$1.00 per Year NOVEMBER, 1911 Price, 10 Cents

The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Founded by EDWARD C. HEGELER.

ST. VERONICA. By Schongauer.
(See pages 650 ff.)

The Open Court Publishing Company
CHICAGO

LONDON: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd.

Per copy, 10 cents (sixpence). Yearly, $1.00 (in the U.P.U., 5s. 6d.).

Entered as Second-Class Matter March 26, 1897, at the Post Office at Chicago, Ill. under Act of March 3, 1879.

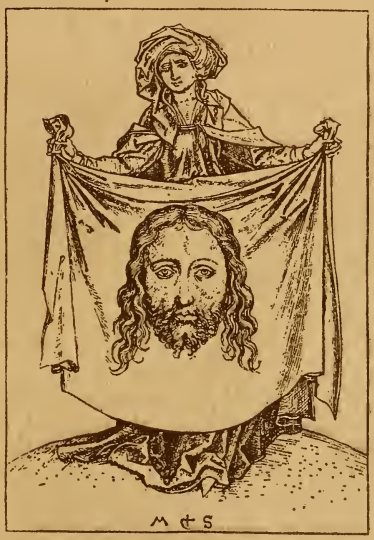
$1.00 per Year NOVEMBER, 1911 Price, 10 Cents

The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Founded by EDWARD C. HEGELER.



ST. VERONICA. By Schongauer.
(See pages 650 ff.)

The Open Court Publishing Company
CHICAGO

LONDON: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd.

Per copy, 10 cents (sixpence). Yearly, $1.00 (in the U.P.U., 5s. 6d.).

Entered as Second-Class Matter March 26, 1897, at the Post Office at Chicago, Ill. under Act of March 3, 1879.

VOL. XXV. (No. 11.) NOVEMBER, 1911. NO. 666

CONTENTS:

VERONICA. BY EUSTACHE LE SUEUR (1617-1655).

Frontispiece to The Open Court.

THE OPEN COURT

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea.

VOL. XXV. (No. 11.) NOVEMBER, 1911. NO. 666

BEETHOVEN'S CHARACTER AND DESTINY.[1]

BY BARON VON DER PFORDTEN.

ON December 17, 1770, at Bonn on the Rhine, Ludwig van Beethoven was baptized, probably therefore he was born a day or two earlier. Only by some happy accident can we reach certainty on this point, and until such a time his baptismal day must serve also as birthday.

If the environment in which a man grows up, and especially the atmosphere of his parent's home, is of supreme importance in determining the character of every man, this factor must be especially worthy of consideration in the case of artists and musicians. In this respect we find extraordinary contrasts among the various masters of music.

Mozart's childhood and youth stand out again and again in enviable brilliancy. He had the unspeakable good fortune to have had an ideal father. Though later investigations may correct some particular features in the picture of Leopold Mozart, it will always remain in large outlines as we have become acquainted with it through Otto Jahn's presentation. Here was a man worthy of a great son fulfilling his parental duties wisely and faithfully. Wolfgang could look up with reverence, gratitude and confidence to his father as his best friend, the guide and teacher of his boyhood, the guardian and stimulator of his genius. Nothing is more refreshing than to observe this intimate communion between father and son. To be sure Leopold Mozart was not in the least a genius. Genius is not an essential in the father of a great artist. We may even admit that he was not capable of completely comprehending the genius of his son. This again is not necessary for the relation be-

[1] Translated from the German by Lydia G. Robinson.

tween them. But he was through and through a character of high principles, a complete man, a proficient musician and a gentleman of culture. He felt very seriously his responsibility toward his highly gifted children; he had a proper respect for art and wholesome steadfast views with regard to duty and a well regulated conduct of life. If all this often extended to trivialities, what did it matter? Wolfgang could easily avoid them. Thus we have the unusual experience of knowing that the greatness of the son was vouched for by the uprightness of his father. It was not without warrant that he used often to say. "Next after the good Lord comes Papa." This was not merely a childish manner of speech, but it was an expression of the most genuine childlike piety.

Such a father as this would we fain desire for each one of our favorite masters, and for Beethoven first of all. But Beethoven's father was a sorry contrast to Leopold Mozart. By no means untalented as a musician, and not a bad man in any sense, he was nevertheless weak and unable to manage his own business affairs and those of his family in a suitable way, and was altogether incapable of educating his son Ludwig as a child or as an artist.

The obstinacy, stubbornness and hot temper of the father became disastrous for the son, as we shall see. There are certain characteristics which appear dangerous just because under certain circumstances they can resemble the virtues of which they are but caricatures. Such are energy, pride, strength of will, independence and freedom. We may well imagine that young Beethoven was obliged to see in his father a caricature instead of an ideal; indeed the wretched scandal which the drunkard finally aroused was not needed to fill the son's cup of misery.

Less important is the fact that Beethoven's bringing up was greatly interrupted; and yet we cannot say that he lacked artistic instruction and incentive. Even his needy circumstances were not the worst feature. Much more does the peculiar tragedy of this son appear in the fact that he could not look up to his father, as Mozart could, with love and veneration. If we try to realize the situation we can conceive what this fact means and how great was his loss.

But might it be possible that he did not feel this deprivation so deeply and bitterly, or that he received some other compensation for his loss as far as that might be possible?

His mother was a good woman but rather insignificant. At her death in 1787 he sadly mourned her as his best friend. We can realize from this fact how unfortunate he must have considered himself in not having his father for his best friend. But he did

not stand alone; he had intercourse with the best families and an advantageous friendship with noble men and women. From this circle of friends we have received a very significant phrase. "The dear, low-voiced man," Beethoven was called. This may well surprise us since it does not at all correspond to the idea of him to which we have become accustomed. There is no doubt but that he altered greatly in the course of his life. He was not always so fearfully intense and violent, so unapproachably distant and reserved, so dramatically passionate; at least his friends could not have considered these qualities as characteristic of him. "Dear" and "low-voiced"—we must not forget these epithets. Therefore he must surely have been deeply susceptible to kindness and love, to tenderness and devotion, to gentleness and peace—and as surely in need of all that his father did not possess and could not offer him.

I deem it of decided importance that we should remain distinctly conscious of this twofold character of Beethoven in order to be able to estimate his future course both as a man and an artist. From his early years we can trace this contrast in his character and life, and through his entire life and work we shall observe the increase and sharper delineation of this antithesis.

This picture is indeed far different from that of the carefully guided, happily encouraged development of Mozart. Life for Beethoven began, ran its course and ended *dramatically*. At this significant word we may well pause.

Here, according to my firm conviction, lies the fundamental basis of his entire being, his greatness, and his eccentricity. A deep longing remained unsatisfied, a sensitive lack in his soul-life remained unfilled, a hallowed thirst for love remained unslaked; this is his tragedy. On the other hand demons awoke in his breast—his father's miserable legacy—with increasing power, with threatening violence; and a battle raged within him between the dominating passions which he had not learned to control, and the ideals he bore shyly hidden in his heart, hoping and renouncing, believing and despairing. This is the sublime drama of his life and his activity. We shall see whether he remained victor and how. At any rate his destiny became so closely linked with his temperament and character as to make the conquest of self as difficult for him as could be.

In November 1792 Beethoven went to Vienna, and in December his father died. This youth of two and twenty years was now alone and dependent upon his own resources, a stranger in the great strange city. It is true he brought with him valuable recommendations, and equally true that many a hospitable home was opened

to him. It can not be said that he suffered want. As an artist he was already quite matured. He had brought a large supply of work with him and it was not long before his genius had spread its wings for its victorious flight. But one invaluable benefit was still wanting and remained wanting, namely, the peaceful assurance of his own personality (*Ich*) which rests on correct training.

That for which his early home still remained indebted to him life itself must retrieve, and the school of life is always a stern one —doubly severe for a Beethoven who could not take anything easily, either with regard to himself or others. It was by no means a comfortable lot to associate with him. He was responsible for many a disagreeable experience for himself and those around him, which under normal conditions might have been easily avoided. There were many annoyances and accusations on both sides. He was too little acquainted with the world and mankind to deal with them quietly and to look beneath the surface. He was impractical and unworldly and therefore, as so often happens, suspicious and distrustful. We hear complaints of his extraordinary irritability and sensitiveness even towards tried friends and patrons. His pride could assume the appearance of arrogance, his self-consciousness of conceit. He could hurt people's feelings by a rude gruffness, yes by actual bad manners. To palliate or excuse it would be quite absurd, and he himself did not make the attempt. On the contrary he would torment himself with the most violent reproaches, and his remorse was as passionate as the outbreak that occasioned it. He had always the same battle to wage within him, ever and again the same drama of emotions.

At this point it is well to observe that Beethoven did not continue to be misunderstood. If we read all that happened we must come finally to the conclusion that he did many things in Vienna which were socially impossible in those days. It would not have been at all surprising if his patrons and friends had gradually withdrawn from him. That they did not do so is not only a credit to them, but gives us an indication of Beethoven's true character.

It is well known that he mingled to a great extent, if not exclusively, in circles of the nobility. It is an honor to the Austrian aristocracy of the end of the eighteenth century that it supported and aided art and artists to a remarkable degree not only with money but also with the most active personal interest. In this way it understood how to continue to play the part of spiritual leader for a long time.

These proud and highly cultured counts and princes not only

suffered Beethoven among them with all his frailties and moods, but treated him with distinction and invited him again and again to their homes. If they had looked upon him only as an eccentric character and had granted him a clown's liberty they would certainly have soon tired of it. They were not so petty as to stumble against his unconventional ways in society; they could recognize his greatness amid his failings and weaknesses. Shall we do less to-day? We are impressed with the fact that Beethoven's errors are those of a great soul which must wrestle its way through to its true freedom. From the beginning the man appears before us as proud and much more self-conscious than, for instance, Mozart. Not until he shall have become great, he says to his friends in his old home, shall they see him again. He had an exalted opinion of himself and his mission. He was imbued with the majesty of the artist's calling, and this inward sublimity manifested itself externally quite of its own accord. He does not stand aside in shy humility or amiable long-suffering, but with head held high he strides through the world whose only mission seems to be to listen to him.

Again it may be said that this has the appearance of insufferable arrogance, and this is always the suspicion with regard to every great man who thus rises above his surroundings. There are also foolish anecdotes which ascribe to Beethoven a demeanor as childish as it was churlish, but it is exactly this sort of stories which are misleading. That he and Goethe could not understand each other is easily comprehensible, but Beethoven can no more be said to have borne himself haughtily, than Goethe can be said to have lowered himself in a servile manner.

We must not look upon the matter from a negative point of view, but from a positive one. In a thousand other less significant natures the inherited frailties and weaknesses would have conquered, the passionate temperament would have subjugated the character.

Beethoven stands before us as a hero in the battle with himself; his whole being breathes *heroism*. This is the second catchword that we shall use. It led upwards, it led to conquest, it led to the ideal—of this Beethoven himself was conscious and the people around him might at least have perceived it. Now we may no longer misunderstand him when he says that he too is a king, and expresses the opinion that it is a good thing to associate with the nobility, but that one must also possess something with which himself to impress them.

It is especially significant that Beethoven sought aristocratic

intercourse with marked preference. The girls and women whom he loved and honored were almost exclusively ladies of the nobility, and his most intimate pupil and his noblest patron was no less a person than the Archduke Rudolf. He wished to walk upon the heights of humanity and there sought both inner and external excellence where he supposed it would most readily be found. In this he was nothing less than fanatical; he was really not in the least reactionary, but democratic in his own way. He set up his own personality and in so doing was sure that he counterbalanced every one else. Many another has done the same thing before and after him. Even Mozart fortified his own dignity by the fine utterance, "A man's heart gives him nobility." But in Beethoven's case it is differently worded: "My nobility is in head and heart," and "Power is the morality which distinguishes some men above others." Here we have the determining motto of his life; power in his entire being, power in his aberrations as in his virtue, power in every phase of his life and in all he acomplished. He himself was conscious of this power; he did not mutely and helplessly let it hold sway, but freely and joyously he exhaled power. It made him an optimist, it fortified his courage, it assured him of victory. There have been few men who were men of power as Beethoven was. It is not even given to every one to understand them.

In the first place many will not comprehend that it is just such enormous power that is capable of the finest delicacy and tenderness, so that in its inmost depths such a nature can be incomparably gentle and mild and therefore possess indescribable richness and goodness of character. For the same reason, however, it suffers the more when injured by misunderstanding or disappointment. The mighty Beethoven was a constant surprise on his other side by his touching gentleness and abnegation. He had no great knowledge of men but did not for that reason feel a contempt for them. An infinite capacity for love lived and stirred within him, and together with it a strong craving for love.

Here again we recognize the tragedy of his life; he was alone and remained alone. This is the lot of greatness and was his destiny. In spite of all the friendship and veneration bestowed upon him on many sides he still remained alone. He never found the woman who might have become the companion of his life, and we might as well say that he could not find her. The costly riches of his inner nature he might not share with any single individual. He was to reveal them to the entire world. To make others happy and sacrifice himself; to enrich others and deprive himself; to

exalt others and himself to suffer and endure—this has been the tragedy of the great man and artist who might well have posed as a martyr.

Now we see clearly that he not only was not but could not have been dominated by selfish motives. Had he been an egotist he could not have endured his destiny. He was able to endure it because it was God who, so to speak, gave him what he had to suffer, and because he therein recognized a sacred task, a true mission. Thus he has become for us a prophet and a searcher of hearts; thus was he called to the vocation of a dramatist in music.

In this fact we have a key to a proper comprehension of his works. That music is capable of giving expression to feeling is of course universally known and recognized; that this expression of feeling can be very different in kind, that music possesses accurate expression for all imaginable degrees and shades of feeling, every one is probably willing to concede. In order to comprehend Beethoven we must learn to understand that music is not only able to give forth simple, uniform and therefore lyrical sounds, but also that it has expedients by which it can reflect mingled feelings, objects, sense-relations and emotions. Thus music becomes dramatic, and Beethoven has revealed to us in how great and emphatic a measure it can be made dramatic. We constantly admire in his works his power and greatness, his tenderness and delicacy, but the dramatic character of his music is always especially distinctive, for in his works he sounds forth his own nature and life. We have become familiar with it as a drama, as a struggle of emotion, as a constant conflict and eternal contrast. How a perfect artistic masterpiece instead of a wild unformed chaos has arisen from this combination, is a mystery which can never be entirely disclosed. It is at the same time, however, a speaking witness to us that Beethoven remained victor over himself and his destiny. We have a whole series of epigrams which express this clearly. Beethoven asserts that he will seize Fate by the throat; he will defy her; he will find the wings of Daedalus, for he feels that he is ruler in the spiritual realm. This power and inspiration was finally to be put to the sharpest test by the worst affliction that could possibly have befallen him.

As early as 1798 he received the first forebodings of a thickness of hearing which was to end in complete deafness. It can not be certainly determined just what the cause was. Various physicians were called in consultation and all known remedies were applied to the case. For a time Beethoven himself believed a cure was

possible, but soon every hope of improvement vanished. He was obliged to undergo the whole painful process of becoming deaf gradually and his confidential communications on the subject are deeply touching, especially the famous Heiligenstädt Testament of 1802. Little by little his resistance was compelled to yield. From 1814 the demon in his ears became very apparent; with cruel remorselessness it ruined every attempt to direct others and every possibility of hearing his own works.

Can we imagine what that meant, what it must have meant for a Beethoven? If we picture to ourselves his temperament and character we must confess that no greater or more critical calamity could have befallen him. Suspicion and mistrust, sensitiveness and irritation—how must they have found constantly increasing support in the fast approaching deafness!

We all know from experience how deafness, in vivid contrast to blindness, tends to induce ill-temper and an unfortunate disposition. On the other hand Beethoven's hunger for love and tender devotion must have suffered unspeakably under the constantly increasing difficulties of oral converse. The blank-book he kept always at hand in order to put himself in connection with his surroundings is still in existence. It cannot be wondered at if he now became more and more reserved and taciturn, more and more unapproachable and eccentric; if his feelings, weaknesses and passions gained more resistless control of his entire nature. Excuses could be made for him in abundance, but he refused to submit.

Now for the first time we understand the dramatic element of his life in its full tragic import. Now for the first time we comprehend how lonely he was. This also, the hardest of all his battles, he had to fight alone, and he stood his ground like a hero. He did not complain against deity; his severe affliction did not make of him a blasphemer or a pessimist. Neither in the spirit of defiance and ill humor nor in indolent submission did he resign himself to being deaf. On the contrary, the more the outside world died to him, the more splendid did the inner world unfold itself before him. The more he depended upon himself, the richer and more beautiful grew his own individuality, and by his wonderful moral strength he escaped the frightful peril of losing himself as man and as artist.

Thus we see him most genuinely great in his affliction. It would have been the destruction of thousands of other people, but him it exalted to his highest self; his sentence of doom became a blessing to him. Now unconfused by the world, by people and the

life around him, remaining faithful to himself, he speaks out all his greatness in his works with supreme truthfulness and freedom, and from his inmost being. Thus we may clearly see how great and genuine he is. Again we must not be surprised if every one is not able to follow him.

Beethoven is not only our great musical dramatist, he is at the same time the great soul-musician who dared to sound forth the entire force of his personality and in so doing to enrich and exalt musical art to its strongest and deepest expression. To understand him, therefore, means to think and to feel with him; the path to this end can be open to us only by the knowledge of the forms and mediums of expression which he has imbued with new meaning to such an unprecedented degree.