

Louis Moreau Gottschalk

*Notes of a Pianist*

Adapted for the stage

by

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## Note

Louis Moreau Gottschalk cannot be said to be exactly unknown to music lovers, but neither has he retained the same position in American culture as Scott Joplin, whom he preceded by nearly a half century, or Stephen Foster, with whom he was nearly an exact contemporary.

Gottschalk was in fact America's first musical superstar. Born in New Orleans in 1829, he was quickly recognized as a child prodigy and sent to Paris before he turned twelve to study, gaining a reputation as one of the greatest pianists on the Continent and returning to the United States only in 1853. Within a few years he had become enormously successful, but in 1857 he embarked on a five-year tour of the Caribbean and did not return to America again until 1862. Reestablishing himself, he became the country's first full-time touring pianist, clocking up some 80,000 miles a year by train, crisscrossing the country from East to West during the Civil War. In 1865 he departed America once more, never to return, and died in Rio di Janeiro in 1869 at the age of 40.

Throughout his journeys, Gottschalk kept a series of notebooks, which he evidently intended to turn into a travel memoir. Certain selections appeared in various magazines, including the *Atlantic*, but otherwise the journals remained unpublished at the composer's death. Later his sister Clara transcribed them, and her husband Robert Peterson translated her transcription from French into English. That version appeared in 1881 as *Notes of a Pianist*. In 1964, A. A. Knopf published a corrected translation with

supplemental notes by pianist Jeanne Behrend. However, by that time, Gottschalk's original journals as well as Clara's transcriptions had long since vanished and any corrections were necessarily made without the primary source material. (The two translations are, in fact, essentially identical.) In 2006 Princeton University Press reissued the Knopf edition. Unmentioned in the reissue is that, improbably, in 1984 Clara's transcriptions had resurfaced in a trunk in New Jersey and now reside unpublished at the New York Public Library.

I have briefly examined the transcriptions with a colleague, Larry Loeb, and as far as we were able to tell, the available translation is fairly accurate. Thus, in preparing this adaptation I have stuck pretty closely to Gottschalk's words as they appear in the Knopf/Princeton edition. I have abridged and paraphrased to make the selections more speakable—to my mind, anyway. Gottschalk (or his sister) is largely mute regarding private matters. To fill in certain gaps I have relied on the sources listed in the bibliography. The dialogues with Gottschalk's interlocutors have been prompted by the source material as well, but the words are largely my own. Hopefully the end product of all this will help bring to life a now little remembered, but one of the most important figures in American musical history.

## Cast

Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829-1869)—The American pianist and composer from New Orleans. In his thirties. Speaks English and lives American with a French accent. He smokes a cigar.

Passengers on a train—Various passengers met by Gottschalk on his travels. To be played by one actor or, if necessary, divided between a male and a female actor.

## Setting

Two train compartments during the years 1862-1865. One compartment is occupied by Gottschalk and the passenger. The other, a baggage compartment, is occupied by Gottschalk's trunks and a grand piano or two.

\*\*\* indicates a "scene change," which can be a quick dimming of the lights or a train whistle, or both.

When Gottschalk is to play certain pieces, this generally means excerpts, left to the discretion of the performer. The embedded links lead to representative performances.

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GOTTSCHALK is revealed staring out a train window. The monotonous clacking of train wheels is heard throughout the performance.

GOTTSCHALK : Certain naturalists assert that the physiognomy of insects reflects the peculiarities of the vegetation upon which they live. According to that I ought to have the gait of a locomotive and the intelligence of a hatbox.

(He ponders one of his hatboxes, trying it on.)

I live on the railroad. My home is somewhere between the baggage compartment and the caboose. My earthly possessions— (indicates trunks, hatboxes, two grand pianos). All notions of space and time are effaced from my mind. If you ask me what time it is, I will reply, “It is time to open my trunk.” “It is time to put on my black coat.” “It is time to close my trunk.” These are the most memorable events of my daily existence. I console myself by imagining that I am not the only example of my species...It is time to play *The Banjo*.

(He sits at the piano and begins to play *The Banjo*, Op. 15. After the introduction, he is interrupted by the PASSENGER.)

PASSENGER (Female, applauding):

Marvelous! That is one of my favorites. You play it almost as well  
as Mr. Gottschalk himself.

GOTTSCHALK (Continuing to play the vamp):

I am flattered, Madame.

PASSENGER: I know all his pieces.

GOTTSCHALK: Ah! You play the piano?

PASSENGER: No, but I have a friend who plays them on the guitar.

GOTTSCHALK: Ah.

PASSENGER: He insists that Mr. Gottschalk doubtlessly intended them to be  
played that way, and that Mr. Gottschalk must be the most  
magnificent guitarist anywhere in the world.

GOTTSCHALK : I assure you, Madame, that is not the case. As a child he did study  
the violin for a time.

PASSENGER: How can you be so convinced, sir?

GOTTSCHALK (Rising slightly):

Louis Moreau Gottschalk, Madame, at your service.

PASSENGER: I think you are mistaken. Mr. Gottschalk is nearly as famous as the  
President. I've seen him in concert, you know; the young ladies go

absolutely mad. He is a genuine Adonis. No, you don't look like him, not in the least.

GOTTSCHALK: After eighty thousand miles this year, you are undoubtedly correct Madame. But I do sound like him.

(Finishes playing *The Banjo* and rises. Stares out the window, listening to the train wheels.)

Eighty thousand miles, four hundred concerts. The sight of a piano sets my hair on end like the wheel on which its victim is about to be broken. Alas, I no longer resemble Moreau Gottschalk. I have the appearance of an automaton under the influence of a voltaic pile.

PASSENGER: Now that you mention it, the similarity to Mr. Barnum's mechanical musicians is plain.

GOTTSCHALK: You have hit the mark, Madame. Once, Moreau Gottschalk resembled New Orleans; New Orleans was music incarnate. Public balls, dancing in the streets, drumming on Congo Square. Rossini, Donizetti, Méhul, Meyerbeer—the city was opera mad. Moreau's mother was opera mad. One evening, Aimée was practicing an aria from *Robert le Diable* with her three-year-old at her side. That night, hearing strange sounds emanating from the piano she rushed back into the salon, fearing Indians had attacked—and was astonished to

find her son singing the aria while attempting to pick out the notes on the keys. The Negro servants called him “zombi.”

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(Staring out the window): At St. Louis, I gave three concerts in a single day, becoming the first pianist in America to accomplish this tour-de-force. With the modern railroad, it should be possible to give three concerts in one day in three difference cities. Leave New York in the A.M., noon matinee in Newark, four-thirty concert in Albany, eight o’clock concert in Troy.

PASSENGER: Have you considered a vacation? From Troy you should easily be able to swim to Saratoga Springs.

GOTTSCHALK: True, Madame, but as my siblings seem incapable of supporting themselves, the burden has fallen squarely on my shoulders. I have played at Saratoga Springs for the soldiers...

“The zombi” was the first offspring of Aimée Marie de Bruslé and Edward Gottschalk. He was a thirty-three-year-old Jew from England; she a fifteen-year-old Catholic Creole; this was America. Not entirely. In truth, Mother’s abode was the imagined Haiti of her ancestors...



Five years ago, en route from Havana to St. Thomas, I caught sight of the Haitian coast. Leaning against the rigging, I contemplated the desolate country that opened before me: the angular mountains piercing the clouds, the palm trees hanging sadly over the desert shore. Everything, the name Saint-Dominigue above all, recalled to me the stories my grandmother recounted to the children gathered around the fireplace, stories of the terrible misfortunes to which the colonists succumbed during the bloody insurrection at the end of the last century.

My great-grandfather, the Comte de Bruslé, and his family were naturally among the first with whom the insurrectionists were infuriated. My great-uncles were all massacred. Their wives and daughters, having fallen into the hands of the former slaves, were subjected to the most horrible outrages before being put to death. My grandfather escaped in the dress of his old mulatto nurse and, notwithstanding his seventy years, placed himself at the head of the colonial troops, where he died heroically. My grandmother saved herself by wandering, naked and dying of hunger, until she found an English vessel bound for Jamaica.

Our dwellings burned, our properties devastated, our fortunes annihilated—such were the immediate consequences of that war between two races who had in common only the implacable hatred they nourished for each other.

But can anyone be astonished at the retaliation exercised by the Negroes over their old masters? What cause more legitimate than that of this people rising in their agony to reconquer their unacknowledged rights and rank in humanity? In contemplating those events from a distance, we see that bloody regeneration purged of the stains imprinted on it. And from the bosom of the world which crumbles away rises, somber and imposing, the grand form of Toussaint l'Overture, liberator of a race that nineteen centuries of Christianity had not yet been able to free from the yoke of its miseries.

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(Staring out the window, sighing): The triple-concert never took place. At one-thirty I departed Newark for Albany—all's well—but "Man proposes and God truly disposes." A mother and her charming daughter, overburdened with an inventory of luggage beyond description, get off at Fishkill. Under the influence that

two pretty eyes always exercise, I heroically seize the canary cage with my left hand and gracefully lend my right arm. Heart in mouth, I descend with them to the platform. But wait!

That is exactly what the locomotive does not do. The concert hall at Albany is undoubtedly full. A little boy conducts me to the residence of our great painter of Niagara and the Andes, Frederick Edwin Church. I spend there a charming afternoon.

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PASSENGER (Male):

Are you Mr. Gottschalk?

GOTTSCHALK: I am every now and then mistaken for him.

PASSENGER: I was at your concert in Springfield yesterday. Don't you think you have some nerve charging a dollar a concert?

GOTTSCHALK: Is that a rhetorical question, monsieur?

PASSENGER: When a person goes to a concert, he expects to get a dollar's worth of music. Why, for a dollar you can get a first-rate bed in one of these cars with an elastic mattress and pillows. In the morning it folds up and you've got a regular car again.

GOTTSCHALK: The ingenious contrivance honors the American spirit of inventiveness and be sure I make use of it nightly. What you are

ignorant of, sir, is that once sold the artist becomes the property of the impresario. Our Mr. Barnum charged twenty-five cents to see George Washington's 161-year-old living nurse—and fifty cents after she died. Why should you be astonished at a dollar a concert? Is a Beethoven sonata worth as much as a mattress?

PASSENGER: I could have used a mattress during that long piece you played in the middle with the violin.

GOTTSCHALK : The Kreutzer sonata? Yes, compared to a dollar for eight hours of sleep, Beethoven's rates are undeniably exorbitant...

(PASSENGER begins snoring.)

Beethoven, as a master of the orchestra is, of course, the most inspired of all composers, but as a composer for the piano he falls below mediocrity. The least pianist of any intelligence in our day writes infinitely better than Beethoven ever did. Alas, the ideas so beautifully clothed in all the splendor of the orchestra become clumsy and tame when he adapts them to the piano. When playing Beethoven we often feel his aspirations by perceiving that he has not attained them.

(Regarding PASSENGER): Springfield, my good man? Do you by chance work at the gun factory I visited yesterday, where ingenious

machines allow three thousand laborers to mass produce twelve hundred rifles each day...?

(A train whistle wakes the PASSENGER with a start, who then goes back to sleep.)

GOTTSCHALK: Aimée, born in America after my grandmother's arrival, might have remained a colonist in Haiti. Creole to the marrow, she never learned to read English, and though she lavished affection on me, the only thing she ever understood about money was how to waste it. Women, even the most virtuous, will never have the judgement to properly raise their sons. I would be worthless and parasitic today if Father had not had the courage to get me away from the family.

Arriving in New Orleans, Edward Gottschalk quickly established himself by a series of successful speculations, allowing me to live in affluence since my birth, providing a buttress on which I could firmly rely. Though I first heard music from Mother, Father arranged music lessons for me. By the age of ten I had met Andrew Jackson and a year later had made my concert debut.

New Orleans had soon offered her native son all she could and, just before my twelfth birthday, without informing my mother, Father

dispatched me to Europe. I set sail on *La Taglioni*, named for the star of the Paris opera, while Mother wept bitter tears.

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PASSENGER (Male):

Are you a Frenchman?

GOTTSCHALK : No, sir, I am from New Orleans.

PASSENGER: Ah! So am I! Glad to meet you.

(They shake.)

I have a restaurant near Lake Ponchartrain, maybe you've been there.

GOTTSCHALK : I think it unlikely. I have not visited New Orleans for many years.

PASSENGER: You know, New Orleans has produced some of the best people in the United States. Take that prodigy Morphy, the chess player. There's a glory for Louisiana! Then there was that little Gottschalk. His father sent him to Europe, hoping to make him a great musician. Nobody ever heard anything about him again.

GOTTSCHALK: To disappear without trace in Paris, indubitably a cruel fate... As a matter of course the Paris Conservatoire banned all foreigners. The auditioner took one look at me, pronounced, "America is nothing but a land of steam engines," and the interview summarily

ended. Liszt was excluded as a prospective teacher, as he was carrying on his affair with the countess, Marie D'Agoult. Chopin, whose pupils were exclusively, aristocratic young girls from the Faubourg St. Germain, was likewise unavailable.

At length, M. and Mme Dussert, who ran the boarding school to which Father had sent me, placed me with professor Stamaty, who counted among his pupils that prodigy of prodigies, Camille Saint-Saëns. Intent that I should be properly educated, the Dusserts ensured that my music lessons were supplemented with Greek, Latin, literature, poetry, horseback riding and, of course, fencing. Paris was awash with concerts. The piano reigned; Liszt, Chopin and Thalberg were emperors, all others—vassals. Within a few years, Stamaty had arranged my debut, with a program featuring Chopin's E minor concerto, Thalberg's fantasy on Rossini's *Semiramide* and Liszt's fantasy on *Robert le Diable*. Thalberg and Chopin graciously consented to attend; Liszt was dallying abroad with his countess. I arranged front-row seats for Mother and five siblings, a sixth soon to make his belated appearance.

Yes, Aimée had left Father, sailed with the children in tow to her imagined homeland, and at once took up her careless, profligate

lifestyle, spending three hundred thousand francs of Father's money. He meekly accepted this rapacity, all the while concealing the true state of affairs. Even at my debut I saw the ruinous abyss looming before us, and understood that the abyss would have to be crossed.

During the tumultuous applause that rained down as the concert hurtled to its conclusion, I was crowned with a wreath of oak leaves. Thalberg congratulated me, a gesture that marked the beginning of a long association. Chopin placed his hand on my head—

PASSENGER (Chopin):

My child, I predict that you will become king of pianists.

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GOTTSCHALK (Staring out the window):

New Jersey is the poorest place in the entire world to give concerts except Central Africa. Elizabeth, eighty persons. Orange, concert cancelled. First Trenton concert, five dollars profits to be divided among the artists. Second Trenton concert—why did I bother?—the premises in ruins, no applause, only a whistle blast from a



facetious Trentonian. New Jersey is incurable. Concerts will never take place there.

PASSENGER: Jackson has defeated General Banks in Virginia. Have you heard?

GOTTSCHALK: Yes, I have heard. Thus the North is shocked out of its exaggerated sense of serenity; everyone expects that the Confederates will march on Washington...

It would be easy to become nostalgic for Paris. On the heels of my debut, salon followed salon with the same anonymity of the American towns I now visit. Only the 1848 revolution, with its blood and barricades, intervened. Who could not support the aspirations of the masses for the liberty that all men crave and deserve? Yet, remaining in Paris while my fellow musicians fled, I watched the city become a slaughterhouse, and I saw that the revolution would be stillborn, a prelude to yet another turn in that ceaseless French carousel of tyranny followed by republic followed by tyranny followed by...At length it was not revolution but cholera that forced me to abandon Paris.

Allow me to recommend a touch of typhoid to accompany an artist's exile. In my fever at my patron's country estate—(He begins to stagger and wave his hands deliriously.)

PASSENGER: Moreau, lie down!

GOTTSCHALK (Waving PASSENGER aside):

Pen and ink!

(He sits, scribbles something and plays *Bamboula*, Op. 2. He can continue through the PASSENGER's reading, below. )

Once ignited, *Bamboula* took off like a Congreve rocket and from that moment on, my future was assured.

PASSENGER (Reading a newspaper):

"It has been a long time since we have seen such a success as has been attained by *Bamboula*, *La Savane* and *Le Bananier*. To find a comparable example, we would have to reach back to Chopin's first works." "Gottschalk is the only one who can fill Chopin's place."

GOTTSCHALK: (He begins to play the "B" section of *Bamboula* or switches to *La Savane*.)

Only mediocrity pays, and as I must live, I must be willing to please others, if not myself...

(Turning to the train window): The Academy of Music in Philadelphia is one of the world's most beautiful concert halls. A superb concert there, but we have been halted at Baltimore—the government had commandeered all the trains. Within twenty-four

hours of the President's proclamation calling for the defense of Washington, five hundred thousand men have been equipped, armed and are on the march.

PASSENGER: There was a riot yesterday in Baltimore. The people wanted to hang a Secessionist.

GOTTSCHALK: Yes. Yes, Chopin was dead. In truth, no one could replace that sensitive genius, but the public demanded a successor.

(Pensively:) I became the man *à la mode*.

PASSENGER (Reading):

"With *Bamboula*, Gottschalk is henceforth placed in the ranks of the best performers and most renowned composers for the piano. We were alarmed to learn that he had recently been taken ill, but thanks to God he has been restored his health and strength."

GOTTSCHALK : The Swiss are insistent. They regard a visit by me as a military victory against Spain, whose queen has also requested my presence.

PASSENGER (Reading):

Lausanne: "Gottschalk's songs bring tears to our eyes. His face is pale, his eyes cast down. His physiognomy expresses melancholy, and there is in all his features a trace of pain and sadness. His

chants of the new world bring tears to our eyes, so much do they breathe of sadness and simplicity.”

(PASSENGER helps carry out the following):

GOTTSCHALK: In Geneva, a young, beautiful girl, who, pouncing on me at the stage door where I have been covered in flowers by excited Calvinists, instantly envelopes me in a large mantle, lifts me by her arms...and sweeps me away to the bewilderment of each and every onlooker.

PASSENGER (Ironically):

Gottschalk has become more popular than Jenny Lind, but of course she was never abducted.

GOTTSCHALK : One day Hector Berlioz challenged me to play all the arias from *Le Prophète* in order, in the exact keys. My winnings from that wager consisted in assisting him with his hastily arranged concerts. Mad and harried visionary!

PASSENGER (Berlioz):

The brilliance and originality of Gottschalk’s playing at once dazzles and astonishes. He know the limits to which fantasy can be indulged. The charming simplicity with which he renders sweet melodies belong to a personality distinct from that which marks his

thundering energy. He is one of the very small number who possess all the elements that endow a pianist sovereign power, and thus cultivated musical audiences have surrounded him with irresistible prestige.

GOTTSCHALK : Thus the artist's progress.

PASSENGER (Reading):

"Since Liszt has fallen silent, Gottschalk sits on the throne."

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GOTTSCHALK (Staring out train window):

I love the people of Baltimore. They love the arts; they sing more, and better, than in most American cities. I am assured they are all Secessionists, but I can't bear to hear it.

PASSENGER (Female):

Mr. Gottschalk, surely you know that General Stuart, General Lee's cavalry commander, is brave, generous, young and ever so handsome. Is it possible that you cannot admire such a man?

GOTTSCHALK (Aside, sighing):

It is true, almost all the ladies of Maryland are Secessionists. A woman's imagination is a deceitful prism through which she sees everything rose-colored or everything black, according as she loves

or hates the object reflected. It is the privilege of women to inspire in us our noblest actions and to be the source of all our poesy, but I deplore the influence they so fatally exert over our conduct. But for the women, this civil war would long ago have ended. The intemperance of their opinions and impudent zeal have on both sides fomented the discord and envenomed the strife. Indeed, women are found at the bottom of every social revolution, and in all the little incidents of social life. When Berlioz lost his wife, Liszt said to him, "She inspired you; you sang of her; her task was done."

(A reflective pause.) The throne of Liszt. What could be more coveted...?

PASSENGER: Excuse me, sir, the train is jammed with soldiers. Could I trouble you for half a seat?

GOTTSCHALK : Please. (He cedes a place.)

When Liszt played, you mistook him for a fakir in the throes of an ecstatic convulsion. Leaning ever backwards, eyes closed, shaking his immense locks, hurling himself upon his keyboard-prey like a wild beast, he seemed to be struggling like the ancient python in the embrace of an invisible god.

Liszt invented nothing. He was devoured by a thirst for glory and his compositions display the prolonged effort of one seeking to hide the sterility and triviality of his ideas beneath a mantle of the extravagant and the obscure. Intoxicated by the facility of his fingers, he piled up difficulty upon difficulty as if he wished only to defy other pianists. Defy them he did. Liszt's long hair came to be the banner around which the sacred battalions of romantic pianists rallied. Many pianists of today have none of Liszt's talent except his hair!

PASSENGER (Worker):

M. Gottschalk, in the name of our comrades, the working men at the Pleyel manufactory, we come to offer you our gratitude for organizing the benefit concert after the fire which threatened the livelihoods of so many of us.

(He presents GOTTSCHALK with an enormous bouquet of flowers.)

GOTTSCHALK(Accepting) :

Think nothing of it, monsieur, I could do naught but otherwise.

(He plays beginning of *Le Mancenillier*.)

It is true, even M. Erard, Pleyel's great rival, contributed. Every piece I played was repeated. *Le Mancenillier* was interrupted ten times by applause.

(Jumps to end of *Le Mancenillier*.)

PASSENGER: Certainly sounds like Liszt to me.

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GOTTSCHALK (To PASSENGER (Male)):

Sir, I saw you step out while the soldiers stopped the train and dig a little hole in that field. May I ask for what purpose? I surmise that you are a farmer who has come from the West.

PASSENGER: I am, sir, but if the soil here is rich enough, I'll quit the West in a second and start a new farm here.

GOTTSCHALK (Nodding):

The incessant activity of mind which torments the Yankee and his adaptability are wonderful to behold. He is ready to set his hand at anything, to settle down anywhere if he sees the least chance of success. His imperturbable confidence, an indomitable fund of energy, and, we must also say, a greediness for gain that too often extinguishes every other feeling, explains his facility in adapting himself to all the circumstances of life.



My father unexpectedly appeared in Paris for a visit, to find Mother a full-fledged Parisian lady, but he voiced no complaint. Before his return to New Orleans with little Edward, he protested that Spain would be a bad investment and that I lavished too much time on charities and benefits. Nevertheless, the Spanish Queen's invitation beckoned.

Railroads had not yet made their debut in Spain, and you may imagine the trip to Madrid. Over the Pyrenees, across rivers, past ruined villages—mule wagons carried myself, my secretary, my tuner and two Erard pianos.

PASSENGER: We have the pleasure of announcing the arrive at Madrid of the celebrated pianist Gottschalk, the distinguished musician with the soul of Chopin and the execution of Liszt, who will justify the advanced praise we have received of him, that his fingers move us as profoundly as the human voice.

GOTTSCHALK : Not so fast, monsieur,. The Queen has learned that I am not French after all, but American...

PASSENGER (Queen Isabella):

I will never patronize an artist of that nation! Never! Only a month ago, in America's continued efforts to wrest Cuba from Us, a

despicable gang of filibusters from New Orleans attempted an invasion of Our possession. By God's will, they ran aground off Havana, where they were captured and the leaders executed.

GOTTSCHALK: Yes, Spain and America stood on the verge of war. But within a few days, their Majesties...

PASSENGER (King):

Ah, M. Gottschalk, how happy I am, and how fortunate for Spain, to receive a man of your talents! Please play *La Bananier*. It is a great favorite of mine—I often play it myself.

(GOTTSCHALK plays some of [\*Le Bananier\*](#), presumably the coda.)

PASSENGER (King, a little dejected):

Ah, I fear I shall not have the courage to touch my piano for some time.

GOTTSCHALK (Switching to *Bamboula*): Nonsense, Your Majesty.

PASSENGER (Queen): Ah, the *Bamboula*! Astonishing!

GOTTSCHALK (Aside):

With admirable foresight, I had dedicated *Bamboula* to the Queen, which undoubtedly hastened my invitation to Spain.

PASSENGER (Queen):

M. Gottschalk, I prefer your playing to that of Liszt, who heretofore has been my favorite.

GOTTSCHALK (bowing and walking awkwardly backwards across the entire stage, occasionally tripping, as the KING waves):

Your Majesty, a more sublime compliment could not be wished for.

(Aside): This is rather awkward.

From that moment on, Spain was triumph after triumph.

PASSENGER (Spanish soldier):

M. Gottschalk, I am commissioned to request that you review our cavalry, if such a duty is not overly fatiguing, and judge its condition in comparison to others with which you are well acquainted.

(GOTTSCHALK bows.)

PASSENGER (Toreador, holding out a bejeweled sword):

Please accept as homage this sword whose blade has permitted me to maintain the Spanish Torréo in the supreme and glorious position which I inherited. In exchange, I ask as proof of your esteem only an autograph from your own hand, which I shall regard as one of the precious souvenirs of my life.

(GOTTSCHALK obliges.)

PASSENGER (A mother):

M. Gottschalk, my daughter lies at death's door. It is her final wish to hear you play. Our circumstances are humble and I know it is much to request...

GOTTSCHALK: Madame, I shall have my piano transported to your village at once.

(He sits and plays. As he finishes, PASSENGER (Girl) dies in ecstasy.)

GOTTSCHALK: I spent two years in Spain—far longer than Liszt.

PASSENGER: M. Gottschalk, in gratitude for your donation of 15,000 reals toward the construction of our new hospital...

(Cheers go up.)

PASSENGER (hurling a wreath at GOTTSCHALK): *Vive La Reine!*

GOTTSCHALK: For eight days Madrid talked of nothing but my *Siege of Saragossa*, for ten pianos...What ever happened to that score...?  
At length, according to the agreement I had made with my father, the time had come to return to America.

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(Staring out the window) : Washington has the appearance of a city having just been taken by assault. Thousands of soldiers everywhere, uniforms of every nation: German, French, Polish, Austrian, Croats. Tomorrow I go to General Wadsworth's camp,

across the Potomac, but the roads are so broken that it will be difficult to get there. Wadsworth is to send horses and the government has offered to provide us a safe-conduct. Mr. Seward desires to see me as well, not as an artist only, but as a Louisianian who remains faithful to the Constitution...

(The click of a rifle.)

PASSENGER (Soldier):

Halt! Who goes?

GOTTSCHALK : Merely a few itinerant musicians who just gave a concert for the soldiers.

PASSENGER (Saluting):

Your safe-conduct, sir.

GOTTSCHALK: I'm sorry, the guards at the previous barricade retained them.

PASSENGER: Then I cannot let you pass. Orders, sir.

(The two stand at an impasse. Soldier peers with a lantern past GOTTSCHALK.)

Is that a violin case stuck in the coach window?

GOTTSCHALK: Yes, and a piano on the wagon.

(PASSENGER salutes and allows GOTTSCHALK to pass.)

GOTTSCHALK : I have solemnly taken the oath of allegiance to the government at Washington. My horror of slavery made me emancipate the three

slaves that belonged to me. Although born in the South, I recognize but one principle—that of the Constitution. In a republic where universal suffrage is not a chimera, where citizens are free and intelligent men and not servile machines, where the ambitious never separate their personal glory from that of their country, no honest and republican conscience ought to feel ashamed. Like the timorous minds who blindly follow Catholic dogma, I blindly accept that those who rule the destinies of a country are those who express the will of the greatest numbers.

Though I honor the South's courage and heroism, I deplore the blindness that has precipitated it into a war without issue. No one fraction of the people has the right to reclaim its autonomy, if it does not carry a greater guarantee of progress and civilization than the majority that enslaves it. But the South, in wishing to destroy one of the most beautiful political monuments of modern times—the American Union—carries with it only slavery. It is indecent of the South to ask for its liberty, when this independence is to be used solely for the preservation of the most odious of abuses and outrages upon the liberty of others.

I have no illusions regarding the Negro. I believe him very inferior morally to the white. No race so mistreated as his could retain...

(GOTTSCHALK waves his hand helplessly.\*)

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PASSENGER: Mr. Gottschalk, you won't remember me, but I was your neighbor on Royal and Esplanade in New Orleans.

GOTTSCHALK : Forgive me if I do not, sir. That was long ago, when I was but a tiny child.

PASSENGER: I heard that tiny child practicing all day. If I recollect rightly, your parents had declared bankruptcy, had sold their big house and all their possessions, and moved into that mean, bare cottage. It seems your father was having difficulty paying off heavy debts. The family was destitute, a real shame. I hope things have improved.

GOTTSCHALK: Your memory plays you false, sir. My circumstances were quite fortunate, my father a buttress. Like any other family, we occasionally experienced hard times...

On January 10, 1853, I returned from Europe and debarked in New York, where Father met me. The city percolated with activity and

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\* In Gottschalk's *Notes*, the sentence is incomplete.

construction: a new railway line, plans for a great park, P.T.

Barnum's Museum... street vendors, saloons, brothels...

Father, who had lavished so much on my education, took over my

career and within the month, concerts were arranged. The critics—

PASSENGER (Alternately raising American and French flags):

"His *Bamboula* and *Le Bananier*, are truly original specimens of a new and delightful, a purely American school."

"Gottschalk has nothing American about him, except the fact of his birth. He is French in spirit, heart, taste and habits."

"Not since Jenny Lind's concerts has any artist received such enthusiasm as the young American Gottschalk."

"A pity that so much stupendous and wonderful labor has produced so little music."

GOTTSCHALK: O critics! Too loud, too soft, too much noise, not enough noise...

You would be fatally annoying if you were not so amusing...!

(Addressing his father): Father, New York proves beyond all doubt that one cannot eat prestige. We must make some money. There is only one thing for it—New Orleans.

Four thousand people greeted us on the docks: Fetes, banquets, serenades outside my hotel rooms, a medal containing nine



hundred dollars' worth of gold. At the concerts, hailstorms of bouquets force my retreat to the anteroom. At one recital, three hundred seventy bouquets are counted.

(PASSENGER throws a bouquet at GOTTSCHALK .)

GOTTSCHALK (Catching it, puzzled):

Every one of these has a ring attached.

Father, let us lay siege to New York once more.

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(Staring out train window): I listened to a rehearsal at the Convent of the Sisters of the Visitation in Georgetown yesterday. With two hundred charming young girls present, my protests not to play, due to my fatigue, proved in vain. There was no escape, neither from our scheduled concert that evening...

PASSENGER (Female):

Sir, it seems I saw you at the concert yesterday. Didn't those sublime singers move you to tears?

GOTTSCHALK: Indeed, the Pattis are the most talented musical family in America.

We shall never see their like again.

PASSENGER: The little girl was superb. She can't be more than fourteen.

GOTTSCHALK: Adelina? I think closer to twenty, but she is already a veteran of twelve years. She will become the greatest opera star in the world—if she does not become the world billiards champion instead—and if she puts her absurd temper into a side pocket.

PASSENGER: Is it true she owns a trained parrot—?

OFFSTAGE PARROT (Shrieking):

Cash! Cash!

GOTTSCHALK: I have not heard that, Madame.

PASSENGER: Her sister Carlotta sang no less beautifully, and her brother Carlo—

GOTTSCHALK: Yes, a virtuoso of the violin, without the least doubt.

PASSENGER: Was he really arrested at one of his concerts with Mr. Gottschalk and nearly hanged as a Confederate spy?

GOTTSCHALK: His sympathies have created a few awkward moments for the company, but I am assured that the rope burns were not too severe.

PASSENGER: You seem to be on intimate terms with them. What can you tell me about Mr. Gottschalk? Has he received any education?

GOTTSCHALK: None whatsoever, but that does not prevent him from being a very good fellow. I beg you to say nothing bad of him, for he *is* one of my friends.

PASSENGER: How does he speak French?

GOTTSCHALK: Oh, imperfectly at best, but you know he is a Spaniard.

PASSENGER: I thought so; his Spanish seemed flawless.

GOTTSCHALK (Aside):

O truth!, why art thou not petroleum? One would at least know  
where to drill a well and make thee flow out!

(To his father): Father, we cannot manage the concerts ourselves.

New York halls are exorbitantly expensive, we are losing to opera  
and orchestras. Mother is incurring insurmountable expenses in  
Paris. Father, listen. Short of a miracle we are standing on the  
verge of ruin—

PASSENGER (Barnum, knocking):

Mr. Gottschalk, in exchange for three years' exclusive rights, I am  
prepared to offer you twenty thousand dollars annually. Only  
Jenny Lind has received a comparable offer from me.

GOTTSCHALK: A superlative proposition indeed!

PASSENGER (Father):

Son, Barnum's properties include a petrified horseman, George  
Washington's dead living nurse, Amazonian reptiles, and a seven-  
year-old leopard tamer. I forbid you to sign with him!

GOTTSCHALK (Ruefully):

I might have become America's first full-time composer.

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(To PASSENGER (Soldier) who is lying down):

Good sir, you are little more than a skeleton. What has happened?

PASSENGER: A bursting shell shattered my thigh, but the hospitals are over-full.

There may be room enough at the naval arsenal...

GOTTSCHALK: Sir, you are sweating and shivering despite the heat. What may we do?

(No reply.)

(Standing): This interminable war...At Washington the entire diplomatic corps attended my concert.

(He begins to play excerpts from *The Union*, probably finale beginning at 6:50. There is also the *Star Spangled Banner* at 1:38. He breaks off):

President Lincoln answers but little to the European idea of a nation's ruler. Lincoln is of the American West. Tall, thin, his back bent, his chest hollow, his arms excessively long, his crane-like legs, his enormous feet, that long frame whose disproportioned joints give him the appearance of a grape vine covered with clothes—all make of him something grotesque and strange. Such an aspect

would strike us as disagreeable if the expression of goodness, and something of the honesty in his countenance did not attract and cause his exterior to be forgotten.

Lincoln is eloquent in his own way. He can speak a long time and utter no idle words. How many great public orators would be embarrassed to do as much! He possess the three qualities required in our popular government—an *inflexible firmness*, an *incorruptible honesty*, and *good sense*, which make him find the natural solution to questions the most difficult in appearance. Brilliant eloquence without good sense and honesty is not only dangerous, but also pernicious. Lincoln is essentially good and benevolent. He loves to tell jokes and does it with a humor that is always very comical...

PASSENGER (Lincoln):

Once a woman said to me that I am the homeliest man she had ever seen. "Yes, Madam," I replied, "but I can't help it." "No, I suppose not," she allowed, "but you might stay at home."

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GOTTSCHALK (Staring out window):

Boston pretends to be the most intellectual city in the United States. Truly, the university at Cambridge is the most celebrated in the

country. A musical amateur presented to the city a statue of Beethoven costing twelve thousand dollars, and here you will find six theatres and three concert halls. The Tremont is the most magnificent concert hall in the world. Boston, however, was founded by the Puritan pilgrims and still preserves the rigidity of its founders despite its advances since my first concert here. That concert...

It had proved impossible to meet expenses in New York; one financial disaster followed another. Father hoisted the white flag and returned to New Orleans; I gave him everything but my last twenty dollars and undertook a tour in New England...

In Boston one is forbidden to smoke on the streets. Sunday newspapers are banned. Worse, Bostonians, righteous of the righteous, are convinced I am the incarnation of the Louisiana villain of Harriet Beecher Stowe's recent novel.

(Peering into the hall) : Only two rows of critics. Hardly an audience.

PASSENGER: "We are all agreed that Gottschalk has laid claims to be considered at the head of his art, despite his impertinence in demanding one-dollar admission."

“Utter trash.”

“Could a more trivial and insulting string of musical rigmarole have been offered to an audience of earnest music lovers than Gottschalk’s *American Reminiscences*.”

GOTTSCHALK (Angrily):

Yes, that was Mr. Dwight. Dwight is the reservoir of every bilious envy, of every irritating impertinence, of all sickly spleen, which gives him the comfort of injuring all those who take umbrage at his mediocrity.

(Peering into audience): What has possessed me to give a second concert in Boston? Hardly anyone is in attendance.

PASSENGER (To audience):

Please bear with Mr. Gottschalk for this evening’s recital; he has just received the sad news that he has lost his father.

PASSENGER (Audience member):

That’s too bad, but we’ve paid for our tickets and expect our money’s worth.

(GOTTSCHALK, staggering, sits at the piano and with great effort begins playing, a Beethoven bagatelle.)

GOTTSCHALK: Revenge might have been sweet. I had already announced several of my own works but instead played a bagatelle by Beethoven. Mr. Dwight swallowed the bait.

PASSENGER: "Mr. Gottschalk's creations are far inferior to Chopin's mazurkas."

GOTTSCHALK: Thanks to Mr. Dwight, I have made all of one hundred forty-nine dollars in Boston.

(To PASSENGER (hotel manager)):

Sir, I throw myself at your mercy; I am unable to pay the hotel bill.

PASSENGER: I'm sorry, sir, in that case I shall be obliged to inform the police.

GOTTSCHALK : The shards of winter pierce every Bostonian heart. In the land of the Puritans I stare at my end...

PASSENGER (Perusing a piece of paper from a mail slot):

Sir! Your bill has been paid, anonymously. My compliments.

GOTTSCHALK: Only a year later did I learn that Mr. Chickering had loaned my then manager three hundred dollars to save my career. I was unable to thank him, for by that time Mr. Chickering had died. Since then I have played on his admirable mastodons (GOTTSCHALK pets his piano), which his firm makes expressly for me and which rival, if not surpass, the finest European pianos... A few days later we filled a hall, but little improved in Boston...



(Shaking his head): Boston. We encounter the fever of proselytism, the rage for conversion at every step of our travels. It is one of Americans' most deeply instilled traits. I tremble on seeing the Irish immigration threatening to overrun the whole United States. It is saddest on account of the ignorance, the brutal instincts and the ferocious superstition of all the Irish.

Yet, I do not know which I should fear more: the fanatics of Rome or the fanatics of the Bible. The Puritans are as rabid as fifteenth-century monks, and think only of the propagation of their faith. Like every fanatical sect, they have forgotten the *spirit* and attach themselves only to the *letter*. Subscribers in New York have furnished fifty thousand Bibles to be sent to China and eleven thousand more to Bengal and Africa—all in English! English! (Laughs.) It is not a monomania? Ought not this manner of understanding religion be cured by cold-water baths?

PASSENGER: If you haven't tried them, allow me to recommend the waters at Saratoga Springs.

GOTTSCHALK (With mounting agitation) :

To damnation with New York! My debts now exceed sixteen thousand dollars! Little Edward, can you not be anything but

frivolous? Mother, I love you, but you and the children are bringing the family to ruin. We have no bookings anywhere! My manager is swindling me. Berlioz has advised me to return to Paris. (He considers.)

PASSENGER (Edward):

Dearest Mother, it pains me to inform you that we are in a very bad position, very bad. Moreau cannot live any longer upon his profession. I fear that he contemplates suicide.

GOTTSCHALK (after a long contemplation):

With the Pattis and little brother in tow, we departed for Cuba.

(GOTTSCHALK may play excerpts from *El Cocoyé*, Op. 80, as he narrates, or we may hear "*Fiesta Criolla*," from his symphony *A Night in the Tropics*.)

Our stay became more pleasant once President Pierce ceased his threats of invasion in favor of an outright purchase of the island, intending to make Cuba a slave state. Only at the last minute were the ten thousand troops who stood poised to invade under the filibuster John Quitman, ordered to stand down. Nevertheless, after a year, the time had come to return to the United States. I say that Havana is the equal of any musical capital of the world, and

that its grand opera house, the Gran Teatro Tacón, takes second place to none.

PASSENGER (Canadian Constable):

Sir, you are under arrest.

GOTTSCHALK (Shocked):

On what grounds, sir!

PASSENGER: For failing to obtain a license for the hall.

GOTTSCHALK: But do you not collect the five-dollar fee before the concert?

PASSENGER: True enough, sir, but during your last trip, you refused to pay the fee and insulted the authorities. The Mayor therefore decided to punish you by not warning you about the license, then fining you after the concert for failing to obtain one.

GOTTSCHALK: Canada! What a frightful country! The priests who promenade through Quebec in their filthy cassocks, are hypocritical forms, outrageously rubicund and oily, or ignobly emaciated and famished. The pulpit here is a throne; the confessional a citadel. I despair of humanity! Quebec exhales the enfeebling bigotry of a population preserved in ignorance and brutishness. The children are weakly, and there are many idiots and deformed. Every Sunday in the sermons at High Mass the phrase invariably appears:

“Above all, my children, do not sully yourselves by crossing the threshold of those dens of perdition called theatres.” The polka is forbidden; the waltz prohibited. Puppet shows are allowed.

PASSENGER (Canadian Customs Official):

Sir, you have two pianos with you, but have declared only one.

GOTTSCHALK: Yes, we have a piano we have not declared, as we intend to remain only two days in Canada and shall not use it.

PASSENGER: But has not Mr. Gottschalk electrified an audience in Toronto with a work for two pianos?

GOTTSCHALK: *Oui, monsieur*, the Grand March from *Faust*.

PASSENGER: Two pianos, and yet you have paid duty on only one. The Queen, sir, cannot be robbed. Seize that piano!

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GOTTSCHALK: Returning from Cuba, I sailed headlong into a gale of sentimentality sweeping America. I am violently opposed to the maudlin treacle I found filling the shop windows, producing an effect as if the Venus de Milo dressed herself as a clown. Alas, only mediocrity finds a home. In New York, my publisher sold all my works to the house of William Hall and Son. For an extra fifty

dollars they threw into the pot a morsel I had composed during my Cuban sojourn.

(He begins to play [The Last Hope](#).)

An old woman had begged me to play for her during her final hours, an *última esperanza*. To this little melody she died contented. *The Last Hope* quickly became one of America's most popular songs, as popular as poor Foster's *My Old Kentucky Home*. Finally, my new publisher sponsored a series of concerts at Dodsworth Hall on Broadway.

(GOTTSCHALK stands, bows to the audience, takes off a pair of doeskin gloves and places them on the piano, wipes his fingers with a handkerchief and continues to play. Cheering. PASSENGER (Female) grabs gloves, rips them to shreds and throws the pieces to the audience, then attempts to rip off GOTTSCHALK's shirt. GOTTSCHALK changes shirts.)

PASSENGER: Didn't Liszt begin his concerts by throwing doeskin gloves onto the stage?

GOTTSCHALK : Liszt, Chopin, Beethoven, Onslow, Gottschalk. It was the longest series of recitals in American history. Finally, I could repay my debts, Father's debts, send aid to my siblings in Paris, whose straits had not altered appreciably with the unexpected death of my

mother. From that moment to this, I have been in demand.

Everywhere...

(Train whistle.)

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(Enter PASSENGER.)

PASSENGER (Captain Clark):

I am Captain Clark and when I summon you, it is your duty to  
come at once!

GOTTSCHALK: I received no summons from anyone.

PASSENGER (Threatening GOTTSCHALK):

You have insulted a lady in the dining car and I intend to punish  
you for it!

GOTTSCHALK: Sir, it is not my habit to insult ladies, and I dined alone this  
evening. You have my word of honor.

PASSENGER: I have known you for twenty years and your word of honor is  
worth nothing. I'll throw you off the train, piano strummer!

(He takes a drunken swing at GOTTSCHALK.)

GOTTSCHALK: I have never set eyes upon you. Get out of here!

(He pushes PASSENGER out.)

For this and seventy-eight dollars I come to Michigan?

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After a further year of ceaseless travel, the South again drew me to it. This time I remained in the Caribbean for six years, six years foolishly spent, thrown to the wind as if life were infinite and youth eternal; six years, during which I indolently roamed under the blue skies of the tropics, by chance giving a concert wherever I found a piano, sleeping wherever the night overtook me—on the grass of the savanna, or under the palm-leaf roof of a tobacco farm.

When I became tired of the same horizon, I crossed the sea to a neighboring island, and visited the Antilles, the Guianas and the shores of Pará. Sometimes I stopped five, six, eight months among an ignorant “pueblo,” to whom I played some of their simple ballads, putting off my departure from day to day. Or I might be detained in a hamlet where the piano was unknown, by the ties of an affection with which my fingers had nothing to do—.

O rare and blest tenderness! I forgot the world, and lived only for two large black eyes, which veiled themselves with tears whenever I spoke of beginning again my vagabond course, living again as the birds sing, as the brook flows, forgetful of the past, careless of the future.

At length, seized with a profound disgust of myself and the world, tired, discouraged, suspecting both men and women, I concealed myself in the desert on an extinguished volcano. There, I lived for many months like a cenobite, with no other companion but a poor fool who had attached himself to me, and loved me with that absurd and touching constancy which one only meets with in dogs and madmen.

Perched upon the edge of the crater, on the very top of the mountain, my cabin overlooked the whole country. The rock on which it was built hung over a precipice, whose depths were concealed by cactus and bamboo. Every evening I moved my piano upon the terrace and there, in view of the most beautiful scenery in the world, which was bathed by the serene and limpid atmosphere of the tropics, I played, *for myself alone*, everything that the vista opening before me inspired. Imagine to yourself a gigantic amphitheatre, such as an army of Titans might have carved out of the mountains. To the right and left, virgin forests filled with wild and distant harmonies that sounded the voice of silence. Over my head the azure of the sky; below the declivities descending gradually to the plain; further on the green savannas;



further again the immensity of the ocean, whose line of deep blue forms the horizon.

There, my pen was rarely inactive. There, my misanthropy softened; I became indulgent towards others and myself. I was cured of my wounds, my despair vanished, and soon the sun of the tropics, which gilds all things, gave me back my vagabond life, strong and confident. In the depths of my conscience I sometimes heard a voice recalling to me what I was, to what I ought to be; and the voice imperiously commanded me to return to a healthy and active life. At length, a letter arrived, offering me a round of concerts in the United States. The time to break all the ties that bound me to those six years had arrived. I returned. Now, when I read in the papers the lists of dead and wounded, I find myself excusing the demi-savages of the savannas who prefer their poetic barbarism to our barbarous progress.

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PASSENGER: Are you Mr. Gottschalk?

GOTTSCHALK: A fate which I perpetually attempt to escape. And you, sir?

PASSENGER: I'm with the *Evening Post*.

GOTTSCHALK: I do not speak to reporters, especially foreign ones. Since my recent return to the United States, I have learned that the New York theatres are closed, that a famine grips the North, that the French terror has been revived by American republicans, that they kill each other in broad daylight...

PASSENGER: I am not a foreign journalist, sir, and have no intention of interviewing you, but you must be aware that there is a war on.

GOTTSCHALK: I am well aware, but New York seems to be as brilliant as always.

PASSENGER: You have been absent a long time.

GOTTSCHALK: Six years, that is, five...

PASSENGER: Tell me, I've heard that at your Paris debut Chopin shook your hand and said, "Good, my child, very good. Let me shake your hand once more."

GOTTSCHALK (Reluctantly):

Yes, he did say something like that.

PASSENGER: Chopin underestimated you, Mr. Gottschalk. You became the king of pianists, the most successful musician ever to perform in New York. I covered your concerts. But why did you depart so precipitously, for six—five—long years?

GOTTSCHALK : If you must know, success becomes as monotonous as train wheels.

PASSENGER: Sir, you must expect that the public will want to follow your goings-on. Do you recollect the name Ada Clare?

GOTTSCHALK: No, sir, I am drawing a complete blank.

PASSENGER: Mr. Gottschalk, please, the papers were full of the two of you.

GOTTSCHALK : Hmm, now I dimly recollect. You refer to that third-rate actress and worse writer who once styled herself queen of New York bohemians? I don't know what happened to her and frankly am not the least interested.

PASSENGER: I understand completely, of course.

(During the following GOTTSCHALK remains silent, doing his best to ignore

PASSENGER (now Ada Clare). She does not relent, alternately throwing herself upon him and repulsing him, grabbing his legs, etc.)

PASSENGER (melodramatically, histrionically):

Behold the blatant Beer Brewers blowing stentorous blasts upon their two-penny trumpets, blighting everything true and earnest by the disgusting miasmatic vapors of their accustomed speech, their pestilential exhalations being the sole sign and measure of their immaterial beings.

Foremost in the snarling ranks of two-penny trumpetdom and beer brewing is Lord Caltiff von Blunderbuss, master of the art of

LYING in all its brilliant phases, God-stabbing audacities, and mudslinging quagmires. Blunderbuss, how long meanest thou to deluge the much-tormented Niobe with thy aimless abuses, thy swamps of impossible lies? I tell thee that thou needed take to thyself no credit for admiring Gottschalk the laureate.

Duncebella frequents the concert room when she obtains free tickets and talks largely of the admiration piano artists have for her. For thee and thy tribe of brewers, I am about to patent my wonderful invention, the Automaton Pianist. The construction of him embraces three distinct features: The first and most important—I myself being the sole puller of the wires and turner of the screws—contains the machinery for making him raise his eyes and SMILE. The second enables him to take off his white kid gloves, and by the third and extremely insignificant feature, I move his fingers and make him play.

Thou, Duncebella, one of my own unhappy sex, will soon speak of him as thy true adorer, and the despiser of the much-tormented.

GOTTSCHALK (Staring wearily out the window as PASSENGER clings to his leg):

One day some savant will discover that time is a fluid that expands and contracts as it is exposed to the varying moral temperaments.

No one will ever make me believe that Sunday at Elmira, New York, is composed of twelve hours such as that make up the other days of the week.

PASSENGER (Using GOTTSCHALK to demonstrate):

The last, great and sublime event of the day was the debut of my Automaton Pianist, Mr. Narcissus Medoro Adonis Hyperion. He is arrayed in his finest clothes, selected after a long and strictly private consultation with Gottschalk's tailor. I place him with trembling hands at the piano, kissing him tenderly on each glassy eye. The curtain rises slowly like a veil parting the sky. Men and women simultaneously jump to their feet, breathe out their overcharged souls in one tumultuous burst of applause that causes the house to shiver and reel upon its foundations. But, horror! that fatal kiss of mine! I have kissed him so vehemently that I have driven his eyes out of their sockets half an inch into his head. So I slip off the wire connecting them to his smile. His eyes only roll about like a goblin damned, and the smile amounts to nothing more than a snicker. Overcome by despair, I think to end my miserable existence by thrusting a rusty nail through my ear, when my threatened brain gives birth to an idea.

I draw the collapse wire, and so cause his face to droop upon his hands. The audience catches its breath at this heart-rending display of the artist's soul melting. After a death-hush, there arises the faint sound of weeping...Gottschalk, one of the first to break into sobs, is finally borne out in a swoon. At last, the automaton plays his great fantasia, "In Memory of a Fool," dedicated to Miss Ada Clare, the talented actress and writer. Gottschalk, recovering, returns and listens with great attention, his lips wearing their usual sneer, and during the interval pronounces the whole affair a humbug.

GOTTSCHALK (Staring out the window as PASSENGER pushes him away):

My God, what features! There stands the stuff for a great artist. What harmony in that striking face, the face of polished ivory, the ebony hair—Halt, imagination! Do not build up a romance; pay the dollar for your dinner. Ah, my Sappho, there she is handing a plate of pork and beans to a traveler. What a fall! Owego. Charming concert. Every piece encored.

PASSENGER: Young as I am, my life is already closed. My faith has glimmered out. Nay, the very world is a dream, yet I perceive that Trigonometry, Carbonic Acid, and Gottschalk exist. What of that?

The world plunges onward to its dissolutions, when shall remain only those two sole self-existences, Necessity and Truth, which were omnipotent before Trigonometry had birth, or e're Gottschalk was.

GOTTSCHALK (Staring out window):

Ennui, ennui, ennui...

PASSENGER: Behold the hunters press upon the wounded lion! On every side, armed men and the blood-dabbled jaws of the frenzied dogs! To the left lieth the yawning abyss, black, awful, fathomless. Then, as the heart-broken woman, the lion giveth one look of passionate regret to the happy earth and the smiling blue heaven, and leaps afar, away, away...

O thou, my poor soul! Whether it be Life or Death! Error dieth as the worm! Truth—Truth alone, triumphs and is eternal!

GOTTSCHALK: It is high time. South! The Caribbean beckons!

(The sound of train wheels becomes louder.)

PASSENGER (Aubrey):

I always assumed my father was Moreau Gottschalk.

GOTTSCHALK: Ah, Aubrey, I am glad to see you, little man. Here is a pair of free tickets for tonight's concert.

(Exit PASSENGER.)

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GOTTSCHALK: Undoubtedly, the feminine type in the United States is superior to that of Europe. Pretty young girls are a majority in American audiences, while in Europe they are the exception. Besides, the education of women is by and large more complete here. American women, with their delicate sentiments and the intelligence that our educational system develops, united to the native elegance of their sex, will do more than all the legislators in the world to polish men, and to circumscribe the turbulent effervescence found at the surface of all new societies. Without them, whiskey and the revolver would completely overrun us. By their soft but powerful influence, our manners, little by little, become softened. I foresee the day when a drunkard will be treated like the brute he is, and when those who are ready to draw their revolver will be punished as murderers.

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(Enter PASSENGER (Max Strakosch, GOTTSCHALK's manager)):

PASSENGER : The town is all commotion. Where are we?

GOTTSCHALK : Williamsport.



(Handing PASSENGER a piece of paper): Have you seen this dispatch? Three columns of Rebels are marching on the capital.

PASSENGER: Harrisburg? But we have a concert there.

GOTTSCHALK : Strakosch, do you think the Rebels will call off their invasion because you wish to present a concert?

PASSENGER: We press on, on!

GOTTSCHALK: You are mad, mad.

(Exit PASSENGER.)

I am less surprised at this news than worried. Lee's apparent inactivity has had too much the appearance of a feint not to lead us to suspect that he will appear unexpectedly somewhere in Maryland or Pennsylvania.

(Enter PASSENGER.)

PASSENGER (Handing GOTTSCHALK a piece of paper):

Another dispatch from the Governor, calling all able-bodied citizens to arms. The Confederates have seized Martinsburg and are marching on Hagerstown—forty-five miles from here.

GOTTSCHALK: We must volunteer.

PASSENGER: Volunteer to give a concert.

GOTTSCHALK : Are all managers so preposterous? Max, have you taken notice of the commotion? Wagons full of barrels for fortifications, farmers under arms, marching toward the river. The roads are impassable. How are we to reach Harrisburg?

PASSENGER: Ah, you see, the train is underway again. Have no fear, Moreau, we shall make it.

(Exit.)

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(Enter PASSENGER.)

PASSENGER : This side of the capital is completely obstructed by wagons and freight trains. The Governor intends to make a stand here, at the Susquehanna.

GOTTSCHALK: I hope it is not while we are stranded over the middle of the river.

PASSENGER: Ah, again we move. You are too much the pessimist, Moreau.

(Exit.)

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(Enter PASSENGER (Reporter).)

PASSENGER: Sir, are you able to tell me anything about what is going on?

GOTTSCHALK: What an absurd thought. Who are you?

PASSENGER: A reporter from the New York *Herald*, just in.

GOTTSCHALK: I do not speak to journalists. Your “sensational stories” are a new name for “canard.” How many times have you reported the capture of Vicksburg, the death of Jefferson Davis? Today we learn that McClellan, who has been relieved from command by Lincoln, is rushing to Pennsylvania to place himself at the head of the Pennsylvania Militia, to crush Lee and proclaim himself...Out of my sight!

(Exit PASSENGER.)

The city expects to be attacked at any moment.

(Enter PASSENGER (Strakosch).)

PASSENGER: The Rebels are only eighteen miles away. All the shops are closed. People are fleeing. I fear our concert is done for!

GOTTSCHALK: A belated revelation, Strakosch, but any revelation is always welcome.

PASSENGER: Three thousand people are at work on the entrenchments.

GOTTSCHALK: Four thousand people are attempting to board this train.

PASSENGER: Have you found the pianos?

GOTTSCHALK: No, they’ve gone missing.

PASSENGER:           Then I'll stay behind. You—North! North! I'll reschedule the concert. Perhaps in a few weeks, for Independence Day, once the Rebels have retreated.

(GOTTSCHALK stares at him in amazement. They shake. Exit PASSENGER.)

(Train whistle.)

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GOTTSCHALK (Staring out window):

Where are we? Somewhere in the Midwest. Lost. I have attended mass at the local church to still my soul. Alas! Why does the priest who chants the mass invariably think himself obliged to sing out of key? Music is the attire in which words are clothed to do more honor to God. Shall we sing just and true in our concerts and sing falsely in church? Why give to God the prerogative of bad music? We should not forget that music is a moral agent. It awakens in us reminiscences, memories, associations, and it brings tears to our eyes. In Switzerland, the desertions caused by an old air became so severe that the government had to prohibit it. The Emperor Napoleon is obliged to allow his Turkish mercenaries their barbarous flutes and tam-tams; without them, their strength succumbs under long marches. In Paris, with a friend, we started a

choir of the insane. A raving lunatic priest was so violent that we restrained him in a straight-jacket, but on hearing the music, he quieted, and even joined in the singing.

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(GOTTSCHALK is lying on the piano, or underneath it, shivering. Nearby,

PASSENGER (Strakosch) is also lying on the stage, shivering.)

GOTTSCHALK : I haven't slept all night. My moustache is covered with frost.

PASSENGER: Does that surprise you, Moreau, when the thermometer reads thirty-two below?

GOTTSCHALK: Are these interminable expeditions worth it, just so Mr. Dwight can call me an idiot? Listen to that wind. What a lament! What will Milwaukee think has happened to us?

PASSENGER: Have no fear, I shall telegraph them that we are delayed.

GOTTSCHALK : Decidedly delayed! The telegraph lines must be buried under ten feet of snow! Milwaukee will never get the message.

PASSENGER: Of course they will. You'll give the concert tomorrow. Perhaps the day after...

GOTTSCHALK: Listen to the moans of those cattle. They are dying. What about that soldier? Did he make it through the night?

(The train whistle sounds.)

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PASSENGER (Female):

Do I correctly perceive, sir, that you hail from New Orleans?

GOTTSCHALK : Indeed, Madame, I first saw the light of day in that fair city.

PASSENGER: I am glad to finally have the company of a Southerner here in the North. You must be as aghast as I am at the Yankees' attempt to force their way of life on us.

GOTTSCHALK: You presume too much, Madame.

PASSENGER: But if you really are from New Orleans, then you know that the North's blow at slavery is a blow at commerce and civilization. The institution of slavery is the greatest material interest of the world.

GOTTSCHALK: Madame, you may express your opinion. Allow me to express mine: slavery is a moral abomination.

PASSENGER: Sir! A true Southerner would acknowledge that slavery is the fairest benefit God ever bestowed on mankind.

GOTTSCHALK: Such a view is utterly repugnant to me. I have never owned any slaves. My father traded in them, and owned several, but the monstrous practice did nothing to prevent his bankruptcy, which left our family destitute. To stave off his creditors he was forced to

persuade his mulatto mistress to allow him to resell the land and the slaves he had once signed over to her.

PASSENGER: Then you admit his slaves were valuable.

GOTTSCHALK : The entire business was utterly distasteful. I refuse to discuss it any longer.

(Moving to the piano): It is extraordinary that in the North, especially Canada, each time I play *The Union*, someone in the audience—

PASSENGER (Audience member):

Play *Dixie's Land*!

(GOTTSCHALK reluctantly begins intercalating *Dixie* with *Yankee Doodle* and improvising. (Gottschalk's *Variations on Dixie's Land* would be preferable, but the score apparently no longer exists.))

PASSENGER (To Audience Member): Traitor! Play *The Union*!

GOTTSCHALK: You see it is a dangerous business. I could easily make four thousand dollars by announcing that I will play *The Union* and my variations on *Dixie's Land*. But the factions are like the country itself, always spoiling for a fight—

(PASSENGER launches himself at GOTTSCHALK, who exits.)

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GOTTSCHALK: (Staring into his hands): En route to California, news is intermittent, but there can no longer be any doubt that Lincoln is dead. We do not know the details of this horrible outrage—except that the name of his assassin is Wilkes Booth. I saw Booth a year ago in Cleveland, where I was struck by the beauty of his features, and at the same time by a sinister expression in his countenance. I would even say that he had something deadly in his look. A lady friend of mine told me that he had as much natural talent for the stage as his brother Edwin, but that his violent and fantastic character would never permit him to polish his brutality or restrain the fury of his acting within the ordained limits of art.

All the men seem crushed, overwhelmed under the weight of an incommensurable grief. A judge, sitting in the corner, weeps as if he has lost a father. The rude seamen are unable to efface the traces of their tears. The women are those who show the least regrets.

PASSENGER (Female):

Lincoln would have had to die sooner or later. This is a judgement from God.

GOTTSCHALK: Madame, I shall not reproach you for those words. All that is good and beneficent in this world shall reproach you.



Where are now those frivolous judgments on the man whom we are weeping for today? His ugliness, his awkwardness, his jokes with which we reproached him: all have disappeared in the presence of the majesty of death. His greatness, his honesty, the purity of that great heart which beats no longer. O Eternal Power of the true and beautiful! Yesterday his detractors ridiculed him; today he appears on the threshold of immortality, and we understand by the universality of our grief what future generations will see in him.

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GOTTSCHALK: The Golden Gate surpasses in magnificence the most beautiful sights I have ever seen, presenting to the eye a more dazzling spectacle than even the bays of Naples and Constantinople. But San Francisco has the air of a Friday night brawl, a town where dance halls and saloons are jammed cheek to jowl with opera houses, each with a gambling hall appended. Where the press thinks nothing of devoting columns to the funeral of a street dog. America is distant. I have left loved ones far behind; no one greeted me on arrival. Our first concert, for two-dollars' admission, featuring Beethoven's Kreutzer sonata, was a dismal failure, but

things have improved. Our monster concert for fourteen pianos had to be repeated and since then a day has scarcely passed without a performance. Mr. Dwight's venom is absent, but the San Francisco press is always pulling one's leg, in particular that whippersnapper who styles himself a humorist.

PASSENGER (Mark Twain):

Gottschalk probably gets as much out of the piano as there is in it. But the frozen fact is, all that he *does* get out of it is "tum, tum." He gets "tum, tum" out of the instrument thicker and faster than my landlady's daughter, Mary Ann—beats her three to one—but after all, it is simply "tum, tum." The piano may do for love-sick girls...but give me the banjo any day.

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GOTTCHALK: Where are we? Virginia City is the most miserable, the most wearisome, the most inhospitable place on the globe. I have never really known spleen except in Virginia City. The dust blinds when it does not choke you, and vice versa, and both at once. It is meagre, sad, mean and monotonous, not really a town. My only solace is that I found here a family from New Orleans which has helped relieve my isolation. Strangely, the day after my final

concert, which I concluded by improvising a "battle piece," the miners forced me to repeat the entire performance from beginning to end.

These Nevada mountains, ravines...I cannot convey the fatigue... I shall be relieved to return to San Francisco, but California is a humbug. The climate is splendid, its natural riches inexhaustible, its fruits and vegetables the finest in the world. What is all this to a man who owns no mines? I am eager to announce my forthcoming departure for South America.

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My farewell concerts and benefits have been extraordinarily well received—

PASSENGER (declaiming):

"It is sufficient to say that two young and blooming girls have been forever ruined by two heartless libertines, and that one of the girls has been sent to a convent. The simple-minded girls were dazzled by a flashing exterior, and a somewhat celebrated manner, and fell victim to the hellish lust of the Seducer. We hear of pistols being called into requisition to right this hideous wrong."

GOTTSCHALK: Infamous slander! My hatter invited me to go for an evening carriage ride. At first I declined, but he later spied me on my way back to the hotel and I climbed aboard. Imagine my astonishment when a half-hour later he stopped, and two young ladies from the Oakland Female College joined us, one expecting a rendezvous with the tenor Sbriglia. My position was anything but flattering, as I found myself but a substitute for the absent Sbriglia, and the conversation was anything but tender. I should tell you, this woman was at least twenty years old. The young ladies laughed a great deal, proud of the stratagems they had employed to escape their rooms, that it would be most funny if they should be caught by their school's director...In spite of their entreaties to spend more time with them, we merely left them on the road and returned to our hotel. Unfortunately, they were discovered entering the school in the morning...

My enemies have fabricated the entire calumny, likely my California manager, who has turned against me, the thieving impresario. The entire school lies in ruins.

PASSENGER: You must defend yourself against these charges. The papers are demanding that you be tarred and feathered!

GOTTSCHALK: It is beneath my dignity as a man of honor to notice such slanders. Let the story of my life be told, every act scrutinized by friends and enemies. If you can find in it anything to prove me capable of such unmanly conduct, cast me from your regard, blot me forever from your memory.

*Adieu* America.

(A boat whistle sounds.)

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(During the following short scenes only glimpses are caught of GOTTSCHALK, stroboscopically.)

GOTTSCHALK: Cries of “¡Viva la revolución!” echo through the streets of Lima. The battle has commenced.

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The firing is against the palace; a breach has opened. A young Indian who has received a ball in the left breast is dying. I stop a priest.

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The crowds on the streets are immense. On the public square they are removing traces of the battle. The dead horses remain. Atop

the cathedral walls lie hundreds of corpses. The cries of the women, searching for their loved ones, add fresh horrors.

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The revolutionists have armed the populace. The only thing for us to do is demand protection at the American Legation, but the enemy's cannon enfilades our street and it is doubtful that we could get there without being killed. What will become of us?

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The Lamentations are sung false by an old Spanish priest.

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The Atacama Desert extends from the coast of Chile all the way to Bolivia. The mountains open before us, rising on each side of a long narrow plain, like a palisade. Illuminated by the sun, the peaks render more somber the first tints of twilight, which begin to descend onto the plateau. The road is horrible, but I am wrong in saying "road," for there is none.

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At the travelers' hovel we have coffee. The goat's milk is exquisite. We smoke excellent cigars. You can hardly have an idea of how

well off we are, seated on the doorsill of the hovel, with the starry heavens, unequaled anywhere on earth, above us.

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(The lights become steady.)

The events that occur in a traveling artist's career are uniform in their tedium. At first they are interesting because they are novel, but after endless repetitions, they become a part of the monotony of the daily routine. New arrivals find a thousand interesting observations that command notice. For myself, whom the automaton's life has rendered callous, whose curiosity has become deadened, I discover nothing here that is not mundane. I no longer keep my journal regularly or carefully. The never-ending rounds tire me—the visits to the editors of the papers, to the artists, to smile obsequiously. To perform these maneuvers is indispensable to the artist's success. After the mechanical concerts are done, the same custom inevitably follows: the adieus, the bills to settle, the trunks to pack...It is time to play *The Banjo*.

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(Seated at the piano, acknowledging applause): Four years have passed since I departed America. I compose a great deal under the

pseudonym Seven Octaves. My agent has been urging me to return to the States, insisting that California is long forgotten. I am, without doubt, forgotten. When I take up his offer, it shall be to perform only enough to permit me to compose. Ah, I am weary. Yet, in Rio, I have been received with indescribable enthusiasm; music lovers pay up to seventy-five dollars to hear me play. The papers in their tyrannical fervor dictate what pieces I must perform on my programs—always *Morte!*—*She is dead!* It is my favorite of late, “shocking,” the critics say, “because of the vague terror it spills into one’s soul and because of the profound inner turmoil it provokes.” The women weep. (Growing quieter): Rehearsing an army of eight hundred musicians tries one’s fortitude. At times I have lost my temper. How dare I? Ah, I am weary...no, there is yet another concert tonight...

(With difficulty he begins to play *Morte!*, and slowly collapses onto the piano. Fade to black.)



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