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Re: Picander (Henrici)
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There had never been any good writer of words for cantatas in Leipzig. In 1716 Gottfried Tilgner had collected five annual series of Neumeister's poems, by permission of the author, and published them under the title of "Five-fold church devotions." These poems, which had hitherto been disseminated privately, were now brought within the reach of every one, and had such a sale that a new edition was demanded in the following year. Tilgner, a young literary man, lodged in the house of *Magister* Pezold, a colleague of Kuhnau, whom we have frequently mentioned.

Kuhnau had undoubtedly set many texts by Neumeister, and besides he was very capable of writing texts himself on Neumeister's pattern. Bach, however, had no such skill in verse making; therefore he was at once obliged to look about for a poet, and he chose Franck in preference to Neumeister. But he had not to wait long before he found in Leipzig itself an adequately skilled and always willing collaborator. Christian Friedrich Henrici, born at Stolpe in 1700, had studied at Wittenberg, and had lately settled in Leipzig, where he was living for the present in poor circumstances chiefly by writing "occasional" verses. In two of his poems he petitioned the King-Elector to grant him free board; and in 1727 dedicated to him, through Count Flemming, a cantata for his *fête* day on August 3, beginning "Ihr Hauser des Himmels, ihr scheinenden Lichter." In the same year he obtained a situation in the Post-office, and in the Leipzig Directory of 1736 he figures as *Ober-Postcommissarius*. In 1743 we again come across his name as a tax-gatherer and exciseman, and in this capacity he died in 1764. The higher officers of the churches and schools received a certain annual sum as compensation for the general tax on liquors; this was a special favour. To this circumstance a small document in Bach's own writing owes its origin ; it is a receipt given to the tax-gatherer at Easter 1743, for a compensation for three casks of beer. But the intercourse of the two men was not simply on matters of business; it had been for a long time of a friendly and artistic character. Among the sponsors to one of Bach's children, born in 1737, was the wife of Henrici, who had then been working for more than twelve years in collaboration with Bach. Henrici began his literary career in 1722, as a satirist ; in this respect we may call him a disciple of Christian

Günther, though, as he is not to be compared to the last-named poet in talent, his mean style and bad taste are all the more repulsive. He was incapable alike of Günther's free and picturesque imagery, and of his audacious licence. When his satirical poems created ill feeling he was frightened, and declared that he had only the best intentions in writing such productions, but that the unfortunate results had spoilt the fun, and the threats of the evil-disposed had deprived him of all his pleasure in it. He now only wrote poems from time to time to please his patrons and friends, but he does not deny that he used "a sharpened pen." In the year 1724 he turned his hand to sacred poetry. He thought it incumbent upon him to give a public explanation of this sudden change. "He imagined that many people would laugh to see him assuming a devotional attitude. He wished to guard, however, against the imputation of having been quite unmindful of heavenly things, and considered it only right to offer to his Creator the fresh fruits of his youth, and not the worn out remains of his old age. Let not anyone blame him for making poetry his chief employment and troubling himself little or nothing about other branches of learning. If necessary he could produce credible testimony to his academic diligence. Besides, verse-making was easy to him, and took him very little time. Why should he not then employ this natural gift and turn it to account for his living?" The work to which these and other remarks served as preface was entitled : "Collection of profitable thoughts for and upon the ordinary Sundays and holidays"; he uses here the pseudonym of Picander, which he adopts from this time. The work consists of meditations in rhyme, mostly in Alexandrines, to which a set of verses to the melody of some church hymn is usually appended. They did not at first appear in a collected form ; for a year the poet was in the habit, on Saturdays and Sundays after vespers, when other people were enjoying themselves in unseemly dissipation, of putting into rhyme his thoughts on the Gospel, and of bringing them out week by week on a half-folio sheet. To this custom he adhered ; the first piece was written for the first Sunday in Advent, 1724, and the second and last for the same day in 1725.

Considering that he had now made ample atonement for his sins, and that his reputation was firmly re-established, he once more threw himself into the arms of the secular muse. In 1726 there appeared, written by him, three German plays: "Der akademische Schlendrian," "Der Erz-Säufer," and "Die Weiberprobe," "designed for amusement and instruction." They are low, repulsive farces, but the tone which pervades them was his natural element, and he owns that it would be pleasanter and easier to him to sing four bridal songs than to grind out even one dirge. His chief object in writing these things was not

attained, however: that of gaining enough to live on. He therefore brought out in the year 1727 a new collection, consisting of "Grave, gay, and satirical poems," and dedicated them "To fortune who will surely yet be kind to him, and grant him something more." Fortune was kind, and he got his situation in the Post-office. In 1728 there followed a collection of texts for cantatas in Neumeister's style. This was the only collection of the kind which he brought out, and he subsequently incorporated it with his "Grave, gay, and satiric poems," to which four more parts were gradually added." Henrici considered himself an original genius and a pioneer of public taste. He "foresaw," he says in the preface to the *Sammlung erbaulicher Gedanken*, "that imitators of his style would speedily arise; he wished them better success than he himself had met with. For his part, he would rather try an unbeaten track than follow in the footprints of another." And then he goes on alluding to the strong influence of English literature, which was then beginning to make itself felt.

"Everybody at Leipzig wishes to be critics, patriots, and moralists, without having tested their powers, and it can only be regretted that the world-famous name of Leipzig should be used as a vain shelter for such unworthy productions. Nothing is more praiseworthy than the foresight with which the authorities have suppressed wretched trash of this kind, and these measures will go far to free Leipzig from the present polluted condition of its literature; Leipzig, so renowned even in foreign lands for good and refined taste. Well may such abortive productions hide their heads at last for very shame of their imperfection." He himself shines most in his satirical writings. They exhibit a certain keenness of perception, and a knowledge of human nature unusual in one so young, and they are very skilfully rhymed. His giving up this line of work so soon is a sign that his satires were not so much the spontaneous production of his mind as imitations of others, suggested by outward circumstances. In the *Epithalamia*, the most numerous of his poems, a few pretty ideas are entirely overpowered by the dullness of the rest, while the plain-spoken improprieties are all the more odious from the weakness of the whole tone

of the work. In spite of this, the fact remains that for a whole generation his poems enjoyed great popularity; they reached four editions before the year 1748, and no doubt they reflect with considerable truth the poetic taste of Leipzig at the time.

In his sacred poems, Picander shows even less original talent than in the satires and the secular occasional verses.

This branch of his art was utterly foreign to his nature, and probably he never would have attempted to write poems for cantatas had not Bach been in want of a versifier, and had it not been important to him, striving as he was for the mere necessities of life, to be brought into connection with the celebrated composer. It is clearly perceptible too that Bach fashioned him for his own purpose. Many indications point to the fact of Bach having employed him in the beginning of 1724, or perhaps even for the Council-election of 1723. The first sacred poem by Picander to which he is known to have composed the music—the Michaelmas cantata "Es erhub sich ein Streit," was written in 1725. The "Sammlung erbaulicher Gedanken," begun in the previous year, afforded no opportunities whatever to the composer ; but in this cantata Neumeister's form of poetry is used with success, at least in the recitatives, though the texts of the arias betray the hand of a beginner. As Picander had previously written words for several occasional cantatas, he cannot have found it hard to acquire the knack of getting the right form in the sacred cantatas. Many turns of expression show the influence of Neumeister, and especially in one particular, that he tries to give his diction an ecclesiastical tone by a free admixture of Scriptural expressions, and of allusions—often extremely farfetched—to Biblical events. In the year 1725 he wrote for the first time a Passion poem, taking Brockes for his model. From this time the intercourse between Bach and himself became closer. Picander was himself not without musical talent and knowledge, and in this respect he had one advantage over Neumeister, to whom indeed he was not inferior in his easy use of language. In his secular poems the allusions to musical matters are of frequent occurrence, and they go into such detail that we may conclude that he not only took a lively interest in it, but practised it also himself. In one place he even gives two very pretty dances as a musical

appendix, and from a poem of the year 1730 we learn that he was a member of a musical society—which must have been the one conducted by Bach.

In the preface to the year-book of cantatas written in 1728-1729, Picander says : "To the glory of God, and actuated by the requests of many good friends, and by much devotion on my own part, I resolved to compose the present cantatas. I undertook the design the more readily, because I flatter myself that the lack of poetic charm may be compensated for by the loveliness of the music of our incomparable Kapellmeister Bach, and that these songs may be sung in the chief churches of our pious Leipzig." This cycle of poems was thus directly intended for Bach, and it seems to owe its origin to an unexpected wish expressed by him, since it does not correspond with the ecclesiastical year, but begins with St. John's Day, ending with the fourth Sunday after Trinity. For Good Friday, 1726, Picander wrote the text of the St. Matthew Passion, this time, however, not imitating Brockes' plan, but keeping the Bible words unchanged. Here again Bach's influence is easily perceptible, and it may be also traced in the circumstance that Picander seems to have borrowed some of his ideas, at least, from Franck. It is impossible to give any positive evidence of this, since Franck's skill in cantata writing was never anything but moderate. Still, a comparison of certain portions of the German text will seem sufficient proof to the reader who cares to search into the matter, and as Bach certainly loved Franck's work for the sake of his fervent and rapturous sentiment, it can only have been he who referred Picander to Franck's works.

After 1729 Picander published only a very few sacred poems, but it must not be supposed that he ceased writing them altogether. We may indeed feel certain of the contrary, for a lasting intercourse remained between him and Bach, and he was the only person in Leipzig who could undertake tasks of this kind with adequate skill. If we are not to regard Picander as the author of most of the other cantatas which Bach wrote in Leipzig, it is inexplicable that Bach should never have set to music a single one (so far, at least, as we know at present) out of the numerous collections of cantatas which appeared at that time, and which must have been accessible to him. After what has been said, Picander's omission of these cantatas from his collected works is easily

explained ; he put no value on these manufactured compositions, which were put together hastily and to please his friend. Franck wrote out of a true poetic inspiration; Neumeister was an active theologian and preacher ; while Henrici did not feel himself impelled to writing sacred poems by any genuine or hearty interest in such things. His impulse came solely from Bach, and this explains the pains he took in turning to account the productions of others and remodeling them for Bach's purposes ; and of this procedure his treatment of Franck's hymns is not the only example. Bach also took an interest in the writing of Johann Jakob Rambach, several of whose devotional works he had in his library. He never used one of Rambach's cantata texts, however, although they are as good as anything of their kind. But he seems to have drawn Picander's notice to a pretty madrigal by Rambach (" Erwünschter Tag") :-

O wished-for day,

To be engraved on marble,

Or metal that will ne'er decay—

for the same idea occurs in the text of one of Picander's Christmas cantatas (" Christen ätzet diesen Tag") :

Christians, grave ye this great day

In brass and stone that will not perish.

In a cantata by Rambach, for the Feast of the Purification, one of the arias begins thus ("Brechet, ihr verfallnen Augen ")

Rest, O eyes so dim and weary, Close in slumber's sweet repose.

And in one of Bach's cantatas on the same feast there are these lines ("Schlummert ein, ihr matten Augen") :- Slumber now, O eyes so weary, Close in soft and sweet repose

Bach had composed music to an ode by Gottsched for the obsequies of Queen Christiana Eberhardine, and afterwards wished to put the music to some other purpose; Picander gave his assistance and wrote a new poem, so that the funeral ode became a Passion according to St. Mark. He was just as willing and ready to put new words to compositions on his own texts, if the music could thereby be made available for other purposes.

It is worthwhile to draw attention to the difference which existed between the sister arts of music and poetry as regards their art-ideals. Music as applied to religion had attained a height which must be allowed to be unapproached before or since, in respect both to depth and richness of substance, and to variety and breadth of form. The art of sacred poetry, however, so far from rising to a similar level, had sunk, under the successors of Neumeister, to be a false and hollow mockery. It would not be too much to say that the influence of the cantata-poem upon the development of poetry at that time was really ruinous. For these collections of texts, although made for the special purpose of musical treatment, ere long asserted their claim to be regarded as independent creations. Originally printed separately, in order to enable the congregation to follow the words during the music, they soon came to be considered as devotional works on their own account, and were, in fact, sold as such in large numbers. Very many of these texts were never set to music; for Picander wrote cantata-poems even for the Sundays on which, as he knew very well, there was no music in church—viz., for the Sundays in Lent and the three last in Advent. Those who chiefly threw themselves into this branch of poetry were persons who either had no poetic faculty at all, or in whom whatever talent there might be inclined to another kind of work; to the last class belonged Picander, as well as another writer well known at that time, Daniel Stoppe, of Silesia. The gigantic advance made by Brockes in his "Irdisches Vergnügen in Gott," and by Gellert in his odes and songs—not to mention Klopstock, who came somewhat later—can only be perfectly estimated by a comparison of their works with the great mass of the cantata-poems in vogue in Bach's time. Still, it must be admitted that the new spirit which appeared in the works of these men was unsuited and opposed to musical setting; their poems were to attain their end by their own poetical inspiration, independent of other aids. During Bach's period, artistic feeling and emotions in the domain of religion found vent almost exclusively in music, and from the moment when sacred poetry made itself felt as a prominent influence religious music began to decline. The overpowering predominance of the musical factor in this kind of work is very clearly seen in Bach's relations with his Leipzig poet. It might have been fatal to him, for it is not possible that church music can be genuine and good which utterly disregards the particular

religious sentiment or emotion called up by the poetry; indeed, Keiser, Telemann, and Stölzel, although their gifts were by no means small, had succumbed to this very danger. Bach triumphed over it, because, however fully and comprehensively he represented all the musical inspirations of his time, he yet remained faithful to the foundation of all Protestant church music, namely, the chorale.