



A Portrait of Beethoven

Review of Bishop Fan S. Noli

Beethoven and the French Revolution

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Review of Bishop Fan S. Noli, *Beethoven and the French Revolution* (New York, 1947: International Universities Press), *English Historical Review* 63 no. 249 (October 1948), 565–6



Beethoven by Joseph Karl Stieler, 1820

THE TITLE of Bishop Fan S. Noli's lively little work *Beethoven and the French Revolution* does not accurately describe its subject. It is mainly devoted to a critical examination of the traditional sources for the life of Beethoven, the authors of which are accused, with a certain degree of plausibility, of concealing their hero's faults and

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vices from motives of mistaken loyalty or a Victorian squeamishness.

The bishop, who must have looked upon the seamy side of life when he governed Albania in the early 1920s, is determined to face the facts, however unattractive. He sets himself to prove that Beethoven was a hideous cripple, a drunkard, a philanderer and a tyrant, but also a fatherly, shrewd and almost wholly self-taught man. Evidence is cited to show that he admired the French Revolution, contributed money to a revolutionary society, was militantly anti-Christian, worshipped power before Nietzsche, and displayed occasional anti-Semitism, snobbishness and violence of temper.

While the author appears to have performed no original researches, he has used existing material in a moderately acute and sometimes quaintly entertaining fashion. The facts described were in a sense known already [566] to those acquainted with the none too numerous original sources, in particular the Conversation Books, but we are none the poorer for this short, mildly eccentric, but gay and well-intentioned little monograph.

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