

April 16, 2007

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The religious scholar and historian, Houston Smith, has described Franz Josef as the last real emperor of Austria-Hungary. His funeral, Houston Smith writes, was one of the most magisterial funerals in history. The body lay in state in the cathedral of St. Stephen in Vienna. The funeral cortege, led by the young Emperor Charles and Empress Zita, proceeded on foot for the burial to a Capuchin monastery. The monks there were known for their gentleness and kindly humanitarianism- A vast crowd stood in reverent silence along the route of the procession but when the cortege reached the monastery gates they were closed. The grand majordomo, white plumes on his hat, knocked loudly, but there was no response. The knocking turned into pounding. Finally, a tiny window opened on an upper story disclosing a wizened face in a brown hood.

"Who knocks?" It asked.

"Franz Josef, Emperor of Austria, Apostolic king of Hungary," came the reply.

"We know of no such man," and the window closed.

More pounding. At length the face reappeared to put the same question.

"Franz Josef, Heir to the house of Anjou, Protector of the House of Hapsburg, King of Bohemia, Lord of Bosnia and Herzegovina -- -- --" the titles seemed endless.

"We know of no such man."

A third time, the drama was repeated. But this time to "who knocks?", the answer came back, "a poor mortal." The gates swung open. Only the casket was admitted, carried by the brothers.

Recently, I was reminded of Houston Smith's description of the effort necessary to gain entrance to his final resting place for the emperor's corporeal remains.

As I began to read, in preparation for the development of this presentation, I first learned of an effort some 125 years earlier by a 14 year old Jewish boy to gain entrance to the city of Berlin.

This was in the autumn of 1743.

At that time, the only entrance to the city, the Rosenthaler Tor, which required payment for passage, was limited to animals, and the occasional Jew.

The 14 year old boy, who presented at the Rosenthaler Tor, was an unimposing

figure, to say the least. He was short in stature and had a prominent deforming kyphosis or hunchback. His neck seemed elongated and his head prominent. Were one to make a prediction of his future based on his physical appearance, the safest bet would be that, with luck, he might become a moderately successful beggar.

Many years later, after he had gained fame as one of the great intellectual figures of the Enlightenment, he noted ironically that based on the tax required for entrance to Berlin, a Jewish philosopher and a pregnant sow were valued equally.

Moses Dessau, as he was then known, had David Frankel as his first teacher.

But Frankel had been called from Dessau to Berlin to be the head rabbi there. The 14 year old Moses realized that there was little future for him in Dessau. So he set out on an 80 mile walk over five days from his home to Berlin. Dessau at that time was a town of some 8500 with perhaps 150 Jewish families. His father was known as Mendel Dessau. He was an impoverished rabbi (a sizable redundancy), who ran a Hebrew school for the Jewish boys of that town, all of whose families were similarly destitute.

Mendel supplemented his minimal income by laboring as a religious scribe, copying passages from the Bible on strips of parchment, which were then incorporated in the mezuzoth or tephillin (the former being attached to the doorpost of their home, the latter being strapped on the forehead and forearm for the morning devotion.)

The young man, Moses, and his younger brother Saul, assisted their father with the copying work. Moses, in particular, developed an exquisite calligraphy, which, it turned out, served him very well.

His son, Abraham, many years later, acquired similar skills, which were said to advance his banking career. And, in fact, Moses's grandson, Felix, also was known for the precision of his musical notation.

When David Frankel had Moses as a student in Dessau Frankel, he presented the boy with a copy of Moses Maimonides' "A Guide to the Perplexed". Moses Dessau has been described as reading the 1000 page text with something approaching ecstasy, recognizing meanings that easily surpassed the legalistic hairsplitting of his required Talmudic studies.

After gaining admission to Berlin Moses Dessau found his way to Frankel's home-Frankel, surprised to find Moses Dessau in Berlin, found Moses lodgings in the home of a neighbor. The latter was willing to lodge the boy in his attic free of charge, additionally providing him with two or three meals weekly. This honored a longtime tradition of

offering hospitality to gifted students. All the young men, however, were not scholars.

Amos Elon writes that in the 18th-century bands of Jewish highwaymen were said to infest the countryside. Some were rumored to maintain a modicum of pious custom, observing a more or less kosher diet, robbing only on weekdays, and resting from their labors on the Sabbath. They became part of the general underworld.

Moses Dessau enrolled in Frankel's seminary, where the curriculum constituted of unending rote repetitions of early medieval texts, interpretations thereof, and extensive commentary accumulated over the centuries. There followed years of dedicated learning and extreme poverty.

Beyond his religious studies, Moses taught himself German, Latin, Greek, French and English. He read every book he could place his hands on. He was obliged to do this secretly, because secular studies were prohibited at the seminary.

Frankel then found a position for Moses Dessau with a silk merchant, Isaac Bernhard, where he also served as a tutor for the children in the Bernhard home. Moses was provided with a room and received a regular stipend. With his new income Moses began to take music lessons and made occasional visits to concerts and the theater.

Moses Mendelssohn (no longer Moses Dessau) was a passionate lover of music and was able to study piano with Johann Philipp Kirnberger, one of Johann Sebastian Bach's close disciples.

While serving as a tutor in the Bernhard home Mendelssohn met and was befriended by several non-Jewish intellectuals- One was Gotthold Lessing, a playwright and journalist. They became close friends, and remained so for the rest of their lives.

The Enlightenment, which I would shorthand as representing an emerging confidence in human reasoning, resulted in strengthening secular forces and the diminution of the force of religious thinking.

The Enlightenment came to Germany first from England, where it mainly was concerned with the economy.

It came next from France, where the concern was largely with liberalizing the political system. In Germany the Enlightenment focused on ensuring the freedom of faith and was not rooted in a political class. It was here, particularly, that Moses Mendelssohn served as an intellectual force.

Immanuel Kant has been considered the philosophic spokesman of the Enlightenment in Germany, and Lessing, the literary spokesman. Lessing's prose has been

described as pure and precise to a degree not seen in German letters until then.

Lessing was attracted to Mendelssohn for several reasons. Lessing admired his autodidactic gifts and viewed Mendelssohn as living proof of one of the Enlightenment's major pillars, that he had become what he was by the force of his own thinking.

Mendelssohn later wrote that everything he had done or written in his life had been with Lessing in mind as inspiration. Lessing, he wrote, had formed his soul.

In 1762 during a visit to Hamburg, Moses Mendelssohn met a 24 year old blonde, blue-eyed girl named Fromet Gugenheim. Her father, a merchant, knew of Mendelssohn's expanding intellectual reputation and was eager to match the couple-It is said that when Fromet first laid eyes on this humpbacked misshapen figure who had been selected as her husband, she burst into tears. Later, the legend goes, Mendelssohn had the chance to sit down with Fromet alone- "Is it my hump?" he asked. She nodded. "Let me tell you a story then."

"When a Jewish child is born, a proclamation is made in heaven of the name of the person that he or she is to marry.

When I was born, my future wife also was named but at the same time it was said that she herself would-be humpbacked.

'O God,' I said, 'a deformed girl will become embittered and unhappy. Dear Lord, let me have the humpback and make the maiden flawless and beautiful.' "

In June, 1762 they were married.

Three sons and three daughters survived past early childhood so the Mendelssohn home was a lively one with the sound of the children and the tutors engaged to instruct them. Moses Mendelssohn never achieved real wealth but his position at Bernhard's silk firm – where he had started as a clerk – but had become a partner – gave him some sense of security.

December 31, 1785, fell upon a Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath. Mendelssohn had promised a manuscript to his publisher and personally carried it to him on a particularly cold and unpleasant day. When he returned home he complained of chest pain and retired.

Two days later, still suffering from chest pain, his good friend and physician, Marcus Herz, was summoned. Herz apparently saw no cause for concern and prescribed bed rest.

In fairness to Herz, we might be reminded that this was at least 125 years before James B. Herrick at the University of Chicago, described the clinical features of what we

now accept as myocardial infarction.

Some 48 hours later, Mendelssohn's 16-year-old son, Joseph, arrived at Herz's home to report that his father's condition had worsened dramatically. Herz hurried to his patient's home and found Mendelssohn in poor condition. Before Herz could conduct his examination, the patient gasped and fell back dead.

Our diagnostic skills may have advanced somewhat since that time, but surely not the poetry of our bedside notes. Herz recorded that the patient lay "without emotion, struggle, convulsion, or any warning of death, as if an angel had kissed his life away."

Moses Mendelssohn was 57 years old at the time of death. He was buried in a simple wooden coffin in the Jewish cemetery in Berlin. The stone marking the grave was inscribed in Hebrew: "Here rests Rabbi Moses of Dessau".

Moses Mendelssohn had three sons; Joseph was 16 years when his father died, Abraham was 10 and Nathan, the youngest, was four.

Joseph later opened a small bank in Berlin and became a great success in banking.

Abraham Mendelssohn also became an important banker in Berlin and, in fact, was sent to Paris as a member of a Prussian commission charged with negotiating the French war indemnity.

Abraham's sister Henrietta had become the tutor and companion to the daughter of one of the most distinguished men in the Empire, General Horace Francois Sebastiani.

In 1824 Henrietta's pupil was 17, had a voluptuous figure, an easy temperament — and an empty head, — all superior qualifications for marriage to a young French nobleman.

This was a time when there was great pressure on Jews to convert to Christianity.

Joseph, the eldest of Moses' three sons, stubbornly refused to convert despite the pressure to do so. Joseph remained a practicing Jew until the end. Joseph, who viewed himself as a man of the Enlightenment, maintained a strong interest in science.

His friend, Alexander von Humboldt, already famous for his scientific work, came to see him in great distress. Von Humboldt's landlord planned to sell his house and then evict the scientist with his collection of natural history specimens. Joseph Mendelssohn reportedly thought for a moment and reassured von Humboldt that he would think of something. Later that same day, Joseph Mendelssohn sent the nervous naturalist a note: "Dear Humboldt: Stay undisturbed in your house as long as you like. I am now your landlord, as I have bought the house."

Abraham's banking career in Paris was proceeding well and he loved France. His wife's family wanted the couple to settle in Berlin, but Abraham objected. At one point he commented to his older sister, Henrietta, also a Francophile, "je preferais manger du pain sec a Paris" (I would rather eat a crust of bread in Paris.)

Abraham's wife, Leah Salamon, was an accomplished pianist and spoke English, French, Italian as well as German. Abraham shared many of his wife's intellectual and artistic interests, but some of his letters suggest less than a full appreciation of the arts.

In one of his letters he described an addition to the Louvre: "In the hall of statues I have found nothing new but a Venus of Milo, who has lost both her arms. I know nothing further about her."

Abraham and Leah's first child, Fanny, was born in November, 1805.

Abraham, announcing the arrival in a letter to his mother-in-law wrote: "Leah says that the baby has Bach-fugue fingers". Not many new mothers have proven that prescient in describing the characteristics of their new babies.

Felix Mendelssohn was Abraham and Leah's second child and first son and was born on February 3, 1809.

Felix had a maternal uncle, born Jacob Levin Salomon, but from childhood was uncomfortable with his Jewish identity. He converted to Protestantism and adopted the name Bartholdy. He took the name from a dairy farm he had inherited.

Bartholdy had accumulated a considerable fortune and had led his sister (Felix's mother) to believe that she would inherit it. The price of Bartholdy's promise seems to have been the right to meddle endlessly in Mendelssohn family affairs.

He proved persuasive in matters of religion in that his brother in law, Abraham Mendelssohn, finally took his children to the New Church in Berlin and had them baptized. Fanny was not yet eleven at the time, and Felix was seven.

The early musical education of Felix Mendelssohn and his sister Fanny was initiated and supervised by their mother, Lean.

At age ten Felix was reading complex scores with ease and transposing at the keyboard. That year Felix had completed his elementary schooling.

About this time Felix began to study piano with Ludwig Berger, a former pupil of Muzeo Clemente. In October 1818, Felix performed in public, probably for the first time, accompanying two horn players.

This accomplishment was eclipsed by Fanny's performance (at the age of 13) of 24

Preludes from Bach's Well Tempered Clavier.

Felix's general education advanced rapidly under the direction of distinguished private tutors.

When he was 12 he was reading Caesar and Ovid and studying history and geography, arithmetic and French. Felix became an avid classicist— dare I say he was avid for Ovid.

In his 12th year his productivity took a huge leap. He completed several sacred choral works, six symphonies for strings, a piano Sonata in G minor, and numerous fugues for string quartet and a wedding cantata for a cousin.

When not yet 13, he made a two-week visit to Weimar where he was the guest of the 70 year old Goethe. He was, of course, called upon to play. He performed several Bach fugues, the overture to Mozart's "Nozze di Figaro", some of his own compositions and improvisations and read autographs of Mozart and Beethoven at sight.

In July, 1822, the family took a Swiss holiday. By this time Mendelssohn had begun to study drawing with the Berlin painter J. G. S. Rosel and had produced some 50 meticulous drawings of scenic landscapes. During October, before Felix's 13th birthday, his parents converted to the Protestant faith under the considerable influence of Leah Salomon Mendelssohn's brother, Bartholdy.

In late 1821 Felix received an exceptional gift from his maternal grandmother, Bella Salomon, a copy of Bach's St. Matthew Passion. Five years later, after considerable study and preparation, Mendelssohn revived the work in what became a celebrated performance at the Berlin Singakademie. He was 19 at the time.

In March of 1825, when Mendelssohn was 16, he made a trip with his father to Paris. His father, Abraham, took the opportunity to solicit the opinion of Cherubini, then the director of the Paris Conservatoire. Cherubini urged Abraham to leave his son in Paris for more study, but Abraham declined.

Despite his youth, —perhaps because of it— Mendelssohn was not bashful about commenting on the characteristics of some of the prominent figures he met and played for. In his letters home, he commented that the 14-year-old Franz Liszt had "many fingers but not much intelligence," and Cherubini "was an extinct volcano that occasionally spewed forth ash."

In September, 1825, shortly before his 16th birthday, Mendelssohn was confirmed in the Protestant faith. By then the family had moved from the house of his grandmother,

Bella Salomon, to a Berlin residence in the Leipzigerplatz. This was a dilapidated mansion with courtyards, gardens, stables and summer house.

The new home became as much a cultural center as a music Center for an ever widening circle of friends.

These included the poet Heinrich Heine, the philosopher Hegel and the scientist Alexander von Humboldt.

In July of 1826, not yet 17, Mendelssohn wrote to Fanny that he would soon begin to "dream the Midsummer Night's Dream.". By early August he had finished this remarkable concert overture. Some musicologists consider this the most perfect overture ever written.

During that summer Mendelssohn was studying for his entrance examinations to the University of Berlin.

I would interject that as someone who has interviewed a generous number of students making application to various university programs Felix would have had no difficulty with me. At that time he had mastered at least six languages, including Greek and Latin, had written a minimum of 16 string symphonies, numerous pieces of chamber music, had rediscovered neglected pieces by Bach and was preparing some of the latter music for public presentation.

On several occasions during his youth, Felix and Fanny were subject to anti-Semitic slurs. These episodes seemed to strengthen Felix's feelings for his Jewish origins. On one trip with his father Felix insisted that they visit Dessau where he visited the tiny synagogue where his grandfather Moses had studied and worshiped as a boy. Felix had never known his grandfather who died many years before Felix was born.

Felix's father, Abraham, pressured him to adopt the name Bartholdy, that of the not particularly popular maternal uncle. During a carriage ride to Paris Felix reportedly asked his father pointedly why he had changed the family name.

Abraham reportedly was distressed by the question. He offered the example that his father originally changed his name from Moses ben Mendel to Moses Mendelssohn. He made the argument (a rather weak one to my view) that to continue to use the name Mendelssohn was an affront to Moses who had made the name famous in Jewish history. "A Christian Mendelssohn is an impossibility. There can no more be a Christian Mendelssohn than a Jewish Confucius. If Mendelssohn is your name, you are ipso facto a Jew."

Abraham Mendelssohn was largely a self-made man and, like so many such people, was consumed with ambition for his children.

The children were awakened at 5 a.m. to begin their morning lessons. Abraham Mendelssohn employed an even wider variety of tutors than had his father, Moses. Felix, for example, had a personal tutor for landscape painting.

He was only eight years old when his father recruited Carl Friedrich Zeiter to instruct Felix. Zeiter was 59 years old, and the director of the Berlin Singakademie.

It was through Zeiter that Felix was introduced to Goethe and later became his house guest.

Goethe's musical tastes were limited. He claimed never to really understand Beethoven, who was still alive and composing, and Goethe had rebuffed Schubert, who wanted to submit some compositions to him.

Goethe loved the music of Bach and on the first day of his visit the 11 year old Mendelssohn played for more than two hours for him. The remainder of the Mendelssohn family were busy advising Felix by letter as to his behavior. His older sister Fanny told him to keep his eyes and ears open in Goethe's presence and further warned him that "after you come home if you can't repeat every word that fell from his mouth, I'll have nothing more to do with you."

Although described as sweet tempered by most biographers, Felix had his rough edges. On one occasion, during his first trip to London, dissatisfied with the performance of the orchestra that he was conducting, he simply tore the score in two and flung it at the startled musicians.

Then, while conducting a rehearsal of Beethoven's eighth Symphony which was not going to his liking, he commented that "he knew everyone of the gentlemen engaged was capable of performing and even of composing, a scherzo of his own; but that just now he wanted to hear Beethoven's, which he thought had some merit."

Two biographical areas merit special emphasis. The first, and more significant, is the relationship between Felix and his older sister, Fanny. To say that they were close vastly underestimates the relationship.

Some biographers, more psychoanalytically oriented, have found the relationship a rich source for speculation. Other writers have maintained that Fanny was the finer keyboard artist and possibly Felix's equal as a composer. The culture of the time and their father Abraham's beliefs on the role of women in music further complicated the

relationships. He insisted that to think of a professional musical career for Fanny was an impossibility. His wife agreed, and they concentrated on a suitable marriage for Fanny.

The other subject of emphasis deals with Felix Mendelssohn's affection for England. His first trip there was at age 20 and in the next 17 years he made nine more visits.

The first visit was a part of a three-year grand tour planned by Felix and his father. He was intrigued by London as he had been by no other city. He apparently developed an eye for the English girls and, according to his letters, met one beauty after another.

Although he wrote no scandalous letters as did Mozart to his cousin, nor did he develop syphilis as did Schubert, he apparently managed a brisk social life-

His sister Fanny married an artist, Wilhelm Hensel, when she was 24. It apparently was a happy marriage and her husband encouraged her musical activities.

Fanny and their mother leaned heavily on Felix to find himself a wife. He was not without lady friends. The most prominent was a beautiful and popular opera star, Maria Malabran.

Her life had a colorful and operatic quality that must have been intriguing to Felix. Her father married her off at age 18 to a wealthy elderly citizen, whom she soon abandoned in favor of a Belgian violinist with whom she had been fiddling around.

Maria and Felix met on a musical evening at the home of mutual friends in London. He accompanied her, improvising on Spanish melodies he had never before heard, adding to her enchantment with him. They had several more meetings in London before he returned home. Three years later, she died after a fall from a horse. He thought of writing a Requiem for her but on more sober reflection chose not to do so.

In 1836 Mendelssohn was invited to direct a series of choral concerts by the St. Cecilia society of Frankfurt. The Cecilia society was a largely amateur local choral group which included a goodly number of the daughters of Frankfurt's best families. One of these was a blue-eyed beauty, an 18 year-old soprano named Cecile Jeanrenaud. A warm friendship between Cecile and Felix quickly developed.

The Jeanrenauds were Swiss but had lived in Frankfurt for many years. Cecile's father, who died when she was two, had been a clergyman in the French Reformed church. He left a beautiful young widow, so attractive that the neighbors were uncertain when Felix came to visit whether it was mother or daughter being courted.

That Felix was smitten by Cecile was quickly evident. He took the unusual step of

leaving Frankfurt to spend a month at the seashore during which he resolved to marry her.

On his return to Frankfurt Felix Mendelssohn, continued his courtship in ways that few could match. He played piano for the family on his home visits and made exquisite sketches of the local scenery as seen through their windows.

His ardor and efforts were rewarded. Felix and Cecile were married in March, 1837. His family was not enthusiastic about the union as reflected by their absence from the wedding. The following year their first son was born followed by four more children within the next seven years.

By then the family reserve had melted and unlike the life of most composers, domesticity ruled the roost- Felix continued to compose and conduct and travel throughout Germany and England.

Sisters Fanny and Rebecca with their families spent the 1839-40 winter in Rome where they became the center of a group of young foreign artists then living in the eternal city. Among them was Charles Gounod, then 21, already a winner of the Prix de Rome. Rebecca, the most vivacious of the family, wrote a letter home delighted that the Italian word "poverino" or "poor fellow" meant the same thing as the Yiddish expression "nebbisch", "a nobody".

Eighteen forty also brought a royal summons for Felix from Leipzig back to Berlin. A new king, Frederick William IV, had ascended the Prussian throne. The mandate was that Mendelssohn was designated to be the head of the music division of the Royal Academy of the Arts. While Mendelssohn's family in Berlin were enthusiastic about this, Mendelssohn was not. But he could not ignore the royal summons. He moved with his family back to Berlin, and what followed were the most miserable five years of his life.

During this time, his mother died which affected him profoundly. He summoned up the courage to tell the king of his desire to return to Leipzig.

Mendelssohn's liberation from Berlin seemed to free his creative talents as well for a short time later he composed the E minor violin Concerto, one of his masterpieces.

A few weeks later he was in Berlin for some business meetings and he met a young singer named Jenny Lind.

According to one observer, she was not a great beauty but as he wrote to friends, "Her upper F sharp possesses an irresistible charm." Apparently she had other charm as well and he spent a good deal of time with her. He invited her to sing with him in Leipzig

at the Gewandhaus. This seemed to please nearly everyone in Leipzig, with the possible exception of his wife, Cecile, who reportedly was cool to the new young Swedish soprano about whom Felix was so enthusiastic.

Both Mendelssohn and his music were very popular in England.

He found an instant acclaim that he had never enjoyed in his native Germany. He has been described as the ideal Victorian composer, a worthy successor of Beethoven. He was welcomed and entertained by the 23 year-old Queen Victoria and her husband, Prince Albert. The latter was comfortable at the keyboard, and the queen enjoyed singing. Singing his music for Mendelssohn did not exempt one from criticism for, as he wrote to his mother, "The queen sang quite charmingly—— except that at one point, she sang a D. Sharp, instead of a D."

During her life Fanny suffered from frequent nose bleeds. Many were difficult to control and one severe episode lasted for more than 36 hours.

In 1847 while rehearsing a chorus at her home she suddenly felt her arms grow numb and lapsed into a coma. She died several hours later. The doctor recorded the cause of death as a cerebral hemorrhage. She was 41 at the time of death-Felix was at the height of his popularity and was called upon to travel a great deal.

He had seen much less of his siblings for several years although they corresponded frequently. Thus, when he returned home to Frankfurt after a trip to London and found a letter from his younger brother Paul he had little reason to anticipate bad news.

Fanny's death had a stunning effect upon her husband. His depression was deep and long-lasting. Essentially, his career had ended. He completed no more paintings. He survived another 15 years until he died from injuries in a street accident.

The impact of Fanny's death on Felix for months was evident to all who knew him. He tried to continue composing but his heart was not in it.

Several months later the family traveled to Switzerland. They settled in Interlaken where Felix did succeed in composing a quartet in F. minor which critics interpreted as a memorial to his sister, Fanny.

He had many projects awaiting him, including commissions from several major cities in England and on the continent.

Once again, he fell into a deep depression. Over the next month Felix Mendelssohn suffered several strokes which left him partially paralyzed. He succumbed on November 4, 1847 not yet age 39.

In this paper I have reviewed the history of three generations of a German-born family whose lives extended from the early 18th century to the mid-19th-century. The family no longer exists. Their disappearance has multiple explanations. Prominent among them is an incompletely understood heritable disorder of blood vessels and possibly of proteins that normally support blood clotting.

The member of the first generation to distinguish himself was Moses who is viewed as the philosophic leader of the German Enlightenment and, though this was not his intent, the inspiration of the Jewish Reform movement. His sons became the founders of powerful European banking interests, second only to the Rothschild family. His grandchildren included Felix, a prodigy some have compared to Mozart and the rediscoverer of some of Bach's greatest works, and Fanny, whose early death denied her recognition as composer, keyboard artist and muse to her younger brother, Felix.

All this in three short generations, only to disappear, washed away by the waves of time.

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