



LOUIS SPOHR.

A MUSICAL GENIUS.



LOUIS SPOHR, the great composer and violinist, was born at Brunswick on the 25th of April, 1784.

His father and mother were both musical, though not by profession; the former, a physician, excelled as a flute player, while his mother was devoted to the piano and to singing.

Like so many eminent musicians, the young Spohr showed his talent at a very early age. When but four years old he would sing duets with his mother, at five he began the violin, and by the time he was six he could take part in a difficult trio. It was not long before he began to try his powers as a composer, and wrote several duets for the violin. His father had so strongly impressed on the boy the importance of accuracy, and of not leaving unfinished anything that

he began, allowing no alterations or corrections in his work, that care and decision became a habit, and the discipline of early years a life-long benefit.

His teachers at Brunswick, however, could not do much for the young prodigy; but he studied on his own account the scores of the great masters—especially Mozart; and thus gained a practical knowledge of the science of music from the most perfect models.

Spohr made his first public appearance at a school concert, where he played with so much fire and skill a concerto of his own composition, that he was requested to repeat it at one of the ducal concerts, and in this way the young Louis, then less than fourteen years old, was launched into public life, and shortly after, with a few letters of introduction in his pocket, set off to try his fortune in Hamburg.

Here, however, disappointment awaited him. Ham-

burg refused to be electrified, or even to give him a hearing; and he returned crestfallen, with his modest funds so nearly exhausted that he was forced to make the journey on foot.

Almost driven to despair, and unwilling to draw on the slender purse of his father, the young Louis formed the bold project of appealing directly to the Duke of Brunswick for means to continue his musical studies, and not without success, for the duke was so pleased with the boy's trustfulness and simple bearing that he gave him a post among the violins of the royal band, and eventually the means of obtaining lessons from Franz Eck, one of the leading violinists of the time, whom he was to accompany on his travels, receiving his instruction, while the duke paid half the travelling expenses, and a salary in addition.

Master and pupil set off for Russia in the spring of 1802—Spohr being by this time eighteen years of age; but although Eck was a first-rate violin player, he was but an indifferent master, and Spohr learnt more by hearing him play, and closely observing his method, than by any more direct instructions.

For the pupil it was, however, a time of great activity, for besides composing several concertos for the violin, he practised for ten hours daily—an amount of work which was only rendered possible by the great strength and health with which he was happily gifted.

A projected visit to Paris, undertaken some time after, on his own account, was most tragically interrupted by a loss irreparable to the young musician. His violin, his precious Guarnerius, the gift of an enthusiastic Russian admirer, and the very apple of his eye, was lost on the journey—stolen, together with his portmanteau, from the carriage, and never heard of again.

Poor Spohr returned heartbroken to Brunswick, and being presented by his ever-kind patron the duke with another, though, alas! less perfect instrument, he once more set out on his travels, this time through the principal cities of Germany.

Here his success was rapid and unmistakable, and his reputation at once established. It is interesting to know that at his Berlin concert he was assisted by Meyerbeer, then a youthful genius of thirteen, but as brilliant and gifted on the piano as was Spohr on the violin.

In the year 1805 the young musician, now established in fame and fortune, is equally successful in love, and at the age of twenty-one marries Dorette Scheidler, herself no mean musician, and a charming performer on the harp.

This marriage was a very happy one, Madame Spohr proving a true helpmate, not only in domestic, but in public life, sharing his labours and triumphs, and appearing with her husband at all his concerts, and accompanying his violin with her harp, for which two instruments he composed many charming duets.

It is pretty to read in Spohr's autobiography his artless pride in his wife's accomplishments, and the sensation invariably made by the "Artist Pair." Indeed an innocent vanity was most characteristic of Spohr, and crops up unconsciously but perpetually in

this same autobiography, which is very pleasant and amusing reading. At a later period, when his presence was eagerly sought at the most aristocratic and courtly réunions in London and elsewhere, he is careful to let us know that, however it may fare with other artists, the "Artist Pair" were invariably received as invited and honoured guests, and indeed that it was only upon these conditions, and as a "Pair," that he would accept any engagements.

The year 1808 was a time of stirring public events, and it was then that Napoleon held his celebrated congress at Erfurt, where a company of French actors performed nightly at the theatre before the great conqueror and a "pitful of kings."

Spohr was anxious to see something of these grand doings, and paid a visit to Erfurt, when, to his great disappointment, he found there was no admittance to the theatre except for the privileged few. Determined, however, not to be beaten, he was visited with a happy thought, and by some means he persuaded the horn player to allow him (Spohr) to take his place for one night in the orchestra. There was, unluckily, one drawback to this arrangement, namely, that the great violinist had never touched a horn in his life; but "where there's a will there's a way," and so taking a lesson from the friendly bandsman, he practised busily all day, in order to be ready for his part in the overture.

Behold our friend Spohr, no longer the fêted and honoured guest of the great, but the humble horn player; indeed—must we confess it?—the *second* horn player of a provincial band. With lips swollen and blackened by their unaccustomed labours, he takes his seat, when he is overwhelmed by the discovery that strict orders have been given that all the band should keep their faces to the stage, nor dare to cast a curious and sacrilegious eye upon the assembled potentes! This was indeed a blow, but Spohr was still equal to the occasion, for, taking from his pocket a little hand-mirror, he placed it on his music-desk, and when not absorbed in his new accomplishment, he was able to satisfy his curiosity with perfect ease. Like the "Lady of Shalott" he watched the shadows in his looking-glass—shadows of princes, shadows of kings, and Napoleon, the arch-shadow of all, so soon to fade into nothingness!

Spohr was now at the height of his fame as a violinist, and doing good work as a composer. While at Vienna he became acquainted with Beethoven; but the two men were so different in mind and temperament, that Spohr seems never to have been able to appreciate the genius of the greater master.

The critical faculty, indeed, which requires "a mind at leisure from itself," was almost entirely wanting in Spohr, and this is probably to be accounted for by the vanity which was his characteristic. In his eyes the music of Louis Spohr was all-important, and beyond that everything was somewhat vague.

An amusing and authentic story is told in illustration of this. A pupil of Spohr's paid, one day, a visit to his old master, who begged he would play something to him. The pupil sat down and played Beethoven's

sonata in E minor, with which Spohr appeared much struck, and when he had finished, observed, with an air of pleased surprise, "Pray, Mr. So-and-So, have you composed much more in that style?"

In 1820 he received an invitation from the Philharmonic Society, accepting which, he made his first appearance in England, and opened with a violin concerto of his own.

It is curious to note that at these concerts Spohr first succeeded in introducing the use of the conductor's bâton, the leader hitherto simply presiding at the piano and directing from thence.

At the farewell concert of the season, Madame Spohr made her last appearance as a harpist, being forced, in consequence of failing health, to give up that instrument.

In the winter of 1824 Spohr passed some time in Berlin, in pleasant intimacy with Mendelssohn and his family; but the following year he had the great misfortune to lose his wife, after a most happy union of eight-and-twenty years.

His second visit to England was a still greater triumph than the first, the Philharmonic Society giving an extra concert by the especial desire of the Queen and Prince Albert, at which the programme was composed almost exclusively of the works of Spohr.

His last appearance in this country was in 1853, to fulfil an engagement at the New Philharmonic concerts, when was produced his lovely symphony for two orchestras, and at the same time he also superintended the preparation of his opera, *Jessonda*, at Covent Garden.

From this time, however, Spohr's health and powers were on the decline, till in the year 1857 he was pensioned off by the Elector, though rather against his own wish, and shortly after had the misfortune to break his arm, which, of course, rendered him unable to play the violin, and probably this forced separation from his beloved instrument went far to hasten the end, for he died quietly at Cassel the next year, on

the 19th of October, 1859, in the seventy-sixth year of his age.

Spohr was a man of great industry and energy, and left behind him more than 200 compositions, including nine great symphonies, several overtures, concertos, a great mass of violin music, and many lovely songs, sacred and secular. He was also the author of a valuable manual, the "Violin School," which holds its place as a first-rate authority on violin-playing.

Among his best-known works in this country are the oratorio of the *Last Judgment*, his symphony for two orchestras, the *Weihe der Töne*, or "Consecration of Sound" (commonly known by the falsely translated title of the "Power of Sound"), and some of his violin music. Most popular of all is the exquisitely melodious "Barcarolle," lately given so perfectly at the Popular Concerts by Joachim, and frequently performed—alas! less perfectly—by almost every violin amateur.

Spohr had pre-eminently the gift of melody, and among his songs may be quoted "The Bird and the Maiden," as one of the best-known and the most tuneful.

In character, Spohr was remarkable throughout his life for a child-like purity and openness. Even his vanity had something so simple and harmless in it that one smiled, as at the open disguises of a child.

He was extremely independent and mindful of his own dignity, and rather silent in society, forming few close friendships, but remaining very faithful and loyal to those few.

He was the greatest violin executant of his day, and was assisted by the peculiar size and strength of his hand, which enabled him to stretch with facility the longest and most difficult chords.

He was also eminent as a conductor, owing to his fine ear, his feeling for time and rhythm, the fire and energy of his leading, and, not a little, by the dignity and grandeur of his person and manner, which at once commanded obedience and respect.

MINNA LOVELL.



MY JOHNNY.

My Johnny is a sailor,
And a-sailing he would go.
I said, "Oh, Johnny-lad, take me,"
But Johnny-lad said, "No."

So I stayed with the childer,
And the childer stayed with me;
There's little Sal, she's just turned five,
And Molly's nearly three;
And Johnny went aboard his ship,
And sailed away to sea.
I cried, "Dear lad, come quickly home,
Come quickly home to me"

The winter passed so slowly,
The summer came so sweet;
I watched and watched for Johnny,
And longed again to meet.

And still and still I'm watching—
I'm watching by the sea;
And little Sal and Molly, too,
They stand and watch by me;
And when we see him coming,
A happy day 'twill be—
The happiest, oh! the happiest
There e'er can dawn for me.

REA.