

**BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES
AND ANECDOTES OF
CELEBRATED VIOLINISTS**

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Biographical sketches and anecdotes of celebrated violinists by T. L. Phipson

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BY
DR. T. L. PHIPSON.



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P R E F A C E.



WELL-KNOWN statesman once said that the violin had done as much for civilisation as the steam-engine; and I am certainly not prepared to contradict this assertion. It naturally follows that a great violinist may exercise as beneficial an influence on mankind as a great engineer or a great philosopher. Of this we shall be better able to judge presently.

It is perhaps well to seize upon this opportunity for a few words on the difference between a *violin* and a *jiddle*. It is not at all an unusual thing to hear ignorant or vulgar-minded persons speak of both these instruments as one and the

same production. But the fiddle is a much older instrument than the violin. A kind of fiddle was used in fairs and shows by the Anglo-Saxons as early as the tenth century. Some believe it to have *originated* in England or Wales; whilst the violin came to us from France and Italy *many hundred years later*, and did not attain its full degree of perfection till the seventeenth century. The fiddle of olden times, which was a very coarse kind of musical instrument, has come down to us modified in form, and *now* externally resembles the violin. It can be purchased at the price of a few shillings; but no violin worthy of the name can be had for less than five to ten pounds, and for a *solo* instrument twenty-five to fifty pounds is the least amount that will procure a good instrument. For a fine Cremona violin of one of the old masters (Amati, Stradivarius, Guarnerius), from one hundred to three hundred pounds is by no means an uncommon price. It need scarcely be added that it is the violin of the seven-

teenth century which is referred to at the beginning of this preface.

I feel it almost a duty to my readers to explain why the present work should differ somewhat widely in character from those which have hitherto escaped from my pen.

I have long been a violinist; and though circumstances have caused me to adopt another profession instead of that of music, yet, from early childhood, my mother's assiduous care and untiring energy taught me to make my violin a source of recreation which has amply repaid me for years of toil. To her, whose efforts have been continued by the dear partner of my joys and sorrows, I owe my first successes in the drawing-room and the concert-room, and the power, not only of giving pleasure to thousands, but of obtaining funds for certain charitable purposes which my purse would be totally inadequate to supply. Let me add to this that my father presented me with a fine Stradivarius instrument, when I was little more than twelve years old, and gave me my first music lesson.

I shall never forget the day—nor the astonishment that it caused to my worthy professor M. Henri Standish—when my mother once interrupted us in the middle of a lesson. It was a hot summer day in Brussels, in the year 1852; we were working away, with our coats off as usual, when she entered the room with a roll of music, evidently fresh from the publishers, and proceeded to unfold it without saying a word. Then, placing it before my master, she insisted that he should teach me to play it without delay. It was the seventh Concerto of De Bériot. The piece had been recently played at the annual competition by the older pupils of the Brussels *Conservatoire*, and my excellent professor had obtained the prize. From that moment I became a violinist.

As years rolled on I took deeper interest in those distinguished men who have left behind them well-known names as celebrated performers, and I have endeavoured to give my readers, in the present volume, a sketch of their lives, their characters, and their works.

A violinist, however great, cannot be set up as the most perfect type of humanity, but it will be seen, I trust, in the following pages, that it is chiefly men of high moral and intellectual character that have attained celebrity in this difficult branch of the musical art. In some instances natural genius may have done wonders, but in most cases courage and perseverance have had their share also. CORELLI, TARTINI, VIOTTI, DE BÉRIOT, were men whose lives many of us might envy; their performances and their works have added to the enlightenment of mankind in every country of the world, have tended to refine our thoughts and soften our feelings, by attracting us constantly towards that which is fine and beautiful.

London, 1877.

