

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-108-01987-3 - Haydn
 James Cuthbert Hadden
 Excerpt
[More information](#)

Haydn

CHAPTER I

BIRTH—ANCESTRY—EARLY YEARS

Introductory—Rohrau—A Poor Home—Genealogy—Haydn's Parents—His Birth—His Precocity—Informal Music-making—His First Teacher—Hainburg—"A Regular Little Urchin"—Attacks the Drum—A Piece of Good Luck—A Musical Examination—Goes to Vienna—Choir School of St Stephen's—A House of Suffering—Lessons at the Cathedral—A Sixteen-Part Mass!—Juvenile Escapades—"Sang like a Crow"—Dismissed from the Choir.

HAYDN'S position, alike in music and in musical biography, is almost unique. With the doubtful exception of Sebastian Bach, no composer of the first rank ever enjoyed a more tranquil career. Bach was not once outside his native Germany; Haydn left Austria only to make those visits to England which had so important an influence on the later manifestations of his genius. His was a long, sane, sound, and on the whole, fortunate existence. For many years he was poor and obscure, but if he had his time of trial he never experienced a time of failure. With practical wisdom he conquered the Fates and became eminent. A hard, struggling youth merged into an easy middle-age, and late years found him in comfortable circumstances, with a solid reputation as an artist, and a solid retiring-allowance from

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-01987-3 - Haydn
James Cuthbert Hadden
Excerpt
[More information](#)

Haydn

a princely patron, whose house he had served for the better part of his working career. Like Goethe and Wordsworth, he lived out all his life. He was no Marcellus, shown for one brief moment and “withdrawn before his springtime had brought forth the fruits of summer.” His great contemporary, Mozart, cut off while yet his light was crescent, is known to posterity only by the products of his early manhood. Haydn’s sun set at the end of a long day, crowning his career with a golden splendour whose effulgence still brightens the ever-widening realm of music.

Voltaire once said of Dante that his reputation was becoming greater and greater because no one ever read him. Haydn’s reputation is not of that kind. It is true that he may not appeal to what has been called the “fevered modern soul,” but there is an old-world charm about him which is specially grateful in our bustling, nerve-destroying, bilious age. He is still known as “Papa Haydn,” and the name, to use Carlyle’s phrase, is “significant of much.” In the history of the art his position is of the first importance. He was the father of instrumental music. He laid the foundations of the modern symphony and sonata, and established the basis of the modern orchestra. Without him, artistically speaking, Beethoven would have been impossible. He seems to us now a figure of a very remote past, so great have been the changes in the world of music since he lived. But his name will always be read in the golden book of classical music; and whatever the evolutionary processes of the art may bring, the time can hardly come when he will be forgotten, his works unheard.

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-108-01987-3 - Haydn
 James Cuthbert Hadden
 Excerpt
[More information](#)

Birth—Ancestry—Early Years

Franz Joseph Haydn was born at the little market-town of Rohrau, near Prugg, on the confines of Austria and Hungary, some two-and-a-half hours' railway journey from Vienna. The Leitha, which flows *Rohrau* along the frontier of Lower Austria and Hungary on its way to the Danube, runs near, and the district



HAYDN'S BIRTH-HOUSE AT ROHRAU

is flat and marshy. The house in which the composer was born had been built by his father. Situated at the end of the market-place, it was in frequent danger from inundation; and although it stood in Haydn's time with nothing worse befalling it than a flooding now and again, it has twice since been swept away, first in 1813, four years after Haydn's death, and again in 1833.

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-108-01987-3 - Haydn
 James Cuthbert Hadden
 Excerpt
[More information](#)

Haydn

It was carefully rebuilt on each occasion, and still stands for the curious to see—a low-roofed cottage, very much as it was when the composer of “The Creation” first began to be “that various thing called man.” A fire unhappily did some damage to the building in 1899. But excepting that the picturesque thatched roof has given place to a covering of less inflammable material, the “Zum Haydn” presents its extensive frontage to the road, just as it did of yore. Our illustration shows it exactly as it is to-day.¹ Schindler relates that when Beethoven, shortly before his death, was shown a print of the cottage, sent to him by Diabelli, he remarked: “Strange that so great a man should have been born in so poor a home!” Beethoven’s relations with Haydn, as we shall see later on, were at one time somewhat strained; but the years had softened his asperity, and this indirect tribute to his brother composer may readily be accepted as a set-off to some things that the biographer of the greater genius would willingly forget.

It was indeed a poor home into which Haydn had been born; but tenderness, piety, thrift and orderliness were there, and probably the happiest part of his career was that which he spent in the tiny, dim-lighted rooms within sound of Leitha’s waters.

In later life, when his name had been inscribed on the roll of fame, he looked back to the cottage at Rohrau, “sweet through strange years,” with a kind of mingled pride and pathetic regret. Flattered by the great and acclaimed

¹ See an interesting account of a visit to the cottage after the fire, in *The Musical Times* for July 1899.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-01987-3 - Haydn
James Cuthbert Hadden
Excerpt
[More information](#)

Birth—Ancestry—Early Years

by the devotees of his art, he never felt ashamed of his lowly origin. On the contrary, he boasted of it. He was proud, as he said, of having “made something out of nothing.” He does not seem to have been often at Rohrau after he was launched into the world, a stripling not yet in his teens. But he retained a fond memory of his birthplace. When in 1795 he was invited to inspect a monument erected to his honour in the grounds of Castle Rohrau, he knelt down on the threshold of the old home by the marketplace and kissed the ground his feet had trod in the far-away days of youth. When he came to make his will, his thoughts went back to Rohrau, and one of his bequests provided for two of its poorest orphans.

Modern theories of heredity and the origin of genius find but scanty illustration in the case of Haydn. Unlike the ancestors of Bach and Beethoven and Mozart, his family, so far as the pedigrees show, had as little of genius, musical or other, in their composition, as *Genealogy* the families of Shakespeare and Cervantes. In the male line they were hard-working, honest tradesmen, totally undistinguished even in their sober walk in life. They came originally from Hainburg, where Haydn’s great-grandfather, Kaspar, had been among the few to escape massacre when the town was stormed by the Turks in July 1683. The composer’s father, Matthias Haydn, was, like most of his brothers, a wheelwright, combining with his trade the office of parish sexton. He belonged to the better peasant class, and, though ignorant as we should now regard him, was yet not without a tincture of artistic taste. He had been to Frankfort during his “travelling

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-108-01987-3 - Haydn
 James Cuthbert Hadden
 Excerpt
[More information](#)

Haydn

years,” and had there picked up some little information of a miscellaneous kind. “He was a great lover of music by nature,” says his famous son, “and played the harp without knowing a note of music.” He had a fine tenor voice, and when the day’s toil was over he would gather his household around him and set them singing to his well-meant accompaniment.

It is rather a pretty picture that the imagination here conjures up, but it does not help us very much in trying to account for the musical genius of *Haydn’s Mother* the composer. Even the popular idea that genius is derived from the mother does not hold in Haydn’s case. If Frau Haydn had a genius for anything it was merely for moral excellence and religion and the good management of her household. Like Leigh Hunt’s mother, however, she was “fond of music, and a gentle singer in her way”; and more than one intimate of Haydn in his old age declared that he still knew by heart all the simple airs which she had been wont to lilt about the house.

The maiden name of this estimable woman was Marie Koller. She was a daughter of the Marktrichter (market judge), and had been a cook in the family of Count Harrach, one of the local magnates. Eight years younger than her husband, she was just twenty-one at her marriage, and bore him twelve children. Haydn’s regard for her was deep and sincere; and it was one of the tricks of destiny that she was not spared to witness more of his rising fame, being cut off in 1754, when she was only forty-six. Matthias Haydn promptly married again, and had a second family of five children, all of whom died in infancy.

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-108-01987-3 - Haydn
 James Cuthbert Hadden
 Excerpt
[More information](#)

Birth—Ancestry—Early Years

The stepmother survived her husband—who died, as the result of an accident, in 1763—and then she too entered a second time into the wedded state. Haydn can never have been very intimate with her, and he appears to have lost sight of her entirely in her later years. But he bequeathed a small sum to her in his will, “to be transferred to her children should she be no longer alive.”

Joseph Haydn, to give the composer the name which he now usually bears, was the second of the twelve children born to the Rohrau wheelwright. The exact date of his birth is uncertain, but it was either *Birth* the 31st of March or the 1st of April 1732.

Haydn himself gave the latter as the correct date, alleging that his brother Michael had fixed upon the previous day to save him from being called an April fool! Probably we shall not be far off the mark if we assume with Pohl that Haydn was born in the night between the 31st of March and the 1st of April.

Very few details have come down to us in regard to his earlier years; and such details as we have refer almost wholly to his musical precocity. It was not such a precocity as that of Mozart, who was playing *His* minuets at the age of four, and writing concertos *Precocity* when he was five; but just on that account it is all the more credible. One's sympathies are with the frank Philistine who pooh-poohs the tales told of baby composers, and hints that they must have been a trial to their friends. Precocious they no doubt were; but precocity often evaporates before it can become genius, leaving a sediment of disappointed hopes and vain ambitions.

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-108-01987-3 - Haydn
 James Cuthbert Hadden
 Excerpt
[More information](#)

Haydn

In literature, as Mr Andrew Lang has well observed, genius may show itself chiefly in acquisition, as in Sir Walter Scott, who, as a boy, was packing all sorts of lore into a singularly capacious mind, while doing next to nothing that was noticeable. In music it is different. Various learning is not so important as a keenly sensitive organism. The principal thing is emotion, duly ordered by the intellect, not intellect touched by emotion. Haydn's precocity at anyrate was of this sort. It proclaimed itself in a quick impressionableness to sound, a delicately-strung ear, and an acute perception of rhythm.

We have seen how the father had his musical evenings with his harp and the voices of wife and children. These informal rehearsals were young Haydn's delight. We hear more particularly of his attempts at music-making by sawing away upon a piece of stick at his father's side, pretending to play the violin like the village schoolmaster under whom he was now learning his rudiments. The parent was hugely pleased at these manifestations of musical talent in his son. He had none of the absurd, old-world ideas of Surgeon Handel as to the degrading character of the divine art, but encouraged the youngster in every possible way. Already he dreamt—what father of a clever boy has not done the same?—that Joseph would in some way or other make the family name famous; and although it is said that like his wife, he had notions of the boy becoming a priest, he took the view that his progress towards holy orders would be helped rather than hindered by the judicious cultivation of his undoubted taste for music.

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-108-01987-3 - Haydn
 James Cuthbert Hadden
 Excerpt
[More information](#)

Birth—Ancestry—Early Years

While these thoughts were passing through his head, the chance visit of a relation practically decided young Haydn's future. His grandmother, being left a widow, had married a journeyman wheelwright, Matthias Seefranz, and one of their children married a school- *His First* master, Johann Matthias Frankh. Frankh *Teacher* combined with the post of pedagogue that of choir-regent at Hainburg, the ancestral home of the Haydns, some four leagues from Rohrau. He came occasionally to Rohrau to see his relatives, and one day he surprised Haydn keeping strict time to the family music on his improvised fiddle. Some discussion following about the boy's unmistakable talent, the schoolmaster generously offered to take him to Hainburg that he might learn "the first elements of music and other juvenile acquirements." The father was pleased; the mother, hesitating at first, gave her reluctant approval, and Haydn left the family home never to return, except on a flying visit. This was in 1738, when he was six years of age.

The town of Hainburg lies close to the Danube, and looks very picturesque with its old walls and towers. According to the *Nibelungen Lied*, King Attila once spent a night in the place, and a stone figure of that "scourge of God" forms a feature of the *Hainburg* Wiener Thor, a rock rising abruptly from the river, crowned with the ruined Castle of Rottenstein. The town cannot be very different from what it was in Haydn's time, except perhaps that there is now a tobacco manufactory, which gives employment to some 2000 hands.

It is affecting to think of the little fellow of six dragged

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-108-01987-3 - Haydn
 James Cuthbert Hadden
 Excerpt
[More information](#)

Haydn

away from his home and his mother's watchful care to be planted down here among strange surroundings and a strange people. That he was not very happy we might have assumed in any case. But there were, unfortunately, some things to render him more unhappy than he need have been. Frankh's intentions were no doubt excellent; but neither in temper nor in character was he a fit guardian and instructor of youth. He got into trouble with the authorities more than once for neglect of his duties, and had to answer a charge of gambling with loaded dice. As a teacher he was of that stern disciplinarian kind which believes in lashing instruction into the pupil with the "tingling rod." Haydn says he owed him more cuffs than gingerbread.

What he owed to the schoolmaster's wife may be inferred from the fact that she compelled him to wear a wig "for the sake of cleanliness." All his life through Haydn was most particular about his personal appearance, "A Regular Little Urchin" and when quite an old man it pained him greatly to recall the way in which he was neglected by Frau Frankh. "I could not help perceiving," he remarked to Dies, "much to my distress, that I was gradually getting very dirty, and though I thought a good deal of my little person, was not always able to avoid spots of dirt on my clothes, of which I was dreadfully ashamed. In fact, I was a regular little urchin." Perhaps we should not be wrong in surmising that the old man was here reading into his childhood the habits and sentiments of his later years. Young boys of his class are not usually deeply concerned about grease spots or dishevelled hair.