











Eugène Ysaye







## FOREWORD

The appreciation accorded Miss Harriette Brower's admirable books on Piano Mastery has prompted the present volume of intimate *Talks with Master Violinists and Teachers*, in which a number of famous artists and instructors discuss esthetic and technical phases of the art of violin playing in detail, their concept of what Violin Mastery means, and how it may be acquired. Only limitation of space has prevented the inclusion of numerous other deserving artists and teachers, yet practically all of the greatest masters of the violin now in this country are represented. That the lessons of their artistry and experience will be of direct benefit and value to every violin student and every lover of violin music may be accepted as a foregone conclusion.

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## VIOLIN MASTERY

EUGÈNE YSAYE

### THE TOOLS OF VIOLIN MASTERY

Who is there among contemporary masters of the violin whose name stands for more at the present time than that of the great Belgian artist, his "extraordinary temperamental power as an interpreter" enhanced by a hundred and one special gifts of tone and technic, gifts often alluded to by his admiring colleagues? For Ysaye is the greatest exponent of that wonderful Belgian school of violin playing which is rooted in his teachers Vieuxtemps and Wieniawski, and which as Ysaye himself says, "during a period covering seventy years reigned supreme at the *Conservatoire* in Paris in the persons of Massart, Remi, Marsick, and others of its great interpreters."

What most impresses one who meets Ysaye and talks with him for the first time is the mental breadth and vision of the man; his kindness and amiability; his utter lack of small vanity. When the writer first called on him in New York with a note of introduction from his friend and admirer Adolfo Betti, and later at Scarsdale where, in company with his friend Thibaud, he was dividing his time between music and tennis, Ysaye made him entirely at home, and willingly talked of his art and its ideals. In reply to some questions anent his own study years, he said:

"Strange to say, my father was my very first teacher — it is not often the case. I studied with him until I went to the Liège Conservatory in 1867, where I won a second prize, sharing it with Ovide Musin, for playing Viotti's 22d Concerto. Then I had lessons from Wieniawski in Brussels and studied two years with Vieuxtemps in Paris. Vieuxtemps was a paralytic when I came to him; yet a wonderful teacher, though he could no longer play. And I was already a concertizing artist when I met him. He was a very great man, the grandeur of whose tradition lives in the whole 'romantic school' of violin playing. Look at his seven concertos — of course they are writ-

ten with an eye to effect, from the virtuoso's standpoint, yet how firmly and solidly they are built up! How interesting is their working-out: and the orchestral score is far more than a mere accompaniment. As regards virtuose effect only Paganini's music compares with his, and Paganini, of course, did not play it as it is now played. In wealth of technical development, in true musical expressiveness Vieuxtemps is a master. A proof is the fact that his works have endured forty to fifty years, a long life for compositions.

"Joachim, Léonard, Sivori, Wieniawski—all admired Vieuxtemps. In Paganini's and Locatelli's works the effect, comparatively speaking, lies in the mechanics; but Vieuxtemps is the great artist who made the instrument take the road of romanticism which Hugo, Balzac and Gauthier trod in literature. And before all the violin was made to charm, to move, and Vieuxtemps knew it. Like Rubinstein, he held that the artist must first of all have ideas, emotional power—his technic must be so perfected that he does not have to think of it! Incidentally, speaking of schools of violin playing, I find that there is a great tendency to confuse the Belgian and French. This should not be. They are distinct, though the latter has undoubtedly been formed and influenced by the former. Many of the great violin names, in fact,—Vieuxtemps, Léonard, Marsick, Remi, Parent, de Broux, Musin, Thomson,—are all Belgian."

## YSAYE'S REPERTORY

Ysaye spoke of Vieuxtemps's repertory—only he did not call it that: he spoke of the Vieuxtemps compositions and of Vieuxtemps himself. "Vieuxtemps wrote in the grand style; his music is always rich and sonorous. If his violin is really to sound, the violinist must play Vieuxtemps, just as the 'cellist plays Servais. You know, in the Catholic Church, at Vespers, whenever God's name is spoken, we bow the head. And Wieniawski would always bow his head when he said: 'Vieuxtemps is the master of us all!'"

"I have often played his *Fifth Concerto*, so warm, brilliant and replete with temperament, always full-sounding, rich in an almost unbounded strength. Of course, since Vieuxtemps wrote his concertos, a great variety of fine modern works has appeared, the appreciation of chamber-music has grown and developed, and with it that of the sonata. And the modern violin sonata is also a vehicle for violin virtuosity in the very best meaning of the word. The sonatas of César Franck, d'Indy, Théodore Dubois, Lekeu, Vierne, Ropartz, Lazarri—they are all highly expressive, yet at the same time virtuosic. The violin parts develop a lovely song line, yet their technic is far from simple. Take Lekeu's splendid Sonata in G major; rugged and massive, making decided technical demands—it yet has a wonderful breadth of melody, a great expressive quality of song."

These works—those who have heard the Master play the beautiful Lazarri sonata this season will not soon forget it—are all dedicated to Ysaye. And this holds good, too, of the César Franck sonata. As Ysaye says: "Performances of these great sonatas call for *two* artists—for their piano parts are sometimes very elaborate. César Franck sent me his sonata on September 26, 1886, my wedding day—it was his wedding present! I cannot complain as regards the number of works, really important works, inscribed to me. There are so many—by Chausson (his symphony), Ropartz, Dubois (his sonata—one of the best after Franck), d'Indy (the *Istar* variations and other works), Gabriel Fauré (the Quintet), Debussy (the Quartet)! There are more than I can recall at the moment—violin sonatas,

symphonic music, chamber-music, choral works, compositions of every kind!

"Debussy, as you know, wrote practically nothing originally for the violin and piano—with the exception, perhaps, of a work published by Durand during his last illness. Yet he came very near writing something for me. Fifteen years ago he told me he was composing a 'Nocturne' for me. I went off on a concert tour and was away a long time. When I returned to Paris I wrote to Debussy to find out what had become of my 'Nocturne.' And he replied that, somehow, it had shaped itself up for orchestra instead of a violin solo. It is one of the *Trois Nocturnes* for orchestra. Perhaps one reason why so much has been inscribed to me is the fact that as an interpreting artist, I have never cultivated a 'specialty.' I have played everything from Bach to Debussy, for real art should be international!"

Ysaye himself has an almost marvelous right-arm and finger-board control, which enables him to produce at will the finest and most subtle tonal nuances in all bowings. Then, too, he overcomes the most intricate mechanical problems with seemingly effortless ease. And his tone has well been called "golden." His own definition of tone is worth recording. He says it should be "In music what the heart suggests, and the soul expresses!"