

TWENTY-FOUR
NEGRO MELODIES

TRANSCRIBED FOR THE PIANO BY

S. COLERIDGE-TAYLOR

OP. 59

WITH A PREFACE BY
BOOKER T. WASHINGTON



BOSTON : OLIVER DITSON COMPANY

NEW YORK : CHAS. H. DITSON & CO. CHICAGO : LYON & HEALY

PHILADELPHIA : J. E. DITSON & CO.

[PRICE: PAPER, \$1.50; CLOTH, \$2.50]

C. W. THOMPSON & CO.
A & B PARK STREET,
COR. TREMONT ST.
BOSTON, - - - MASS.

SAMUEL COLERIDGE-TAYLOR



Died 1914
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IT is given to but few men in so short a time to create for themselves a position of such prominence on two continents as has fallen to the lot of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor. Born in London, August 15, 1875, Mr. Coleridge-Taylor is not yet thirty. His father, an African and a native of Sierra Leone, was educated at King's College, London, and his medical practice was divided between London and Sierra Leone.

As a child of four and five Coleridge-Taylor could read music before he could read a book. His first musical instruction was on the violin. The piano he would not touch, and did not for some years. As one of the singing-boys in St. George's Church, Croydon, he received an early training in choral work. At fifteen he entered the Royal College of Music as a student of the violin. Afterwards winning a scholarship in composition he entered, in 1893, the classes of Sir Charles Villiers Stanford, with whom he studied four years or more.

Mr. Coleridge-Taylor early gave evidence of creative powers of a high order, and to-day, at the age of twenty-nine, he ranks as one of the most interesting and remarkable of British composers and conductors. Aside from his creative work, he is actively engaged as a teacher in Trinity College, London, and as conductor of the Handel Society, London, and the Rochester Choral Society. At the Gloucester Festival of 1898 Mr. Coleridge-Taylor attracted general notice by the performance of his *Ballade in A minor*, for orchestra, Op. 33, which he had been invited to conduct. His remarkably sympathetic setting in cantata form of portions of Longfellow's *Hiawatha*, Op. 30, has done much to make him known in England and America. This triple choral work, with its haunting melodic phrases, bold harmonic scheme, and vivid orchestration, was produced one part or scene at a time. The work was not planned as a whole, for the com-

poser's original intention was to set *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast* only. This section was first performed at a concert of the Royal College of Music under the conductorship of Stanford, November 11, 1898. In response to an invitation from the committee of the North Staffordshire Musical Festival *The Death of Minnehaha*, Op. 30, No. 2, was written, and given under the composer's direction at Hanley, October 26, 1899. The overture to *The Song of Hiawatha*, for full orchestra, Op. 30, No. 3, a distinct work, was composed for and performed at the Norwich Musical Festival of 1899. The entire work, with the added third part,—*Hiawatha's Departure*, Op. 30, No. 4,—was first given by the Royal Choral Society in Royal Albert Hall, London, March 22, 1900, the composer conducting.

The first performance of the entire work in America was given under the direction of Mr. Charles E. Knauss by the Orpheus Oratorio Society in Easton, Pa., May 5, 1903. The Cecilia Society, of Boston, under Mr. B. J. Lang, gave the first performance of *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast* on March 14, 1900; of *Hiawatha's Departure* on December 5, 1900; and on December 2, 1902, *The Death of Minnehaha*, together with *Hiawatha's Departure*.

In 1902 Mr. Coleridge-Taylor was invited to conduct at the Sheffield Musical Festival his orchestral and choral rhapsody *Meg Blane*, Op. 48. The fact that this work was given on the same program with a Bach cantata, Dvořák's *Stabat Mater* and Tchaïkovsky's *Symphonie Pathétique* indicates the high esteem in which the composer is held.

A sacred cantata of the dimensions and style of a modern oratorio, *The Atonement*, Op. 53, was first given at the Hereford Festival, September 9, 1903, under the composer's bâton, and its success was even greater at the first London performance in the Royal Albert Hall on Ash Wednesday,

1904, the composer conducting. The first performance of *The Atonement* in this country was by the Church Choral Society under Richard Henry Warren at St. Thomas's Church, New York, February 24 and 25, 1904. Worthy of special mention are the *Quintet for Clarinet and Strings*, Op. 6 (1897), which Joachim has given, and the *Sorrow Songs*, Op. 57 (1904),—a setting of six of Christina Rossetti's exquisite poems.

Beside the works already mentioned are a *Nonet for Piano, Strings and Wind*, Op. 3 (1894), *Symphony in A minor*, Op. 7 (1895), *Solemn Prelude for Orchestra*, Op. 40 (1899), between thirty and forty songs, various piano solos, anthems and part songs, and works in both large and small form for the violin with orchestra or piano.

Mr. Coleridge-Taylor has written much, has achieved much. His work, moreover, possesses not only charm and power but distinction, the individual note. The genuineness, depth and intensity of his feeling, coupled with his mastery of technique, spontaneity, and ability to think in his own way, explain the force of the appeal his compositions make. Another element in the persuasiveness of his music lies in its naturalness, the directness of its appeal, the use of simple and expressive melodic themes, a happy freedom from the artificial. These traits, employed in the freedom of modern musical speech, coupled with emotional power and supported by ample technical resource, beget an utterance quick to evoke response.

The paternity of Mr. Coleridge-Taylor and his love for what is elemental and racial found rich expression in the choral work by which he is best known, and more obviously in his *African Romances*, Op. 17, a set of seven songs; the *African Suite* for the piano, Op. 35; and *Five Choral Ballads*, for baritone solo, quartet, chorus and orchestra, Op. 54, being a setting of five of Longfellow's *Poems on Slavery*. The transcription of Negro melodies contained in this volume is, however, the most complete expression of Mr. Coleridge-Taylor's native bent and power. Using some of the native songs of Africa and the West Indies with songs that came into being in Amer-

ica during the slavery régime, he has in handling these melodies preserved their distinctive traits and individuality, at the same time giving them an art form fully imbued with their essential spirit.

It is especially gratifying that at this time, when interest in the plantation songs seems to be dying out with the generation that gave them birth, when the Negro song is in too many minds associated with "rag" music and the more reprehensible "coon" song, that the most cultivated musician of his race, a man of the highest æsthetic ideals, should seek to give permanence to the folk-songs of his people by giving them a new interpretation and an added dignity.

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Negro music is essentially spontaneous. In Africa it sprang into life at the war dance, at funerals, and at marriage festivals. Upon this African foundation the plantation songs of the South were built. According to the testimony of African students at Tuskegee there are in the native African melodies strains that reveal the close relationship between the Negro music of America and Africa, but the imagery and sentiments to which the plantation songs give expression are the outcome of the conditions in America under which the transported children of Africa lived. Wherever companies of Negroes were working together, in the cotton fields and tobacco factories, on the levees and steamboats, on sugar plantations, and chiefly in the fervor of religious gatherings, these melodies sprang into life.

Oftentimes in slavery, as to-day in certain parts of the South, some man or woman with an exceptional voice was paid to lead the singing, the idea being to increase the amount of labor by such singing.

The Negro folk-song has for the Negro race the same value that the folk-song of any other people has for that people. It reminds the race of the "rock whence it was hewn," it fosters race pride, and in the days of slavery it furnished an outlet for the anguish of smitten hearts. The

plantation song in America, although an outgrowth of oppression and bondage, contains surprisingly few references to slavery. No race has ever sung so sweetly or with such perfect charity, while looking forward to the "year of Jubilee." The songs abound in Scriptural allusions, and in many instances are unique interpretations of standard hymns.

The songs that had their origin in Virginia and the more northern of the Southern States, where the slave changed masters less often, and where he was under the personal care and guidance of his owner, are more bright and joyous in tone than are those which were sung in the Gulf States, where the yoke of slavery was more oppressive. The songs of the lower South are sadder in tone, less buoyant than are those of the upper South.

The plantation songs known as the "Spirituals" are the spontaneous outbursts of intense religious fervor, and had their origin chiefly in the camp meetings, the revivals and in other religious exercises. They breathe a child-like faith in a personal Father, and glow with the hope that the children of bondage will ultimately pass out of the wilderness of slavery into the land of freedom. In singing of a deliverance which they believed would surely come, with bodies swaying, with the enthusiasm born of a common experience and of a common hope, they lost sight for the moment of the auction-block, of the separation of mother and child, of sister and brother. There is in the plantation songs a pathos and a beauty that appeals to a wide range of tastes, and their harmony makes abiding impression upon persons of the highest culture. The music of these songs goes to the heart because it comes from the heart.

The question is often asked to what extent are these songs being sung by the colored people and to what extent are they being preserved. In the larger city churches they are being used but

little; but in the smaller towns, and in the country districts, where the colored people live in greater numbers, their use is quite general, and new ones appear from time to time. Several schools and colleges of the South make an effort to preserve these songs, and at Fisk, Hampton and Tuskegee, they are sung constantly. New students coming from remote parts of the South occasionally bring in new ones. While some of the colored people do not encourage the singing of the songs because they bring up memories of the trying conditions which gave them rise, the race as a whole realizes that apart from the music of the Red Man the Negro folk-song is the only distinctively American music, and is taking pride in using and preserving it.

It is, I repeat, a cause for special gratitude that the foremost musician of his race, a man in the zenith of his powers, should seek to chronicle, and thus perpetuate, the old melodies that are so rapidly passing away.

Mr. Coleridge-Taylor is himself an inspiration to the Negro, since he himself, the child of an African father, is an embodiment of what are the possibilities of the Negro under favorable environment. In his preface to the *Cabin and Plantation Songs*, as sung by Hampton students, Mr. Thomas P. Fenner said four decades ago, "The freedmen have an unfortunate inclination to despise this music [Negro music] as a vestige of slavery; those who learned it in the old time, when it was the natural outpouring of their sorrows and longings, are dying off, and if efforts are not made for its preservation, the country will soon have lost this wonderful music of bondage. It may be that this people which has developed such a wonderful musical sense in its degradation will, in its maturity, produce a composer who would bring the music of the future out of this music of the past." May we not look to Samuel Coleridge-Taylor for a fulfilment of this prophecy?

Born in Washington,

Tuskegee Institute, Alabama, October 24, 1904.