

Love Stories of Famous Jews.

Felix Mendelssohn and Cecile Jeanrenaud.—By Joseph Kaye.

There may have been happier men in the world of music than Felix Mendelssohn, but history has no record of them

If one silver spoon at birth assures a babe a fortunate existence, then young Felix was blessed with at least half a dozen.

Born of wealthy parents, of high social standing, himself of an attractive personality, popular with everyone, possessing a genius for musical composition that was recognised immediately—what more could he have wished for?

And as he was fortunate in every other particular so was he equally fortunate in love. His handsome, aesthetic face, his graceful figure, his charming manners, his witty conversation and his marvellous music was a combination which few girls could resist. He travelled extensively and wherever he went there was sure to be a pleasant flirtation with several maidens, usually very pretty for Mendelssohn adored beauty in every form and took care not to be disappointed in any of his female friendships.

At the age of twenty-seven he came to Frankfort at the invitation of a local choral society to conduct one of their concerts. There he became acquainted with the widow of a French clergyman, named Mme Jeanrenaud. She was a good-looking woman, the madame, very well-preserved for her years, and an intelligent and amiable companion. Felix spent a good deal of his time at the widow's house and the rumour began to spread that the lady had captured the musician's heart. But that lady was given greater credit than was her due, for it was her seventeen-year old daughter, Cecile Charlotte Sophie who had attracted Mendelssohn.

There is a peculiar coincidence in the meeting of these young people. The name of the choral society Mendelssohn had come to conduct was the Cecilla Society; the girl's name was Cecile too, and that is also the name of music's patron saint. Perhaps this had something to do with the deep attraction which both immediately felt for one another.

A graphic, though perhaps over-coloured, pen picture of

Cecile is given by a contemporary chronicler of that time, Elise Polko:

"To the present hour she has always remained my beau ideal of womanly fascination and loveliness. Her figure was slight, of middle height and rather drooping, like a flower heavy with dew; her luxuriant gold-brown hair fell in rich curls on her shoulders, her complexion was of transparent delicacy, her smile charming and she had the most bewitching blue eyes I ever beheld with dark eyelashes and eyebrows—her whole aspect had a Madonna air . . . Her manner was generally thought too reserved; indeed, she was considered cold and called "the fair Mimosa." In music we have an expressive term, "calm but impassioned," and this I deem an appropriate conception for the portrait of Cecile."

Quick as he was to receive a flirtation, Mendelssohn became a very cautious individual when he began to sense that the influence which Cecile cast over him was altogether different from any he had ever felt before. He gave the matter much thought and worry and eventually decided that the only way he could know whether he actually was in love or not, or whether she truly loved him, was to go away from Frankfort for a time.

After this decision he wrote to his parents this letter:

"The present period of my life is a very strange one, for I am more desperately in love than I ever was before and I do not know what to do. I leave Frank-

fort the day after tomorrow but I feel as if it would cost me my life. At all events, I intend to return and see this charming girl once more before I go back to Leipzig. But I have not an idea whether she likes me or not and I do not know what to do to make her like me."

Courteously, Mendelssohn took upon himself all the blame for his indecision.

He left Frankfort and went to Scheveningen, the Dutch sea resort, where he remained a month. That was all that he could stand. Nothing else but Cecile remained that had any attraction for him and he returned post-haste to Frankfort and proposed to her. He accepted him and Mendelssohn became delirious with joy. He ran to his rooms, seized his pen and dashed this message to his mother:

"I have only this moment returned to my rooms but I can settle down to nothing until I have written to tell you that I have just been accepted by Cecile Jeanfenaud. My head is quite giddy from the effects of the day, but I must write you that I feel so rich and happy! To-morrow I will, if I can, write a long letter; and so, if possible, will my dear betrothed."

"Mendelsshon's married life was idyllic. Nothing ever happened to disturb the loving serenity which blessed his household—nothing save that it was not destined to last long. Ten years after the wedding, the great composer died, leaving behind him the most profound sorrow.

Sabbath day like any other day rather than depend upon charity. (Ib)

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