

JOHANNES BRAHMS

German composer

One of the greatest composers of his century, Brahms left an enduring body of work, which demonstrated that the forms and genres of Viennese classicism would continue to have artistic validity during the late nineteenth century and that they were not incompatible with the ethos of Romanticism.

BORN: May 7, 1833; Hamburg (now in Germany)

DIED: April 3, 1897; Vienna, Austro-Hungarian Empire (now in Austria)

AREA OF ACHIEVEMENT: Music

EARLY LIFE

Johannes Brahms (brahmz) was the son of Johann Jakob Brahms, a double bassist in the municipal orchestra of Hamburg, and Johanna Henrika Christiane Nissen, a small, disabled woman who was seventeen years her husband's senior. Though romantic biographers often exaggerated the humble origins of their subjects, accounts of Brahms's childhood in a Dickensian tenement in Hamburg are largely accurate, and it appears true that Brahms was required at an early age to play the piano in dockside taverns and dance halls in order to augment the family income. Certainly Brahms's childhood was not altogether wretched: It seems clear that his parents offered considerable affection (Brahms worshiped his mother throughout her life) and did what could be done, given their straitened circumstances, to develop their son's gifts.

Brahms's remarkable musical talent was discovered at an early age by his father. He was given competent instruction at the piano by Otto F. W. Cossel and distinguished, if conservative, instruction in composition by Eduard Marxsen. Though Brahms was not a prodigy on the order of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart or Felix Mendelssohn, his talent developed rapidly. During the 1848-1849 season, he gave two public piano recitals, performing works as formidable as Ludwig van Beethoven's *Waldstein* Sonata, Op. 53. He was also composing prolifically, though the works from this period are no longer extant; Brahms, ever self-critical, later destroyed these "youthful indiscretions" by the trunkful.

In 1853, Brahms seized an opportunity to participate in a concert tour with the flamboyant Hungarian violinist Eduard Reményi. The tour proved to be a turning point in Brahms's life. Through Reményi's offices, Brahms was introduced first to Franz Liszt in Weimar and then to Robert and Clara Schumann in Düsseldorf. The initial meeting with the Schumanns—he the leading spirit in the

German Romantic musical movement and she the greatest female pianist of the century—took place on September 30, 1853.

The three immediately experienced a remarkable personal and musical communion, and Brahms became virtually a member of the Schumann household. At this time, Brahms was twenty years old, small, slightly built, blond, unbearded, and androgynously fair of face (not the bearded, well-fleshed, cigar-smoking doyen of later photographs), and he seems to have exercised a complex fascination on both the Schumanns. So impressed by Brahms's playing and compositions was Robert Schumann that he was moved to issue a review in the prestigious *New Journal for Music* declaring Brahms to be a "young eagle" who had sprung forth "fully armed." Schumann had, in effect, anointed Brahms as his musical heir; the younger man's public career had begun.

LIFE'S WORK

The first works that Brahms allowed posterity to see date from the period of the first meeting with the Schumanns. It is easy to see why Robert Schumann admired the three piano sonatas (Opp. 1, 2, and 5) that Brahms presented to him. Though the shadow of Beethoven looms over these works, they display an emerging individuality, a formal mastery, and a seriousness of purpose that justify Schumann's description of Brahms as already "fully armed." The Sonata in F Minor, Op. 5 is particularly impressive: It is a big-boned work in five movements whose carefully organized ideas are alternately fiery and lyrical. Brahms's unique, thick-textured, robust, and occasionally awkward keyboard idiom, doubtless deriving from his own idiosyncratic piano technique, is already fully present.

The years from 1854 to 1856 were years of personal turmoil for Brahms. Early in 1854, Robert Schumann suffered a nervous collapse that required his institutionalization and that led ultimately to his death in 1856. Brahms devoted much of his energy during this time of trial to the emotional support of Clara. There is no doubt that Brahms believed himself to be in love with Clara at this time. The degree of intimacy to which Brahms and Clara progressed is not known. Shortly after Robert's death, the two evidently agreed to maintain their friendship on a purely platonic basis.

The years of Schumann's illness had not been productive ones for Brahms. Shortly before Schumann's col-

lapse, Brahms had completed his first major chamber work: the Piano Trio in B Major, Op. 8. It was an auspicious beginning. The next large works date from the end of the decade. In 1857, Brahms accepted a post as pianist and choral conductor at the small court of Detmold. There he had an opportunity to work with the court's forty-piece orchestra. In 1859, Brahms completed his first work employing full orchestra, the Concerto No. 1 in D Minor, Op. 15. The work had a complicated genesis: Brahms had first intended to write a symphony, and the work lacks the surface brilliance of most Romantic concertos. Though it was not well received at first, it is a great, if somewhat austere, work. The piano part is in some respects ungracefully written, and the work was long considered unplayable.

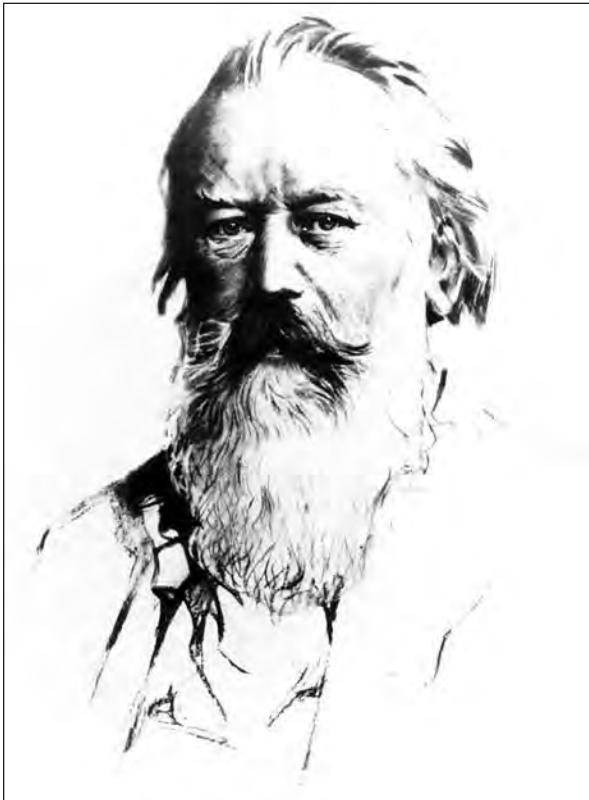
Though Brahms was by no means a reactionary, he found himself increasingly allied during the 1850's and 1860's with musical conservatives such as the Schumanns and violinist Joseph Joachim in opposition to radical Romantics such as Franz Liszt and Richard Wagner. Brahms himself had little interest in critical polemics of any sort, but in 1860 he allowed his name to be placed on

a manifesto decrying the so-called music of the future of Liszt and his cohorts. Ultimately, Brahms was made to suffer for this gesture: He became the *bête noire* of radical critics and was the victim of critical vituperation for the remainder of his life. To these thrusts, Brahms appeared stoically indifferent; on later occasions, he expressed admiration for the works of Wagner, the leader of the opposing camp.

In 1863, Brahms accepted a post as director of the Vienna *Singakademie* (choral society) and for the remainder of his life resided chiefly in Vienna. The city of the Habsburgs, with its *Gemütlichkeit* and its memories of Franz Schubert, Mozart, and Beethoven, thus became the backdrop for Brahms's supreme achievements as a composer. The move was probably a healthy one for Brahms: The sunniness of the Viennese doubtless helped to mitigate Brahms's North German dourness and enabled Brahms to show on occasion a more genial and charming face. As Brahms aged, he seemed in some respects to personify the aging of the century itself; his works increasingly assumed that cast that generations of critics have called "autumnal." Brahms's late works are indeed the Indian summer of Romanticism, warmed by a low sun whose rays shine obliquely.

Brahms's great work of the 1860's, and the work that firmly established his international reputation, was the *German Requiem*, Op. 45, for chorus, soloists, and orchestra. Despite its title, this is not a liturgical mass. Brahms assembled his own text from the German Bible, and as Karl Geiringer has observed, Brahms's requiem is not so much a prayer for the dead as an attempt to comfort and reassure the living who mourn. The occasion that gave rise to this work was the death of Brahms's mother in 1865; the great seven-movement edifice that he constructed in her memory was completed in 1868. Brahms's compositional technique was by this time completely assured in both choral and orchestral idioms, and the *German Requiem* shows Brahms working at a sustained level of inspiration throughout.

Among numerous other works that Brahms composed in his fourth decade, mention should be made of the Piano Quintet in F Minor, Op. 34 (1864); the Horn Trio in E-flat Major, Op. 40 (1865); and the orchestral *Variations on a Theme by Haydn*, Op. 56a (1873). The quintet for piano and strings began life as a duet for two pianos but is heard to greatest effect as a quintet. The trio was written for the unusual combination of violin, French horn, and piano; in its euphony and elegiac quality, it is purest Brahms. The Haydn variations show Brahms in his highest spirits; although the theme was not



Johannes Brahms. (Library of Congress)

original with Haydn, a measure of his good humor pervades the work.

As Brahms entered his forties, he had not yet completed a symphony. It is part of his lore that he shrank from comparison with Beethoven in this genre. It is ironic, then, that his Symphony No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 68 (1876) was promptly dubbed “Beethoven’s Tenth,” and it is revealing that Brahms was not displeased by the nickname. The work borrows the key of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony and appropriates some of the emotional world of the Ninth as well, but these borrowings are not the result of a nullity on the part of Brahms; rather, they reveal Brahms emboldened by the sureness of his own voice. Brahms was to write three more symphonies in 1877, 1883, and 1885; each is the product of consummate craftsmanship, and each has become a repertory staple.

Brahms’s productivity did not diminish in his later years. Among the notable works of his last two decades are the Violin Concerto in D, Op. 77 (1878), the Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat, Op. 83 (perhaps his greatest utterance in concerto form), the second and third piano trios (1882 and 1886), the *Four Serious Songs*, Op. 121 (1896), and the miniatures for piano entitled variously *Intermezzo*, *Capriccio*, and *Ballade*, Opp. 116-119 (1892). These works for piano are an anthology of gems and have a valedictory quality; in some cases, they are an exquisite sort of sublimated café music.

The event that hastened Brahms’s end shortly before his sixty-fourth birthday was the death of his great friend and artistic companion Clara Schumann in 1896. Shortly thereafter, Brahms was found to be suffering from cancer of the liver, to which he succumbed in April of 1897.

SIGNIFICANCE

It was fashionable in progressive circles at the turn of the century to disparage Johannes Brahms. Hugo Wolf railed against Brahms’s vacuousness and “hypocrisy”; George Bernard Shaw declared his style to be “euphuistic,” and quipped that “his *Requiem* is patiently borne only by the corpse.” These views seem today to be quaint at best and monuments to critical vanity at worst. A remarkable percentage of Brahms’s works have remained in the active repertory, and they seem to appeal equally to the learned and the casual listener. Though the formulation may be simplistic, it can be said that Brahms—like Beethoven—speaks both to the intellect and to the heart. As a builder, Brahms was masterful both in design and in execution, and admirers of craftsmanship will not fail to respond to this. Brahms kindly supplied enough recon-

dite features in his works to subsidize a large corps of scholars. At the same time, Brahms had the courage to speak directly and ingenuously to his listeners on an emotional level. This combination of sophistication and directness is the stamp of a great artist.

—Steven W. Shrader

FURTHER READING

- Gál, Hans. *Johannes Brahms: His Work and Personality*. Translated by Joseph Stein. Reprint. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977. Gál, a composer as well as a musicologist, was coeditor of the collected works of Brahms; his study is informed by an exhaustive knowledge of Brahms’s works.
- Geiringer, Karl. *Brahms: His Life and Work*. 2d rev. ed. London: Allen & Unwin, 1948. Geiringer’s work remains the standard study in English of Brahms’s life and creative achievement. The book is divided into two parts: a chronological account of Brahms’s life and a critique of his works organized by genre. Includes an appendix containing an interesting sampling of Brahms’s correspondence.
- Latham, Peter. *Brahms*. London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1948. Rev. ed. 1966. A valuable shorter appraisal of Brahms in a two-part life-and-works format. Contains vivid, epigrammatic descriptions of major works.
- MacDonald, Malcolm. *Brahms*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. A thorough biography aimed at readers who are familiar with Brahms’s works and can read music. MacDonald carefully analyzes Brahms’s compositions, providing sixty-eight musical examples.
- Newman, William S. *The Sonata Since Beethoven*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969. Newman’s study of the sonata principle contains a section of generous dimensions discussing Brahms’s affinity for the sonata form, in general, and his sonatas for violin, piano, and clarinet, in particular.
- Ostwald, Peter. *Schumann: The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1985. Contains a well-documented and thoughtful account of the relationship between Brahms and Schumann. Ostwald, a practicing psychiatrist, bases much of his presentation on previously inaccessible documents. Essential for the student who would understand the Johannes Brahms-Robert Schumann-Clara Schumann triangle.
- Schauffler, Robert H. *The Unknown Brahms: His Life, Character, and Works*. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1933. An anecdotal account of Brahms’s personal life,

Schauffler's work is based in large part on interviews with actual acquaintances of Brahms, and herein lies its chief value. In his attempt to unravel the enigma of Brahms's sexuality, Schauffler provides an early specimen of the so-called psychobiography. Schauffler's discussion of the works is old-fashioned and flowery but not altogether useless.

Schönberg, Arnold. "Brahms the Progressive." In *Style and Idea*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1950. An essay by the influential atonal composer demonstrating the progressive aspects (rhythmic complexity and subtlety of motivic manipulation) of Brahms's art. A useful counterpoint to the prevailing view of Brahms as an autumnal composer.

LOUIS BRAILLE

French inventor and social reformer

Braille invented what became a worldwide system for teaching the blind to read and write and thereby made an enduring contribution to the education and lives of the visually impaired.

BORN: January 4, 1809; Coupvray, near Paris, France

DIED: January 6, 1852; Paris, France

AREAS OF ACHIEVEMENT: Science and technology, social reform

EARLY LIFE

Louis Braille's mother, Constance Braille, was the daughter of a farming family in the countryside near Coupvray. His father, who also bore the name Louis, was a harness-maker. While playing in his father's workshop, the three-year-old Louis suffered an accident that would lead first to sympathetic ophthalmia and then to total blindness. Because there were no special educational facilities for the blind in the provincial areas of France at that time, the child spent the next seven years of his life in a state of relative solitude.

In 1819, when Braille was ten years old, he received a scholarship that enabled him to go to the Royal Institute for the Blind in Paris. It was there that, at the age of fifteen, Braille helped develop a new system of tactile coded impressions that could be used by the blind both to read and to write. This work represented a vast improvement over earlier methods. Although some time passed before this invention gained widespread acceptance, Braille was such a model student at the institute that, once he earned his completion certificate, when he was

Swafford, Jan. *Johannes Brahms: A Biography*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997. Swafford, a musician and biographer, has produced a comprehensive biography of Brahms that combines biographical material with musical scholarship. Includes illustrations, extensive notes, and a bibliography.

SEE ALSO: Antonín Dvořák; Clara Schumann; Robert Schumann; Johann Strauss.

RELATED ARTICLE in *Great Events from History: The Nineteenth Century, 1801-1900*: April 7, 1805: Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony Introduces the Romantic Age.

seventeen, he was appointed as a teacher in the Institute for the Blind.

LIFE'S WORK

As his career as a teacher progressed, Braille played a role in several of the changes that affected not only the organization but also the philosophy of education for the blind in France and other countries. Before 1784, when Valentin Haüy founded what would eventually become the National Institute for the Blind in Paris, few, if any, institutional provisions had existed for special assistance to the blind either in France or elsewhere in Europe or in the United States. This is not to say that the blind had not been the focus of considerable popular attention during prior generations. Indeed, Haüy and others associated with the new institute tried immediately to address some of the most important public-image questions that both he and, ultimately, Braille would face throughout their careers as educators of the blind.

One of these was the task of counteracting traditional prejudices, ranging from innocent pity or emotional compassion to open fear, visibly present among the majority of the population in their attitudes toward the blind. In Haüy's generation, the methods used to achieve this end were not always effective. In some cases, for example, arguments were introduced that underlined special characteristics of the blind. When these had to do with presumed extraordinary talents possessed by the blind by dint of one missing sense (heightened capacities of sense perception through touch or hearing), educators of the

blind could emphasize certain positive points. To a certain extent, this was being done at the institute when Braille began there as a student: Many blind children were given training in music, so they could “prove” to society that they had talents worthy of recognition and praise.

On the other hand, there was another stream of literature, supported in part by Haüy, that suggested that the blind possessed a distinct inner nature that touched the realm of the mysterious. Anyone with a tendency to react negatively to obvious differences between the blind and persons with normal vision might also have been tempted to interpret suggestions of this special characteristic more in negative than in positive terms.

Even before Braille came to the Institute for the Blind in Paris, a debate had already challenged the *Société Philanthropique* (the founding inspiration behind the institute) for offering only charitable assistance to the blind children who came under its care. Some argued that more practical attention needed to be given to preparing blind children for life as participating members of society. In Haüy’s generation, such pressures tended to focus on a list of so-called suitable occupations for which the blind could be trained. Most of these were simple manual trades that could be learned through the sense of touch.

In practical terms, the members of the institute knew that, in order for the transmission of intellectual knowledge to occur, some technical method needed to be found to enable the blind both to read the same texts that were available to the literate majority population and to write without assistance. The most obvious method—one that was already in use by the time Braille became a student at the institute—was to print texts with raised letters. Although the blind could thus follow any printed text by tactile progression, there were two disadvantages in this early system. First, the method was rather slow, because the full form of each letter was fairly complicated and difficult to feel. Second, because of the relative complexity of the forms of the letters, the likelihood of errors in reading, particularly if one tried to move rapidly, was fairly high.

On the other hand, those who insisted that fuller integration into so-called normal society would be a desirable by-product of educating the blind to read had also to keep other, less practical, considerations in mind. Prejudices against presumed special inner moral and psychological characteristics of the blind might rise if a communications system were devised for or by them that was not as immediately accessible to the “normal” majority as simple raised letters were. Haüy himself discovered,



Louis Braille. (Library of Congress)

well before Braille made his contribution, that controversy would rise over any form of innovation that went further than the simple method of raised letters: Representation of sounds by raised symbols rather than letters (the Haüy method), for example, never became an established technique for teaching the blind to read.

There are several reasons why the work of Braille—which was technologically rather commonplace—needs to be placed in the wider context of the time and society in which he lived. Braille’s system of printing writing by means of a “code” of dots rather than actual letters was obviously meant to simplify the reading process for the blind. Because knowledge of what eventually came to be known as Braille involved mastery of a “secret” code, however, some of Braille’s contemporaries believed that the new system ran counter to the normal integrationist objectives that education for the blind was meant to serve. As a consequence, Braille techniques did not spread as rapidly or as widely as the modern observer, more accustomed to practical criteria for judging the effectiveness of technological innovations, might imagine.

Despite its rather slow start (Braille was not used, even in the institute where Braille taught, until 1829),

progress toward the official adoption of the six-dot reading code was made gradually. By the mid- to late 1830's, Braille's insistence on the fact of increased teaching efficiency through the use of his system gained important recognition. A special school was founded on the outskirts of Paris (at Maisons Alfort), in which Braille was used exclusively. Later, as the success of the Maisons Alfort program became obvious, the school moved to the center of Paris, on the rue Bagnole.

By the late 1840's, the use of Braille was enhanced considerably by two new developments. First, in 1847 the first Braille printing press was invented and used in France, soon to be exported for use throughout Europe and the United States. Second, the French government decided to establish a series of branch schools for the blind that would use the same Braille methods as the Paris Institute to provide elementary levels of instruction through reading, as well as manual trade training at the departmental level. From the mid-nineteenth century onward, the most qualified graduates of these provincial elementary schools would qualify to continue their education in full academic subjects at the National Institute for the Blind in Paris.

Braille himself did not live to see the full effects of the application of his reading code for the blind. Because of health complications caused by tuberculosis, he was forced to retire from teaching at the institute in 1837. At the time of his death in January, 1852, Braille lived in seclusion and was a nearly forgotten man. His reputation as an important contributor to modern education came only in stages. In 1887, the town of Coupvray, Braille's birthplace and the site of his grave, erected a monument to his memory in the center of the town square. In 1952, one century after his death, and at a time when the techniques he had pioneered were in use throughout the world, Braille's remains were transferred from Coupvray to a place of national prestige in the Panthéon in Paris.

SIGNIFICANCE

The life of Louis Braille is more representative in many respects of the history of an issue than the history of an individual personality. Before Braille's time, both in France and elsewhere in Europe or the United States, institutions that cared for the blind functioned more as asylums than as places where useful trades could be taught. Intellectual stimuli, and even basic educational instruction, remained even more remote than possibilities for simple vocational training. Until an effective means of communication had been found, learning was restricted to areas concentrating on the senses of touch and/or hearing.

The importance of the contribution of Braille, therefore, should be considered not only in practical terms (development of a simplified system of representing the letters of the alphabet by means of a code of raised dots) but also for its effect on attitudes toward the types of schooling that have since become possible for the blind. Even though the use of Braille to teach reading was initially limited to special schools for the blind, an important difference was in the making: Those who had formerly had no access to normal texts, be they in literature or the sciences, were now able to prepare themselves for interaction with society. Eventually, as Braille became more common and less expensive as a system of printing, this movement in the direction of fuller social and intellectual integration of the blind went further. By the early stages of the twentieth century, the blind were able to attend regular schools and follow the same academic curricula as their fellow classmates, using the same books, printed in Braille for their special use.

—Byron D. Cannon

FURTHER READING

- Bickel, Lennard. *Triumph over Darkness: The Life of Louis Braille*. Sydney, Australia: Allen & Unwin Australia, 1988. A brief review of Braille's life, one of the few Braille biographies written for adults, not children.
- Davidson, Margaret. *Louis Braille*. New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1971. A work of historical fiction, designed mainly for young readers, recounting the life of Braille. In addition to Braille himself, the author portrays the people who influenced him as a youth in Coupvray and during his adult years.
- Dixon, Judith, ed. *Braille Into the Next Millennium*. Washington, D.C.: National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, and Friends of Libraries for Blind and Physically Handicapped Individuals in North America, 2000. This 600-page anthology of articles examines the past and present uses of Braille and speculates about how the Braille system might be used in the twenty-first century. The discussion of the Braille system's past uses includes information about Louis Braille's birthplace and the system's origins.
- Hampshire, Barry. *Working with Braille*. Lausanne, Switzerland: UNESCO, 1981. This book updates the 1954 United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) analysis of methods of adapting Braille for international use. It is particularly important for its discussion of the impact of

technological changes that have facilitated rapid communication beyond the imagination of the original inventors of the Braille system.

Kugelmass, J. Alvin. *Louis Braille: Windows for the Blind*. New York: Julian Messner, 1951. Although this biography was designed for a popular reading audience, it is the result of fairly extensive research into relevant resources in French and other languages. These lend an impression of historical accuracy, as well as some sense of the technical details of Braille's system, to what is otherwise a simple account of Braille's life.

Mackenzie, Sir Clutha. *World Braille Usage*. Paris: UNESCO, 1953. Provides a historical review of the processes that were followed over a century's time to alter the original Braille system to meet the needs of blind readers and writers of Asian and African lan-

guages. It includes a brief review of Braille's life and work as well as a history of the World Braille Council. Paulson, William R. *Enlightenment, Romanticism, and the Blind in France*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987. A scholarly historical study of changing cultural values that affected French attitudes toward the blind from the mid-eighteenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries. Paulson's book fully develops the question of prejudices, particularly toward the presumed mystical inner nature of the blind.

SEE ALSO: Samuel Gridley Howe.

RELATED ARTICLE in *Great Events from History: The Nineteenth Century, 1801-1900: 1820's-1850's: Social Reform Movement*.

JOHN BRIGHT

English politician and social reformer

Dedicated to improving the conditions of life in Great Britain and its dependencies, Bright combined moral courage and personal integrity and was instrumental in bringing about many liberal reforms in nineteenth century Great Britain.

BORN: November 16, 1811; Rochdale, Lancashire, England

DIED: March 27, 1889; Rochdale, Lancashire, England

AREA OF ACHIEVEMENT: Government and politics

EARLY LIFE

John Bright was the second, but oldest-surviving, of eleven children born to Jacob and Martha Wood Bright. Both of his parents came from old, established Society of Friends (Quaker) families. As a boy, Bright attended several Friends schools, until the age of fifteen, when he entered his father's business. Although his formal education ended, he continued his education through reading and travel. He traveled throughout the British Isles, the Continent, and the Mediterranean before he was thirty, and he continued traveling throughout his life. At the age of twenty-two, he and a number of friends organized the Rochdale Literary and Philosophical Society.

Jacob Bright, along with two friends, had founded a cotton mill in 1809. By 1823, he was the sole owner of the mill. Eventually, the firm had six mills, and during the 1850's it added a carpet manufacturing business. Ja-

cob took his sons into the business and it provided a comfortable living for John throughout his life.

John Bright entered public life in 1830, when he began making temperance speeches in Rochdale. In 1834, he joined the Rochdale resistance to paying church rates. His involvement in these public causes led to difficulties when he proposed marriage to Elizabeth Priestman, also a member of the Society of Friends. Before she would marry him, she wanted his assurance that he would not become overly involved in politics. They were married in November, 1839. One daughter, Helen was born to them. Bright was devastated when his wife died in September, 1841. In June, 1847, he married another Friend, Margaret Leatham. They had four sons and three daughters. She died in May, 1878.

LIFE'S WORK

The issue that thrust Bright onto the national stage was his involvement in the Anti-Corn Law League. The Corn Law imposed a duty on imported corn and, according to the league, kept the cost of food artificially high to the advantage of the landed class and to the detriment of the rest of society. Bright had joined the local branch of the league in 1838. Through the league, he became associated with one of its founders, Richard Cobden. Cobden visited Bright three days after Bright's first wife died and persuaded him to forget his melancholy through work.