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COMPOSER OF "THE MESSIAH."

OUR frontpiece this month is a very fine picture of the immortal musical composer, George Frederick Handel. He was born at Halle, Germany, in 1685, in a home where music was despised. The record of his childhood tells us chiefly the old story so common in the early biography of musicians and artists, of an innate passion for his art, early manifested, and sternly repressed by his father.

The first great turn of his life resulted from his own strength of will at the early age of seven, when, on his father refusing to take him on a journey to the ducal court of Weissenfels, where an elder brother of the family had a post, the child followed the carriage on foot, until he was taken up and duly introduced to his half-brother at court, where he soon got the run of the harpsichords. One day he climbed up to the organ stool in the chapel and began to play. His music so attracted the attention of the Duke that father and son were summoned to the august presence, and the father got a lecture on the duty of developing his son's genius. The opinion of the Duke could not be overlooked, and the boy was placed under the tuition of a good teacher. He developed rapidly and soon became a player of extraordinary ability. At twelve years of age, it is said that he could compose a piece of sacred music in eight parts in less time than another man would take to write a letter.

At the age of twenty-six he went to London, England, and received a position at Court, which brought him an income of £600 a year. His early years were devoted principally to writing operas, but his fame as a musician is almost altogether connected with his sacred productions, and he is chiefly known as the author of the great oratorio, "The Messiah."

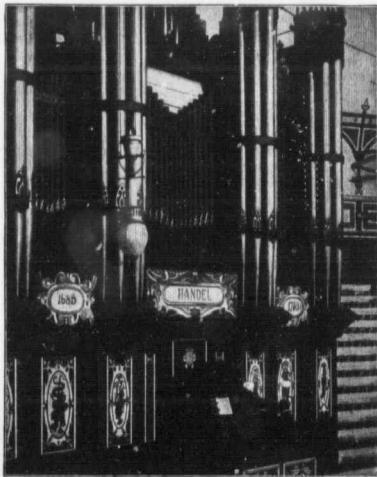
Among his other productions are, "Esther," "Deborah," "Saul," "Israel in Egypt," "Samson," "Joseph," "Hercules," etc. His "Messiah" was written in twenty-four days, and first performed April 18th, 1742, at Dublin.

Handel himself, it is said, preferred "Samson" to his other works, but the music-loving public has always given "The Messiah" the first place. From every point of view it is a truly great work. The opening recitative, "Comfort Ye My People," is unsurpassed in beauty and appropriateness, as representing the first dawn of hope and promise to a peo-

ple walking in darkness. The subject is carried on from point to point with new beauties, until the climax is reached in the Hallelujah Chorus, which is unequalled in the whole of choral music.

Handel seems to have been a man of very decided opinions, and somewhat brusque in his manner. On one occasion he scolded the Prince and Princess of Wales for being late at a concert, and "keeping all these poor people (the performers) so long from their scholars and other concerns."

When a certain poet complained that Handel's music did not suit the words he had written, the great composer said, "Den de worts is bat."



ORGAN AT CRYSTAL PALACE, LONDON, ENG.

If he was pleased with the way the music was going at one of his oratorios, his enormous wig had a peculiar nod or vibration, and at the close of an air he called out "Chorus" in a voice which his biographer says was "extremely formidable."

Handel was never married. He was at one time offered the position of organist of Lubeck if he would take the daughter of the retiring organist along with the organ, but he did not accept. Something did not suit, whether it was the organ, the daughter, or the salary we are not told, but he remained in single blessedness.

In 1751 he was attacked with blindness, but continued to preside at the or-

gan to the last. It is said that he could never hear the pathetic air allotted to "Samson" without being visibly affected. His blindness, instead of causing him to become, sour, impatient or irritable, made him gentle and subdued. He made large amounts of money, and was exceedingly charitable,—always anxious to assist poor and suffering people by the performance of his music.

He inherited from his mother a deep reverence for the Bible, and knew it well. During the composition of "The Messiah" he was absorbed in the deep significance of the words, and was found pouring over some of them with tears.

He expressed the wish that he might breathe his last on Good Friday, "in hopes," he says, "of meeting the good God, my sweet Lord and Saviour on the day of His resurrection." This desire was gratified, as he died on Good Friday, April 14th, 1759. He was buried in Westminster Abbey.

The name of Handel will be kept ever green so long as his magnificent oratorio, "The Messiah," continues to be sung, and, from present indications, that will be for many generations. In most of the large cities of England there is an annual production of this masterpiece about Christmas time, and at the Crystal Palace, London, it has been given many times by immense choruses. The magnificent organ at the Palace was built as a memorial of Handel. His name and the dates of his birth and death are inscribed on the front. The "Handel Festivals" at the Crystal Palace have been great musical events.

Mr. F. H. Torrington has, during recent years, conducted "Messiah" concerts thirteen times in Toronto, but the public do not weary hearing the splendid classical music. On the 18th ult., a very fine performance of this oratorio was given by Mr. Torrington's well-trained chorus in Massey Hall.

The citizens of Toronto owe a great debt of gratitude to the late Mr. H. A. Massey for the splendid hall which his generosity erected. It enables the people to hear concerts of this class at very reasonable prices.

HIGH hearts are never long without hearing some new call, some distant clarion of God, even in their dreams; and soon they are observed to break up the camp of ease and start on some fresh march of faithful service.—J. Martineau.

THE ERA wishes its growing family of readers a very HAPPY NEW YEAR.