

**A FEW FACTS IN
THE LIFE
OF HANDEL**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649246199

A Few Facts in the Life of Handel by William Hutchins Callcott

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Cover @ 2017

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WILLIAM HUTCHINS CALLCOTT

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BY
WILLIAM HUTCHINS CALLCOTT.

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LONDON:
LONGMAN, BROWN AND CO., PATERNOSTER ROW:
AND
C. LONSDALE, 28 OLD BOND STREET.
1859.

Plus 2996. 40. 41

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MITCHELL AND SON, PRINTERS,
WARDOUR STREET.

A FEW FACTS
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BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE.*

GEORGE FREDERICK HANDEL was born at Halle, in Saxony, on the 23rd of February, 1685. At the time of the composer's birth, his father was 63 years of age. He was by profession a surgeon. Almost from the birth of the child, his father had determined to educate him for the law; and he was therefore much concerned to find that Handel

* The latest life of this great Composer is that written by Victor Schoelcher, published in 1857. Those who wish to read an excellent, amusing, and comprehensive account of Handel and his Times, will find in this volume all that they can desire.

shewed a very strong inclination for music. In order to check this evident propensity, his father banished from his house all musical instruments, and endeavoured to divert the boy's attention from music by every means in his power. Handel was then under seven years of age. He had never been sent, as most German children are, to any of the public schools, where the pupils learn music as a part of their regular education; so that he had no idea of musical notation, nor of the method of playing upon any instrument; though he may possibly have seen a harpsichord, and have touched the keys, and thus acquired a pleasure in listening to musical sounds. But however this may have been, the child seems to have exercised all his ingenuity in order to get at the keys of a spinnet; and he found means to have a small one conveyed into a room at the top of his father's house, upon which he constantly played as soon as the family had retired to rest.

Handel's father had been married before;

and a son by his first wife was valet in the service of the Duke of Saxe-Weissenfels. When Handel was about seven years old, his father determined to pay a visit to his elder son. He intended to go alone; but Handel, having a strong desire to see his half-brother, begged his father to take him with him. He refused, and set out by himself. Handel, however, contrived to watch for the departure of the carriage; and followed with so much resolution and spirit, that he overtook his father, and implored him to take him in. Struck with the boy's earnestness, the father's love for his child prevailed, and he made him the companion in the journey.

Handel and his father remained some weeks at the Duke's palace. One morning, when the service in the private chapel was concluded, Handel found means to steal to the organ, and began to play upon it before the court had left the chapel. The Duke himself was not gone; and hearing the organ played in an unusual manner, he inquired of his

valet what stranger was touching the instrument. The valet replied, that it was his half-brother. The Duke immediately directed both Handel and his father to be sent for. It is not necessary to repeat the conversation which passed between them; suffice it to say, that the result was, the father yielded to a wish expressed by the Duke in respect to his son, and devoted Handel to the profession of music. On his return to Halle, he became the pupil of Zaccan, who was a sound musician, and the organist of the cathedral in that city.

THE COURT OF HANOVER, 1709.

Handel had now entered into the service of the Elector of Hanover (afterwards George I.), a prince who had manifested his love for music, and had shewn much good taste and knowledge in the art, by patronising several of the greatest musicians in Europe.

At this time (1709) the connection between the courts of Hanover and St. James's was

growing closer every day; and Handel, now 25 years old, determined to visit London. He was probably prompted by curiosity to see a city which was likely hereafter to become the place of his residence; or he may have come hither in compliance with an invitation from several English noblemen, with whom he had made acquaintance at the court.

ARRIVES IN LONDON, 1710.

Having obtained leave of the Elector, George of Brunswick, Handel arrived in London at the close of 1710.

Mr. Aaron Hill was then the director of the Theatre in the Haymarket; and hearing of the arrival of Handel, the fame of whose abilities had already penetrated into this country, he immediately applied to him to compose an opera. Handel acceded to this request, and Hill sketched out a plan of a drama from Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*, and entitled it RINALDO. We are told Handel was so rapid in his part of the work, as hardly