

H A Y D N.

CHAPTER I.

CHILDHOOD AND EARLY LIFE, 1732—1750.

ROHRAU—HAINBURG—VIENNA.

THE interest of the life of Joseph Haydn centres almost exclusively in his career as a musician. As we trace his artistic progress step by step, we do not, as is the case with Mozart, come across pleasant side glimpses of home interiors, bright with the love of wife or sister and welcome to the observer as showing the man as he was in his best and truest moods. Nor do Haydn's letters which have been preserved possess much general or human interest, although they are valuable, as letters always must be, in helping us to form a true estimate of his character.

His disposition would seem to have fitted him admirably for a domestic life, but this blessing was denied him. His childhood ended at six years old, and from that time until he was sixty-five he had, properly speaking, no home nor home life. His life and his art were indissolubly bound together; his friendships, though the view we get of these is so pleasant and life-like as almost to contradict what we have been saying, were all with his fellow-artists or his patrons.

He cared for nothing, lived for nothing but music, and his sole regret in extreme old age was that he must die before having carried his art to greater perfection than it

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had yet attained. This being so, it behoves the biographer of Haydn to centre the interest of his life in the work of his life, and, while eagerly gathering such crumbs as he may find of information as to Haydn the man, to strive to give his readers a clear and accurate portrait of Haydn the musician. To do this, however, imperfectly, will be the aim of the present sketch, and it will involve a description of Haydn's surroundings, physical and human, and of the times in which he lived and worked, which, it is hoped, will supply that element of general interest which a mere record of dates, events, and compositions would certainly lack.

Haydn's birthplace was the little village of Rohrau, lying, as its name implies, in a flat, marshy district close to the River Leitha, which here forms the boundary between Lower Austria and Hungary, and later falls into a tributary of the Danube. The house in which the great composer first saw the light stands at the end of the long village street nearest to the Leitha and the bridge spanning the river, and was consequently at the mercy of the floods, which laid the low-lying country under water as often as the river overflowed its banks. Twice since the cottage was built by Haydn's father has it been swept away; first in 1813, and again in 1833. Twice has it been rebuilt, each time in its original form, so that the present single-storied, straggling little house, with its thatched roof and over-shadowing tree, may be accepted as a very faithful presentment of Haydn's earliest home.

The workshop in which Mathias Haydn, the father, carried on his trade as a wheelwright has disappeared, but the orchard and kitchen garden, stretching almost to the banks of the Leitha, are still to be seen, and here we may imagine Joseph, like any other sturdy little German peasant, passing the first six years of his life, playing, shouting, tumbling, and getting into all the mischief within his reach. Not only his father, but four or five of his six uncles also were wheelwrights by trade. The family came originally from Hainburg on the Danube, about four leagues from Rohrau. There most of Mathias Haydn's brothers still pursued their calling, and there also a

connection by marriage named Frankh was schoolmaster and Chorregent.

Mathias Haydn may be described as a last-century German peasant of the best type. An honest, God-fearing, hard-working man, content with his own lot in life, but not without a spark of ambition for his sons; so that as his little Joseph's talent for music became more and more marked, he liked to imagine him a future Capellmeister or Chorregent. Ignorant enough, doubtless, he was of all outside his trade, but not absolutely uncultivated either, since during a visit to Frankfort in his youth, undertaken for some purpose connected with his trade, he had learned to play the harp by ear, and was fond of singing to its accompaniment, sometimes alone, sometimes in duets with his wife. As the children grew up they were allowed to join in these family concerts, and their father took pride in teaching them to sing in parts correctly. In after-years, when Joseph and his younger brother Michael, both studying music in Vienna, were spending their holidays at home, the evening music was resumed. One can imagine how eagerly the old man would produce his instrument and uplift his still pleasing tenor voice, as one who would say, "And I, too, am a musician!" Then the sons, with all the arrogance of youthful knowledge, would question this or that point in the father's rendering of voice part or accompaniment, and the dispute waxing warm, Mathias would finally close it with the angry and unanswerable remark, "You are a set of donkeys!"

Mathias Haydn married in 1728 Maria Koller, daughter of the "Marktrichter" and cook to Count Harrach, lord of the castle and village of Rohrau. She was a girl of twenty-one when her husband brought her home to his newly-built cottage, and here she bore him twelve children, and lived a faithful wife and mother till her death in 1754.

Joseph's love for his mother was deep and lasting, and, considering the early age at which he left her side never to return as an inmate of the home, this fact points to a more than ordinary maternal influence.

The habits of order, regularity, and hard work which

she inculcated, lasted to the end of his life, and to a visitor who expressed surprise at finding him when over seventy years of age fully dressed and with freshly powdered periwig on early in the morning, he gratefully declared that the strictness with which his mother had insisted on neatness and order in her children from the earliest youth had made these habits second nature to him.

Franz Joseph Haydn, known to the world as Joseph Haydn, the second child of this worthy couple, was born in 1732. The exact day of his birth is variously given as the 31st of March or the 1st of April. He himself held to the latter date, and declared that his brother Michael had invented the earlier, lest people should call him a born April fool! The probability is that his birth took place during the night between the last day of March and the first of April.

There is little to tell of Haydn's early childhood. It differed in no respect from that of the other village children with whom he played in the meadows, and went to and from the village school, sent there no doubt as soon as he could toddle to be safe out of the way of the busy mother and the younger babies, who followed each other into the world in rapid succession. The little fellow soon began to give signs of a good musical ear; his special treats were the evening duets of the father and mother, and one can imagine him perched on a stool in the corner of the low, dark living-room, listening with all his ears, and occasionally venturing to join in with a pretty childish treble. We may imagine him, too, loitering behind the other children when school was over, listening with open-eyed wonder to the performances upon the violin with which the village schoolmaster solaced his evening leisure. "That must be such easy music to make!" thinks little Joseph. "One has only to find two nice smooth pieces of wood and rub one of them gently up and down the other;" and, provided with his instrument, he set himself gravely by his father's side and joined in the evening concert, keeping strict time, and imitating the schoolmaster's handling of the bow to admiration.

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CHILDHOOD AND EARLY LIFE.

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The delighted father began to imagine a brilliant future for his eldest son. Who could tell that he might not, with industry and good luck, rise to be a Capellmeister, or at least Chorregent, like cousin Frankh at Hainburg? The mother had other and less worldly dreams, and would fain have seen the boy devoted to a priestly career. But Mathias's stronger will prevailed, and at Frankh's next visit to Rohrau, he was pressed to give his judgment on Joseph's voice and ear. With an eye to his own advantage as well as to his little cousin's future fame, he offered to take entire charge of him and begin his musical education without delay. The father's eager consent was given, the mother's hesitation overcome; solacing herself with the thought that as Chorregent or Capellmeister it would still be open to Joseph to enter the priesthood and fulfil her dearest wish, she began with all a mother's hopes and fears to prepare her little son for his early flight from the parent nest. Sepperl,¹ finding himself suddenly the centre of the family interest, betrayed little grief at parting, but listened dutifully to his mother's exhortations as to cleanliness and good behaviour; and when the morning of his departure arrived, having bid adieu to his friend the schoolmaster, and sought the blessing of the good priest of the village, he bravely mounted the waggon by his father's side, and made his first plunge into the wide world.

Early as he left his home, Haydn never forgot it, nor did the friendship and flattery of the great ever tempt him in after-years to feel ashamed of his lowly origin. On the contrary, he was proud of having, as he expressed it, "made something out of nothing;" and his poorer relations, of whom he had plenty, had no cause to complain of his want of generosity. The actual place of his birth was dear to him, and we are told by an eye-witness that in 1795, when he was making his triumphal return from his second visit to London, and was invited by Count Harrach to inspect the monument erected to his honour in the grounds of Castle Rohrau, Haydn stopped

¹ The Austrian diminutive for "Joseph."

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short on the threshold of the little cottage that had been his home, and kneeling down, kissed the ground made sacred to him by the footsteps of his father and mother.

The short journey from Rohrau to Hainburg is an interesting one to the lover of antiquity or the student of history; the country around is thickly strewn with Roman remains, and the little town of Petronell, which lies about half-way between the two, covers the site of the Roman city Carnuntum, destroyed by Attila. A mile south of Petronell is the Heidenthor, the ruins of a triumphal arch erected by Augustus to commemorate the conquest of Pannonia by Tiberius.

Mathias Haydn and his little son, however, were little likely to feel any association with these relics of a past age, or to have an eye for anything but the first sight of the schoolhouse which was to be the end of their journey. The father's heart must have beat high with hopes and fears when the picturesque old town, with its walls and towers, came in sight, and his mind must have been full of the memories of his own early youth as the humble conveyance passed slowly through the Wienerthor, one of the two castellated gateways planted at the extremities of the principal street. Fifty-five years before, on July 11th, 1683, Hainburg had been stormed and pillaged by the Turks, and Haydn's great-great-grandfather had barely escaped with his life. Since then it had been rebuilt, and was now a flourishing market-town. The school, in which the elements of an ordinary education were given to the boys, together with special training as choristers, was, as we have seen, at that time under the direction of Johann Mathias Frankh, who united the offices of schoolmaster and Chorregent, and bore the title of Schulrektor. He was a man of about thirty, possessed of considerable musical knowledge, and a severe, though by no means conscientious teacher. He was more than once called to account by the authorities for neglect of his duties as schoolmaster, and later on was dismissed (though afterwards reinstated in his office) on a charge of gambling with loaded dice. To Haydn he gave, as

the latter declared, more blows than victuals; but he earned his gratitude as a teacher nevertheless, as is proved by a bequest in Haydn's will to the daughter of Frankh and her husband, Philipp Schimpel, at that time Chorregent, of 100 florins and a portrait of Frankh, "my first instructor in music."

It was on the side of Frankh's wife that the relationship with the Haydn family existed. She was Julie Rosine, daughter of Mathias Seefranz, who was the second husband of Haydn's grandmother. She seems to have neglected her duty towards the little fellow confided to her care, and the change to poor Joseph must have been great. He has recorded his distress at finding himself, for want of his mother's care, becoming "a dirty little urchin," and the fact of a child of six years old being compelled to wear a wig "for the sake of cleanliness," gives one a pathetic idea of his forlorn state. Haydn had, fortunately for himself and the world, a naturally buoyant and cheerful disposition, which sustained him under the petty oppressions and annoyances, which are the inevitable lot of a youth of genius struggling upward, and he seems even at this early age to have taken Frankh's cuffs and hard words, and his wife's neglect with all the philosophy possible to him. Dies relates the only musical anecdote of him which has come down to us from this time, and which reminds us of many such stories told of the young Mozart.

There was to be a great church festival, including a procession through the streets of the town, in which the choristers were, as a matter of course, to take part. But the drummer falling ill, no one could be found to take his place, till Frankh called for Joseph Haydn, showed him how to make the stroke, and left him to practise it alone. Joseph found a meal tub, stretched a cloth over the top, set it on a stool, and began to drum away with such vigour that the stool was soon overturned and himself covered with meal dust. But the stroke was learnt, and the spectators of the melancholy procession found their gravity unduly taxed by the sight of a little fellow of six years old beating a big drum, carried before him by a

hunchback, as a bearer of ordinary stature would have raised the instrument far out of his reach. The drums on which he performed this feat are still preserved in the choir of the church at Hainburg.

Joseph had been two years at Hainburg, and was consequently between seven and eight years old, when an event occurred which marks the commencement of the second epoch of his musical career. Georg Reutter, Capellmeister of the Cathedral of St. Stephen in Vienna, passed through Hainburg in the course of a journey undertaken in search of boys' voices to recruit his choir. Hearing from Frankh of the musical talent of his little cousin, he singled him out from among the choristers summoned to sing before him, and, charmed by his "weak but pleasing voice" (as Haydn himself says), he sent for him to the house where he was staying. Placing a canon before the boy, he desired him to sing it at sight, and Haydn obeyed with so much readiness and correctness of ear that Reutter was delighted. He saw the little fellow as he sang cast longing glances at a plate of cherries on the table, and throwing a handful into his cap, he said, "Well done, you little rascal! Can you make a shake?"

"No," answered Sepperl, unabashed. "But no more can my cousin Frankh."

Reutter laughed at the ready answer, and taking Joseph between his knees he explained to him shortly how to take the intervals that compose a shake, and bade him try. The first attempt was sufficiently good to show that here was a pupil who would do honour to his teacher, and Reutter at once offered to take Haydn into the Cantorei of St. Stephen, and charge himself with his musical future. Provided the parents consented to this arrangement, Haydn was to remain at Hainburg until he had completed his eighth year, and then at once to proceed to Vienna. The consent of the parents, as may be supposed, was not difficult to obtain. The father saw his highest ambition on the way to be realized, and the mother, who still cherished secret hopes of the priesthood for Joseph, looked upon this step as one in the right direction. The boy himself was not too young to feel

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pride in his advancement, but he used to say afterwards that he never saw a plate of cherries without thinking of that day, and his first introduction to Capellmeister Reutter.

The Vienna of Haydn's day contained about a fifth of the number of its present inhabitants. The city has been variously compared to a ring with a centre of brilliants surrounded by a row of emeralds, and a further row of parti-coloured gems; and to a spider's web, the centre near St. Stephen's Cathedral, whence the streets radiate outwards in every direction and are encircled mid-way by a belt of boulevards called Ringe. This green belt (the emeralds of the ring) is laid out upon the ground that was the *Glacis* of the city until 1858, when the fortifications were destroyed. It forms the boundary of Vienna proper, and beyond it are the thirty-four suburbs (*Vorstädte*), stretching further into the country as the city increases year by year. In the centre and older quarter are all the principal churches, the palaces of the emperor and the nobility, the public offices, and the best shops. Here stands the Cathedral of St. Stephen, with its wonderful spire and beautiful doorways, and here—one of a row of small houses built close over against the principal doorway (*Riesenthor*)—was at that time the *Cantorei*, or choir school, where the next ten years of Haydn's life, the most important of his artistic career, were to be spent. The *Cantorei* of St. Stephen's was of very ancient foundation. It is mentioned in official documents as early as 1441, and the constitution of the school may be gathered from directions given concerning it in 1558—1571. It was newly constituted in 1663, and many alterations were made then and afterwards, but in its main points it was the same in Haydn's day as it had been for nearly a century before. The school consisted of a Cantor (made Capellmeister in 1663), a Subcantor, two ushers, and six scholars. The number had been thirteen, but was reduced in 1715. They all lived together, and had meals in common. All expenses were paid by the town, and a fairly liberal allowance was made for the board, lodging, and clothing of the scholars.

But the cost of living had increased since this sum had been fixed, and the boys of Haydn's time were poorly fed and scantily clothed. They rejoiced greatly when they were summoned to sing at private banquets, for then they were sure of a good meal and a small present in money, which was always put into a box to form a common fund for the supply of any little luxuries granted to the boys.

The teachers had formerly been obliged to give instruction in music to the pupils of the neighbouring town schools, but this obligation had been removed, and their duties were now confined to the Cantorei. Here they taught their boys religion and Latin, together with the ordinary subjects of school education, and in music the violin, clavier, and singing. Singing must have been very carefully taught to enable the boys to perform as they did difficult masses and other church compositions at first sight. Haydn's musical instructors at St. Stephen's were Gegenbauer and Finsterbusch; little but their name is known of either, except that the former also taught the violin, and the latter had, according to Haydn, "a fine tenor voice." The more advanced scholars instructed the younger ones, and Joseph's delight was great when his younger brother Michael joined the choir and was placed under his care.

The labours of the choir might be considered severe. There were two full choral services daily in the cathedral, viz. High Mass and Vespers, with all their subdivisions; special *Te Deums* were constantly sung, and the singing boys had to take part in the numerous solemn processions of religious brotherhoods through the city, as well as in the thanksgiving services for the deliverance of Vienna from the siege of the Turks, for royal birthdays, and other such occasions. During Holy Week the labours of the choir were continuous. On Palm Sunday the archbishop and clergy went in solemn procession, carrying palms, while the choristers and priests sang alternate verses from the Gospel account of Christ's entry into Jerusalem, and the boys spread their church vestments on the floor of the cathedral. The Passion