," a musical mood of the war from 1914 to 1915, the poem by Margaret M. Harlan. While we were talking George Maxwell, managing poem by Margaret M. Harlan. While we were talking George Maxwell, managing director of the Ricordi house for Amer-ica, entered. He has for the last few years brought out Burleigh's music; he believes in H. T. Burleigh and he has aided him, perhaps more than any other individual in America, in striving for his ideals in composition ideals in composition.

Taking a manuscript in pencil from his coat Burleigh showed Mr. Maxwell and myself the sketch of a setting he has just made of Rupert Brooke's much praised poem, "The Soldier." Wars pro-duce a mass of inconsequential literary and mysical stuff. The present Encode and musical stuff. The present European conflict is no exception. Max Reger has already written a patriotic overture of no significance, Claude Debussy a 'Christ-mas Carol for Homeless Children" that will add nothing to his reputation as composer. I think that this Burleigh setting of Rupert Brooke's inspired lines will be among the important art-products of the Great War, when the record is made. It is a composition that will stir deeply those who hear it; and best of all it is vital because it is not a contribution to a cause but a spontaneous musical re-flection of Brooke's sublime sentiment.

#### **Chooses Texts with Big Meaning**

As we parted I asked Mr. Burleigh how he felt toward the modern art-song and its development. "The next," he said, "determines the character of the song. The kind of music one writes is governed by this solely, I believe. If the American composer will only remember that when he chooses he is to look for poems in which the spiritual forces of mercy, jus-tice truth play a part he will be adding tice, truth play a part, he will be adding to the literature things that have a big meaning. For me a poem must have more than just an ordinary sentimental refer-ence before I can set it, or rather before it makes any impression on me. I read it makes any impression on me. I read hundreds of perfectly good poems that I would never think of setting to music. There has been a neglect on the part of our composers, I think, of the kind of poems which in my estimation call out musical thought of real fiber." I had talked with H. T. Burleigh for more than an hour. I had for the first time since I met him—that was several years ago—acquainted myself with his fine mental equipment. This man is a composer by divine right and what is

nne mental equipment. This man is a composer by divine right and what is more he is a thinker, a man who writes music not because he enjoys seeing his name on the program of some singer, but because he feels deeply, profoundly in the language of tone. I left him with my firm conviction that H. T. Burleigh is contributing to American art-song excontributing to American art-song ex-amples of creative music that deserve world-wide attention and respect. A. WALTER KRAMER.

# Helen Jeffrey String Quartet Makes Initial Albany Appearance

Initial Albany Appearance ALBANY, N. Y., April 22.—The Helen M. Jeffrey String Quartet made its first appearance Friday night at the His-torical Society, where the Art Pageant was given for the benefit of the Albany School of Fine Arts. Miss Jeffrey has associated with her Carl Kreuter, sec-ond violin; Gerald Kunz, viola, and Marie Roemaet, 'cellist, all of the New York Institute of Fine Arts. The quar-te numbers included the Grieg Sonata in G Minor, Op. 27; a group by Tschaikow-sky, Glazounoff and Percy Grainger's "Molly on the Shore." Miss Jeffrey's objo offerings were the "Spanish Dance," by Granados, played with rare charm and skill; the "Village Dance" of Bur-leigh, Beethoven's "Rondino" and "Theme and Variations," by Tartin. W. A. H.

W. A. H.