

SPOHR ... AND BRUCKNER'S DREAM

translated and introduced by Peter Palmer
(editor *Bruckner Journal*)

HANS COMMENDA (1853-1939), who lived in Linz, was a schoolmaster and custodian of the Upper Austrian Museum of Mineralogy and Geology. He belonged to the "Frohsinn" male voice choir which Bruckner had directed during his period in Linz. Although the Bruckner stories collected in his *Geschichten um Anton Bruckner* (1946) are not considered altogether reliable, the degree of editing practised by Commenda was probably no greater than was typical of his generation. Here is one event recounted by Commenda:

Bruckner got some of his best ideas in his sleep. When he dreamed of a musical theme he would get up in the middle of the night so as to record it straightaway, or to develop it at the piano. Even though the priest at Steyr was a true admirer and patron of his, he kicked up a fuss on several occasions, because Bruckner's nocturnal piano playing was depriving people of their well-earned sleep.

Bruckner's creative dreams took a variety of forms. In one dream Dorn, the former Kapellmeister in Linz, played him a theme (not subsequently used) on the piano. In another a violist played him the main theme of the Seventh Symphony. And a delightful story is linked to the origin of the *Te Deum*.

When rehearsing for the 1885 performance in Vienna, the conductor Hans Richter stepped down from the podium with tears of rapture in his eyes, embraced Bruckner and exclaimed: "The only other person who could have written that was Beethoven!" But Bruckner said candidly: "And d'you know, Herr Hofkapellmeister, it isn't really by me at all!" Seeing Richter's surprise and bafflement he went on eagerly: "Yes, that isn't by me but by Spohr! And do you know how it happened? It was like this: I'm lying in bed one night and in a dream Spohr comes in and says to me: 'Bruckner, get up and write this down!' So saying, he whistles the theme to me. As I'm still lying there, he says again: 'Bruckner, get up and write this down!' Then I woke up and I really did write it down. Now tell me: is it by me or by Spohr?"