



FRAU DR. CLARA SCHUMANN.

A SHORT SKETCH OF HER LIFE.

BY THE COUNTESS A. VON BOTHMER.

FRAU DR. CLARA SCHUMANN, who is considered by many good judges to be the first pianist of the day, has been longer before the public than any other living artiste; and during the sixty-three years which have elapsed since her first appearance, as a child of nine, at Leipsic, in the year 1828, she has always met with thorough appreciation from the musical world.

Clara Wieck was born on the 13th of September, 1819, in the town of Leipsic, which has for so long been a great musical centre, and the resort of many well-known musicians and composers.

Her father was a well-known music teacher of great talent, but of a morose and gloomy disposition; and her mother, who was light-hearted and impatient, did not understand the nature of her husband, and this led to frequent quarrels, which ended in a complete separation and finally in a divorce, soon after which Frau Wieck married another teacher of music, whose name was Bargiel, and moved with him to Berlin.

These constant disagreements made the home life of the Wiecks most unhappy, and the childhood of Clara proved a very melancholy one, for from her earliest years she was brought up in the most sternly strict manner by her father, who was determined to crush at the outset of his little daughter's life any frivolous tendencies that she might have inherited from her mother.

When Clara was only five years old she began her musical studies, and even at that early age showed great talent, which pleased her father immensely, who a year later began a course of systematic teaching with her, which he pursued with the utmost strictness, and which, though it in later years bore excellent fruit, must have been a great trial to the poor child, who had to work her little aching fingers day after day at the uninteresting exercises devised by her stern father.

Herr Wieck was, however, in spite of his moroseness, a man of an affectionate nature, who had a great love for his children, and an honest interest in their welfare and happiness.

At nine years of age Clara had profited so much from her father's teaching that she was able to play correctly concert pieces by Mozart, Beethoven, and Hummel, and often in the evenings astonished and delighted her father's friends by her proficiency, who prophesied great things for the little girl. Finally, her father arranged that she should appear in public for the first time soon after her ninth birthday, in the year 1828.

The concert was given in the Merchants' Hall at Leipsic, and Clara played the Concerto in F minor by Chopin, and some variations by the same master on a theme taken from Mozart's "Don Giovanni"; but, unfortunately, Chopin was not appreciated then in Leipsic, and Clara did not receive the applause she deserved, although some people in the audience afterwards told her father that there was a great future for the child.

Only a few months later the celebrated Paganini visited Leipsic on one of his concert tours, and having heard through friends of the great musical talent of Herr Wieck's young daughter, he expressed a wish to hear her play.

Accordingly, Clara was taken to play before the great violinist, who was very much struck by her rendering of the difficult music which she performed, and by her wonderful *technique*; but what pleased him the most was the soul that she put into her music, and the originality which she showed.

At the end of the performance he remarked, "Dieses Kind wird eine glänzende Zukunft haben, und einst grosse Künstler in Schatten stellen," or "This child has a brilliant future before her, and will one day put great artistes in the shade."

This praise from Paganini gave great encouragement to Clara and to Herr Wieck, and she continued to work entirely under her father's training for several years, occasionally playing at small concerts in Leipsic and the neighbourhood, and thereby gaining the self-confidence necessary for a performer in public.

After three years of diligent painstaking study, under the strict supervision of her father, Herr Wieck determined to take his daughter on her first concert tour, as she had now become an accomplished musician, with a complete knowledge of her instrument, and power to speak with her soul in the beautiful tones which she produced.

One of the first towns visited by Herr Wieck and his daughter was Weimar, the centre, at that time, of the intellectual life in Germany; and here they became acquainted with Goethe, who was then quite an old man, but not too old to understand the spiritual poetical playing of Clara Wieck.

Clara played several times before him, and he was enraptured by her perfect rendering of the most difficult passages, and said that her music was to him the most beautiful poetry.

Goethe gave the Wiecks an introduction to the Court at Weimar and to the principal families in the town, so that they stayed a

considerable time there; and on their departure Goethe sent the young pianist a portrait of himself, with an inscription in his own handwriting, as a little remembrance, and a return for the great pleasure she had given him by her music.

This was the real beginning of Fräulein Wieck's public life, and from this time her career was one of continued success, and she speedily became acquainted with all the great musicians of the day, and amongst others with Spohr, who was greatly taken with her playing, and prophesied a great future for her.

Spohr's favourite pupil, Wilhelmine Baldewinn, also became acquainted with the young musician, and, like everyone else, was very fond of her, and helped her in many ways, on one occasion singing for her at one of her concerts.

Wilhelmine Baldewinn often spoke in after years of the lasting impression the young girl's playing had made on her, both by her *technique*, but even more by the poetry of her music.

Shortly after the visit to Weimar, Herr Wieck moved with his daughter to Paris, in order that she might study there, and have the advantages of that school of music; and here she became acquainted with Mendelssohn, Chopin, Meyerbeer, Raltbrenner Humboldt, and Madame Schöder-Devrient, and delighted them all by her playing.

Clara became a great pet with all these great musicians, who were one and all anxious to give the young girl a helping hand over the first difficulties of her trying profession.

Clara, girl-like, conceived a most enthusiastic friendship for Madame Schöder-Devrient, who was extremely kind to her, and returned her admiration by a steady friendship, and on one occasion helped the young pianist by singing at one of her concerts, an honour which made Clara at that time wild with delight.

In spite, however, of the praise and admiration which she received, her head was not turned, as her musical genius told her how far from perfect she still was, and she therefore spent her time in Paris most diligently, and while there studied thoroughly the works of Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, and Mendelssohn. But the hard work was diversified and made very happy by the intellectual circle in which she was living, and this was good for her brain and heart, both of which had been somewhat starved by her gloomy surroundings at home. The bright intellectual life in Paris, and the kindness shown to her by these great musicians, were like a glimpse of heaven, and also a

foretaste of what life in the not very far future might bring her; and the return home to Leipsic was a great trial. But constant work, and the love she felt for her art, cheered and helped her in her home life.

On the return to Leipsic, Clara began the thorough study of harmony, counterpoint, and composition, and made extremely rapid progress in these most interesting but difficult studies.

Her life was greatly cheered by the friendship of Mendelssohn, who had much affection for her, and who was able to be of great assistance to her in various ways, as well as helping her in her trials by his sympathy and good advice.

In the year 1835 he played with Fräulein Wieck and Moscheles at Leipsic in a triple concerto by Johann Sebastian Bach, and by this means brought her prominently before the public, with whom he was then an immense favourite.

After two years more of careful study, Herr Wieck took his daughter to Vienna on a concert tour, and here she took the impulsive Austrians by storm, and they literally raved about her. Poems were written in her honour, and everyone wished to become acquainted with her. The Empress offered her the post of Court pianist, and from highest to lowest there was only one subject of conversation—the spiritual playing of Fräulein Wieck, the most perfect pianist of the age.

Franz Listz, who was at Vienna at the time, was perfectly charmed by her playing, which, he said, contained such marvellous poetry, power, and individuality, her touch being quite free from the affectations and mannerisms which so often spoil the greatest artists.

Clara had meantime become acquainted with the young composer, Robert Schumann, and the friendship which they conceived for each other soon ripened into a deep and lasting love. And now began the greatest joys and trials of her life, for although Robert Schumann was in every way a suitable husband for her, and although the young people loved each other most truly, Herr Wieck refused his consent, and nothing his daughter could do or say shook his fixed resolve in the least degree.

His own unhappy married life had darkened a mind naturally gloomy, and he was determined that his daughter should never marry and run the risk of having a life as miserable as his own had been.

Clara, who was a most dutiful daughter, when she found that her prayers were of no avail, worked on with a heavy heart, hoping that time might soften her father's heart, and that he would yield when he saw the sorrow his refusal to sanction her marriage was causing her.

But patience and waiting were of no avail, for Herr Wieck continued determined that his daughter should remain unmarried, and to all her appeals he only told her that her art was the best husband for her, and that any other would only bring her misery.

This state of things went on for a long time, as Clara could not bear to think of disobeying her father, who, in spite of his sternness, she knew had a deep affection for her. But at last her patience wearied, and she yielded to the wishes of her lover. In the year 1840, one morning, she went with Robert Schumann to the church of Schönefeld, in the neighbourhood of Leipsic, and was there married to the man whom she so faithfully loved by the parish priest.

They then returned to Leipsic and confessed what they had done to Herr Wieck, who was terribly angry, and refused to have anything more to do with them; and in spite of their begging him most humbly to pardon them, he remained obdurate, and said he hoped never to see them again.

This quarrel was never healed, to the great sorrow of Frau Schumann, who did everything in her power to bring about a reconciliation.

The marriage proved ideally happy during the first years, for the husband's and wife's natures perfectly harmonised, and were able to produce the most perfect music in their home life.

Frau Schumann's cheerful spiritual nature was the greatest help to her husband in his occasional fits of depression, and his love and admiration for her were unbounded.

From their first acquaintance she had thoroughly understood his marvellous compositions, which at that time had not been properly known or appreciated by the public; and her rendering of them was a perfect revelation even to him, for she produced his very soul and thoughts in her exquisite playing.

His love for her seemed to give him fresh power, and the music which he composed after his marriage is more perfect and of a deeper character than that which he produced before he met his wife.

During the early part of her married life, Frau Schumann studied composition very diligently, and produced some excellent work, amongst other pieces some romances for the pianoforte and a trio and concerto for orchestra.

Ten years after their marriage, in the year 1850, Robert Schumann was appointed the town Concertmeister for Düsseldorf, a most excellent post, and they accordingly moved there. But alas! their unhappiness began here, for soon after receiving this appointment Herr Schumann fell ill from failure of nerve and brain-power—the fatal illness which finally destroyed his splendid intellect.

During the first trying years of her husband's illness, Frau Schumann was unremitting in her efforts to help him, and save him from all mental worry and anxiety. But it was in vain, and it was finally found necessary to put him under partial restraint.

His brave wife, however, remained in his immediate neighbourhood, and constantly visited him, and was able to cheer him at times when his brain was not too clouded by his malady. In the year 1854 he died, a happy release for him, and almost immediately afterwards Frau Schumann left Düsseldorf, and went with her children to Berlin, where her mother was at that time living.

Her means were at this time very small, owing to the large inroads her husband's sad illness had made on her purse, and she therefore determined to make a concert tour.

She was engaged to play in most of the principal towns in Germany during the winter, and had the melancholy satisfaction of bringing her husband's beautiful music more before the public, and by her exquisite rendering of it ensured its popularity for that and succeeding generations; and since that time Robert Schumann's music has been more understood, admired, and played than that of almost any other master.

Frau Schumann's public life was one continued success both in England and Germany, and she soon became the most admired pianist of her day and school, and to the present time has lost none of her well-earned popularity.

In 1878 she moved to Frankfurt again, where she had obtained the post of head teacher in Dr. Hoch's Conservatorium, and it was here that I first had the great pleasure of hearing her play.

She possesses a marvellous faculty in imparting her knowledge to her pupils, and is perhaps the most successful teacher of her day.

Her method is extremely strict, and after hearing pupils play, if they prove to have sufficient talent, she always sends them to be drilled thoroughly as regards *technique* to one of her unmarried daughters, who live with

her, and help their mother in her arduous duties.

Until the necessary *technique* is attained Frau Schumann herself gives the pupil no lessons, but is present from time to time to see what progress is made.

Her best pupils are Fräulein Janotha, Mr. Leonard Borwick, and Miss Fanny Davies, all of whom are well known to the British public, and two of whom are of English birth.

She is a most kind and judicious friend to her pupils while they are with her, and takes a great interest in their *comfort and welfare*, and after they leave her guidance to go out into the great world, continues to take interest in their progress, and is always delighted to welcome them at her house if they are passing through Frankfurt, and to hear them play and give them the benefit of her criticism.

Frau Schumann is very much loved and respected in Frankfurt, and the first time I heard her play there she received a perfect ovation from the crowded house on her appearance, and the orchestra gave a tattoo in her honour.

It was at one of the celebrated Museum concerts, to which it is almost impossible for a stranger to get tickets, as nearly all are subscribed for yearly by the old Frankfurt families.

The dear old lady looked charming with her calm, intellectual face, and was dressed in a grey silk trimmed with black lace, and her quiet, dignified manner was perfect.

I was sitting not very far from her daughters, and it was very pretty to see their pride and delight in their mother's music, and in the enthusiastic reception which she received.

While she was playing her husband's music she had a most rapt, beautiful expression, as if her spirit was with his, and it was plain to see that her greatest happiness lies still in giving his beautiful thoughts in their proper interpretation to the world.

Frau Schumann is in most comfortable circumstances, and has a pleasant circle of musical and other friends, and every musical celebrity who visits Frankfurt never fails to call and pay a tribute of respect to the great pianist, and always receives a hearty welcome from her, although she objects to being introduced to strangers who only wish to know her because of her celebrity.

She leads a very quiet, happy, family life with her two daughters in her pretty home—32 Mylinsstrasse—and is able to see a great deal of her married daughter, Frau Sommerhoff, who lives quite close to her mother, and who is extremely well off, and is a very charming and interesting companion.

Every Christmas Frau Schumann gives a large evening entertainment, to which she invites all her pupils and the professors of the Hoch Conservatorium, and she certainly has the power of winning the love as well as the respect of her pupils, who are one and all devoted to her.

She has certainly had a hard-working and in many respects a sad life, in spite of her brilliant triumphs; but the memory of the few years of perfect happiness in her married life has cheered her in all her trials, and has made the sad years, when the light had fled from her husband's brain, only a sad memory; for now the happy past remains to her, and she only thinks of him as he was in those first years.

She is wonderfully well for her age, and her only complaint is rheumatism, which occasionally is very severe, and prevents her playing either in public or private.

It is to be hoped that she may be spared for many years to come to delight the world with her music, and to train future musicians, who, though they may never equal her, will be able to transmit to future generations some of the poetry of her playing, for she is without doubt the greatest musical poet of the age.