

ANECDOTES OF EMINENT PERSONS

Life of Mozart,

*The celebrated German Musician.*

Among the illustrious individuals, who by their superior abilities have ornamented and improved the world, how few have dared to defy the obstacles which envy, arrogance, and contending meanness opposed to their progress! or indignantly to break the shackles which indigence imposes, and dart through that obscurity too well calculated to scatter and quench the rays of genius! To how small a number have their own country proved that beneficent protectress, that kind, that "nursing mother" who should watch the growing strength of new-fledged talent, encourage its flights, and applaud the vigor of its spreading pinions. This has formed the complaint of every age, and will continue to excite the murmurs of suffering merit, till minds of the superior class seize, by independency of spirit, that ascendancy in the scale of worldly power which gives weight and force to human movements, and which can only spring from conscious importance, and dignified self-assertion. The shade of the great Mozart, whose sublime productions have astonished and still continue to delight, all Europe, awakens these reflections—accompanies me in my progress—revives the complaints of neglected genius—and demands redress.

Had not the almost uniform practice of courts long explained to mankind the principles on which they act, how difficult would it be to conceive, that that of Vienna could so little appreciate the merit of this extraordinary man, who looked to it for an asylum, and passed in its vicinity the last ten years of his life! the dispensers of royal favors, whose ears imbibe with such avidity the flattery that meanness offers, can neglect that genius which nobly refuses the tale of adulation; can stifle it with poverty, and even follow it with persecution.

Availing myself of the materials furnished me by the learned professors Niemtscheck and Olivarius, I now hasten to those details, which so strongly distinguish and characterize the subject of my present biographical discussion.

The father of Mozart was master of the chapel at Salzburg. His favorite work, entitled "Lessons for the Violin," possess more than a moderate share of merit; and have passed through two editions. He was also a respectable performer; but certainly did not discover anything sufficiently extraordinary, either in his execution or compositions, to presage the future brilliancy of his son.

Mozart the younger, was born at Salzburg in the year 1756. At the age of three years, attending to the lessons which his sister, then seven years old, was receiving at the harpsichord, he became captivated with harmony; and when she had left the instrument, he would instantly place himself at it, find the *thirds*, sound them with the liveliest joy, and employ whole hours at the exercise.

His father, urged by such early and striking indications of genius, immediately began to teach him some little airs; and soon perceived that his pupil improved even beyond the hopes he had formed of him. Half an hour was generally sufficient for his acquiring a minuet, or a little song, which, when once learned, he would of himself perform with taste and precision.

At the age of six years, he had made such a progress as to be able to compose short pieces for the harpsichord, which his father was obliged to commit to paper for him. From that time nothing made any impression upon him but harmony; and infantine amusements lost all their attractions unless music had a share in them. He advanced from day to day, not by ordinary and insensible degrees, but with a rapidity which hourly excited new surprise in his parents—the happy witnesses of his progress.

His father returning home one day with a stranger, found little Mozart with a pen in his hand. "What are you writing" said he? "A concerto for the harpsichord" replied the child. "Let us see it:" rejoined the father, "It is a marvellous concerto, without doubt." He then took the paper, and saw nothing at first but a mass of notes mingled with blots of ink by the mal-address of the young composer, who, unskilled in the management of the pen, had dipped it too freely in the ink; and having blotted and smeared his paper, had endeavoured to make out his ideas with his fingers; but on a closer examination, his father was lost in wonder; and his eyes, delighted, and flowing with tears, became rivetted to the notes. "See," exclaimed he to the stranger "how just and regular it all is! but it is impossible to play it: it is too difficult." "It is a concerto," said the

child, "and must be practised till one can execute it. Hear how this part goes." He then sat down to perform it; but was not able to execute the passages with sufficient fluency to do justice to his own ideas. Extraordinary as his manual facility was universally allowed to be for his age, it did not keep pace with the progress of his knowledge and invention. Such an instance of intellectual advancement, in a child only six years of age, is so far out of the common road of nature, that we can only contemplate the fact with astonishment, and acknowledge that the possible rapidity of mental maturation is not to be calculated.

In the year 1762, his father took him and his sister to Munich, where he performed a concerto before the elector which excited the admiration of the whole court; nor was he less applauded at Vienna, where the emperor called him the *little sorcerer*.

His father gave him lessons only on the harpsichord; but he privately taught himself the violin: and his command of the instrument afforded the elder Mozart the utmost surprise, when he one day at a concert took a second violin, and acquitted himself with more than passable address. True genius sees no obstacles. It will not, therefore, excite our wonder, if his constant success in whatever he attempted begot an unbounded confidence in his own powers: he had even the *laudable* hardihood to undertake to qualify himself for the *first* violin, and did not long remain short of the necessary proficiency.

He had an ear so correct, that he felt the most minute discordancy; and such a fondness for study, that it was frequently necessary to take him by force from the instrument. This love of application never diminished. He every day passed a considerable time at his harpsichord, and generally practiced till a late hour at night. Another characteristic trait of real genius! always full of its object, and lost, as it were, in itself!

In the year 1763 he made, with his father and sister, his first grand musical journey. He visited Paris; and was heard by the French court, in the chapel-royal at Versailles, where his talent on the organ was admired even *more* than on the harpsichord. At Paris, the musical travellers gave two concerts which procured them the highest reputation, and the distinction of public portraits. It was here that a set of Sonatas for the harpsichord, some of his earliest compositions, were engraved and published.

From Paris, they went to London, where they also gave two concerts, consisting of symphonies composed by young Mozart, who, even at that early age, sang also with much expression, and practiced publicly with his sister. Mozart played already at sight, and in a concert, at which the king was one of his auditors, a bass being placed before him as a *ground*, immediately applied to it a most beautiful melody. Those who are best acquainted with the extent of such a task, will be the most astonished at such mature familiarity with the intricacies of the science, and such prompt and ready invention in so juvenile a mind.

From London, where Mozart also published six sonatas for the harpsichord, the musical family went to Holland, thence again to France; and in 1766 returned to Salzburg. There this extraordinary youth remained more than a year in perfect repose; devoting the whole of his time to the study of composition, the principles of which he scrutinized with the depth and penetration of confirmed manhood. Emmanuel Bach, Hasse and Handel were his chief guides and models; though he by no means neglected the old Italian masters.

In 1768 he again visited Vienna, where Joseph the second engaged him to set to music a comic opera, entitled "La Finta Semplice," which obtained the approbation of Hasse and Metastasio. At the house of the prince of Kaunitz, it often happened, that the first Italian air which came to hand would be given him, that in the presence of the company he might add to it accompaniments for numerous instruments; which he would write in the first style of excellence, and without the least premeditation: This is at once a proof, with what acuteness of observation he had listened to the music of the best masters; how intimate he had already rendered himself with the characters, capacities, and effects of the different instruments; and what skill he had acquired in that abstruse art of mixed combination, which, while it calculates the conjoint effect of sounds, as they regard the established laws of harmony, accommodates the different *parts* to the scales, tones, and powers of the respective instruments by which they are to be executed. It was at this time also, that, although but twelve years of age, he composed music for the consecration of the church of orphans, at the performance of which he himself presided.

In 1769 Mozart again returned to

Salzburg, where he became *maitre de concert*. Not having yet seen Italy, in the December of the same year, he set out for that seat of the fine arts. Those talents which had already excited the admiration of Germany, France, and England, now awakened in that land of musical taste, the most lively enthusiasm.

In 1771 he had no sooner given personal proofs of his genius, than *la scrittura* for the following carnival was conferred upon him. He visited Bologna, then as famous for harmonic excellence as Naples, where the celebrated theorist, Martini, was amazed to see a German boy work and execute the theme of a fugue which he presented to him, in the extraordinary style in which Mozart acquitted himself. He next went to Florence: Florence even enhanced the eulogiums which Bologna had lavished upon him.

During the holy week he arrived at Rome, and assisted at the *Miserere* in the Sixtine chapel, which performance is justly considered as the *ne plus ultra* of vocal music. This circumstance claims particular notice, as inducing a proof of another faculty of his mind, only to be equalled by those wonderful powers which he had already demonstrated. He was prohibited from taking a copy of this *miserere*, and therefore piqued himself on retaining it in his memory. Having heard it with attention, he went home, made out a manuscript from recollection; returned the next day to the chapel, heard the piece a second time, corrected the rough draught, and produced a transcript which surprized all Rome. This *miserere* formed a *scorer* numerous in its parts, and extremely difficult of execution. His mind had embraced and retained the whole!

He soon after received from the Pope the order of the gilt-spur; and at Bologna was complimented, by an unanimous decision, with the title of *Member and Master of the Philharmonic Academy*. As a proof, *pro forma*, of his qualifications for this academical honour, a fugue, for four voices, in the church style, was required of him, and he was shut up alone in his chamber. He completed it in half an hour; and received his diploma. This evinced that he possessed an imagination constantly at his command, and that his mind was stored with all the riches of his beloved science.

The opera which he composed for Milan, was called *Mithridates*: this piece procured him *la scrittura* for the grand opera of the carnival of 1773, which was his *Lucio Silla*. At length, after a tour of fifteen months, he returned to Salzburg.

In 1777 Mozart visited Paris: but the music of that capital, which so little accorded with his taste, together with the disgust he conceived from the base intrigues of the late French court, soon determined him to quit that capital, and return to his domestic comforts. In 1781, at the request of the Elector of Bavaria, he composed the Opera of *Idomeneo* for the carnival of that year. The general merit of this opera is so great, that it might serve alone for the basis of a distinguished reputation. At his twenty-fifth year he was invited to Vienna, where he continued spreading, as from a centre, the taste of his compositions through all Germany, and the lustre of his name over the whole of Europe.

Of all the virtuosi of the piano-forte who then crowded Vienna, Mozart was much the most skilful. His finger was extraordinarily rapid and tasteful, and the execution of his left hand exceeded every thing that had before been heard. His touch was replete with delicacy and expression; and the profound study he had bestowed on his art, gave his performance a style the most brilliant and finished. His compositions had a rapid circulation: and in every new piece the connoisseurs were struck with the originality of its cast, the novelty of the passages, and the energy of the effect.

Joseph the second, solicitous for the perfection of the German opera, engaged Mozart to compose a piece. He accordingly produced *L'enlèvement du Serail*; performed for the first time in 1782. It excited the jealousy of the Italian company, who therefore ventured to cabal against it. The emperor, addressing himself to the composer, said, "It is *too fine* for our ears, my dear Mozart, and most *charmingly crowded* with notes." "Precisely what it ought to be," replied the spirited musician, who justly suspected that this remark had been suggested to Joseph by the envious Italians. "Though I cannot describe, as an auricular evidence," says the faithful author of the biography, "the applauses and the admiration which this opera produced at Vienna, yet I have witnessed the enthusiasm it excited at Prague among all the connoisseurs, as well as among those whose ears were less cultivated. It was said that all which had been heard before was not music: it drew the most overflowing audiences; every body was amazed at its

new traits of harmony, and at passages so original, and, till then, so unheard from wind instruments."

The cautious reader will, perhaps, hesitate to admit, in its fullest extent, this account by the author of the biography; but even after an allowance for some exaggeration, the most phlegmatic will grant that much must have been achieved by this great master, to afford a basis for so glowing a picture of the merit and success of *L'enlèvement du Serail*. During the composition of this opera, he was married to Mademoiselle Weber, a distinguished *virtuosa*; and the piece was supposed to owe to this felicitous circumstance, much of that endearing character, that tone of tenderness, and that expression of the softer passions which form its principal attractions. "*The Marriage of Figaro*," which was in the highest repute at all the theatres, was in the year 1787 transformed into an Italian opera; and Mozart, at the instance of the emperor, set it to music. This piece was highly received every where, and kept possession of the theatre at Prague during almost the whole of the winter in which it first appeared: numerous extracts were made from it, and the songs and dances of Figaro were vociferated in the streets, the gardens, and the taverns. Mozart came that very winter to Prague, and performed in public on the piano-forte. His auditors at all times listened to him with admiration: but whenever he played extempore, and indulged the spontaneous and uninterrupted sallies of his fancy, which he sometimes would for more than half an hour, every one was seized with the most enthusiastic raptures, and acknowledged the unrivalled resources of his imagination. About this time the manager of the theatre contracted with him for the composition of a new opera, which, when produced, was called "*Il Dissoluto Punito*, or *Don Giovanni*." His reputation was now so exalted, that the Bohemians piqued themselves on the circumstance that this opera was composed for their entertainment.

But this fame, this great and universal applause, had not yet produced to the admired artist any solid advantages; he had obtained no place, no settled income: but subsisted by his operas, and the instructions and occasional concerts which he gave. The profits of these proved insufficient for the style which he was obliged to support; and his finances became much deranged. The critical situation in which he now found himself, made him resolve to quit Vienna, and seek an asylum in London; to which metropolis he had often been invited; but Joseph nominating him *compositeur de la chambre*, though, with a very inadequate salary, he was induced to accept it; and Germany had the advantage of retaining him. But let me ask: had not the active and penetrating Joseph the ability better and less tardily to appreciate the merits of a man so distinguished in genius and in science? Or had not his ministers the power, at least, to persuade him how greatly it would have been to his honour to have granted so illustrious an artist a protection more efficacious? But emperors will be emperors; mortals so extravagantly exalted, know too well their own security from the general inconveniences of life to be greatly subject to the gracious influence of benevolent persuasions; or to those inducements to a good action which operate with men whose conditions are common; otherwise the baron de Switten, must have enjoyed an influence with this Joseph sufficient to have given a better direction to his conduct with respect to Mozart. But the signal protection which the baron has always afforded to this respectable family will not permit his name to descend to posterity with less *eclat* than that of his father, so illustrious for his success in the noblest of the sciences.

It is lamentable that premature genius too rarely enjoys a long career: The acceleration of nature in the mental powers seems to hurry the progress of the animal oecomy, and to anticipate the regular close of temporal existence.

In the year 1791, Mozart, just after he had received the appointment of *Maitre de chapelle* of the church of St. Peter, and when he was only thirty-five years of age, paid the last tribute; and left the world at once to admire the brilliancy, and lament the shortness of his earthly sojournment.

Indefatigable, even to his death, he produced during the last few months of his life, his three great master pieces: *La Flutte Enchanté*, *La Clemence de Titus*, and a *requiem*, his last production. *La Flutte Enchanté*, was composed for one of the theatres at Vienna; and no dramatic *Olio* could ever boast a greater success. Every air struck the audience with a new and sweet surprize; and the *tout ensemble* was calculated to afford the deepest and most varied impressions. This piece had, in fact, so great a number of successive

representations that for a long time it was unnecessary to consult the opera-bill; which only announced a permanent novelty. And the airs selected from it and repeated throughout the empire, as well in the cottage as in the palace, and which the echoes have resounded in the most distant provinces, favoured the idea that Mozart had actually the design to enchant all Germa[n]y with his *Flutte Enchanté*.

*La Clemence de Titus* was requested by the states of Bohemia, for the coronation of Leopold. The composer began it in his carriage during his route to Prague, and finished it in eighteen days.

Some circumstances attending the composition of the piece which we have already mentioned as the last effort of his genius, are too interesting to be omitted. A short time before his death, a stranger came to him with the request that he would compose as speedily as possible, a *requiem* for a catholic prince, who, perceiving himself on the verge of the grave, wished, by the execution of such a piece, to soothe his mind, and familiarize it to the idea of his approaching dissolution. Mozart undertook the work; and the stranger deposited with him as a security, 400 ducats, though the sum demanded was only 200. The composer immediately began the work, and during its progress, felt his mind unusually raised and agitated. He became at length so infatuated with his *requiem* that he employed not only the day, but some hours of the night in its composition. One day, while he was conversing with Madame Mozart on the subject, he declared to her that he could not but be persuaded that it was for himself he was writing this piece. His wife distressed at her inability to dissipate so melancholy an impression, prevailed on him to give her the *score*. He afterwards appearing somewhat tranquillized, and more master of himself, she returned the *score* to him, and he soon relapsed into his former despondency. On the day of his death he asked for the *requiem*, which was accordingly brought to his bed: "Was I not right," said he, "when I declared that it was for myself I was composing this funeral piece?" And the tears trickled from his eyes. This production of a man impressed during its composition with a presentiment of his approaching death is *unique* in its kind, and contains passages which have frequently drawn tears from the performers.

Only one complaint escaped him during his malady: "I must quit life," said he, "precisely at the moment when I could enjoy it, free from care and inquietude; at the very time, when independent of sordid speculations, and at liberty to follow my own principles and inclinations, I should only have to write from the impulses of my own heart; and I am torn from my family just when in a situation to serve it."

Mozart at the time of his death was considerably involved in debt; but Vienna and Prague disputed the honour of providing for his widow and children; and M. Van Switten has been a father to them. Notwithstanding many vexatious events, he might, perhaps, have died solvent, had he been sufficiently oeconomical. But endowed with great sensibility, and an organization susceptible of all the softer passions, he from his infancy contracted the habit of resigning himself without reserve to those persons and things which at the moment interested his feelings.

The countenance of this great master did not indicate any thing uncommon. He was small of stature; and except his eyes, which were full of fire, there was nothing to announce superiority of talent. His air, unless when he was at the harpsichord, was that of an absent man. But when he was performing, his whole physiognomy became changed: a profound seriousness recalled and fixed his eyes; and his sentiments were expressed in every movement of his muscles. Never has a musician more successfully embraced the whole extent of his art, and shone with greater lustre in all its departments. His great operas, no less than his most simple songs; his learned symphonies as well as his airy dances; all carry the stamp of the richest imagination, the deepest sensibility, and the purest taste. All his works develop the originality of his genius; and imply a mind great and exalted; an imagination which strikes out for itself a new course. He therefore merits to be ranked with that small number of original geniusses, those *phenomena splendida*, who form an epoch in their art, by carrying it to perfection, or giving it an unknown career.

It is in the employment of wind instruments that Mozart displays his greatest powers. His melody is always simple, natural, and full of force; and expresses with precision the sentiments and individual situations of his personages. He wrote with extraordinary facility. *La Clemence de Titus* the reader will recollect cost him the study of but eighteen days; and his *requiem*, which is equal in length

to an opera, was produced in four weeks. It is also worthy remark that the overture to his *Don Giovanni* was not begun till the night before the piece was to be performed. At midnight, after having devoted the evening to amusement, he locked himself up in his study, and composed it in a few hours. His memory was wonderfully retentive, as we may judge from his copying by recollection the *miserere* at Rome. But a fact equally astonishing is that, soon discovering the eagerness of people to procure his works, and fearful that they might be pirated, it was his constant custom to transcribe from the *scores* of his sonatas only a part from one hand, and at the public performance to supply the other by memory.

He very early began to display that true dignity of an artist which renders him indifferent to the praises of those who are unqualified to judge. The commendations of the ignorant great he never considered as fame. His hearers, whether the wealthy or the titled, must have acquired some credit for their judgment, before he could be ambitious of their applause. Indeed he entertained so just a sense of scientific elevation and importance, that he would insist upon respect. And the least noise of idle babble, while he was at the instrument, excited a displeasure which he was too indignant to conceal. Once, to the honour of his feelings, he suddenly rose from his seat, and left his inattentive auditory to experience the keen, though silent reproach of insulted genius.

His mind was by no means unlettered: nor was it embellished with one science alone. He was master of several languages, and had made considerable progress in the mathematics. He was honest, mild, generous, full of frankness; and with his friends, had an air at once amiable, gay, and free from the least tincture of pedantry.

Far from viewing with envy the success of others, a weakness too closely interwoven in the general nature of man, he was always just to the talents of his fellow professors; and valued and respected merit wherever he found it: a clearer proof of which cannot be adduced than the following circumstance. At a concert, where a new piece composed by the celebrated Joseph Haydn was performed, a certain musician who never discovered any thing worthy of praise, except in his own productions, did not fail to criticise the music; exclaiming to Mozart "There now! there again! why that is not what I should have done." "No: neither should I" replied Mozart; "but do you know why? Because neither you nor I should have been able to conceive it."

Thus have I traced with a faithful though faint pencil, the prominent features of this eminent musician. And the picture of a mind so highly qualified to ornament and delight society; a mind rich in talent, cultivated by study, and recommended by a heart, amiable, liberal, and just, cannot fail to impress the reader with an adequate idea of the exalted merits of Mozart. Drawing his attention with sage indifference from the emptiness of superficial grandeur, and fixing his eye on real greatness, he will be filled with those sentiments of respect and admiration ever due to such rare and shining productions of nature.

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