

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, the Anglo-African Composer

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THOSE who attended the musical festival in Leeds, England, a few years ago witnessed a scene the like of which was probably never enacted before since the world began. A new work was to be sung which had been written by a great English composer. The orchestra of 140 players had assembled to a man. Each and every member of the large chorus was present and a vast audience filled every available seat. All eyes were turned toward that portion of the hall in which the composer, who was to conduct his work, would appear. The orchestra and chorus caught a glimpse of him first and arose to its feet with cheers; then the audience spied him, whereupon all of those Englishmen, who are said to be so undemonstrative and cold, made the rafters ring with their wild applause. The man to whom this great homage was paid is a negro—to be more accurate, an Anglo-African—Samuel Coleridge-Taylor by name, born in London in 1875, the son of a full-blooded African from Sierra Leone and an English woman.

At eighteen this colored youth won a scholarship at the Royal College of Music, and before a year had passed he had written a composition for stringed instruments which took a prize. Before he was twenty-five he had written a cantata, by which he achieved fame. Since he left college he has been commissioned to write for all the great musical festivals in England but one, and the critics admit without exception that he is one of the best and most original composers that Great Britain has ever produced.

Mr. Coleridge-Taylor shows his African origin in the brown of his complexion and the crispiness and curl of his hair. He is under rather than above medium stature and is a bit thin. He has the polished manners of a cultured gentleman, affable, tho somewhat re-

served; converses well on any subject and is English to the finger tips. His wife is an Englishwoman, whom her distinguished husband met at the Royal College while they were both students there. Mrs. Coleridge-Taylor took a course in vocal music and has a voice of great sweetness, richness and strength. As a concert singer she might easily make a name for herself, if she chose. Before her marriage Mrs. Coleridge-Taylor sang frequently at private musicales, at which her husband accompanied her. The friendship which began in this way ripened into love, which was consummated in marriage five years ago.

It was my privilege and pleasure to visit these artists last summer in their quaint and comfortable home in South Norfolk, a few miles from London, where I saw their two beautiful children, a boy of four, who is a brunette, and a little girl of two, who is a blonde, with blue eyes and flaxen hair. As I heard Mrs. Coleridge-Taylor sing several of the dainty lyrics composed by her husband, who accompanied her, I thought it would be a long time before I should see a more beautiful picture of domestic happiness than this.

Fortunately for Mr. Taylor, he was born in a country in which he is not handicapped on account of his dark face and curly hair. The English may have a slight antipathy to all dark races on general principles, as is asserted by those who are supposed to know, but it must be admitted that they place no obstacle in the way of those representatives of dark races who possess extraordinary gifts. At present Mr. Taylor is professor of harmony and composition in the Crystal Palace, one of the best conservatories in England. As a judge in musical contests he is in great and constant demand. There are few musicians in England who train and conduct more choral societies

than does Mr. Taylor, but requests for his services pour in upon him in such profusion that he is obliged to refuse many on account of lack of time.

Like all musical prodigies this colored man gave evidence of possessing great talent when he was but a small boy. As he himself says, "I was writing music from my earliest childhood, then I left off scribbling and commenced the study of the violin." Under Professor Stanford, in the Royal College, one of the

most renowned teachers in England, Mr. Taylor discovered that composition rather than execution was his forte and so he began to write. Whenever Professor Stanford's name is mentioned in his famous pupil's presence the latter's face lights up with enthusiasm and pleasure as he declares that he owes all the success he may ever attain to his great teacher.

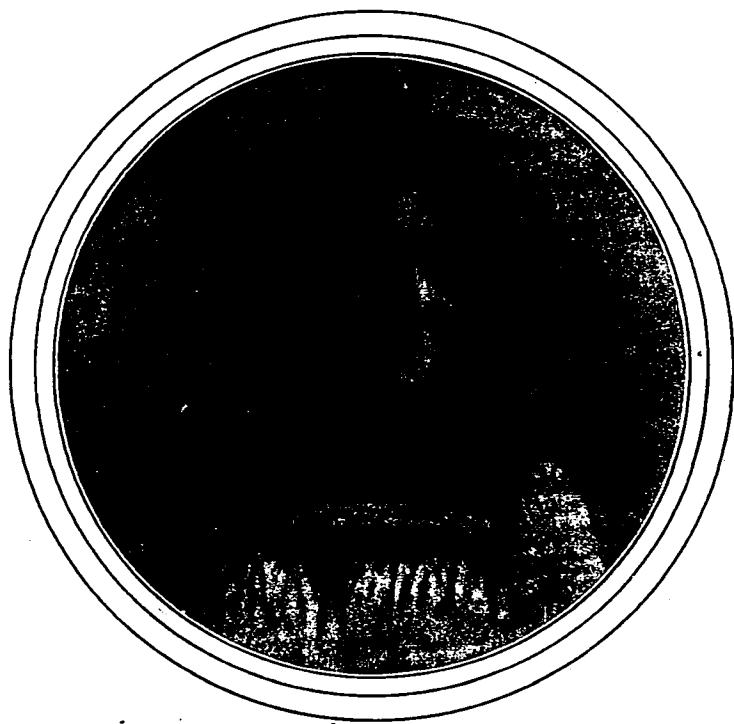
The work by which Mr. Coleridge-Taylor first attracted the attention of the



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musical world was his trilogy entitled "Scenes from Hiawatha," which is founded on Longfellow's poem. It would be difficult to find a composition in which the music more accurately paints the meaning of the words than does this. The Anglo-African musician has caught the spirit of the Anglo-Saxon poet, so

From the nature of the case the tragedy of the second canto, describing Minnehaha's Death, is in marked contrast with the comedy and joy of the Wedding Feast. In this cantata, which contains more solos than choruses, the numbers describing the terrible sufferings of the red men through the long and dreary



MRS. S. COLERIDGE-TAYLOR

that the tones produced by the orchestra together with the melodies and harmonies rendered by the human voice, affect one precisely as do the poet's words. The first part of the trilogy describes Hiawatha's Wedding Feast, the second Minnehaha's Death and the third Hiawatha's Departure. Of the nine numbers which compose the Wedding Feast eight are for the chorus, and there is but one solo, "Onaway, Awake, Beloved," which is written for the tenor and which is as dainty and melodious as a love song can possibly be. The music describing Jagoo's boasting ripples along with irresistible humor and a delightful swing.

winter, the tragic death of Minnehaha as she lay there trembling, freezing, burning, and Hiawatha's prayer for help are so full of pathos and power that few can listen to them unmoved. The music of the last section of the trilogy, in which Hiawatha becomes prophetic, welcomes the pale-faced strangers, tells what effect their coming will have upon his people, delivers his farewell address to Nokomis and the other Indians, and then sails away to the Kingdom of Ponemah, the land of the Hereafter, is exceedingly graphic, elaborate and pathetic. While the music of Hiawatha represents the highest art, it is so natural, simple and

unaffected that it appeals to the hearts of all. The humblest listener who does not know a note is carried away, while the most callous and cynical critic is charmed. Musicians of international reputation declare that the workmanship is perfect and that no living writer knows more about the secrets of the orchestra—that vast repository of mysteries—than does the composer of "Hiawatha." Mr. Coleridge-Taylor seems to express his own thoughts and emotions as well as those of others as easily as did Schubert, who is said to have written some of his immortal songs in beer houses on the backs of bills of fare.

"Hiawatha" was probably sung for the first time in this country by the St. Cecilia of Boston, one of the oldest and best musical organizations in the United States. Since then it has been rendered many times here. Two years ago a chorus of 200 people, named in honor of Mr. Coleridge-Taylor, sang "Hiawatha" in Washington. Altho they were not accompanied by an orchestra, some of the leading white musicians in the city declared that it was the best chorus singing they had ever heard in the National Capital. The musicians of Washington without regard to race or color, therefore, are looking forward to

a great treat this month of November, when Mr. Coleridge-Taylor will come from London to direct this well-trained chorus, which will sing in Convention Hall, the largest auditorium in the city, with a seating capacity of nearly 3,000. On this occasion the chorus will be accompanied by the orchestra of the United States Marine Corps under the leadership of Lieut. W. H. Santlemann, the director of the United States Marine Band. The soloists will all be colored and are trained musicians. Mr. Harry Burleigh, the baritone, is a soloist in St. George's Church in New York City. Mr. Freeman, the tenor, is a teacher of music in the public schools

of St. Louis, Mo. Mme. Estelle Clough, the soprano, has been taught by some of the best vocal teachers and has sung in the opera "Aida" several times.

Last year at the Heresford Festival in England Mr. Taylor's "Atonement," a sacred cantata, was produced for the first time. The spirit of devotion which permeates the work, the reverence with which the Saviour's character is drawn, the strength both in the choral writing and in the orchestration, the dramatic style of the composition and the good taste governing the promotion as a whole have received the highest praise throughout the musical world. In the Gethsemane scene of the "Atonement," as well as by the numbers in Minnehaha's Death, the young composer shows that he can illustrate intensity of feeling with a picturesqueness and a sincerity which are extremely rare. In commenting upon the "Atonement" one of the best musical critics in England declared:

"My own judgment is that the 'Atonement' is not only a remarkable composition, but the most dramatic work ever written by an English musician. It is laid out and wrought with skill. Every technical device is employed in its structure and nearly every orchestral instrument is brought into requisition in adding color to the glowing tonal picture."

In addition to "Hiawatha" and the "Atonement," about fifty productions represent the pedestal on which Mr. Coleridge-Taylor's fame already rests. Among them may be mentioned his "Blind Girl of Castel-Aille," "Meg Blane," the music for "Herod," which was produced at Her Majesty's Theater in London; a "Coronation March," the musical setting of many poems, among them four sonnets written by Mrs. Browning, and several "Albums of Songs," which include a set entitled "African Romances," the words of which are by Paul Laurence Dunbar, America's colored poet. Mr. Taylor says it will be a long



HIAWATHA
COLERIDGE-TAYLOR,
From a recent photograph.

time before he attempts another religious composition. Neither does he intend to write any more music to order for festivals, as the nervous strain and the responsibility are too great. He would like to write a light opera, if an original subject could be found. In fact, the young composer is already engaged upon what he calls light music, according to a promise made a few years ago to some singers and violinists. An American firm, Oliver Ditson & Co., has commissioned Mr. Taylor to write a book of Negro Melodies, the

manuscript of which is already in the publisher's hands, so that the book will probably be out of press this fall. Two of the melodies in this book come straight from Africa. Three choral ballads and several other new pieces composed by Mr. Taylor will be sung in the Norwich musical festival in 1905.

The future of this young Anglo-African seems very bright indeed. On the 15th of last August he was 29 years old. He is primarily and essentially a creative genius and he neither imitates any particular school nor borrows.

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