

**SEBASTIAN  
BACH**

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Sebastian Bach by Reginald Lane Poole

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**REGINALD LANE POOLE**

**SEBASTIAN  
BACH**



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# The Great Musicians

*Edited by* FRANCIS HURFFER

## SEBASTIAN BACH

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## PREFACE.

No one will expect a life of Bach to be amusing, but it will be my own fault if the present Essay does not offer an interest of a high and varied character. If it labours under a disadvantage, as the first biography of the master written in this country, on the other hand it is only now that, thanks to the devotion of Professor Spitta, we can congratulate ourselves on the possession of absolutely all the attainable facts. Hitherto, three translations or abridgements of German works have appeared in England; and the first is one of those books which, however incomplete, can never really be superseded. It is a translation of the "Life" of J. N. Forkel, published at Leipzig in 1802, and in London in 1820. Forkel was not only pre-eminent among the learned musicians of the end of the last century, but also the friend and scholar of Bach's sons Friedemann and Emanuel. He presents us, therefore, with more than a masterly criticism of Bach's science, knowing, it should seem, little beyond the organ and clavichord works: he is full of anecdotes and reminiscences of the master, all the more valuable, because told with a naïveté and

freshness that stamp them at once as genuine and uncoloured.

The translation of Forkel was followed after a long interval by a volume based partly upon it, partly upon a sketch written by Hilgenfeldt as a centenary memorial in 1850. Though presumably edited by the late Mr. Rimbault, whose initials are appended to the preface, the abstract is so unfaithful and illiterate as to be practically without value. The third biography to which I have alluded is of a different character; it is a plain and conscientious abridgement of the work of C. H. Bitter, now minister of finance in Berlin, and only to be laid aside in view of the more complete materials which have been made accessible to us by Professor Spitta, and in the later publications of the Bach-Gesellschaft.

Dr. Spitta's "Johann Sebastian Bach," published at Leipzig in two volumes in 1873 and 1880, represents the many years' study of a professed musician. For all the facts of Bach's life, and all the obtainable data relative to his works, it is a final and exhaustive treasure-house. Nothing can be more scientific and workmanlike than the method with which he has exhumed and collected every detail from every source that might possibly bear upon his subject, and nothing more admirable than the warm enthusiasm which lights up his work. Practically he has left hardly anything for further research, nothing certainly that could be made use of in a short sketch like the present. When, however, I state that my facts are mainly due to him, I do not wish to imply his responsibility for a



single word not covered by this admission. In criticism I give exclusively the results of an independent study of Bach's works, which I have pursued for a number of years. Nor am I sure that Dr. Spitta would invariably approve of my arrangement of his facts, and especially of the extent to which I have drawn from the personal narrative of Forkel. In many respects, a small book demands a different treatment from a large one, and I have not restricted my freedom of choice in a sketch that can never by possibility enter into competition with Dr. Spitta's work. My best wishes for it are that it may serve the modest aim of preparing a worthy reception for his English translation which is shortly to appear.

It would be affectation to conceal the great help in the composition of this volume which I have had from my wife, not merely in the selection of material, but even more in the judgment and taste with which she has controlled my writing.

R. L. POOLE.

*Leipzig, 21st March, 1882.*

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