

CLASSICS TO GO

LIFE OF HAYDN



LUDWIG NOHL

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Geo. Dance

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JOSEPH HAYDN.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE abridged Life of Haydn, by Dr. Nohl, prepared originally as a contribution to a series of biographies, which is issued in popular form in Germany, is so simple in its narrative, that it would hardly need an introduction, were its subject-matter confined to the record of Haydn's life, with its many musical triumphs, or to the portraiture of this genial, child-like and lovable master. The trials and troubles of his youth, their intensification in his married life, his marvelous musical progress, his seclusion at Eisenstadt, his visits to London and his introduction to its gay world in his old age, followed by such wonderful musical triumphs, make a story of extraordinary personal interest, which the author has heightened with numerous anecdotes, illustrating his rare sweetness and geniality. There are many discursions, however, in the work, in which Dr. Nohl analyzes the component parts of Haydn's musical creations, and traces the effect of his predecessors as well as of his cotemporaries upon his development as an artist. To understand these, it must be remembered that the author deals with music from a philosophical standpoint, choosing Schopenhauer for his authority, the philosopher whom Wagner admires so much, and who makes the Will the basis of all phenomena. Applied in a musical sense therefore, music is not a matter of sweet sounds, whether melody or harmony, nor is its principal office the creation of pleasure by these sounds, but it is the chief agent of the Will in giving expression to its impulses. What this theory is, has been stated by Richard Wagner himself in his "Essay on Beethoven," in the following words: "The mere element of music, as an idea of the world, is not beheld by us, but felt instead, in the depths of consciousness, and we understand

that idea to be an immediate revelation of the unity of the Will, which, proceeding from the unity of human nature, incontrovertibly exhibits itself to our consciousness, as unity with universal nature also, which indeed we likewise perceive through sound." The definition will afford a clue to some of the author's statements, and may help to make clearer some of his musical analyses. The rest of the work may safely be left to the reader. It is the record of the life not only of a great musician, but of a lovable man, who is known to this day among his own people, though almost a century has elapsed since his death, by the endearing appellation of "Papa."

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CHAPTER I.

1732-1753.

HIS YOUTH AND EARLY STUDIES.

Haydn's Birth and Family—His Early Talent—First Studies with Frankh—Chapel-boy at St. Stephen's—Reutter's Instructions—Early Compositions—His Mischievous Tricks and Dismissal—Anecdote of Maria Theresa—Acquaintance with Metastasio—Influence of Philip Emanuel Bach—The Origin of his First Opera, "The Devil on Two Sticks."

"SEE, my dear Hummel, the house in which Haydn was born; to think that so great a man should have first seen the light in a peasant's wretched cottage." Such were the words of Beethoven, upon his death-bed in 1827, as he spoke of the father of the symphony and quartet, both of which he himself brought to their highest perfection.

Joseph Haydn was born March 31, 1732, at the market-town of Rohrau, near Bruck, on the river Leitha, which at that point separates Lower Austria from Hungary. The little place belonged to the Counts Harrach, who erected a memorial to his honor in their park upon his return from his London triumphs in 1795.

Haydn's father was a wheelwright, and the craft had long been followed by the family. He had traveled as a master-workman, and in his wanderings had been, it is said, as far as Frankfort-on-Main. His marriage was blessed with twelve children, six of whom died very young. They were brought up religiously in the Catholic faith, and as they were poor,

they were also accustomed to economy and industry. In his old age, Haydn said: "My parents were so strict in their lessons of neatness and order, even in my earliest youth, that at last these habits became a second nature." His mother watched over him most tenderly, but his father alone lived to enjoy the recompense of such care, when his son was installed as Capellmeister. The manner in which he remembered his mother's grave many years later in his will reveals the strength of her influence.

His father, who was "by nature a great lover of music," had a fair tenor voice, and during his travels accompanied himself on the harp without knowing a note. After the day's toil, the family sang together, and even when an old man, Haydn recalled with much emotion these musical pleasures of his boyhood. The little "Sepperl," as he was called, astonished them all with the correctness of his ear and the sweetness of his voice, and always sang his short simple pieces to his father in a correct manner. More than this, he closely imitated the handling of a violin-bow with a little stick, and upon one such occasion a relative, from the neighborhood, observed the remarkable feeling for strict tone and time, in the five-year-old boy. This relative, who was the schoolmaster and choir-leader in the neighboring town of Hainburg, took the lad, who was intended for the priesthood, to that place, that he might study the art which it was thought would undoubtedly open a way to the accomplishment of this purpose. After this, Haydn only returned home as a visitor, but that he remembered it and his poor relatives all his life with esteem and affection, is evidenced by this remark in his old age: "I live not so much for myself as for my poor relatives to whom I would leave something after my death." His "Biographical Notices" say he was so little ashamed of his humble origin that he often spoke of it himself. In his will, he remembers the parish priest and schoolteacher as well as the poor children of his

humble birth-place. In 1795, when he revisited it, upon the occasion of the dedication of the Harrach memorial, before alluded to, he knelt down in the familiar old sitting-room, kissed its threshold, and pointed out the settle where he had once displayed in sport that childish musical skill which was the indication of his subsequent grand artistic career. "The young may learn from my example that something may come out of nothing; what I am is entirely the result of the most pressing necessity," he once said, as he recalled his humble antecedents.

In Hainburg, Haydn learned the musical rudiments and studied other branches necessary to youth, with his cousin Matthias Frankh. In an autobiographical sketch, about the year 1776, which may be found in the "*Musikerbriefe*" (Leipsic, 1873, second edition), he says: "Almighty God, to whom I give thanks for all His unnumbered mercies, bestowed upon me such musical facility that even in my sixth year I sang with confidence several masses in the church choir, and could play a little on the piano and violin." Besides this, he learned there the nature of all the ordinary instruments, and could play upon most of them. "I thank this man, even in his grave, for making me work so hard, though I used to get more blows than food," runs one of his later humorous confessions. Unfortunately, the latter complaint corresponded to the rest of his treatment in his cousin's house. "I could not help observing, much to my distress, that I was getting very dirty, and though I was quite vain of my person, I could not always prevent the spots upon my clothes from showing, of which I was greatly ashamed—in fact, I was a little urchin," he says at another time. Even at that time he wore a wig, "for the sake of cleanliness," without which it is almost impossible to imagine "Papa Haydn."

Of the style of musical instruction in Hainburg, we have at least one example. It was in Passion week, a time of

numerous processions. Frankh was in great trouble, owing to the death of his kettle-drummer, but espying little "Sepperl," he bethought himself that he could quickly learn. He showed him how to play and then left him. The lad took a basket, such as the peasants use for holding flour in their baking, covered it over with a cloth, placed it upon a finely upholstered chair, and drummed away with so much spirit that he did not observe the flour had sifted out and ruined the chair. He was reprimanded, as usual, but his teacher's wrath was appeased when he noticed how quickly Joseph had become a skillful drummer. As he was at that time very short in stature, he could not reach up to the man who had been accustomed to carry the drum, which necessitated the employment of a smaller man, and, as unfortunately he was a hunchback, it excited much laughter in the procession. But Haydn in this manner gained a thoroughly practical knowledge of the instrument and, as is well known, the drum-parts in his symphonies are of special importance. He was the first to give to this instrument a thorough individuality and a separate artistic purpose in instrumental music. He was very proud of his skill, and, as we shall see farther on, his ideas were of great assistance to a kettle-drummer in London.

This first practical result convinced his teacher that Haydn was destined for a musical career. His systematic industry was universally praised, and his agreeable voice was his best personal recommendation. The result was, that after two years of study he went to Vienna, under happy, we may even say the happiest, of auspices.

The Hainburg pastor was a warm friend of Hofcapellmeister Reutter. It happened that the latter, journeying from Vienna on business, passed through Hainburg and made the pastor a short visit. During his stay he mentioned the purpose of his journey, namely, the engagement of boys with sufficient talent as well as good voices for choir service. The pastor at