

# 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



—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 oratorio. We might call him a "composer of songs," he was willing to admit, but surely 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 symphonies by Bargiel or a thousand chamber music works by Hummel? That closed the argument and we proceeded unhindered.

Music, like murder, will out. The examples would fill columns. The boy Burleigh 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 associated in service to the family of a Mrs. Elizabeth Russell in Erie, where the renowned 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. 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, realizing 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. Mrs. Russell was moved by this plea and arranged that he might "open the door" at the next visit of a concert artist to Erie.

### 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 departing guests and helped the maids wait upon them. He saw the kindly lady and 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 below 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 before 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 Edward 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 addressing 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 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' Symphony from his original *partitur*," he said, "getting it ready for its first performance 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 of the 'New World' resembles so strongly. I 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 valuable, 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 consumption, 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 advanced; 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 international reputation for himself). That position H. T. Burleigh has held for twenty-two years. Shortly after, he was engaged at the Temple Emanu-El, a post which 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 clerical work, assisting Mrs. MacDowell. For

two years I taught voice and solfeggio there, too. I always had a sense for harmonies, but of actual composition I had done little. I wrote a few songs. When about twelve years ago the William Maxwell 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 wrote 'Jean' and when it came out it somehow or other 'caught on' immediately. I have only a little time for composition, 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 Settings, his "Passionale," his deeply felt musical tone-paintings of Arthur Symons'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 director of the Ricordi house for America, 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.

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 produce a mass of inconsequential literary and musical stuff. The present European conflict is no exception. Max Reger has already written a patriotic overture of no significance, Claude Debussy a "Christmas 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 reflection 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, justice, 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 reference before I can set it, or rather before 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 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 examples of creative music that deserve world-wide attention and respect.

A. WALTER KRAMER.

### Helen Jeffrey String Quartet Makes Initial Albany Appearance

ALBANY, N. Y., April 22.—The Helen M. Jeffrey String Quartet made its first appearance Friday night at the Historical 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, second violin; Gerald Kunz, viola, and Marie Roemaet, cellist, all of the New York Institute of Fine Arts. The quartet numbers included the Grieg Sonata in G Minor, Op. 27; a group by Tchaikovsky, Glazounoff and Percy Grainger's "Molly on the Shore." Miss Jeffrey's solo offerings were the "Spanish Dance," by Granados, played with rare charm and skill; the "Village Dance" of Burleigh, Beethoven's "Rondino" and "Theme and Variations," by Tartini.

W. A. H.

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