

HANDEL'S REALM IN MUSIC.

by

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If we would appreciate the power of this great master, we must acquaint ourselves with the age and time in which he lived. But we are not to regard his influence as living in his age and country alone, but rather to feel his power throughout all time and place, to feel him still alive in his great Hallelujah Chorus, as when he says he looked up and saw the Heavens open, and there stood the great God himself.

He practically belongs to England, the practical sense of his music with its close adherence to the Bible, and its lofty imagination makes it strike the English people. Outside of England, he was mostly a curiosity, but to the English he is still with them their "meat and drink."

In the time of Handel, England was passing with rapid strides from a cold, cynical and intellectual world, to one awakening in life and thought. Underneath this strata of cold cynicism, was buried the emotional life of the nation, which was to be brought out by the great leaders of the time. The key note of conscience was struck by Whitfield and Wesley; and with it came a deeper compassion and feeling for mankind. The patriotic appeal is awakened by the heroic cry of Pitt, and the artistic sentiment is set forth by Handel.

Before this time, English theatres were corrupted with a low form of entertainment, and Handel's name stands high as the main factor in raising the standard of art in music, that art which appeals to the soul rather than to fashion and frivolity. There could be no better time selected for the development of a musical genius, in art or literature there were no exalted standards, but here arose this composer to help raise the cloud that hung over the nation, and to unveil to the world England's power to produce the pure and emotional.

Some one has said, "Genius waits for no favoring time or event, no matter how unhospitable the welcome accorded." Handel can owe none of his musical ability or genius to his parentage. He was born at Halle, in Upper Saxony on the twenty-third of February, 1685. His father, a barber, surgeon, was sixty-five years of age when young Handel was born, and at once became determined to have his son study law. So anxious was he that the child should not become a musician, that he forbade him to listen to any musical entertainment and would not allow him to attend school, lest he should be led into what he deemed a low profession. But nature was bound to win in the struggle, and the young child would creep up into the garret at nights, and play on a dumb spinet which his nurse had secretly hid away for him. He soon learned to master the instrument under the restraining circumstances, and, by the time he was seven years old, he was quite proficient. Another incident is told of Handel which proved an opening into the musical world. When Handel was quite

young, his father started for a visit with a son, of a former marriage, who was at the court of Saxe Weissenfels. The boy asked his father to take him, but, on being refused, followed the carriage a long distance, and so pleaded with his father that he was taken in. The stay at the Duke's proved to be the turning point in the career of this young musician. He was strolling thru the chambers of the palace, trying all the instruments he could lay his hands on, when he finally found access to the organ after the chapel exercises. The Duke's attention was aroused by the quaint musical sounds, and he was at once won by the child's ability. Before they left, the Duke had persuaded the father to give the boy a musical education. They were fortunate in getting an excellent teacher, Zachan, organist at Halle. The boy was given a thoro course in elementary practice, harmony and musical structure, besides Greek and Latin. He studied the works of great German composers, and Zachan, bearing the true Catholic spirit, set before his young student, sacred music of German and Italian.

In about a year after he entered under Zachan, he began to compose, and three years, Zachan pronounced him greater than himself and confessed that he could carry him no further.

At about eighteen years of age, he went to Hamburg, where the Italian and German Opera were flourishing. But perhaps the most influencing move he made was his flight to Italy in 1706. Here was the dreamland of all artists, where Handel should acquire the art of

recitative, and command over the human voice. This met his natural melodious instinct, and was to furnish the store of materials for his operas and oratorios. While here he composed several operas which won high praise and honor. Later he went to Hanover, where his style received the finishing touches under Steffani. He became very anxious to go to England and try his fortune. He went with the determination to be a scholar, but instead he became a teacher.

This period, briefly passed over, is simply a list of bare facts, yet, in order to appreciate his great works later on, we must know what influences tended to mold his character and create his style of music.

Now, being thoroly equipped, he launched out for himself. To know him is to know his music; his whole life and that is expressed in tones.

"Music says in tones what the mind fails to utter in words."

Music, to him, was all there is in life; friends, home and comforts. His whole life was spent in attaining this art, and to take away his music was to take away his life.

A story is told of him, showing his love for his work, and its power over him. He was once engaged to a very beautiful young lady, and he seemed to be very much in love with her; but, on hearing her mother remark that "her daughter should never marry a fiddler," became very indignant and broke off the engagement at once. He cared little for worldly things and his house, at times, was almost empty

of the necessities of life, but the composer would often say cheerfully, "Never mound, de musick vill sound de petter."

The English people were eager and ready for the Italian opera, and they hailed Handel as a redeemer. His first opera was Rinaldo, founded upon Tasso's poem. It received great praise, regardless of the ridicule of some. He continued writing operas in England, finding here a great field for his genius. Later he was made chapel-master to the Duke of Chandos. Here he was in his sphere with an orchestra and a chorus at his command, and it was here he produced his first English Oratorio, "Esther."

He soon loses his popularity by a jealous conspiracy, headed by Buononcini and Ariosti, (Handel's rivals as musicians). He had held sway for ten years, and now he lost friends money and health. This marks a very important point in the life of the musician, for he no longer writes to please the English people, but turns to the side of his deeper nature, and "sinks in opera, to rise in oratorio."

We may question if Handel's change from opera to oratoria was in the best interest of music. We may know he excelled in oratorios, but would he have risen so high in drama, had he continued writing operas? No, the field of drama was too limited for his wide expression, he needed something in which he could grow on and on, and the field of oratorios was his mission.

The oratorio is a sacred story or text, written in dramatic form. Before Shakespeare's time, the miracle plays,

illustrating some Bible story or sacred legend, were very popular. They can be traced back as the root of these oratorios, but it was not until later, when Dan Fillipo Neri began to dramatize sacred stories that they were called "oratorios." Later we find Shutz, Bach, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Listz, Rubenstein, Handel and others, as followers of this form of work.

Among Handel's principal oratorios, is "Israel in Egypt," which deals with the plagues of the Israelites. The music is wonderrfully descriptive: we hear the wail of the people as the first scene opens, followed by the plagues; the water of the Nile turns to blood; the great hail storm on the earth; the reptile and insect pests are all brought out in perfect imitation.

The next we might mention is Saul, whose theme is the relation between David and Saul. We may simply mention the Judas Maccabaeus and the Dettingen Te Deum as great works of art, and pass on to the one oratorio that stands out as the gem in the crown of Handel's genius: The Messiah.

The Messiah took the people from the first, and its popularity has steadily increased up to the present day; and we can say that the enormous spread of music since his day has largely been thru the instrumentality of the Messiah.

Altho Handel wrote the Messiah in twenty-one days, he no doubt had it planned in his fertile brain long before it reached

paper; and, as a result, we have a wonderful masterpiece, representing the sin and sorrow thru which our race has passed.

It is said that the first time it was given in England, the King and whole audience arose to their feet when the chorus rang out the Hallelujah Chorus. The custom of rising during the chorus is still kept up.

In passing over the life of this wonderful composer, we would class him amongst the greatest musicians the world has produced, and as a chorus writer, he reigns supreme. The power of his music is what we would call immense in the true sense of the word. It stands for strength and sublimity, and what he tells us is concise and hits the mark.

Perhaps, if he had a fault, it was plagiarism, a habit of using ideas from others' or his own earlier works. He may have done this for some practical purpose; and again themes to him may have been subordinate to the result, and to him it was no sin to borrow from others. His power of transformation was wonderful, he could take an ordinary theme and translate it into a masterpiece. Beethoven says of him, "Handel is the unapproachable master of all masters; go to him and learn to produce great effects with little means!"

The rapidity with which he wrote was marvellous. He rarely sketched his pieces but began by scoring at once.



Rinaldo was written in fourteen days.

Tamerland was written in twenty days.

The Messiah was written in twenty-four days.

Israel was written in fifteen days.

A man may be very great in his own age and nation, but, unless his works become immortal thru all time and place, he soon fades away in the past and is forgotten. But those, on the other hand, who appeal to all men, in all nations and ages, live on as long as the world lives, and their names will exist as long as there are people to repeat and sing their praise.

Such is one great composer, Handel. He lived in the past, yet he still exists in the twentieth century, and without him, England cannot "bury her dead or elect her legislators."

How many dying souls have been lifted up to the True Light and divine presence of God by the magnificent chorus and sweet tender melodies. He not only stands for an elevator of the standard of art, but he also represents a great benefactor of mankind, appealing not only to man's aesthetic life, but also to his higher spiritual nature.