

The Ordeal of Beethoven

Study
Spiritual darkness hovers over the world. An age of materialism oppresses mankind, and egotism is the alpha and omega of public life. Hate and ambition rule alike the destinies of men and nations; the people of the earth live in fear. War destroys cities and civilizations while despair robs men of their idealism and hope. We grope in the darkness, stumbling blindly, seeking escape from the gloom that surrounds us.

Study
Then like a flash of lightning the life of a truly great man throws the world about us into deep relief. We can see the road ahead; we recognize its goals, while for a moment man clearly sees his destiny. Hope and courage shall brighten the path as we trudge onward through a (miserable world.) A flash! then all is dark again, but our minds retain the image of its brightness and our hearts have captured a spark of its fire. Henceforth our journey shall be a little less fearful and uncertain.

is
Ludwig van Beethoven (~~takes his place as~~ ^{is}) one of those few, who because of their goodness and ~~their~~ idealism have left their lives shining beacons to their fellow men.

Simple
but a history

To those whose destiny it is to bear like burdens, be his life the symbol of man's victory over fate; to those who are spared that agony, be it undying proof of man's divine nature.

Not a history

It is a cruel paradox ~~of nature~~ that suffering should be the prerequisite of true greatness and that pain should cause every spiritual growth. Yet it was undoubtedly the suffering of a noble heart that lifted the genius of Beethoven into immortality. Loneliness, disappointment, and deafness made his life one of the most pathetic ever recorded by history.

History

Heredity had endowed Beethoven with an uncompromising character, and the sadness of his youth supplemented what nature had already begun. Even as a child he was often alone, and his artificial isolation made him an unusually individualistic person. This individualism in his character was what others so often called stubbornness, what made it so hard for him to get along with people. It need not surprise us then, if those who had no idea of the real nature of Beethoven's character classified him as vain and haughty. - Pause

There were many, however, who admired him, and a circle of friends who loved him and were faithful to him as long as they lived. Yet not even they could fathom what was going on in Beethoven's soul. They only sensed that

there was something very wonderful about this rude unhappy man, whom though they were ever ready to help, they could never really understand.

That is why essentially Beethoven was always lonely, and why out of the realization of his unhappy lot he wrote such hopeless words as open his Heiligenstadt Testament. "Oh ye men, you who consider me inimical, obstinate, or misanthropic, what injustice ye do me! You know not the secret cause of what appears to you thus." - *Pause* There-in his own words, is the vastness that separates him from other human beings. ~~[Again and again he tries to bridge that chasm, but in vain. As he becomes more and more isolated from the world about him, his loneliness grows, and at the end of his life he is practically alone.]~~ He prefers the silence of the forest to the glitter of society; the fields and the woods become his sanctuary and his home, and the trees and the flowers are his true friends.

Pause

It seems a miracle that in the midst of such loneliness Beethoven should have any idealism at all, and yet his political and social ideas are two centuries ahead of his age. At a time when most of the world is yet fettered with the phains of aristocracy, he is a prophet of the new freedom of Voltaire and Jefferson. Despising all social distinctions, Beethoven refused even to remove his hat for royalty, and his utterance to Goethe on that occasion has become one of the basic statements of democratic ideology,

*Hand over
New Bible*

effectively

"I know no other values of a man, except those which tend to make of him a nobler one." ~~Other men would have been imprisoned for such statements in his day, and for a while the police considered his arrest. They thought him, however, too unusual a person to be very dangerous to the state. He was never actually arrested, but these convictions made his life immeasurably harder, his fate more grim.~~

slowly

Few men have struggled more with their fate than did Beethoven. ~~Poverty was his constant companion, and ill health added to his misfortune.~~ He could never reconcile himself to his own life; he could find no purpose in it but his music and often that too seemed inadequate to him. This is the conflict between the genius which tends to set Beethoven apart from men, and the human desire to be one of them, to think, act, and live as they do. The very nature of the struggle determines the outcome. Does not genius always triumph over mediocrity, spirit over flesh? . . . This unrest finds its counterpart in music. The same struggle that develops Beethoven's soul makes his music great. The characteristic allegro portrays the ^{inner fight} ~~clashing of arms~~, the ^{with fate} ~~call to battle~~. The themes break forth like the roar of the surf, crashing upon a moonlit strand as though they endless deep were trying express in one tremendous roar the passions of a thousand centuries. Softly the melodies retreat, only to be caught by the thundering crescendo of the next wave.

clearly, harmoniously

We feel it in the first movement of the fifth symphony, in the Leonore Overtures, this yearning to give expression to something intangible that cannot be expressed. But we feel the nearness of the conflict to our own souls, and our inmost spirits become resonators for that which alone is able to give our minds a goal, our lives, a purpose. Above (all) the uncertainty, above the strife, above all the sorrow an air of triumph ascends. The battle has been fought and won. And even so the life, the outcome is never uncertain, but so long as the heart beats there can be no rest.

Pause

More trying than all the struggling, than all the loneliness was disappointment. The glowing idealism that worked so well in theory found nothing but rebuffs when applied to the environment. With fervent hope, Beethoven had dedicated his third symphony to Napoleon when the tyrant seemed to him a protector of freedom. Napoleon too, disappointed him, and when the soldier was crowned emperor, the great idealist tore up the title page to the symphony and substituted the inscription that has become an epic, "Heroic Symphony to celebrate the memory of a great man." It seems unmistakably clear that the work was not meant for a single man; it was written for far more than that. It stands for an idealism and a pureness of mind that have seldom been equalled in the long history of mankind.

Although Beethoven was writing music for the angels, he was still living on earth. It was a sorrowful place for him. "How sadly I must live now among such ego-

Build up

climax

Start over

effectively

tistic and miserable people," he writes to Karl Amanda.
~~And to add to that sadness, disappointment came to Beethoven~~
~~in love as in most other things. He was engaged, and tho-~~
~~roughly happy, probably for the only time in his life. The~~
~~engagement was broken and he almost ^{collapsed under} ~~break down with~~ the~~
~~weight of that shock. "I can live either with you, or~~
~~not at all," he had once written her. For a while he was~~
~~on the verge of suicide, but he did not take his(own)life~~
~~He felt a responsibility that surpassed all personal tra-~~
~~gedy, a responsibility to keep on living and to keep on~~
~~working.~~

It would seem that such disillusionment would be almost too much for one man to bear, but an even greater evil plagued Beethoven. The most discouraging blow to him was his deafness. What irony of fate ! that his ears, so sensitive to every note, should fail him in the prime of his creative life. Frequently he would stuff his ears with cotton to escape the pain which noise gave him. The disease came gradually, and hope for cure faded day by day. At first Beethoven tried to hide the ^{illness} ~~malady~~ from his friends, but after about a year he was forced to admit it, and to ask them to write down what they had to say on paper. "Sad resignation, in which I must now seek my refuge," he wrote at the time. But he did not suffer as resignedly as that statement might imply. More than once did he curse his creator and the world in which he was living. He poured out his soul into works of music that have never been surpassed in depth of feeling or tonal beauty.

Change
F.H.H.
slowly

Allegro

Amidst all his depair, Beethoven turned the negative side of his suffering into a positive influence in his life. What would have wrecked others, became to him a source of strength. "I shall prove that whoever lives nobly and virtuously can in turn bear the abuses of others," he once said. That was the spirit in which he lived and in which he created. But ~~(not even a Beethoven could hold out forever)~~ slowly his physical condition deteriorated. Worry and pain had left their mark. Only death gave him the peace he had vainly sought in music all his life. He died during a storm. Lightning flashed and thunder roared above the head of the dying man. No friend stood at his bedside.

Long Pause

He died in a thunderstorm, even as he had lived. His music is eternal witness to his genius, his writings to his vision. Yet more than all that history or musical score can record, his suffering and his triumph are everlasting proof to all those whose lives are sad like his own, that it is possible to walk through darkness into light, to pass from suffering to joy.

Jochen Meyer

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