

**FAMOUS VIOLINISTS AND
FINE VIOLINS: HISTORICAL
NOTES, ANECDOTES, AND
REMINISCENCES**

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Famous violinists and fine violins: historical notes, anecdotes, and reminiscences by Dr. T. L. Phipson

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DR. T. L. PHIPSON

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Famous Violinists and Fine Violins

Historical Notes, Anecdotes, and
Reminiscences

By

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Dedication

TO

SIGNOR GUIDO PAPINI

Hon. President of the College of Violinists

The high reputation which your compositions for the violin have obtained in this country, and, indeed, in every quarter of the civilised world, induces me to dedicate to you the following pages.

That the name of so celebrated a musician should adorn this modest little volume is perhaps more than it deserves, since you are the direct descendant of the immortal Corelli, Tartini, and Viotti, and, like them, have caused the beneficent influence of Italian music to spread around the globe for the delight and welfare of mankind. But I take advantage of our long and affectionate friendship to inscribe here a name so universally beloved and admired.

THE AUTHOR.

1810720

P R E F A C E

MUSIC began for me in what may well be termed a paradise on earth; and often have I thanked Providence that, by its means, the joys of this world have almost equalled the sorrows which, alas! are inseparable from our existence. A lovely country in Warwickshire, not far from the home of Shakespeare, a splendid mansion, with beautiful gardens and meadows, stabling for six horses, ponds, and woods of majestic elms and beeches, made up an abode such as can only be found in Merry England. It is natural enough that an intense love of melody should have entered my childish heart with the song of the wild birds and the perfumes of the flowers. There was music constantly in our house at Ladywood, and all around us.

When my father returned from the University of Jena, where he had passed a good many years, he brought back with him, not only a fine collection of student songs, but a violin. He was taught the violin during his residence in Germany; and though I never heard him play more than a few notes, I have

ample proof that he was one of the best judges of good playing that ever lived ; and he would not allow the slightest bad taste or false note to be produced in his presence without correcting it at once.

My first violin came to me under rather peculiar circumstances, when I was not quite six years of age. I had been very ill with scarlet fever, but had recovered wonderfully since my mother had allowed me to sponge my aching head over a bucket of cold water. One morning my father entered my bedroom ; he said he was going to ride into Birmingham, and asked me what he should bring back for me to play with. Without a moment's hesitation I exclaimed, "A violin !"

Why did I say that ? Why did I ask for an instrument which was destined ever afterwards to cling to me through life, to soothe my sorrows, to become a source of delight, and to lead me through endless adventures ? Heaven alone knows ! I asked for a violin, and my good father, to my great joy, actually brought one to me. It was cautiously wrapped, with its bow, and a little box of rosin, in a brown paper parcel, so that he could carry it attached to the pommel of his saddle. To describe the feeling of contentment and the enthusiasm with which I opened this precious parcel, as I sat up in bed exulting over my good fortune, would be quite impossible. But, alas ! when it was opened I could do nothing but silently admire the contents.

There was, sure enough, a magnificent violin, with a brilliant golden varnish which would have shamed Joseph Guarnerius *filius Andreæ* himself. The strings were perfectly new and clean, and the bow, of a lovely crimson colour, with its white hair and ivory nut, appeared splendid. According to my father's instructions, the bow was passed several times over the rosin before being drawn across the strings, and when at last this operation was performed, there issued from the instrument, which had been carefully tuned, the most extraordinary sound ; it was something between that of an Eolian harp and the buzzing of a bumble-bee.

It pleased me exceedingly, and I was delighted at the ease with which it was produced ; but, at the same time, a feeling of powerlessness came over me as the sounds on the open strings were repeated several times, and the want of variety took possession of my mind. It was like the music of some composers I could name—mostly *fifths*, and decidedly monotonous.

My excellent father grasped the situation at once, and showing me how to hold the instrument properly, he placed my fingers on the finger-board, pressing them down and pulling them up alternately, whilst I drew the bow across the strings, and caused it to scrape out a simple little melody.

That was my first lesson on the violin.

In a few days, sitting up in bed, and grasping the

instrument firmly, I could play this little air with tolerable satisfaction to myself, whatever it might have been to others; and when a few months had elapsed I had made what is generally termed "considerable progress." But yet I had only this little melody of eight bars. It was pretty, it was easy, and it was so simple that it really required no accompaniment. At this juncture a friend, who was a violinist, happened to call at our house, and whilst in the corridor he heard the sound of my music upstairs. Turning to my parents, he said, "If your child is going to learn music, you should have him taught the violin, for he has got something, naturally, which we violinists have to work for, sometimes for years."

However, my mother had decided upon having me taught the piano by a lady from the Royal Academy of Music, whom she was befriending at that time. The piano lessons went very well so long as the right hand only was engaged; but when it came to studying the bass clef, and using the left hand at the same time as the right, it proved too much for my feelings; and I hugged my violin with more tenderness than ever. I did more; I ran out into the open country, far across the flowery meadows, whenever the hour of the piano lesson approached, and stayed there till it was too late and the music mistress had gone! This convinced my dear parents that the piano was of no use; so, when