

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH.

By ELEONORE D'ESTERRE-KEELING.

In the work of every musician something of his character is revealed. As we listen to the glorious symphonies or sonatas of Beethoven we feel the pulsings of that great heart which yearned for a sympathy it never gained.

As Mozart's graceful melodies strike our ears with infinite tenderness we seem conscious of the presence of the kindly, courteous Viennese.

Haydn says to us, and repeats it over and over again:—"How happy I am. How gay is the world. Let us be merry together."

Händel and Bach point to Heaven and cry, "God is good!" And yet how differently these two utter the cry.

To Händel, who travelled across foreign countries, and visited many courts, God was a King, and he praised Him with right royal magnificence. To Bach, in his obscure German town, far from pomp or worldliness, God was a Spirit, to be worshipped in spirit and in truth.

If we look into the circumstances of Bach's childhood, and consider the nature of his surroundings, it will become clearer to us how this thing came to be.

The beautiful province of Thuringia is bordered on its northern side by the Hartz Mountains, the home of German fairy-tale and legend; its former capital is a small unimportant town, which is usually overlooked by the casual tourist. Shyly it hides itself among the hills and forests, but even the passing traveller, speeding towards Leipzig and Dresden is struck by the massive fortress which stands above it on the crest of a mountain peak, the steep ascent to which is almost hidden by a dense mass of foliage. This town is Eisenach, the birthplace of Sebastian Bach, and the fortress is the famous Wartburg.

The Wartburg was built with incredible speed, between the years 1060-69, when a terrible famine had laid waste the land and the men of Eisenach were thankful to labour in return for bread for themselves and their starving families. Till 1440 the Landgraves of Thuringia resided there, and during the reign of Landgrave Hermann, about 1207, the Wartburg was the scene of the famous Sängerkrieg or Minstrel War, a contest of song between some of the most renowned of the Minnesänger, among them being Walther von der Vogelweide, Wolfram von Eschenbach and Heinrich von Ofterdingen. These Minnesänger laid the foundation of Germany's musical greatness. Not only did they write poems, but each man set his words to music, and sang his song to his own accompaniment, played on harp or violin. The theme of all these songs, as their name, Minne, implied, was love, but it was love in the purest and most

ideal sense. The Landgrave Hermann was succeeded by his son, Ludwig, husband of the holy Elisabeth, whose beautiful life has been extolled in history and legend. This gracious princess used to visit the poor and sick in the little town of Eisenach, and she founded there the St. Anna's Hospital, which afterwards sheltered her from her enemies when, her husband having died on his way to Otranto, whither he had gone to join the Crusaders, she was driven by his relations from her rightful home. It was during her lifetime, but after she

among these children were some who bore the name of Bach. There were many of them, and all, or nearly all, were musical. One who was born about 1550 at Wechmar, not far from Eisenach, was called Veit Bach. He became a miller and baker, and in the intervals between grinding his corn and baking his bread, good Veit used to play on a peculiar kind of instrument which somewhat resembled a guitar. Veit's son Hans turned his back on the mill and became a musician, travelling about the country and fiddling at

weddings, christenings, and the like festivities. He is known in the annals of the Bach family as "Hans der Spielmann" (Hans the player). He had three sons, the eldest of whom, Johann, became the first organist among them. The second son, Christoph, had a greater destiny; he was to be the grandfather of Sebastian.

By this time the whole province of Thuringia was becoming well peopled with Bachs, and by degrees they came to occupy all the principal positions in the various neighbouring towns. Erfurt, Eisenach, and Arnstadt were their chief centres, and all the branches of the family used to meet at one or other of these three places for certain festival occasions, such as Christmas, Easter or Whitsuntide. To all these Bachs music was a sacred possession, to be cherished and fostered for itself alone, regardless of any material benefit that might accrue from its practice. When a man who had filled the post of organist, choirmaster, or town musician grew old, and died or retired, it was usual for his successor to marry his daughter. To this rule the Bachs strictly adhered, with the result that bride and bridegroom were frequently of the same family, though the cousinship was often distant. The father

of Sebastian Bach, Johann Ambrosius, was an exception; he did not marry a cousin, but chose for his wife, Elisabeth Lämmerhirt, the daughter of a furrier at Erfurt. But though Elisabeth was not herself a Bach, her family had already been connected with the Bach family, for Johann, the great-uncle of her husband, who has been mentioned as the first organist among them, had married Hedwig Lämmerhirt, probably a great-aunt of Elisabeth's.

It seems strange that nothing but the name should be known of the mother of Sebastian Bach; his numerous biographers have taken infinite pains to trace out his family on the father's side through a bewildering number of generations, but even the best of them, Spitta, is content to mention merely the name of his mother, and tells us nothing about her character or tastes.

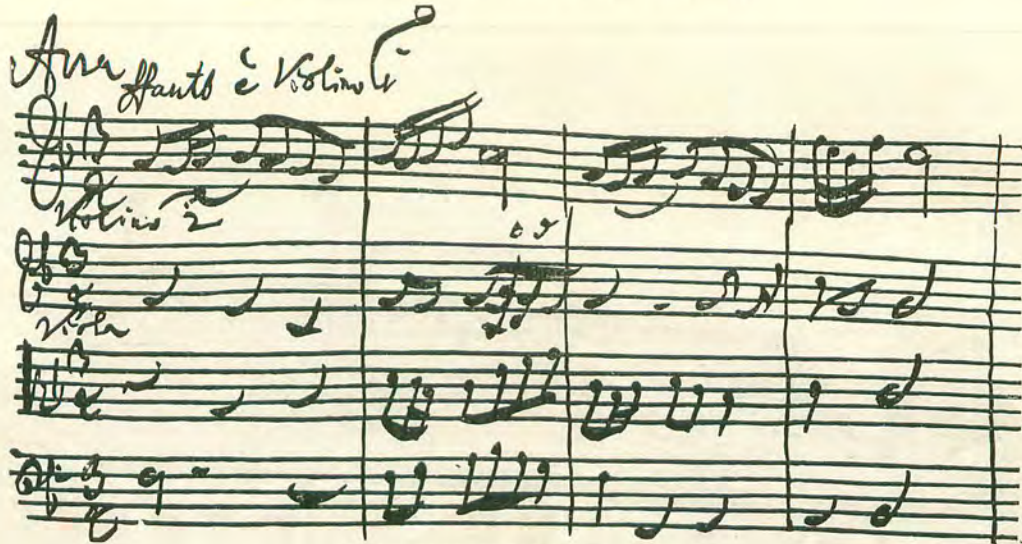
Johann Ambrosius and Elisabeth Bach had



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had retired to the convent in which she ended her days, that Martin Luther found a refuge from his pursuers in the friendly Wartburg. The tree is still shown about fourteen miles from Eisenach, beneath which, at midnight on May 4th, 1521, the reformer was seized by followers of the Elector of Saxony, who had directions to carry him off and hide him in the fortress where he spent ten months, disguised as "Yunker George." Here he wrote a great part of his translation of the Bible, and the room in which he sat is still pointed out to visitors, though the table at which he worked has had to be replaced by a new one, the original having been wholly whittled away by people anxious to obtain relics of his presence.

Years passed by. Life was uneventful in the little Thuringian town where children were born, grew up and died, without apparent influence on the history of the world. But



A FEW BARS OF BACH'S MS. MUSIC.

five children, the youngest of whom, our great Sebastian, was born on March 21st, 1685. They lived in a comfortable two-storeyed house at Eisenach, and the father rejoiced in the high-sounding title of *Hof und Rath's Musikus* (musician to the court and town council of Eisenach).

Hard by lived Sebastian's uncle, Johann Christoph, the organist of Eisenach, a man whose genius must have had considerable influence on the impressionable nature of his little nephew. At the neighbouring town of Arnstadt lived another uncle, Michael Bach, also an excellent organist and maker of clavichords and violins. The daughter of this uncle afterwards became Sebastian's wife.

Before he was ten years old the little Sebastian had lost both father and mother, and was taken to live with his elder brother,

Johann Christoph, who was organist at Ohrdruf. This brother was already a married man, and, though only twenty-four years old, had the cares of a growing family pressing upon him. Some excuse must therefore be made for him if his treatment of his little brother was somewhat harsh and unsympathetic. Johann Christoph was a pedant; he doled out music to the greedy Sebastian with, as he thought, a prudent discretion, but this was just what Sebastian could least endure. A book of manuscript music, containing copies of the works of the best composers, was kept in a locked book-case, and the boy longed with an ever-increasing longing to possess it. A trellis wood-work alone separated him from the coveted treasure, and, at length, after much manipulation, the eager little student succeeded in working the book

through the narrow openings. In his own small attic, by the light of the moon, he copied it all out; but, just as he had finished his self-imposed task, he was discovered, and the work of six months was confiscated by the relentless Christoph.

Soon afterwards it became necessary for Sebastian to leave his brother's house, and he was taken as scholar at the St. Michael's School at Lüneburg. He had excellent musical training there, was taught Latin, and had access to an unlimited supply of the best music. At the age of eighteen he was appointed court musician at Weimar, and from there he went as organist to Arnstadt. Here, however, he had little success; his soaring spirit would not let him rest content in the old grooves, and when, in 1705, he went on foot to Lübeck to hear the great organist



BACH'S INTRODUCTION TO FREDERICK THE GREAT AT POTSDAM.



BACH'S BIRTHPLACE.

Buxtehude, and, lost in the wonder of this music, outstayed his holiday by several months, dissatisfaction was very openly expressed. Soon, however, he obtained a better engagement, as organist at Mühlhausen, and now he thought he was in a position to marry. The wife he had chosen was his cousin, Maria Barbara, and the following is the quaint entry of the marriage in the church register:—

“On October 17, 1707, the respectable Herr Johann Sebastian Bach, a bachelor, and organist to the church of St. Blasius at Mühlhausen, the surviving lawful son of the late most respectable Herr Ambrosius Bach, the famous town organist and musician of Eisenach, was married to the virtuous maiden, Maria Barbara Bach, the youngest surviving daughter of the late very respectable and famous artist, Herr Johann Michael Bach, organist at Gehren; here in our house of God, by the favour of our gracious ruler, after their banns had been read in Arnstadt.”*

After staying one year at Mühlhausen, Sebastian and his wife moved to Weimar, where he was now appointed organist of the Castle chapel. There he remained for several years, and there he composed some of his finest cantatas. But in 1717 he was again on the wing. The Prince of Köthen, who was a passionate lover of music, offered such advantageous terms to the Weimar organist that an arrangement was speedily made, and the Bach family removed to Köthen. Three years later the Prince, accompanied by Sebastian, paid a visit to Carlsbad. It was a sad visit for the musician, for on returning to his home he found

that his wife, the good and faithful Maria Barbara, had died during his absence and was already laid to rest in the green churchyard. She left seven children, the eldest two of whom became famous musicians. After a year and a half of widowhood, Sebastian Bach married again. He was only thirty-six, and a houseful of unruly boys must have been hard to manage without a mother's help. His choice now fell on Anna Magdalena, the twenty-one year old daughter of a musician named Wülkens. During his stay at Köthen, Bach composed a number of instrumental pieces for solo and duet, amongst them being his *Inventions* and the first part of his *Wohltemperirte Clavier*, that book of Preludes and Fugues which has delighted musicians from his day to ours.

Shortly after his second marriage Bach moved to Leipzig, where he had been appointed Cantor (Precentor) at the Thomasschule, and there he remained for the rest of his life. His work was unceasing. Thirteen more children were added to Maria Barbara's seven, so that at the end there should have been twenty of them had they all lived!

All of them were more or less musical, and Frau Anna Magdalena was an excellent singer.

During this Leipzig period the two glorious *Passion Musics*, according to St. John and according to St. Matthew, were composed. The second of these is much the finer; it was composed expressly for St. Thomas's Church, in which there were two organs, and for the musical service in which Bach was responsible.

The words are taken partly from the 26th and 27th chapters of St. Matthew's Gospel, and partly from hymns by Picander. The instrumental parts are for two organs and a

double orchestra, but no brass instruments or drums were used, as these were considered out of keeping with the sacredness of the subject.

The first performance of this wonderful music was given on Good Friday, 1729, the sermon being preached between the two parts. It was received with respectful attention, but Bach was not encouraged to repeat it. Next day it was consigned to a cupboard in which it remained for one hundred years; then it was found by Mendelssohn, who persuaded the Berlin Academy to give it a hearing. On the 1st March, 1829, the *Passion Music* once more was heard. The master had long lain in his quiet, unknown grave, somewhere in the cemetery at Leipzig, but the seed he had sown had borne good fruit. People no longer regarded his music as eccentric and far-fetched, but listened, entranced by its beauty and power.

To the efforts of Mendelssohn and Schumann the Bach-Renaissance, which began with that performance of the *Passion Music*, is due. Since then, every musical society in the world has performed the works of the great Leipzig Cantor, who composed, not for fame or glory, but for love of God and of the art through which he hoped to serve Him best.

Sebastian Bach lived long enough to see several of his sons in prominent positions. The eldest, Wilhelm Friedemann, should have had a splendid career; he had immense talent, but through the irregularities of his life, he destroyed his prospects and his powers.

The second son, Carl Philip Emanuel, won a distinguished position at the Court of Frederick the Great. In the year 1747 his royal master desired him to invite his father to Potsdam, and one evening, when the king,

* Spitta's *Life of Bach*. Translated by Clara Bell and J. Fuller-Maitland.

surrounded by his musicians and courtiers, was taking part in a musical performance, the list of visitors just arrived was handed to him. Looking quickly through it, his Majesty exclaimed, "Gentlemen, old Bach has come!" and, laying down his flute, he went himself to meet his honoured guest.

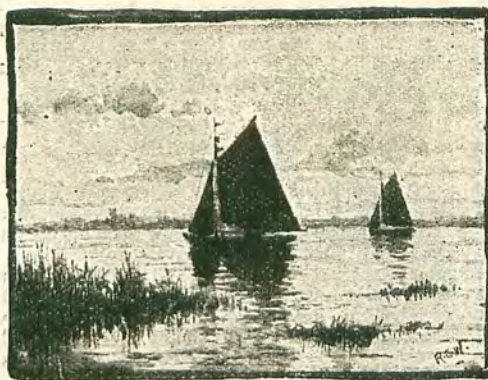
"Old Bach" was not given time to change his dress, but just as he was, he was led to the king, who conducted him into a large hall where there were seven new pianofortes by Silbermann. The piano at this time was a very new invention, and Sebastian was not much accustomed to it; the clavichord was the

instrument on which he played all those of his compositions which we now perform on the piano. The king made him try all his new pianos, and was delighted with the wonderful fugues improvised by the old master on subjects given him by his hearers. Next day Frederick accepted Bach's invitation to come and listen to his unrivalled performance on the organ, and then the old man returned to his home in Leipzig, flattered and pleased by the enthusiasm of his reception at the great king's court. Soon afterwards he became blind, and on June 28th, 1750, he died.

A monument has been erected to Sebastian

Bach at Eisenach, beneath the shadow of the great Wartburg towards which his childish eyes must often have been raised in affection and awe; but his best monument is unveiled when, with full orchestra and chorus, the conductor lifts his bâton to unfold the beauties of the *Passion Music* according to St. Matthew. Listening to such music as this one is reminded of the words of Thomas Carlyle:—

"Who can express the effect music has on us? A kind of inarticulate, unfathomable speech, which leads us to the edge of the infinite, and lets us for moments gaze into that!"



DEAF PEOPLE, AND HOW TO HELP THEM.

AN interesting paper appeared lately in this magazine on the subject of the small kindnesses which it is possible for girls to show to the deaf. It has struck me that, as I am one of these unfortunately afflicted people, I might perhaps be allowed to supplement the above-mentioned article by suggesting a very much needed help which most girls have it in their power to render if they care to do so.

Many, if not most of the Board Schools give lessons in lip-reading to deaf and dumb children, but there are many deaf people who have become so late in life, and who are not dumb, but are too old to enter the Board Schools, and just too well off to wish to do so, and yet who are unable to afford more than a few lessons from a competent lip-reading teacher, for as there are but few really good instructors in lip-reading, the terms for learning the art in private are necessarily high. It would be a very great boon if those girls who are longing to help someone and yet have no money or any other means of doing so except leisure, would seek out the deaf residing near them—often it may be of their own rank in life—and give a certain definite time once or twice a week, or even oftener, to practice lip-reading with them.

The art of learning to read words from the lips of another is very difficult to most people and needs constant practice, and this in many cases cannot be given by relations for want of time and other reasons; but when it is once acquired it is a wonderful help and blessing to those who cannot hear. If girls only knew how painful and how irritating it is to feel one's-self cut off from all conversation and intercourse with others, and to have to wait patiently (or impatiently) to be told every little thing that is arranged, and then only to glean the information with consciousness of worry to other people, they would surely be really anxious to help the deaf by any means in their power.

No outlay of money is needed, nor is a special knowledge of lip-reading at all necessary. All that is required is a large stock of sympathy

and patience, and the art of speaking slowly and distinctly. Lip-reading is really, strange as it may appear, the art of reading sounds, and the theory on which the whole idea is founded is simply that every different sound expressed by the human mouth (including the lips, the teeth, and the tongue), must necessarily take its own special shape on the lips in speaking. It is best to begin either with the days of the week, month, etc., or by reading aloud some easy book, speaking each syllable very clearly and slowly, but taking great care to speak quite naturally also and not to distort the words or lips. Three or four, or five or six words (sometimes even a whole short sentence) are often more easily understood than one or two, because the key word of the sentence (that which gives the clue to the meaning of the rest), is more easily caught in a sentence. The learner generally has to guess small words from the general sense of what she makes out, for small words are less easy than long ones, having but slight distinctive form, though there are exceptions to this rule, the names of places and people being usually difficult to read, and words containing the letter k are specially hard, this letter when contained in a word, not by itself, being very little seen upon the lips. Great patience is needed, lip-reading being very difficult and exhausting at first, but the art will nearly always be gained more or less in the end, if only pupil and teacher persevere. It is sometimes helpful to get the learner to notice her own lips in a hand-glass.

It must be remembered that the sounds and not the spelling of words is what must be learnt, much as in shorthand.

Totally deaf people nearly always dislike speaking much themselves, because, especially in the case of those who have once been used to hearing, it is most perplexing and annoying never to hear the sound of their own voices. They must, however, be encouraged to talk, or they may not improbably lose this faculty also, and lip-reading is a real help here, as the learner must repeat words and sentences after

her teacher to make sure that she has caught them rightly.

No knowledge of the art of lip-reading is really necessary for any girl who practices with a deaf person who has already had a few lessons from a competent teacher; she really only needs a thorough grasp of the fact that she is helping the deaf person to see sounds on the lips, the shape and form as it were of the words and syllables she utters, naturally and easily, though slowly spoken. Further knowledge is indeed somewhat apt to confuse the helper, leading her to distort and exaggerate the sounds, but it may be a help to observe that certain sounds are divided into throat or voice and breath sounds; thus th in thine is a throat sound, and the tongue can be seen to protrude between the teeth in making it, while th in think is a breath sound, and the tongue, though still seen, comes less forward. Other breath sounds are made by sharp consonants, such as f, where the teeth close on the lower lip, and p which is practically a puff of breath or air. H is of course merely an aspiration of the breath.

In vowel sounds the oo in food shows rounded lips, whilst in foot, though the sound and shape is the same, it is much shorter and quicker. There are, of course, many other sounds to be learnt, and to any who may desire it the writer would be glad to send further information on receipt of a stamped addressed envelope.

But there are by no means so many sounds to be learnt as might be thought, for many words are made up of the same sounds in different combination. One great difficulty indeed is to distinguish between different similar sounds, as e.g., to, you, do, but the general meaning of the sentence helps here, and it is not wise to harp too much on such words. The drift of the sentence is the best guide.

The office of lip-reading practiser is not perhaps an easy one, but any one who undertakes it with a fairly intelligent pupil will be amply rewarded by her gratitude and progress.

ALFREY PORTER.

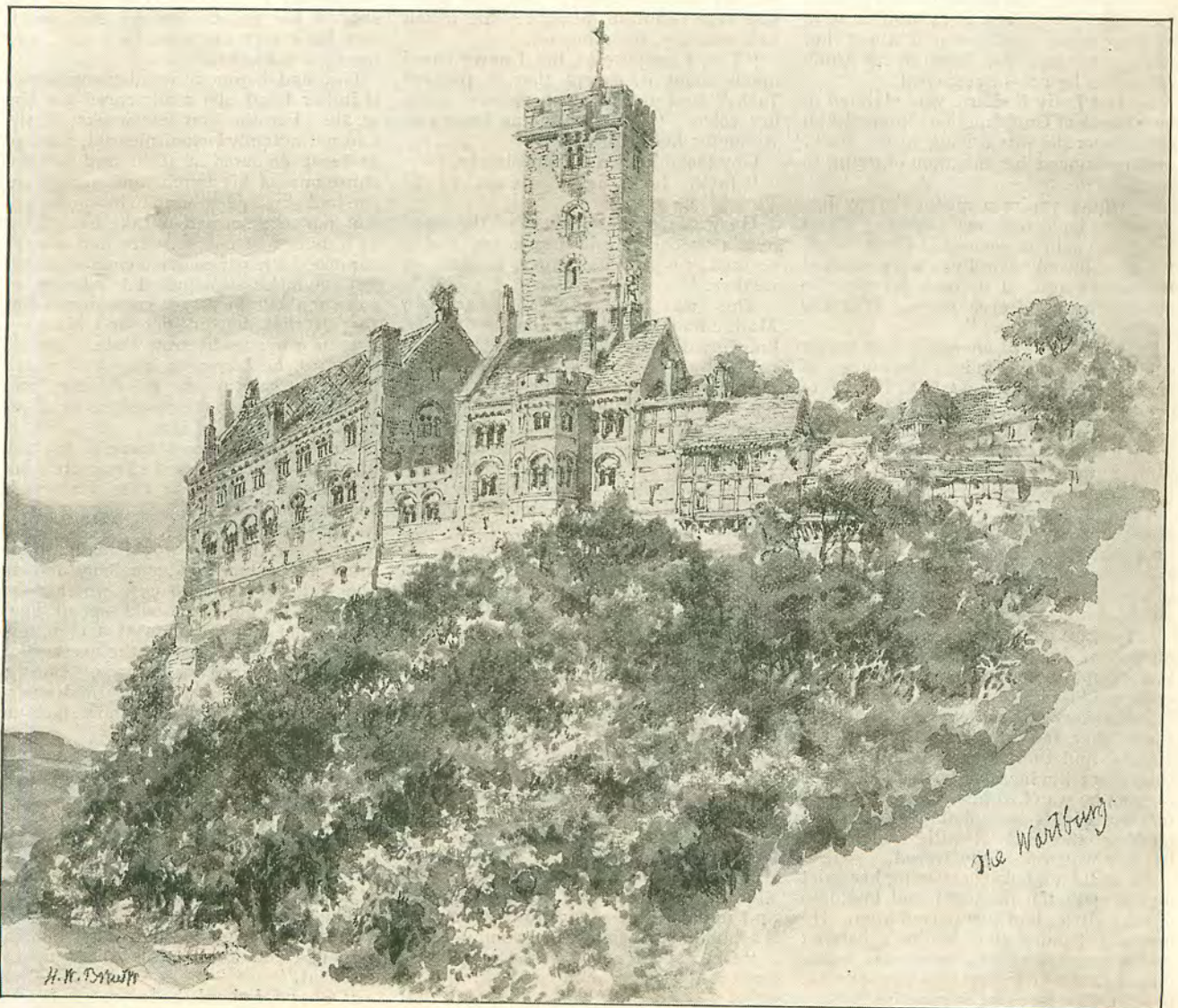


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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]

THE WARTBURG.



"The scene of the famous Sangerkrieg or Minstrel War, a contest of song between some of the most renowned of the Minnesanger. These Minnesanger laid the foundation of Germany's musical greatness." (See p. 248.)
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