

# THE LITERARY DIGEST.

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~p. 10~

## BEETHOVEN AND HIS DEAFNESS.

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ALL the later works of Beethoven have suffered in the thought of critics and players from the mischievous "Beethoven and His Three Styles" of Von Lenz, the easy-writing Russian student. His theory (stolen most likely from some still earlier breeder of mischief) is that in the works of Beethoven we are



BEETHOVEN.

—From *Reich der Tone, Dresden.*

shown three styles. In the first, it is the youthful Beethoven, still under the influence of Haydn and Mozart. This department embraces all the piano-sonatas up to Opus 13, the *Pathétique*. Then we come to the period of his real maturity, wherein all the works are clearly and delightfully done, and deep, strongly contrasted musical thoughts follow one upon another with a prodigality truly masterly: this takes us as far as the *Appassionata*, and the Waldstein Sonata in C, and perhaps a little further. Then we come to

a third style,—embracing works written after Beethoven had become stone-deaf, and could, therefore, no longer correct his writing by the evidence of his ears. Moreover, he was soured by many disappointments in life, and was beginning to be neglected in favor of younger and fresher musicians. He was often unwell, and, in fact, somewhat morbid. It is on these grounds only, so they say, that the lack of clearness of form in his later works can be accounted for, and the fantastic effects are merely the efforts of a brain disordered and tired, if not absolutely diseased. This is the theory, and a charmingly plausible one it is for the average reader. There is not a word of truth in it—absolutely not a single word.

That there are great differences of style between the compositions of the Beethoven of 1795, a piano *virtuoso* as well as a somewhat over-bold and independent young man, and the Beethoven of 1822 and 1825, is indeed true. That any of the later works are morbid in the sense alleged by Von Lenz is wholly untrue. Equally untrue is it that they manifest the slightest defect arising from inability to hear them performed upon a piano. On the contrary, if the reader has at hand the Rondo Capriccioso, Opus 129, written after the much-discussed, but now Wagner-explained Ninth Symphony, he will find a theme as much like Haydn's as two peas. When, however, we follow the development of the theme, we encounter a free fantasy such

**THE LITERARY DIGEST.  
BEETHOVEN AND HIS DEAFNESS.**

as no master save Bach, Beethoven, and Schumann ever had. Moreover, the queer thing about the Rondo is that it is so thoroughly sportive and good-humored. Beethoven, himself, once called it a "search after a lost groschen;" the old woman hunts in the cupboard, under the dresser, on the windows, and everywhere in the whole house for her lost groschen. So it goes with the treatment which the playful theme gets.

There is another merit about this Rondo, which shuts it off from the operation of Von Lenz's "fool theory." The Rondo exactly fits the piano. Botch indeed! Let some living and hearing composer place musical ideas upon the instrument better, if he can.

Seriously, the idea that Beethoven's style suffered from his being unable to hear is the most absurd of all. It shows such a childlike misapprehension of the manner in which musical ideas come to the composer. According to these critics a deaf person should gradually become unable to write a pleasant-sounding letter—because he cannot hear it read. But this, they say, is different. Is it? What does the composer write? Is it something which he hears, or something which he tries to make up? Certainly he writes exactly what he hears—what he hears, that is, in the chambers of his soul. A pregnant idea sounds to him out of the eternal stillness, and straightway it goes on and develops into something noble and grand—spins itself through, just as some heavenly orchestra might play it; and this when written down becomes the composition of a master. Who knows where he got it? Does anybody? Am I composing as I write this? Or am I merely setting down something which a more potent intelligence is passing through me unconsciously, as the mild current of the Morse wire might pass through the body without being felt.

When Beethoven retained one of his manuscripts in hand for months and continually retouched a note here and a note there, until the copy looked as if it had had a fit of sickness (which, however, was always unto health), what was it he was doing? Was he trying to "compose" it better? Nay! He was merely changing a note here and there in order to make it agree more perfectly with the heavenly pattern shown him on the Mount. Thus it is with all the great arts. Behind the artist, there are spirits of higher intelligence which shine through and impart to his work that clearness and that grip upon the hearers which no small art, however cunningly executed, can ever have. It is spirit in the work which shows and controls; and it is the command of the spirit before which our admiration bows.—*Music, Chicago, June. Condensed for THE LITERARY DIGEST.*