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Handel

R. A. Streatfeild

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WITH TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS

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PREFACE

TO the inquiring student the ebb and flow of fashion in the world of music present phenomena of remarkable interest. The stone that the builders rejected becomes the head of the corner, and the idol of one age is trodden under foot by the next. A mute antagonism reigns between one generation and another, and the sons delight in nothing so much as in consigning the cherished treasures of their fathers to the dust-heap. This is the rough-and-ready process by which immortality, or what, according to Mr. Arthur Balfour, passes for such in the world of music, is ultimately achieved, and even the greatest composers have to submit to it. For a musician to please his own age is no very severe test. At any given point in the history of music successful composers may be counted by the hundred. But their day is brief. Fashion turns her wheel, and the favourites of an hour sink into oblivion. Then comes the final test. Will the fallen god be lifted from the mire and restored to his old splendour? Will the dead musician be rediscovered by a later generation and live a second life in their newborn love and veneration? A second life it must be, for the first is dead for ever. A man's work can never mean

to a later age what it meant to the men of his own time. But it is characteristic of great art that it carries a message to every generation in turn. We can all find in it something to suit our own idiosyncrasies. It may be something entirely different from what our forefathers found, but it is none the less valuable and none the less true on that account.

What the music of Handel meant to the men of his own time it is now difficult to say, but we know well enough what it meant to our fathers and grandfathers. To them Handel was the musician in ordinary to the Protestant religion. He had been taken over bag and baggage by the Church of England. Handel is himself partly responsible for the popular view of his genius. One of the most often quoted of his sayings relates to the production of *The Messiah*. Some one congratulated him upon having given the town a fine entertainment, whereupon he replied: "My lord, I wish not only to entertain them, but to make them better." This was a very natural and proper observation to make, but unfortunately to the average Englishman to "be good" means only to go to church or chapel on Sunday morning and to conform externally to whatever form of Christianity happens to suit the exigencies of his temperament; and thus Handel's *obiter dictum* was gradually twisted into meaning that he wrote with a definitely evangelistic purpose, and in consequence he was held up as an example of a composer who had consecrated his genius to the service of religion. So widely was this

view disseminated that in time even his secular works were claimed by the Church. In the year 1862 we find Dean Ramsay—an amiable divine usually credited with a sense of humour—declaring in a lecture on Handel that "Lascia ch'io pianga" was "like all Handel's fine Italian airs, essentially of a sacred character."

This was the Handel that the present generation in its boyhood was expected to fall down and worship. No wonder that, like the enterprising youth in the nursery rhyme, we took him, metaphorically speaking, by the left leg and threw him downstairs, though in his case it was not because he wouldn't say his prayers, but because he would say them and nothing else.

But even in those days there were a few who recognised the real Handel beneath the black gown and white tie in which his ecclesiastical friends had disguised him. In 1863 Edward FitzGerald wrote: "Handel was a good old Pagan at heart, and, till he had to yield to the fashionable Piety of England, stuck to Opera and Cantatas, where he could revel and plunge and frolic without being tied down to Orthodoxy." Twenty years later Samuel Butler, the author of *Erewhon*, comparing Handel to Shakespeare, in the opening words of his *Alps and Sanctuaries* said: "It is as a poet, a sympathiser with and renderer of all estates and conditions whether of men or things, rather than as a mere musician, that Handel reigns supreme. . . . There has been no one to touch Handel as an observer of all that was observable, a lover of all that was lovable, a hater of all that was hateable, and, therefore, as a poet.

Shakespeare loved not wisely but too well. Handel loved as well as Shakespeare, but more wisely. He is as much above Shakespeare as Shakespeare is above all others, except Handel himself; he is no less lofty, impassioned, tender, and full alike of fire and love of play; he is no less universal in the range of his sympathies, no less a master of expression and illustration than Shakespeare, and at the same time he is of robuster, stronger fibre, more easy, less introspective."

In those days these were voices crying in the wilderness, yet a change was at hand. The year after Butler published his *Alps and Sanctuaries* appeared Rockstro's biography of Handel, in which the then traditional view of the composer was exaggerated to the verge of caricature. I am inclined to think that Rockstro's book dealt the death-blow to the Christian Handel. From that time forward a certain impatience of the national Handel-worship began to manifest itself, which, growing stronger year by year, has ended in practically dethroning Handel from the position that he occupied for so many years.

There is no doubt that at the present time, in England at any rate, Handel is unpopular with those who are the mouthpieces of cultivated musical opinion. Dr. Ernest Walker, for instance, in his *History of Music in England*, though much of his criticism of Handel is very much to the point and is obviously derived from a careful study of his works (which is more than can be said for a good deal of modern Handelian criticism), says that "no other composer can even attempt to rival

Handel in his power of intensely irritating those who have the strongest and sanest admiration for his genius," and talks light-heartedly about consigning the old idol to the rubbish-heap. I am well aware that many thousands of Englishmen habitually attend performances of *The Messiah* as a religious exercise, just as many thousands habitually go to church; but you cannot for that reason call *The Messiah* popular as a work of art any more than you can call the Book of Common Prayer popular as a masterpiece of literature. If Handel were really popular, his other works would not be shelved so completely as they are. Thirty years ago *Samson*, *Solomon*, *Jephtha*, *Judas*, and *Joshua* were frequently performed in London. Now they are practically unknown. No, the Handel of our forefathers is dead; it remains for us to revive a new Handel from the ashes of the old. Handel the preacher is laid for ever in the tomb, but Handel the artist, with his all-embracing sympathy for human things and his delight in the world around him, lives for evermore.

In spite of the obvious trend of modern criticism, I anticipate a return of popularity for Handel, or if not of popularity, at least of more general appreciation; and, paradoxical as it sounds, this will be accomplished by the gradual acceptance of the theory of the poetic basis of music. For as the comprehension of the meaning of music grows, so will less and less value be attached to mere questions of form. At present the advocates of abstract music are sticklers for certain forms of music, and they maintain, I understand, that the interest

of music lies in the manner in which these forms are used—they even talk of the "plot" of a symphonic movement, referring only to the development of the themes employed. When people have grasped the fact —and in time I have little doubt that they will grasp it —that it is what a man has to say that matters, and that the way he says it is comparatively unimportant, there is bound to be a reaction in favour of a man who had a great deal to say, even though the way in which he chose to say it now seems absolutely out of date. I know that this sounds as if it should apply chiefly to instrumental music, whereas Handel's most characteristic works are vocal. But though Handel set words to music, he often used the words merely as a peg to hang his ideas upon, or perhaps one should say as a spring-board from which to take dives into the infinite. I mean that in order to find his real meaning one often has to go behind the words to some remote idea lurking in the background, the existence of which a casual hearer might hardly suspect. I will give an instance of what I mean. Every one knows the famous air "Ombra mai fu" from the opera *Serse*, which is played by every violin student in the kingdom in a vulgarised modern version usually described as "Handel's celebrated Largo." This air is sung by the hero Xerxes, who is standing beneath the boughs of his favourite plane tree. The words mean: "Never was the shade of aught that grows more grateful." I had known the air from childhood, but I confess that I never realised what Handel meant

by it till I happened to stroll one Sunday evening last summer into Lincoln's Inn Fields at the hour when one of the excellent London County Council bands was playing in the gardens. I paused to listen under the shadow of a magnificent plane tree, broad and spreading as Xerxes's own, and as the familiar melody with its broad rich harmonies floated to my ears through the dense foliage I knew that it was the hymn of the tree that Handel was singing, not only of the plane tree beloved by Xerxes, but of that other tree, emblem of growth and strength and purity, that "bulk of spanless girth, which lays on every side a thousand arms and rushes to the sun."

It is the inner meaning of Handel's music, and its power of searching the profoundest recesses of the soul, that in the following pages I have endeavoured, so far as I am able, to elucidate. Its merely technical qualities have already been discussed enough and to spare. Books on Handel written by musicians already abound, but musicians as a rule take more interest in the means by which an end is attained than in the end itself. They tell us a great deal about the methods by which a composer expresses himself, but very little about what he actually has to express. I have tried, how feebly and with what little success no one knows better than myself, to find the man Handel in his music, to trace his character, his view of life, his thoughts, feelings, and aspirations, as they are set forth in his works. That Handel, like other men, had his faults and weaknesses I

readily admit. Writing as he did *currente calamo*, he had not always time to weigh the worth of his ideas. He was content to employ certain conventional formulas and certain well-worn cadences, which to modern ears seem threadbare, and if a second-rate idea occurred to him he did not always wait for a first-rate one. Yet to me the mighty soul moving behind seems to give life to the driest of bones, and I feel the tremendous personality of the man even in his most perfunctory strains. Handel's warmest admirer could perhaps scarcely claim for him that he was a greater musician than Bach or Mozart or Beethoven. What he could claim, and I think with justice, would be that of all who have written music Handel was the greatest man.

It remains for me to conclude with a tribute of gratitude to the authors from whose works I have derived assistance. To Friedrich Chrysander, whose biography of Handel stands alone as a monument of painstaking erudition, my debt is greatest. It is a grievous misfortune to the student of Handel that Chrysander's labours upon his great edition of Handel's works prevented him from carrying his biography beyond the year 1740. So far as it goes it is invaluable, and the points upon which I have ventured to differ from the learned historian are few in number and of no great importance. I have also been much helped by the biographies of Rockstro and Schoelcher and the more recent monographs of Dr. Hermann Kretzschmar and Dr. Fritz Volbach. With regard to Handel's Italian journey in 1706–10 Signor

Ademollo's *G. F. Haendel in Italia* has been of the greatest assistance to me. To the other authorities that I have consulted due reference has been made in the body of the work, but I must mention with especial gratitude Mr. Randall Davies's *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, which gives so admirable a picture of London life during the Handelian epoch.

My warmest thanks are due to the Earl of Shaftesbury for permitting me to make use of the MS. record of Handel's operatic career compiled by his ancestor the fourth Earl, which is now among the Shaftesbury papers in the Record Office; and to the Earl of Malmesbury for his kindness in allowing me to publish a reproduction of his portrait of Handel by Mercier, which was painted about the year 1748 and is undoubtedly the most lifelike and characteristic presentment of the composer that has come down to us. It is impossible for me to thank by name all the friends who have helped me in my work, but I must record my gratitude to Mr. Montgomery Carmichael, H.M. Consul at Leghorn, to Senhor Manoel de Carvalhaes, and to Dr. Guido Biagi, the Keeper of the Laurentian Library at Florence, for the kind assistance that they gave me in my attempt to unravel the history of the production of Handel's *Rodrigo*.

R. A. STREATFEILD

August 1909

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CHAPTER I

HANDEL AT HALLE, 1685–1703

THE political and religious wars of the seventeenth century, so fertile and far-reaching in their issues, accomplished nothing more important for the future of European society than the elevation of the middle class to the rank of a power in the state. In England the Civil War stamped out the last traces of feudalism, in Germany the Thirty Years' War, though less sweeping in its apparent results, cleared the field quite as effectively. At the close of the struggle the burgher class awoke to the fact that it was practically its own master. The bogey of the Church was exorcised, the fangs of the aristocracy were drawn. A Frederick the Great and a Maria Theresa were still possible, but the command of the body politic had passed from the belly to the brain. The results of this social revolution, for so it practically was, were not immediately perceptible, but the habit of self-reliance and the acquired faculty of independent thought and judgment bore rich fruit in the ensuing generation. From the loins of the sturdy race that had won its way to liberty by blood and iron sprang the giants who were to build the shining citadel of German art. Only a line of heroes—mute, inglorious heroes, it may be, but heroes none the

less—could father such a man as George Frederick Handel.

The Handel family originally belonged to Breslau, but early in the seventeenth century the coppersmith Valentine Handel migrated to Halle. His youngest son George, the composer's father, was born in 1622. George began life as a barber, but like many of his craft blossomed into a surgeon. His fortune was made by a lucky operation performed in 1660 upon Duke Augustus of Saxony, who in gratitude appointed him "Geheimer Kammerdiener und Leibchirurgus," which being interpreted is Groom of the Chamber and Private Surgeon. In 1665 he bought the house Am Schlamme, now famous as the birthplace of George Frederick. The latter, who was the second son of his father's second wife, Dorothea Taust, was born on the 23rd of February 1685, and was baptized on the following day.

Halle in 1685 was in some ways but a shadow of its past self. It had been for many years the favourite residence of Duke Augustus, who ruled over the archdiocese of Magdeburg in the name of his father, John George, the Elector of Saxony. His court at the Moritzburg, if not the most dazzling, was one of the most artistic in Germany. The Halle theatre had been famous not only for its history—for it was one of the earliest to cultivate the German Singspiel as opposed to the fashionable Italian opera of the day—but also for its *personnel*, since on its staff were to be found many of the most illustrious musicians of the time. Records survive, too, of court festivities of no common splendour, of ballets, tournaments, and spectacles, which prove that life at Halle was something very different from the trivial round of the ordinary German provincial town. But in 1680, after the

death of Duke Augustus, all this gaiety came to an abrupt conclusion. In accordance with the terms of the Peace of Westphalia, Halle was handed over to the Electorate of Brandenburg, and the young Duke Johann Adolf of Saxe-Weissenfels, who succeeded his father, transferred his court to Weissenfels. The muses fled from the banks of the Saale, and Halle relapsed from courtly splendour into the dull monotony of burgherdom. Yet though the glory of Halle had departed, the quaint old town upon which Handel's eyes opened was not without its charm. The Moritzburg, not yet degraded into a Calvinistic church, still frowned down upon the city in stately splendour; the mysterious Rothe Thurm and the stone Roland still whispered the secrets of the Middle Ages to a later and more prosaic race; and from the towers of Our Lady's Church the sweet-voiced bells still chimed the evening hymn, that to the ears of the infant musician must have sounded like a message from another world.

The chief authority for the events of Handel's childhood is the memoir by the Rev. John Mainwaring, which was published in 1760, a year after Handel's death. Mainwaring did not himself know Handel, but he collected his anecdotes from those who did, particularly from John Christopher Smith, who had been Handel's secretary and was the son of one of his oldest friends, and, if due allowance is made for the legendary atmosphere that invariably gathers round the head of an illustrious man, there is no particular reason for doubting the general truth of his statements, though his details are often obviously pure romance and his chronology is not to be relied on. According to Mainwaring, therefore, the future composer "from his very childhood discovered such a strong propensity to Music, that his father, who always intended him

for the study of Civil Law, had reason to be alarmed." His alarm took the practical shape of consigning to the flames all the musical toys, drums, trumpets, and so forth, with which the boy had filled his nursery. George Frederick himself was packed off to school, although he cannot very well have been more than five or six years old. However, in spite of parental sternness, he was not altogether severed from his beloved music. He contrived, with the aid of an amiable relative, possibly his mother or the aunt Anna who we learn from the baptismal register was his godmother, to smuggle a clavichord—doubtless one of the miniature sort which could be carried under the arm—into a garret at the top of the house. Thither in the stillness of the night the tiny boy would creep and practise to his heart's content, while the rest of the household was wrapt in slumber. No better instrument for these nocturnal concerts could have been devised than the clavichord, with its sweet muffled tone, which is barely audible a few yards from the instrument itself. From early association the clavichord should have been dear to Handel,—as dear as it undoubtedly was to Bach,—yet he seems to have written nothing for it, at any rate nothing has survived.

The next recorded event of Handel's childhood took place, according to Mainwaring, when he was seven years old. At Weissenfels, some forty miles from Halle, occupying a subordinate position in the household of Duke Johann Adolf, dwelt George Christian, a grandson of old George Handel of Halle, sprung from his first family, and a full ten years older than his little half-uncle George Frederick. Thither, in spite of his seventy odd years, George Handel proposed to go to visit his grandson, and to pay his respects to the Duke. Boylike, his little

seven-year-old son wanted to go too, and, in the words of Mainwaring, "finding all his solicitations ineffectual, he had recourse to the only method which was left for the accomplishment of his wish," that is to say, he ran after the chaise as well as he was able, contrived to get picked up when he was too far from Halle to be sent back alone, made his peace with his father, and drove to Weissenfels in triumph. At Weissenfels the stars in their courses fought his battles for him. His astounding precocity won the hearts of all the musicians in the Duke's orchestra, and the Duke, who happened to hear the boy playing the organ in the chapel one day after service, talked seriously to his father about devoting him to the musical profession. Old Handel stood out as firmly as he could in favour of a legal career, but the Duke was too much for him. Doubtless the precedent of Schütz was quoted, who had died at Weissenfels some twenty years before. Schütz had begun life by studying law, but ere long had yielded to the seductions of music, with such results as even the obstinate old surgeon could scarce cavil at. In the end he gave way, and promised that his boy should be allowed to study music when he got home again. He kept his word, and when they were safely back at Halle he submitted George Frederick to the instructions of Friedrich Wilhelm Zachow, the organist of the Liebfrauenkirche, while insisting that at the same time he should continue his school work just as before.

Zachow was at that time about thirty years old, and a fair average specimen of the cantor of the period. A few of his works have survived to our day, and show talent and sound musicianship if not genius. The man himself we may judge to have been worthy and conscientious. Handel was not a man who suffered fools gladly, yet he

retained his regard for Zachow to the end of his days. He spoke of him invariably with affection and gratitude, and he supported his widow in her old age. Zachow was evidently a believer in hard work. It is said that he required his pupil to produce a church cantata every week. Handel himself admitted, according to Burney, that he worked "like a devil" in those days. This was said *à propos* of a set of trios for two hautboys and bass, which was discovered by Lord Polwarth in Germany many years afterwards. He brought them to England and they were shown to Handel, who recognised them at once as a production of his boyhood. If they are the trios printed by Chrysander in the Händel-Gesellschaft edition, they are the best possible proof of Handel's astounding precocity. As a specimen of the work of a boy of ten years old they stand alone in the history of music. Even Mozart wrote nothing at that age that can be compared with them for freshness of melody and maturity of musicianship. Of Handel's other works written at this time little has survived. An interesting record of his studies with Zachow, in the shape of a volume of extracts from the works of his contemporaries, dated 1698, was known to exist so late as the year 1799, but all trace of it has now disappeared. It would have been doubly valuable if it had proved that even at that early age Handel had already began the practice, which he carried in his later years to such extreme lengths, of adapting the work of his predecessors and contemporaries to his own use. Three years of hard work with Zachow gave Handel all the learning that his master could impart, as the latter himself confessed, and the boy looked round him for more worlds to conquer. Berlin was at that time the goal of every German musician's ambition. The Elector of

Brandenburg, afterwards King Frederick I of Prussia, was a monarch of liberal tastes, and the Electress Sophia Charlotte ruled a court which would willingly have rivalled Versailles in its encouragement of art and artists. Thither Handel was taken by his father, probably in the year 1696.

The Berlin with which he made acquaintance was, it need hardly be said, very different from the spacious and handsome city of to-day. It contained but twenty thousand inhabitants, and in its outward appearance seemed not far removed from the country village from which it originally sprang. Trees grew in the narrower streets, and swine grouted among the refuse that collected under the lime trees of the now famous Unter den Linden. Many of the houses were thatched with straw, and wooden chimneys added to the ever-present danger of fire. The countrified aspect of the town was accentuated by the fences and palings which still surrounded the houses. The lighting of the streets was characteristically managed. Every three houses had to provide a lantern, which was hung at night over the door of each one in turn. Till the very end of the seventeenth century there was no pretence at anything like a watchman in Berlin. The inhabitants were a quiet, law-abiding race, and the Berlin street-life was very different from that of London. No Mohock orgies troubled the placid banks of the Spree, and when the Elector instituted his new police, the good Berliners indignantly declared that they were quite capable of looking after themselves. But though the city of Berlin lingered in its primitive state of civilisation, the court was nothing if not advanced and cultured. The Electress Sophia Charlotte consoled herself for a loveless marriage by surrounding herself with scholars and artists. Her

husband was a typical German soldier-monarch. He rose at 4 a.m., just the time when his wife went to bed, and worshipped etiquette a good deal more fervently than he worshipped God; whereas Sophia Charlotte cared little for rules and regulations, and took a malicious pleasure in bestowing her patronage upon persons who were not *hoffähig*.

The great literary light of the Berlin court was Leibniz, whose friendship with Sophia earned her the title of the Philosophic Queen, though it may be doubted whether she was quite as competent to act the part of Egeria to the great philosopher as her courtly flatterers tried to make her believe. At any rate, we find her writing in a petulant mood to a friend: "Il traite tout si superficiellement avec moi. Il se défie de mon génie, car rarement il répond avec precision sur les matières que j'agite."

However, when Leibniz snubbed her, Sophia Charlotte could take refuge in music, for she was an accomplished performer on the harpsichord, and had collected a good library of music. She is said, too, to have dabbled in composition. In her younger days she had been a pupil of Steffani, who was Kapellmeister at the court of her father, the Elector of Hanover, and she remained his trusted friend all her life.

Her husband, though not himself troubled by artistic leanings, liked to think that he was at the head of a cultivated court, and encouraged her artistic tastes. She invited celebrated musicians to Berlin, and organised operatic performances among her household. On one occasion she incurred the wrath of the court preacher by summoning one of her performers to a rehearsal from the communion table itself. Possibly it was the same preacher

who was refused admission to Sophia Charlotte's chamber when she lay on her death-bed some ten years later. "Laissez-moi mourir," whispered the poor lady to her attendants, "sans disputer."[1]

On what pretext the youthful Handel went to Berlin is not clear, but probably his fame had overstepped the limits of his native town, and a sedulous courtier may have desired to gratify his royal patrons by introducing a new infant prodigy to their musical circle. Handel's visit to Berlin was an unqualified triumph. The Elector and Electress were at his feet in a moment. The bonds of etiquette dissolved in his presence, and the courtiers vied with each other in singing the praises of the wonderful child whose performance upon harpsichord and organ put to shame the grey-haired professors of music.

The story of Handel's encounter with Bononcini and Ariosti at the court of Sophia Charlotte must be regretfully dismissed to the limbo of legend. Mainwaring relates with a profusion of detail how the gentle Ariosti welcomed the boy with rapture, applauded him with sincere delight, and held him on his knee for hours together while they talked of music and her inexhaustible treasures.[2]

Bononcini, on the other hand, we are told, stood

[1] Erman, J. P., *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de Sophie Charlotte, Reine de Prusse*, Berlin, 1801, 8°; Hahn, W., *Friedrich, der erste König in Preussen*, Berlin, 1851, 8°.

[2] Ariosti is usually described by his contemporaries as an amiable and unambitious man. An epigram, however, by Paolo Rolli, published in his *Marziale in Albion* (1776), gives a less attractive view of his character. It may be roughly translated as follows:—

> "Here lies Attilio Ariosti—
> He'd borrow still, could he accost ye.
> Priest to the last, whate'er betide,
> At others' cost he lived—and died."

sullenly aloof, ignoring the boy when possible, and when he was compelled to notice his existence, presenting him with the most difficult test of musicianship that he could devise — a cantata bristling with chromatic harmonies, which the lad was to accompany at sight from the figured bass. Handel fulfilled the task with complete success, and Bononcini was forced to admit his young rival's attainments, but he nursed his jealous envy in secret, and when they met many years afterwards, memories of Berlin added rancour to his hatred of the man who had vanquished him in London.

All this, unfortunately, is pure romance. As Handel's father died early in 1697, the Berlin visit cannot have taken place later than 1696. Modern research has discovered that Ariosti did not reach Berlin until the spring of 1697, and Bononcini not until 1702. It is just possible that when Handel left Halle in 1703 he may have passed through Berlin on his way to Hamburg. In that case he would probably have met both Ariosti and Bononcini, and possibly may have submitted to Bononcini's test. In any case, the romantic picture of the youthful Handel sitting upon Ariosti's knee must be abandoned, for it would have needed a man of stouter build than the frail little Italian *abate* to nurse an eighteen-year-old stripling of Handel's sturdy build.[1]

The Elector gave the boy more than barren eulogy. Wishing like a true Mæcenas to attach so brilliantly gifted a genius to his own court, he offered to send him at once to complete his education in Italy, and on his return to give him a suitable position at Berlin. But

[1] Ebert, *Attilio Ariosti in Berlin*, Leipzig, 1905; "Briefe der Königin Sophie Charlotte von Preussen." (*Publikationen aus den K. Preussischen Staatsarchiven*, Bd. 79.)

the tough old surgeon at Halle was as obstinate as ever. He still dreamed of legal honours for his Benjamin, and we may hope, too, that parental affection had something to do with his prompt refusal of the suggestion that he should part with the child of his declining years. At any rate the royal bounty was uncompromisingly declined, and we may be glad of it, for the mere thought of Handel, the proudest spirit that ever wrote music, as a pensioner of royal charity, even at an age when refusal or acceptance did not rest with him, has something repulsive about it.

Handel, however, was to owe nothing to the favours of the great, and his father's rejection of the Elector's offer was the signal for the boy's return to Halle. After his taste of the splendours of the court, it must have been difficult for the lad to settle down to the common tasks of his life at Halle. But all thoughts of leaving home were banished from his mind by the death of his father at the age of seventy-five in 1697, which left him and his two little sisters dependent upon his mother. Frau Dorothea was fully equal to the task of bringing up her young family. The amiable divine who preached her funeral sermon enlarged upon her "pleasant gifts of mind and body, and her talent in ruling her household"; but funeral sermons have little weight as evidence, and the best tribute to the good lady's educational system lies in the character of her son, and in the strong affection which he bore her until the day of her death.

Five years now passed rapidly over Handel's head—five years of schooling at the Gymnasium, and of counsel if not precisely of instruction from Zachow, for whom he often acted as assistant. In February 1702 he matriculated at the University of Halle, which had been founded only a few years before, as a "Studiosus Juris," or student of law.

But, however conscientiously Handel strove to fulfil his father's wishes as to his career, the muse was not to be denied. During his later schooldays he must have made considerable progress in music, since to Telemann (himself a rising composer who passed through Halle in 1701 and made Handel's acquaintance) he was "the already accomplished George Frederick Handel."[1]

Hardly had he entered the university when an event occurred which threatened to interfere very seriously with his legal studies, that is to say, he received the appointment of organist at the Schlosskirche, the second church in Halle. The salary was fifty thalers and an official residence in the Moritzburg, which was sub-let at sixteen thalers a year. He was to serve a probation of twelve months, not because of any doubt as to his musical capacity, but in order that the Calvinist congregation might make up their minds whether they could endure to have their hymn tunes played to them by a staunch Lutheran. Handel's duties were not merely to play the organ at all the services, but to see that the instrument was kept in proper repair and working order, to compose psalm tunes and cantatas for all Sundays and festivals, and to ensure their proper performance.

There is no reason to suppose that Handel failed in any of these duties—indeed he had plenty of time not only to keep up an animated correspondence with his friend Telemann, who was now established at Leipzig, but to pay him occasional visits, probably at the ducal court of Weissenfels, for which Telemann, stripling as he was, wrote no fewer than four operas.[1] At Halle, too, Handel's official tasks were not onerous enough to satisfy his fiery spirit, and he induced some of his university

[1] Mattheson, *Grundlage einer Ehren-Pforte*, *s.v.* Telemann.

comrades to form a voluntary choir, so as to give performances on Wednesdays and Saturdays of vocal and instrumental music, of a more elaborate nature than was admissible on Sundays. It may well be imagined that many of his own compositions first saw the light under these conditions, but of the music that he wrote at this period but little has survived.

A setting of the *Laudate Pueri* for soprano solo is undoubtedly authentic, and contains many characteristic touches. One of the melodies is a kind of early sketch for "O had I Jubal's lyre," and another with its repetition of a single note has a kinship with the theme of "Blessing, glory, wisdom, and power," in *The Messiah.*

There exist also two oratorios dating from this period which have been attributed to Handel, *Die Erlösung des Volks Gottes aus Egypten* and *Der ungerathene Sohn*, and a church cantata, *Ach Herr, mich armen Sünder*, but though Chrysander was inclined to accept the cantata as genuine, he did not include it in his great edition, and the consensus of critical opinion is against the authenticity of all three works. Handel's term of office at the Schlosskirche was but a short one. Ere his year of probation had expired, he was sighing for fresh woods and pastures new. He had stuck manfully to his legal studies for many years, but as he drew near to manhood his natural genius asserted itself. He felt that music was his vocation, and knew that his duty called him to the service of art rather than to the dull round of slavery to which his father had destined him. He felt, too, that Halle was too narrow a field for his genius. He needed a wider horizon and ampler skies. So Pegasus burst from his harness, and sought the viewless fields of air. One fine

summer morning Handel left Halle behind him, and turned his steps northward. It was not without a pang, we may be sure, that he relinquished the scene of boyhood's dreams and struggles, for he was leaving behind him his mother and sisters and others perhaps who were dear, but the call of life had sounded, the immortal longings would not be stifled, and the boy, full of ardent hope and glowing ambition, hastened away to take his place in the great battle of life.

CHAPTER II

HANDEL AT HAMBURG, 1703–1706

HAMBURG at the opening of the eighteenth century stood apart from the other great cities of Germany. Its isolated position had not only saved it from the terrors of the Thirty Years' War, but had induced many wealthy citizens from other towns to take refuge within its walls. Strengthened thus in substance and consideration, it had an advantage over its rivals when peace at last came, and during the latter half of the seventeenth century it easily established itself as the chief trading centre of Germany. Its commercial prosperity reacted upon its social life. The wealthy burghers could afford to send their sons on the grand tour, and to educate their daughters in the age's best accomplishments. Thus, while many German towns were still lingering in the mists of medievalism, Hamburg boasted an almost Italian degree of culture. In 1678 a theatre was opened, in which the German tongue was for the first time employed for operatic purposes. At first the operas given were sacred, but though the range of subject was strictly limited, no bounds were placed upon the splendour of decorations and accessories. Contemporary writers vie with each other in describing the sumptuous scenery and dresses. Even the French critic Regnard was compelled grudgingly

to acknowledge that "les opéras n'y sont pas mal representés; j'y ai trouvé celui d' 'Alceste' très beau."

As time went on, sacred operas gave way to secular, and the last sacred opera was performed in 1692. But before that date, opera, even in cultivated Hamburg, had to live down a good deal of prejudice and opposition. The pietistic pastors of the period undertook a new crusade against this latest snare of Satan. They fulminated against opera from their pulpits, they denounced it in the streets. So successful was their campaign that in 1684 they induced the civic council to order the closure of the theatre. But the triumph of blindness and bigotry was shortlived. In the following year the theatre was reopened, and ere long reached the zenith of its success under the auspices of Reinhard Keiser, who rose upon the Hamburg horizon in 1694.

When Handel reached Hamburg in 1703 the decline had already begun. German opera was yielding its pride of place before the advance of the stranger. Not merely were operas given in Italian and French, but even German works were interspersed with Italian airs. The taste of the city, too, was not what it had been. Opera wavered between idle pomp and gross buffoonery, and Keiser, who had undertaken the management of the theatre in 1703, was dissipating his brilliant talents in riotous living and debauchery. Still, there was much for a boy of Handel's age to learn in Hamburg, and he plunged into the enchanted world of music with the eagerness of a neophyte.

Soon after his arrival at Hamburg, Handel fell in with Johann Mattheson, one of the cleverest men of his time, who, though only four years older than Handel, was already a personage of considerable influence in Hamburg

musical circles. Mattheson was everything by turns, and nothing long. He sang at the opera, played in the orchestra, was an organist, poet, and composer, and, in fact, was ready to turn his hand to anything. He is now famous chiefly for his writings on music, of which one of the most entertaining is his *Grundlage einer Ehren-Pforte*, a biographical dictionary of musicians of priceless value to students of the period, though it is always necessary in reading it to make allowance for Mattheson's inordinate vanity and his jealousy of rival composers. Of the youthful Handel he writes: "Handel came to Hamburg in the summer of 1703, rich only in ability and goodwill. I was almost the first with whom he made acquaintance. I took him round to all the choirs and organs here, and introduced him to operas and concerts, particularly to a certain house where everything was given up to music. At first he played second violin in the opera orchestra, and behaved as if he could not count five, being naturally inclined to a dry humour. (I know well enough that he will laugh heartily when he reads this, though as a rule he laughs but little. Especially if he remembers the pigeon-fancier, who travelled with us by the post to Lubeck, or the pastrycook's son who blew the bellows for us when we played in the Maria Magdalena Church here. That was the 30th July, and on the 15th we had been for a water-party, and hundreds of similar incidents come back to me as I write). But once when the harpsichord player failed to appear he allowed himself to be persuaded to take his place, and showed himself a man—a thing no one had before suspected, save I alone. At that time he composed very long, long airs, and really interminable cantatas, which had neither the right kind of skill nor of taste, though complete in harmony, but the lofty schooling

of opera soon trimmed him into other fashions. He was strong at the organ, stronger than Kuhnau in fugue and counterpoint, especially *ex tempore*,[1] but he knew very little about melody till he came to the Hamburg operas. At that time he came nearly every day and took his meals at my father's house, and he gave me many hints about counterpoint. I helped him, too, in the dramatic style, so one hand washed the other.

"On the 17th of August in the same year we journeyed to Lubeck, and in the carriage made many double fugues *da mente non da penna*. I had been invited by Magnus von Wedderkopp, the president of the council, to compete for the post of successor to the renowned organist Dietrich Buxtehude, and I took Handel with me. We played on almost all the organs and harpsichords in the place, and made an agreement, which I have mentioned in another place, that he should only play the organ and I only the harpsichord. However, it turned out that there was some marriage condition proposed in connection with the appointment, for which we neither of us felt the smallest inclination, so we said good-bye to the place, after having enjoyed ourselves extremely, and received many gratifying tributes of respect."

In another book Mattheson makes a further reference to Handel's early days at Hamburg: "There is a world-renowned man, who when he first came to Hamburg only knew how to make regular set fugues, and imitations were as new to him as a foreign tongue, and as difficult. No one

[1] In his *Critica Musica* (i. 326) Mattheson makes special reference to Handel's talent for improvisation: "And among the younger men I have not found one who has such readiness as Herr Capellmeister Handel, not only in composition but also in extemporisation, as I have hundreds of times heard with my own ears in the greatest amazement and admiration."

knows better than I how he used to bring me his first opera scene by scene, and every evening would take my opinion about it—and the trouble it cost him to conceal the pedant! Let no one be surprised at this. I learned from him just as he learned from me. *Docendo enim discimus.*"[1]

The friendship between Handel and Mattheson lasted for some time after their Lubeck adventure, and Mattheson in his *Ehren-Pforte* quotes an affectionate letter written to him by Handel in 1704. But later in the year matters became somewhat strained between the two friends, though their quarrel did not break forth into open wrath until the 5th of December, at a performance of Mattheson's opera *Cleopatra*, in which Handel played the harpsichord and Mattheson himself sang the principal part. But we will let Mattheson tell his own story: "I as composer directed the performance and also sang the part of Antony, who has to die a good half-hour before the end of the opera. Hitherto" (*i.e.* at the previous performances, *Cleopatra* having been produced on Oct. 20) "I had been accustomed after finishing my part to go into the orchestra and accompany the remaining scenes, and this is a thing which incontestably the composer can do better than any one else. However, on this occasion Handel refused to give up his place. On this account we were incited by some who were present to engage in a duel in the open market-place, after the performance was over, before a crowd of spectators—a piece of folly which might have turned out disastrously for both of us, had not my blade splintered by God's grace upon a broad metal button on Handel's coat. No harm came of the encounter, and we were soon reconciled again by the kind influences

[1] *Critica Musica*, i. 243.

of a worthy councillor and the manager of the theatre. Whereupon I entertained Handel at dinner on that very day, the 30th of December, after which we went together to the rehearsal of his opera *Almira*, and were better friends than ever."

What the rights and wrongs of the quarrel actually were it is now of course impossible to say, but there is no particular reason to suppose, as all Handel's previous biographers have taken for granted, that the fault rested entirely with Mattheson.

Mainwaring actually falsifies chronology so as to make Handel out to be a lad of fourteen at the time of the duel, and speaks of that historic event as an "assassination more than a rencounter," while Rockstro cannot speak too bitterly about Mattheson's effrontery, treachery, and so forth, whereas the saintly Handel is "too good a Christian to bear malice," and altogether behaves in a manner that would at once qualify him for admission into the angelic choir. As a matter of fact, Handel was the last person in the world to play the part of an injured and long-suffering innocent, and in this quarrel, as in all others in which he was engaged, he probably gave as good as he got. The misunderstanding between the two friends seems to have originated in Mattheson's appointment, in October 1704, to the post of tutor to the son of Sir Cyril Wyche, the English envoy at Hamburg. Handel had previously been engaged to give the boy music lessons, but his duties not unnaturally ceased on Mattheson's appointment. Handel considered himself ill-used, and probably suspected Mattheson of underhand dealings. His suspicions may or may not have been well-founded, but there is no evidence to prove that Mattheson behaved badly. As to the trouble about the accompaniments to