

## America Gradually Coming Into a True Appreciation of Its Greatest Composer

Some of the Finest Fruits of MacDowell's Genius Still Undiscovered by Most Music-Lovers—  
But the Light Seems at Last to Be Breaking, as a Result Largely of the Country-wide Propaganda Carried Through by His Widow—MacDowell's Artistic Ideals and Achievements as Viewed by the One Who Knew Them Best

INVOLUNTARILY one remembers Cosima Wagner upon meeting the widow of Edward MacDowell. For, if the two women are antithetical in character, in temperament, in their relations to the world, their abiding devotion to the memory of those choice spirits whose light continues to reflect upon them, and their complete self-consecration to the advancement of an artistic cause constitute a bond that commends itself to the imagination. Yet in the very process of their fidelity there are great differences. The aged, proud recluse of Bayreuth has with years grown narrow, suspicious, intolerant. The no less faithful companion of the American composer—who is still a young woman—is liberal, open to progressive influences and democratic in a sense that Cosima, even in her earlier days, never was. Who shall say that her mission is not the harder? Richard Wagner, Titan that he was, would have commanded the allegiance of mankind by dint of sheer prodigious personality, by the vastness and novelty of his conceptions and by his aptitude in focussing attention upon himself. In a sense, open hostility is easier to overcome than indifference—and merely indifferent to Wagner the world could never be. Edward MacDowell had none of Wagner's combativeness nor his genius for self-exploitation. His reticence militated against him in life. He was not truly appreciated when he died, nor is he to-day. By most persons the "greater MacDowell" is still undiscovered. People are slow to learn—musicians, especially, are bovine. But light seems to be breaking and for this fact credit belongs primarily to MacDowell's wife. The extent of popular indebtedness to her will be realized in America only later.

In an earlier day Mrs. MacDowell had harbored the ambitions of a concert pianist. Her marriage put a period to them. Thereafter her aim and object consisted in devoting her best efforts to the well-being of her husband. But after his tragic passing she returned to the task of making capital of her pianistic skill (which she modestly endeavors to minimize), this time in his interest. And so, besides her great work in relation to the Peterborough colony—the proceeds of her recitals revert unreservedly to the MacDowell Memorial Association—she has for years traveled the country doing propaganda for his music—lecturing, explaining, illustrating by performance. She has had to encounter and overcome ignorance and prejudice, to combat apathy and misconception. She has done so unflinchingly, with

cheerful eagerness and a simple charm of manner that never fails of its appeal. And she is just beginning to see her labors bear fruit.

employ one of the composer's own phrases; because piano virtuosi wreak themselves vertiginously upon the "Hexentanz," the "Concert Study" and the

becomes thoroughly popular when it is adequately performed. I have noticed that. On my travels about the country it has pleased me to see how warmly people grew to like a song like 'The Golden Rod' and a piano piece like 'From a German Forest.' I have a queerly retentive memory and the mental note I made of MacDowell's playing of his own music has never left me. And so, without for a moment making pretensions to virtuosity, I believe I am better able than most persons to convey an exact notion of his own ideas regarding its interpretation.

"Of course, the genuine exponent of MacDowell must have the Celtic intuition, the Celtic subtlety of imagination. But the average person is likely to be led astray by the metronome markings. These, for the greater part, are very faulty and MacDowell himself is to



Photo by W. H. Hamerton

Mrs. MacDowell's Music Room in Her Peterborough, N. H., Home. A Bust of the Composer Is Shown Near the Window

Liszt, when told of the slow progress of his compositions, remarked "I can wait." MacDowell, too, has had to wait. It is one of the curious ironies of American musical history that, while most persons would, if asked, pronounce him the outstanding American composer, not ten per cent of them know those productions wherein he is greatest. One recalls a remark to the effect that "every school-girl plays Grieg's piano pieces and vocalists sing his melodious songs"; yet Grieg's best piano writings almost never figure on concert programs, while a thick-skulled generation of singers are entirely oblivious to most of his finest lyrics. Similarly, certain people entertain the notion that MacDowell's music is common property to-day because every schoolgirl does tear up the "Wild Rose" by the roots—to

"Märzwind" and because songsters have made "Thy Beaming Eyes" an abomination and have discovered "Long Ago" and "The Sea," while Geraldine Farrar wins encores with "Bluebell." And yet the real MacDowell is only beginning to emerge in the superb clangor and inexorable momentum of the "Keltic" Sonata.

### MacDowell's Metronomic Markings

It was my privilege to spend an hour recently with Mrs. MacDowell. We

blame for that. For when he had finished a work it possessed little further interest for him. Proofreading became a burden and the addition of metronome indications was done haphazardly—with the unfortunate consequence that the score failed to convey his true intentions. Some things become quite preposterous taken at the tempo demanded by the metronomic figures. More than one person has called my attention to the digressions between my style of playing and the requirements of the printed page.

### SIDELIGHTS ON MACDOWELL

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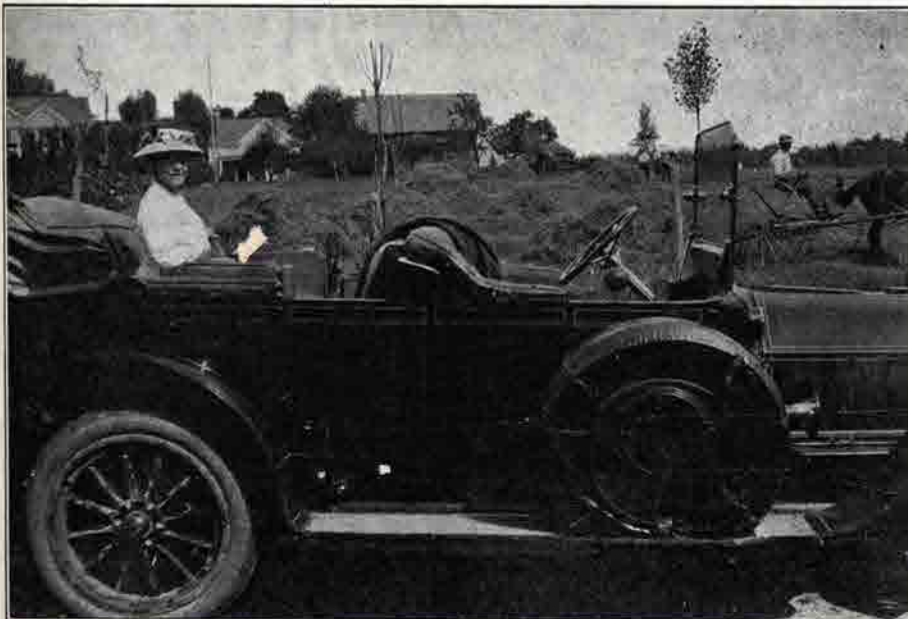
"The average player is likely to be led astray by the metronomic markings.

"Few deeds I have witnessed have struck me as more moving and noble than the tireless enterprise of Teresa Carreño, who has upheld the cause (of MacDowell) from the first.

"MacDowell could never write to order nor would he attempt music in a form or style uncongenial to his artistic nature. \* \* \* It was this consciousness of his own limitations that caused him to be so annoyed when people referred to him as the 'leading American composer.'

"Creative ideas came to him in a flash, but he expended the greatest energy and labor in their amplification. It was precisely because of this that he did not write more for orchestra. His leisure did not serve him.

"Had he been spared for further creation, I think he would have ceased writing for piano and turned to opera."



Mrs. Edward MacDowell on the Grounds of Her Peterborough Home

spoke of this singular unfamiliarity of many leading musicians with her husband's finest and most representative efforts—of the neglect of compositions like the "Norse" and "Keltic" sonatas, the "Sea Pieces," the "Fireside Tales"; of songs like the magnificent "Fair Spring-tide" and the adorable "To a Golden Rod." Not a little of it she ascribes to the still prevalent hostility to indigenous musical products. As for singers, they are so easily satisfied with what makes ready appeal to a comparatively non-exigent public! "Strangely enough," she told me, "the best of MacDowell's music

The 'Sea Pieces' in particular suffer if not done with the proper rhythmic effect. Not long ago a lady from Montclair told me she would be especially happy to hear me play these, 'for,' she said, 'I feel as if I ought to like them, though now I don't. This, I am convinced, is the case with many; they have not heard MacDowell's greatest works performed as he himself would have done them, with the right rhythm, tempo and spirit. And the clue to these is not invariably found in the pages of the score.

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