

LIFE OF BEETHOVEN

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Life of Beethoven by Ludwig Nohl

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LUDWIG NOHL

**LIFE OF
BEETHOVEN**



LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN.

BIOGRAPHIES OF MUSICIANS.

LIFE OF BEETHOVEN

BY

LOUIS NOHL

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

BY

JOHN J. LALOR.

"Our age has need of vigorous minds."

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INTRODUCTION.

MUSIC is the most popular of the arts. It fills man's breast with a melancholy joy. Even the brute creation is not insensible to its power. Yet, at its best, music is a haughty, exclusive being, and not without reason are training, practice, talent, and the development of that talent, required for the understanding of her secrets. "One wishes to be heard with the intellect, by one's equals; emotion becomes only women, but music should strike fire from the mind of a man." In some such strain as this, Beethoven himself once spoke, and we know how slowly the works of the great symphonist found a hearing and recognition from the general public.

Yet, who is there to-day who does not know the name of Beethoven? Who is there that, hearing one of his compositions, does not feel the presence of a sublime, all-ruling power—of a power that springs from the deepest sources of all life? His very name inspires us with a feeling of veneration, and we can readily believe the accounts that have come down to us; how even strangers drew back with a species of awe, before this man of imposing appearance, spite of his smallness of stature, with

his rounded shoulders, erect head, wavy hair and piercing glance. Who has not heard of the two charcoal-burners who suddenly stopped their heavily laden vehicle when they met, in a narrow pass, this "crabbed musician," so well known to all Vienna, and who was wont to stand and think, and then, humming, to go his way, moving about bee-like through nature from sunrise, with his memorandum-book in his hand.

We are moved with the same feeling of respect that moved those common men, when we hear only Beethoven's name, but how much more powerfully are we stirred when we hear his music! We feel in that music the presence of the spirit that animates and sustains the world, and which is continually calling new life into existence. Even the person who is not a musician himself may feel, in these mighty productions, the certainty of the presence of the Creator of all things. Their tones sound to him like the voice of man's heart of hearts, the joys and sorrows of which Beethoven has laid bare to us. We feel convinced, when we hear them, that the person who in them speaks to us has, in very deed, something to tell us, something of our own life; because he lived and felt more deeply than we what we all live and feel, and loved and suffered what we all love and suffer, more deeply than any other child of dust. In Beethoven, we meet with a personage really great, both in

mind and heart, one who was able to become a sublime model to us, because life and art were serious things with him, and one who made it his duty "to live not for himself, but for other men." The high degree of self-denying power found in this phenomenon of art, it is that has such an elevating effect on us. The duties of life and the tasks of the artist he discharged with equal fidelity. His life was the foundation on which the superstructure of his works rose. His greatness as a man was the source of his greatness as an artist. The mere story of his life, given here in outline, reveals to us the internal springs of his artistic creations, and we must perforce admit, that the history of Beethoven's life is a part of the history of the higher intellectual life of our time and of humanity.

