

BALL THOMAS HANLY

SKETCH OF HANDEL AND
BEETHOVEN

Thomas Ball

Sketch of Handel and Beethoven

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Thomas Hanly Ball
Sketch of Handel and Beethoven Two Lectures,
Delivered in the Lecture Hall of the Wimbledon
Village Club, on Monday Evening, Dec. 14,
1863; and Monday Evening, Jan. 11, 1864

DEDICATION

TO JOHN A. BEAUMONT ESQ., WIMBLEDON PARK HOUSE

My Dear Mr. Beaumont,

Seneca has well said, "The three main points in the question of benefits, are, first, a judicious choice in the object; secondly, in the matter of our benevolence; and thirdly, in the manner of expressing it."

Of the first, it would not be becoming in me to speak; of the second, you are the rightful judge; of the third, I beg leave thus publicly to state, that not only in requesting permission to publish this lecture at your own expense but *on many other occasions*, you have fully come up to Seneca's idea of what a benefactor ought to be.

I shall not attempt describing what I hope you give me credit for; *Furnius* never gained so much upon *Augustus* as by a speech, upon the getting of his father's pardon for siding with *Anthony*, "This Grace," says he, "is the only injury that ever Cæsar did me; for it has put me upon a necessity of living and dying ungrateful."

Allow me to dedicate the little volume to you, and believe me, ever to remain,

Your obedient and faithful Servant,

T. HANLY BALL.

Wimbledon, 12th February, 1864.

PREFACE

A brief account of "The Wimbledon Village Club" will explain the origin and object of the two following Lectures.

"The design of the Institution is to afford to the inhabitants, and more especially the working and middle classes of Wimbledon and its vicinity, opportunities of intellectual and moral improvement, and rational and social enjoyment, through the medium of a Reading Room and Library, Lectures and Classes."¹

The Reading Room is supplied with Daily and Weekly Newspapers, Periodicals, and Books.

The Library contains upwards of Six Hundred volumes, all which have been presented to the Institution.

The Lectures are on various literary and scientific subjects.

To these have been recently added, *Readings* and *Chat Meetings*.

Readings, are three short readings from some popular author, by different readers, on the same evening.

"*Chat Meetings* are simplifications of a soirée, or a conversazione. They originated in the idea that many parishioners, having in their homes interesting objects, the examination of which would afford pleasure and instruction to their fellow-parishioners, would on certain occasions gladly take these objects to a room appointed for the purpose, and display and explain them."²

Mr. Toynbee, the *Fidus Achates* of the Club, has, in his admirable "Hints on the Formation of Local Museums," well said – "The Wimbledon Club is admirably calculated to meet the wants of the working classes, as regards their recreation and instruction. While it furnishes amusement and instruction to all classes, it brings them together at its various meetings in friendly intercourse; the management of the Institution, and the organization of its several proceedings, afford a valuable experience to the Committee, who portion among themselves their respective work; and the preparation of the Lectures, &c., proves a healthy mental stimulus to those intelligent inhabitants who desire to take part in *one of the most delightful of duties, viz., the conveyance to the minds of others an interest in those pleasing and elevating subjects from which, happily their own minds derive gratification.*" – "Hints," pp. 8, 9.

Should these Lectures again interest any of the large and attentive audiences with which they were honoured, I will consider myself justified in having consented to their publication, and feel happy to be the medium of imparting information, even on a secular subject, to those whom it is my duty, and is my pleasure, to profit and please.

It is scarcely necessary for me to say, biographical lectures are chiefly the result of reading and research;³ I have, however, somewhat fully expressed my opinions on the advantages of music, and very freely on one or two cognate subjects, and others incidentally alluded to.

¹ "Rules and Regulations of the Wimbledon Village Club," p. 1.

² "Hints on the Formation of Local Museums, by the Treasurer of the Wimbledon Museum Committee," p. 27.

³ Works referred to, and extracted from, in the following Lectures: – Besides those mentioned in the Lectures, the following works are alluded to, or quoted; – Beattie's Essays; Burnet's History of Music; Hogart's Musical History; Edwards's History of the Opera; The Harmonicon; Schlegel's Life of Handel; Holmes' Life of Mozart; Moschele's Life of Beethoven.

A SKETCH OF HANDEL

A Lecture

Before I say of that great composer and extraordinary man whose life I have undertaken to sketch, it will not be out of place, I hope, to make a few remarks on the History and Utility of Music.

I. – The History.

It has been well said by Latrobe, that – though the concise and compressed character of the Mosaic history admits no data upon which to found this supposition, yet we may readily conclude from the nature of music, and the original perfection of the human powers, that the Garden of Eden was no stranger to "singing and the voice of melody."

We read in Scripture that before the Fall, the state of our first parents was a state of unmingled happiness. Now, it is the very nature of joy to give utterance to its emotions. Happiness must have its expression. And thus it may well be supposed that man in his primal felicity would seek to express, by every conceivable mode, the love, gratitude, and joy which absorbed every affection of his nature.

Now, the most natural, as well as powerful, medium for conveying those feelings with which we are acquainted, is music. If then music be the expression of joy, it cannot be supposed unknown to our first parents, whose exultation was as intense as it was hallowed.

Milton says: —

"Neither various style,
Nor holy rapture wanted they to praise
Their Maker in fit strains, pronounced or sung
Unmeditated, such prompt eloquence
Flowed from their lips, in prose or numerous verse,
More tuneable, than needed lute or harp
To add more sweetness."

But soon the voice of unalloyed thanksgiving was silenced. Sin brought with it sorrow; and, ever since, the Hallelujahs of the saints have been strangely intermingled with the moanings of self-reproach, and the cries of judicial sufferings. The heart, now become the seat of a tremendous conflict between sin and holiness, lost its elasticity, and needed some outward excitement to call forth its song of praise. Hence the invention of instrumental music, which is assigned by Scripture to Jubal.

Longfellow says: —

"When first in ancient time, from Jubal's tongue,
The tuneful anthem filled the morning air,
To sacred hymnings and Elysian song
His music-breathing shell the minstrel woke —
Devotion breathed aloud from every chord,
The voice of praise was heard in every tone,
And prayer and thanks to Him the Eternal One,
To Him, that, with bright inspiration touched
The high and gifted lyre of everlasting song,
And warmed the soul with new vitality."

"To the element of air," says Bishop Horne, "God has given the power of producing sounds; to the ear the capacity of receiving them; and to the affections of the mind an aptness to be moved by them, when transmitted through the body." The philosophy of the thing is too deep and wonderful for us; we cannot attain to it! But such is the fact; with that we are concerned, and that is enough for us to know.

II. – Utility.

Of the Utility of Music there can be no question.

Lycurgus, one of the wisest of all ancient legislators, gave great encouragement to music.

Polybius, one of the most ancient historians ascribes the humanity of the Arcadians to the influence of this art and the barbarity of their neighbours the Cynethians to their neglect of it.

Quintilian, the great rhetorician, is very copious in the praise of music; and extols it as an incentive to valour, as an instrument of moral and intellectual discipline, as an auxiliary to science, as an object of attention to the wisest men, and a source of comfort and an assistant in labour even to the very meanest.

The heroes of ancient Greece were ambitious to excel in music. In armies music has always been cultivated as a source of pleasure, a principle of regular motion, and an incentive to valour and enthusiasm.

And there is this in music, that it is suited to please all the varieties of the human mind. The illiterate and the learned, the thoughtless and the giddy, the phlegmatic and the sanguine, all confess themselves to be its votaries. It is a source of the purest mental enjoyment, and may be obtained by all. It is suited to all classes, and never ceases to please all.

Many of you, I am sure, are familiar with what Shakespeare says: —

"Nought is so stockish, hard, and full of rage,
But music for the time doth change his nature.
The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils;
The motions of his spirit are dull as night,
And his affections dark as Erebus:
Let no such man be trusted."

You recollect, too, what Lord Byron has so pathetically sung: —

"My soul is dark – oh! quickly string
The harp I yet can brook to hear,
And let thy gentle fingers fling
Its melting murmurs o'er mine ear.

"If in this heart a hope be dear,
That sound shall charm it forth again;
If in these eyes there lurk a tear,
'T will flow, and cease to burn my brain.

"But bid the strain be wild and deep,
Nor let thy notes of joy be first,
I tell thee, minstrel, I must weep,
Or else this heavy heart will burst.

"For it hath been by sorrow nursed,
And ached in sleepless sorrow long;
And now 't is doomed to know the worst,
And break at once, or yield to song."

All, however, do not agree with Byron and Shakespeare. Charles Lamb says: —

"Some cry up Haydn, some Mozart,
Just as the whim bites. – For my part,
I do not care a farthing candle
For either of them, or for Handel.
Cannot a man live free and easy
Without admiring Pergolesi?
Or through the earth with comfort go,
That never heard of Doctor Blow?
I hardly have;
And yet I eat, and drink, and shave,
Like other people, if you watch it,
And know no more of stave or crotchet
Than did the primitive Peruvians,
Or those old ante queer diluvians,
That lived in the unwash'd earth with Jubal,
Before that dirty blacksmith, Tubal,
By stroke on anvil, or by summ'at,
Found out, to his great surprise, the gamut."

Witty essayist, your "Free Thoughts," like many other of your clever writings, are erroneous. In all ages, and even by the least enlightened of mankind, the efficacy of music has been acknowledged, and considered as a genuine and natural source of delight. Now it awakens the latent courage in the breast of the soldier, and now administers to the pensive sorrow of the weeping mother. At one moment it inspires the soul with sublime and hallowed awe, and at the next gives life to unbounded mirth. It is suited to stimulate the feeling of devotion, and to increase the boisterous pleasures of a village harvest-home. Wearied with the oppression of the noon-day sun, and exhausted with labour, the husbandman sits beneath the shade of his native oak, and sings the songs he heard in infancy. The man of business, the man of letters, and the statesman, wearied with the exertion of mind and burden of care, seek relief round the family hearth, and forget awhile ambition and fears under the influence of music. And the dejected emigrant sings the songs of fatherland, whilst recollections, sad but sweet, arise and disappear.

"In far-distant climes, when the tear gushes o'er
For home, love, and friendship, that charm us no more,
Oh! what on the exiles' dark sorrows can shine
Like the rapture that flows at the songs of Lang-syne!

"The music of Britain is sweet 'midst the scene;
But, ah! could you hear it, when seas roll between!
'Tis then, and then only, the soul can divine
The music that dwells in the songs of Lang-syne.

"The spirit, when torn from earth's objects of love,
Loses all its regrets in the chorus above:
So in exile we cannot but cease to repine,
When it hallows with ecstasy songs of Lang-syne."

But I must allow music herself to prove her influence and assert her sway.

(CAPRICE HONGROIS.)

"Cease gentle sounds, nor kill me quite
With such excess of sweet delight.
Each trembling note invades my heart,
And thrills through every vital part:
A soft – a pleasing pain
Pursues my heated blood through every vein.
What – what does the enchantment mean?
Now, wild with fierce desire,
My breast is all on fire!
In softened raptures now I die!
Can empty sound such joys impart?
Can music thus transport the heart
With melting ecstasy!
Oh! art divine! exalted blessing,
Each celestial charm expressing —
Kindest gift the heavens bestow,
Sweetest food that mortals know!
But give the charming magic o'er —
My beating heart can bear no more!"

George Frederick Handel was born at Halle, in Lower Saxony, on the 24th February, 1684. His father (who was a surgeon, and was sixty-three years old when this child first saw the light) determined to make a lawyer of him: but nature had resolved to make him a composer; and the struggle between nature and the father commenced at the very cradle of the future author of the "Messiah."

Scarcely had he begun to speak when he articulated musical sounds. The doctor was terribly alarmed, when he discovered instincts which in his eyes were of so low an order. He understood nothing of art, nor of the noble part which artists sustain in the world. He saw in them nothing but a sort of mountebank, who amuse the world in its idle moments. Uneasy, and almost ashamed at the inclinations of his son, the father of Handel opposed them by all possible means. He would not send him to any of the public schools, because there not only grammar but the gamut would be taught him – he would not permit him to be taken to any place, of whatever description, where he could hear music – he forbade him the slightest exercise of that nature and banished every kind of musical instrument far from the house.

But he might as well have told the river that it was not to flow. Nature surmounted every obstacle to her decree. The precautions taken to stifle the instincts of the child served only to fortify by concentrating them. He found means to procure a spinet, and to conceal it in a garret, whither he went to play when all the household was asleep – without any guidance finding out everything for himself, and merely by permitting his little fingers to wander over the keyboard, he produced

harmonic combinations; and at *seven* years of age he discovered that he knew how to play upon the spinet.

The poor father soon discovered his mistake, and in the following manner. He had, by a former marriage, a son who was valet to the Duke of Saxe Weisenfeld. He wished to go and visit him; and George, who was then seven years old, and who was not acquainted with this brother, begged of his father to take him with him. When this was refused he did not insist, but watched for the moment when the coach set off, and followed it on foot. The father saw him, stopped the coach and scolded him; when the child, as if he did not hear the scolding, recommenced his supplications to be allowed to take part in the journey, and at last (thanks to that persistence which predicted the man of energy which he eventually proved to be) his request was granted.

When they had arrived at the palace of the Duke, the boy stole off to the organ in the chapel as soon as the service was concluded, and was unable to resist the temptation of touching it. The Duke, not recognizing the style of his organist, made inquiries; and when the trembling little artist was brought before him he encouraged him, and soon won his secret from him.

The Duke then addressed himself to the father, and represented to him that it was a sort of crime against humanity to stifle so much genius in its birth. The old doctor was greatly astonished, and had not much to answer. The opinion of a sovereign prince must have had, moreover, a great influence over the mind of a man who considered musicians mountebanks. He permitted himself to be convinced, and promised, not without some regret, to respect a vocation which manifested itself by such unmistakeable signs. Handel was present, his eyes fastened upon his powerful protector, without losing a word of the argument. Never did he forget it, and for ever afterwards he regarded the Duke of Saxe-Weisenfeld as his benefactor, for having given such good advice to his father. On his return home his wishes were gratified, and he was permitted to take lessons from Sackau, the organist of the cathedral at Halle.

Sackau was an organist of the old school, learned and fond of his art. He was not long in discovering what a pupil Fortune had sent him. He began by carefully instructing him in general principles, and then laid before him a vast collection of German and Italian music which he possessed, and which they analyzed together. Sackau was every day more and more astonished at his marvellous progress; and, as he loved wine nearly as well as music, he often sent him to take his place at the organ on Sundays, whenever he had a good *dejeuner* to take part in. At length, although he found him of great use, this worthy man confessed, with excellent and admirable pride, that his pupil knew more than himself, and advised that he should be sent to Berlin, where he might strengthen himself by studying other models.

Handel was eleven years of age when he went to Berlin. There he passed for a prodigy. The Elector, wishing to become the patron of so rare a genius, manifested a disposition to attach him to himself, and to send him to Italy to complete his musical education. But when the father was consulted, he did not think it wise to enchain the future of his son to the Court of Berlin, and he excused himself, saying that he was now an old man, and that he wished to keep near him the only son who remained to him; and, as in those days it was not prudent to oppose a prince on his own land, Handel was brought back somewhat hastily to his native town.

Handel's father died shortly after the return of his son from Berlin, in 1697, leaving him poor; and it became necessary to provide for his *existence* as well as his *renown*. Halle was too small to contain him. He wished to visit Italy, but not having the means of such a journey, he went to Hamburg in the month of July, 1703.

Soon after his arrival in Hamburg, the place of the organist of Lubeck was offered for competition, upon the *retirement* of the old incumbent. Handel canvassed for the vacancy; but finding a rather singular condition attached to the programme, which was *that the successor was to marry the daughter of the retiring organist*, as this was not quite agreeable to him, he returned to Hamburg as

happy as he went. This adventure, at the very outset of his career, appears all the more original, when we remember that Handel never manifested any taste for matrimony.

I shall not occupy your time by describing Handel's peregrinations through Italy – wherever he went his fame preceded him. In 1709 he left Italy, with an intent to settle in Germany. He came to Hanover. The Elector George of Brunswick, afterwards George I. of England, was delighted to receive such a man in his principality, and offered to retain him as his chapel master, at a salary of 1800 ducats, about £300 a year.

Handel was not very desirous of occupying this post. For at the Court of the elector he had already met some British noblemen who had pressed him to visit England; and being persuaded by them to undertake that journey, he did not wish to engage himself, except upon the condition of being allowed to accomplish it. The condition was accepted and he set out at the end of the year. Passing through Dusseldorf he could scarcely tear himself away; for the Elector Palatine wished to keep him at any price. Thence he went to Halle to embrace his mother, who was now blind; and his good old master, Sackau. Afterwards he visited Holland and arrived in London at the close of 1710.

Handel's first work in England was the Opera of Rinaldo, and this at once established his reputation.

The Cavatina in the first act, "Cairo Sposa," was to be found, in 1711, upon all the harpsichords of Great Britain, as a model of pathetic grace. The march was adopted by the regiment of Life Guards, who played it every day for forty years. Like the regiments themselves, marches have their days and their strokes of fortune; and this one, after a long and honourable existence, was subsequently pressed into the service of the highway robbers. Twenty years later Pepusch made out of it the Robber's chorus in the Beggar's Opera, "Let us take road." The brilliant morceau in the second act, "Il tri Cerbero," was also set to English words – "Let the waiter bring clean glasses," and was a long time the most popular song at all merry-makings. But what shall be said of "Lascia che io pianza?" Stradella's divine air of "I miei sospiri," has nothing more moving, or more profoundly tender.

It has been asserted that in music the *beau ideal* changes every thirty years, but that is an ill-natured criticism. Certain forms of accompaniment may grow out of fashion like the cut of a coat. But a fine melody remains eternally beautiful and always agreeable to listen to. The 100th Psalm of the middle ages is as magnificent to-day as it was when nearly four centuries ago it came from the brain of its composer, Franc.⁴ "Laschia che io pianza" and "I miei sospiri" will be admirable and admired to the very end of the world.

Handel's publisher was said to have gained £1,500 from the publication of Rinaldo, which drew from Handel this complaint, "My Dear Sir, as it is only right that we should be upon an equal footing, *you shall compose* the next opera, and I will sell it." Publishers then, as now, not only lived by the brains of others, but had the lion's share of the profits.

Handel's success as an harpsichordist was equal to that which he enjoyed as a composer. He very often played solos in the theatre, and at the house of Thomas Britton.

⁴ See Note, p. 91.

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