

**REEVES MUSIC PRIMERS -
BIOGRAPHICAL
SERIES, NO. 2. THE LIFE
AND WORKS OF HANDEL**

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Reeves music primers - biographical series, No. 2. The life and works of Handel by Alfred Whittingham

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ALFRED WHITTINGHAM

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REEVES' MUSIC PRIMERS.—BIOGRAPHICAL
SERIES.—No. 2.

THE
LIFE AND WORKS
OF
HANDEL.

BY
ALFRED WHITTINGHAM.



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1882.

PREFACE.

THE following "Life of Handel" was originally commenced with the intention of supplying a small book for the audience at a performance of some of the mighty master's music. A general outline of his life with a list of his numerous compositions would have fulfilled this original intention, but the writer was strongly impressed with an idea that the opera songs of Handel furnish a mine of wealth to diligent students of music; that the accompaniments to these songs might open the eyes of many to the fact that the merit of a song does not consist entirely in its vocal melody; many modern songs, otherwise fairly written, being simply good tunes spoiled by paltry meaningless accompaniments. As Burney is the best authority upon the subject of Handel's operatic music, great use has been made of his valuable criticisms, with the object of inducing musical students to analyse some of these opera songs. As it was necessary to avoid making the book too long, a greater amount of criticism has been bestowed upon the operas than the oratorios; the former were preferred, not because they are superior as works of art, but because the oratorios are too well known to escape notice, whereas the operas have never received a tithe of the attention to which their extraordinary merit entitles them. Musical students should remember that Handel, when a student, "*constantly analysed large quantities of music*"—also that they have an immense advantage over him: they have for analysis "THE WORKS OF HANDEL."

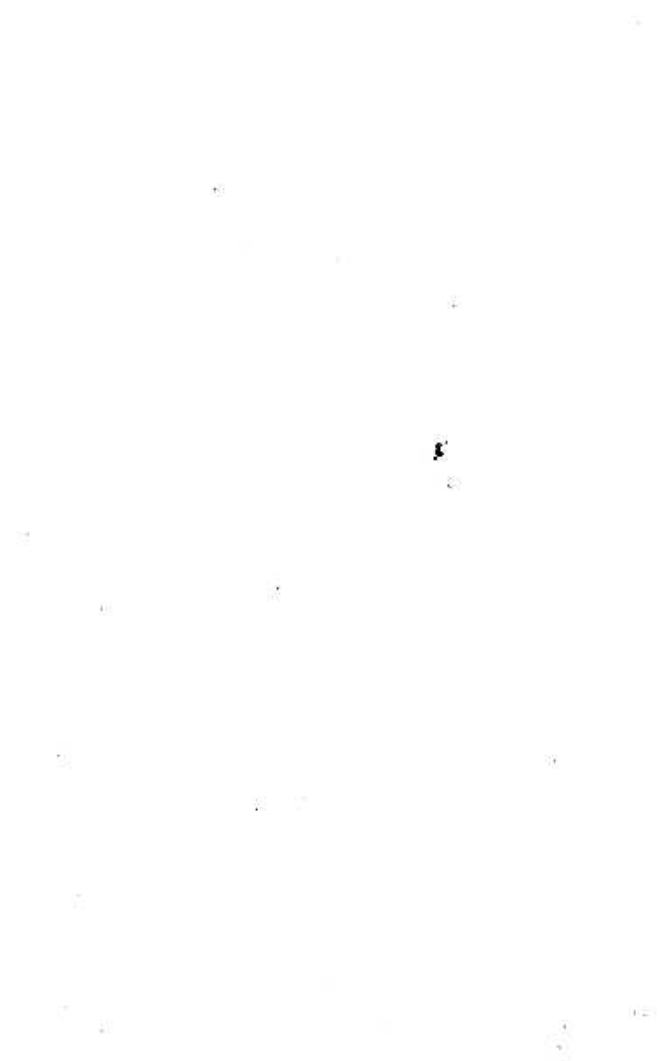


Figure 1: A scatter plot showing the relationship between the number of children (X-axis, 0-10) and the number of books read (Y-axis, 0-10). The data points are: (0, 0), (1, 1), (2, 2), (3, 3), (4, 4), (5, 5), (6, 6), (7, 7), (8, 8), (9, 9), (10, 10). A solid line of best fit passes through the origin and the point (10, 10). A dashed line is drawn parallel to the solid line, shifted upwards, and is labeled "Line of best fit".



THE
LIFE AND WORKS OF HANDEL.

GEOERGE FREDERICK HANDEL was born at Halle, in Lower Saxony, on the 23rd of February, in the year

1685. His father, a surgeon, aged sixty-three years at the time of the birth of the immortal composer, was one of a class of men, not extinct in our own days, who may be described as "immediate utilitarians." Art was to him something contemptible, even if cultivated for amusement; and, having set his heart upon educating his son for the law, he was perfectly horrified at the discovery that the baby-boy had been born with a natural affliction—viz., that of producing, and evidently taking pleasure in the production of, musical sounds. It can hardly be imagined that the good doctor jumped at once to the conclusion that, unless he could prevent the development of the disorder, his unfortunate son would eventually neglect law and adopt music as a profession, since probably in his time, as in ours, some lawyers took an interest in music, and were capable of emitting musical sounds. No; the doctor regarded musical taste as a vice, and his feelings

upon hearing the production of musical sounds by his own son must have been very much like those of a hen, who, having inadvertently hatched a duck's egg, exhibits considerable emotion and surprise at that which she undoubtedly regards as an attempt, on the part of one chicken, to commit suicide by drowning. Mainwaring,* however, tells us that the doctor admitted music to be "a fine amusement"; but, if this be correct, it seems curious that he should have endeavoured to deprive his son of that "amusement," seeing that, in lieu of it, he might possibly substitute some other amusement, anything but "fine." From the house of Handel's father every kind of musical instrument was expelled, and all places in which music could be heard, including the public schools, were prohibited to the boy. Handel was a good and virtuous man, therefore it may be presumed that he was not a bad boy; and a higher command than that of an earthly parent must have caused him to disobey his father, for he procured, or some one procured for him, a small clavichord, which he concealed in an attic, and upon which he played at night, whilst the rest of the family slept. No doubt he played gently and quietly, scarcely allowing himself to produce the sounds, lest some sleepless one should overhear them and destroy his hope; however, with Nature only for his teacher, at seven years of age he could play upon the clavichord. Perhaps his enforced quiet manner of playing was one great secret of his success; he could hardly have made more rapid progress by permission to play noisily and clumsily from the outset upon an instrument like a modern pianoforte—a permission too frequently accorded to the pianoforte student at the present time. It must have been in the year

1692 that Handel's father set out upon a journey for

* *Memoirs of the Life of Handel.* 8vo. London, 1760.

the purpose of visiting another son—his son by a former wife—which son was in the service of the Duke of Saxe Weissenfels. George, never having seen this half-brother, entreated that he might be allowed to accompany his father. His request being refused, he appeared to acquiesce in the refusal; but when the coach started, he followed it on foot with such a manifestation of that intense resolution which in after-life was so prominent a feature in his character, that his father stopped the coach. Heedless of scolding, the boy renewed his entreaties, and the ultimate consent of his father was the reward of his perseverance. At Weissenfels the organ in the duke's chapel was the great object of his attention; he could not resist the temptation of playing upon it when he had a chance, and, happily for him and for the world, his performance one day attracted the attention of the duke, who sent for him, and, by kind encouragement, elicited the facts of the case from him. The duke then represented to the father that for such a manifestation of genius his boy ought to be encouraged, and reluctantly the father allowed himself to be convinced, the opinion of a prince outweighing his objections. Upon his return to Halle, George's musical education was entrusted to Zachau, organist of the cathedral, with whom he studied general principles, counterpoint, canon, and fugue. Music of all kinds, of all schools, and by all great masters, was analysed by master and pupil together. For three years this course of study was pursued, the pupil each week composing as an exercise a motett or cantata, the practice of the harpsichord, organ, violin, and hautboy also occupying much of his time, and at the end of these three years Zachau admitted that the pupil was superior to the master. In the year

1696 he went to Berlin for the purpose of pursuing his studies, and here he became acquainted with Ariosti and Buononcini. Ariosti was a generous man, and fully recognised the talent of the boy, but Buononcini was of a different