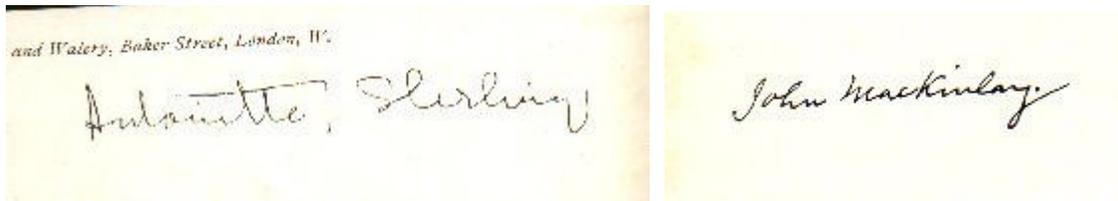


Antoinette Sterling And Other Celebrities
Chapter 4 – At Her Zenith
By Lady Mary Sinner-Hendrickson

With the marriage to John MacKinlay, came to the life of Antoinette Sterling, order, both private and professional. No longer would she live in apartments. The new husband immediately assume all responsibility, freeing the singer from any worry. He scheduled her appointments, private and business, and became known as one of the best business men in the music profession. As Malcolm wrote “Out of disorder he brought order.” John answered all correspondence, in most instances in her name, which would prove disastrous for autograph collectors. She had such terrible handwriting, and John, a neat, flowing style. There are letters, notes, pictures, and perhaps other items, which bear the name of Antoinette Sterling, but when compared with a true signature of hers, against her husband’s writing, it is quick to prove whose the signature truly is.



John devotedly arranged the programs, and attire Antoinette sang, and wore, insuring they were not duplicated in the same town at a later engagement. He kept a record of all her songs, encores, and her gowns. When on the way to a concert, he would make sure all conversation was of a happy nature, so she would be in the happiest frame of mind, ensuring the best possible performance. He could usually be found in the artists’ room, during a concert, singing along with Antoinette, under his breath. In his son, Malcolm’s own words, John was “diplomatic, tactful, businesslike, a man of the world, with a wonderful memory for names and faces, distinguished in appearance, artistic, with fine musicianly feeling, theoretical knowledge, and skill in accompanying – whereby he could be of much help in the arranging and preparing of a song for public performance – quiet, gentle, and loving – such a man was John MacKinlay.”

John had a strong sense of humor, and when Antoinette’s sister, Mary Bradford Sterling-Clark visited their home, he decided to give her a little strife. He knew Mary was very religious, and prided herself on knowledge of her bible. He teased her, for quite sometime, by asking her where in her scriptures the following could be found: “If the sheep have lost their shepherd, wherewithal shall they be salted?” What a character my great-great Uncle John appears to have been!

Not long after moving into their Stanhope Place home, Monsieur Ch. Gounod paid them a visit. He was the composer of “Faust”. Mons. Gounod asked if Antoinette would sing for him, which she happily did, and sang “The Better Land, with her husband accompanying her at the piano. When she sang the final chord, Gounod approached her, kissed both her hands, and said “I have heard every voice of any repute throughout the whole world, but that this *one* was unique.”

Because the MacKinlays had just moved into their new home, not all the furniture had arrived, or yet been purchased. At the time of Mons. Gounod’s visit, the drawing-room had only the semi-grand piano, and stool. The story of the piano is quite interesting. The piano was a gift from William Steinway, the founder of Steinway pianos. Mr. Steinway and Antoinette had been friends since her early studies in New York. He had

come to England on business, and heard Antoinette sing “The Three Fishers”, at the Albert Hall. He was so moved by her performance, he did not care to hear any other singer that day. The next morning, a Steinway van stopped in front of Antoinette and John’s home, and the delivery men delivered a concert-grand piano to Antoinette. It was put in the drawing-room. Mr. Steinway had picked the piano out expressly for the singer. Some time later, a mutual friend said Mr. Steinway had told them “The voice of Antoinette Sterling had in it a rarity of quality which could only be fully appreciated by one whose ear had been trained by piano tuning.” When the drawing-room was finally filled with all the necessary furnishings, the concert-grand piano proved to be too large for the available space. Mr. Steinway, at Antoinette’s request, exchanged it for a semi-grand piano. Concert or semi-grand, I would have loved to have heard the sound of the piano, being played by Uncle John, and Aunt Antoinette’s voice singing so beautifully!

Antoinette Sterling was well known for ballad singing, but also classical, and specially German songs. In fact, she had always wanted to sing lieder. In America, she was the first to perform groups of lieder at her recitals. In the early 1870’s, at Mr. Steinway’s Hall, in New York, she performed the following lieder program. This, by the way, was the only trip to America which her husband, John, ever accompanied her.

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| Overture to Leonora, No. 1 | | Beethoven |
| Prelude, Choral and Fugue | | Bach |
| Recitative | “Then cometh Jesus from Galilee” | |
| Trio | “This My Beloved Son” | MacFarren |
| Aria | “In the Beginning was the Word” (From the new oratorio “St. John the Baptist.”) Mme. Antoinette Sterling | |
| Romanze for Violin, op. 42 | Mr. S.E. Jacobson. | Mox Bruch |
| Song | “When the Tide comes in” (Expressly composed for Mme. Antoinette Sterling.) “Dance of the Bayaderes” | |
| Ballet Music | “Torchlight Dance of the Cashmere Brides” “Second Bayaderes Dance” “Wedding Procession” (From the opera “Feramors.”) | Rubenstein |
| Intermission | | |
| Overture | “Euryanthe” | Weber |
| Lieder: | “Wonne der Wehmuth” | Beethoven |
| Lieder | “Der Wachtelschlag” | Schubert |
| Lieder | “Wenn ich fruh in den Garten geh” | Schumann |
| Lieder | “Sei Still” | Joachim Raff |
| Lieder | “Neue Liebe” | Mendelsohn |
| Lieder | “Es muss ein Wanderbares sein” | F. Liszt |
| Lieder | “Gelb rollt mir zu Fussen” Mme. Sterling. | Rubinstein |
| Symphonic Poems | “Omphale’s Spinning Wheel” | Saint Saens |
| Scotch Song | “Caller Herrin” | |

The singing of German music was not accepted easily by some audiences, but that did not sway Antoinette in the least bit. She was many years ahead of her time, or should I say ahead of most others, where lieder was concerned! She felt exonerated, when she personally met Franz Liszt!

There was a luncheon reception being held in Franz Liszt's honor, at the home of the Baroness Burdett-Coutts. Liszt had made his wishes known that he did not care to play, or even set eyes on a piano. He, at this time, was seventy-five years of age. He had given his last concert, and was leaving England in two days. Antoinette Sterling was the sole vocalist at this occasion.

After lunch, everyone gathered in the drawing-room. Liszt was told Antoinette was going to sing two of his songs, one of which was "Der Koenig in Thule." The composer sat near the piano, as Antoinette sang his song. In her own words, "At the end he put his head back and murmured 'Ach Gott! Ach Gott!'"

His last day in England, Antoinette and John received, and accepted, an invitation to join Liszt for dinner, at the home of his host. After dinner, Antoinette was to sing for Liszt, and a Mr. Coenen accompanied on the piano. Just the day before, Liszt had no wish to play the piano, but this time he asked the singer who would play the piano. Though she desired the composer to do the honors, she did not want to impose, though later wished she had asked him accompany her. After Antoinette sang for Liszt and the others present, he sat and played the piano. Then, he requested Antoinette to sing "King of Thule." She recalled, in later years, "When I had done so he improvised more divinely even than before, and said many sweet things to me. Next day, he left, and died soon afterwards at Bayreuth."

John was the one in the family who made the decisions of how to decorate the home. The dining room was oak, along with oak furnishings. The mantle was oak, with a large slab of onyx, and near it was a carved oak chest from the fifteenth century. There was a ceiling chandelier that had belonged to Dante Rosetti. There was a large oriental carpet, hundreds of years old, which had Koran verses woven into it. The curtains were red velvet, and from the sixteenth century. The hall and landing were of inlaid mosaic, and the staircase had old French prints. There was a double drawing-room, with yellow tapestry walls, parquet floors, mahogany doors, and finely decorated ceiling. The drawing-room contained a wedding chest, which had a picture panel in front executed by an old Italian colourist, and two ends were painted with the family arms, for which it was originally made. A large Chinese curtain of yellow embroidery, which once hung in the bedchamber of the Emperor, separated the two rooms. The chairs were from the French periods, and there were many antique cabinets of fine workmanship, and cushions from the "Peacock Room" designed by Whistler. There was a clock which had belonged to Napoleon. In the furnishings was a set of silver desert knives and forks, engraved with the Imperial arms of Russia, and at one time belonged to Peter The Great. I can't imagine living in such a home. It must have appeared, to visitors, more of a museum. It seems as if John MacKinlay had, as the comedian Gallagher, would say "Style!"

Next, the adventure continues, with chapter 5 – Her Songs and Singing.