

**HANDEL: HIS LIFE PERSONAL
AND PROFESSIONAL. WITH
THOUGHTS ON SACRED
MUSIK. A SKETCH**

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Handel: His Life Personal and Professional. With Thoughts on Sacred Musik. A Sketch by
Mrs. Anna Eliza Bray

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HANDEL:

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THOUGHTS ON SACRED MUSIC.

A Sketch.

BY MRS. BRAY,

AUTHOR OF THE "LIFE OF BENTHAM;" "THE BORDERS OF THE TAMAR
AND THE TAVY;" "THE WHITE HOODS;" "THE LAWNEY," &c. &c.

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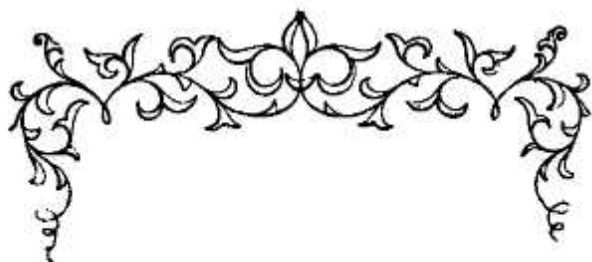
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HANDEL.

PART I.

IMRESSED from an early age with the deepest veneration for the name of Handel, I have long wished to give my own feelings and reflections respecting his character as a man, the progress of his genius, and his all-surpassing works. I am the more induced to attempt a sketch of this nature, because I have so frequently remarked, with surprise, how few appear to know anything more of him than that he was the composer of the Messiah and other celebrated oratorios, whilst with the many struggles, trials, and misfortunes which befel him, more especially towards the latter part of his long and arduous career, they seem to be wholly unacquainted, and know as little that he was excellent no less as a man than as a musician.

This slight acquaintance on the part of the public at large with a life and character so replete with interest as those of Handel, may perhaps arise from the notices of him being principally confined to Biographical Dictionaries, or to works solely on music. The former are books of reference, not of general reading, and the latter are mostly professional; so that I fain would hope a sketch, in a popular form, of this great composer may not altogether be useless or unacceptable to the reader, more especially as I propose giving some little account of the Commemoration held in Westminster Abbey in 1834, at which I had the good fortune to be present.

It was indeed a noble tribute to his memory. Most other distinguished men amongst poets, painters, and sculptors had equals; but the world had never seen but one Handel. In his own class, as a composer of sacred music, till Mendelssohn appeared he stood unapproached, even by a Haydn, a Mozart, or a Beethoven.* These, so to speak, gained the third heaven, and brought thence the harmony of those regions; but Handel alone reached the seventh, and taught us how far it is possible for the choiring of the "cherubim" and

* Since the above was written Costa has produced his splendid oratorio of Eli.

"the bright seraphim" to surpass all mortal conceptions save his own, and to awaken in the soul that ecstasy, blended with awe and love and adoration, that leaves the mind not a thought, the heart not an emotion, which is not fixed and absorbed in the "high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity."

In attempting the sketch I propose, I shall indeed feel much pleasure, as it is a gratifying task, when, with the triumphs of men of genius, we have to record instances of their private worth, as well as of their public fame. I confess I have ever been disposed to entertain the opinion, that (except in a few, a very few instances which seem contrary to the general laws of nature) great men are good men.

Genius and taste are also so nearly allied, that the observations which apply to the one will, in some measure, be found equally applicable to the other; for if we examine into the principles of true taste, we shall unquestionably find they have their origin in deep feelings. Nothing excellent ever originated in a cold heart. The great, the noble, the generous inventions and discoveries of man, all emanate from a warm spring. The heart is the source of taste, though the head may educate it. And it is this natural propensity to goodness in really great minds which makes the truly great always the truly modest; for the conceptions of

greatness are always beyond its own powers in the execution of them.

Circumstances and the repeated triumphs of success may give to greatness confidence, but its first dawn will ever be marked by modesty; as the rising of the sun is generally ushered in by a gentle and a blushing light, that steals forward and gradually unfolds itself before it bursts into the effulgence of "the perfect day." How much will these remarks be exemplified in the subject now in view!—it is my apology for introducing them.

George Frederick Handel was born on the 24th of February, 1684, at Halle, in the Duchy of Magdeburg, in Upper Saxony. He was the son of an aged physician, who intended him for the law. The Doctor soon observed, before the child was six years old, the strong propensity he evinced for music; and fearing it would grow upon him, and lead him away from the less inviting studies designed for him, he forbade the boy, on pain of his utmost displeasure, to touch any musical instrument, or to entertain the least thought of music, even as an amusement. We may fancy how awfully shook the old Doctor's periwig, and how the gold headed-cane was uplifted, as this angry denunciation was given forth.

But so ardent was the child's love of his darling

pursuit, that under all this discouragement, and in spite of all pains and penalties annexed to disobedience, he contrived to steal from his bed and spent a considerable part of the night in practising, in his own self-taught manner, on an old clavicord which stood in a garret in a remote part of the house.*

The father of Handel had a son by his first wife, who was at this period in the service of the Duke of Saxe-Weissenfells, most probably as a page. Dr. Handel was about leaving home to visit this son, when little George, who was an affectionate child, and dearly loved his elder brother, begged hard to be permitted to go and see him. On being somewhat peremptorily refused, he still persisted; and followed the carriage with such earnest entreaty and so many tears, that at length his father relented and took him up. This was a fortunate circumstance, as the visit to the palace of the Duke determined his future course.

Soon after his arrival at the court, George found

* It is not a little remarkable, that Dr. Arne (for simplicity, airiness, and sweetness, the most delightful of the English composers of his day) was designed by his father for the law; and forbidden to indulge his genius for music. Nevertheless, he contrived to teach himself on an old spinnet, which he managed, with the connivance of a servant, to get conveyed into an attic, where he practised upon it, after first muffling the strings. See Hawkins and Burney's "*History of Music*."