

Old Scores and New Readings eBook

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Page 1

WILLIAM BYRDE ... HIS MASS

Many years ago, in the essay which is set second in this collection, I wrote (speaking of the early English composers) that “at length the first great wave of music culminated in the works of Tallis and Byrde ... Byrde is infinitely greater than Tallis, and seems worthy indeed to stand beside Palestrina.” Generally one modifies one’s opinions as one grows older; very often it is necessary to reverse them. This one on Byrde I adhere to: indeed I am nearly proud of having uttered it so long ago. I had then never heard the Mass in D minor. But in the latter part of 1899 Mr. R.R. Terry, the organist of Downside Abbey, and one of Byrde’s latest editors, invited me to the opening of St. Benedict’s Church, Ealing, where the Mass in D minor was given; and there I heard one of the most splendid pieces of music in the world adequately rendered under very difficult conditions. I use the phrase advisedly—“one of the most splendid pieces of music in the world.” When the New Zealander twenty centuries hence reckons up the European masters of music, he will place Byrde not very far down on the list of the greatest; and he will esteem Byrde’s Mass one of the very finest ever written. Byrde himself has rested peacefully in his grave for over three hundred years. One or two casual critics have appreciated him. Fetis, I believe, called him “the English Palestrina”; but I do not recall whether he meant that Byrde was as great as Palestrina or merely great amongst the English—whether a “lord amongst wits,” or simply “a wit amongst lords.” For the most part he has been left comfortably alone, and held to be—like his mighty successor Purcell—one of the forerunners of the “great English school of church composers.” To have prepared the way for Jackson in F—that has been thought his best claim to remembrance. The notion is as absurd as would be the notion (if anyone were foolish enough to advance it) that Palestrina is mainly to be remembered as having prepared the way for Perosi. Byrde prepared the way for Purcell, it is true; but even that exceeding glory pales before the greater glory of having written the *Cantiones Sacrae* and the D minor Mass. In its way the D minor Mass is as noble and complete an achievement as the St. Matthew Passion or the “Messiah,” the Choral symphony of Beethoven or the G minor symphony of Mozart, “Tristan” or the “Nibelung’s Ring.” It is splendidly planned; it is perfectly beautiful; and from the first page to the last it is charged with a grave, sweet, lovely emotion.

The reason why Byrde has not until lately won the homage he deserves is simply this: that the musical doctors who have hitherto judged him have judged him in the light of the eighteenth-century contrapuntal music, and have applied to him in all seriousness Artemus Ward’s joke about Chaucer—“he couldn’t spell.” The plain harmonic progressions of the later men could be understood



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by the doctors: they could not understand the freer style of harmony which prevailed before the strict school came into existence. Artemus Ward, taking up Chaucer, professed amazement to find spelling that would not be tolerated in an elementary school; the learned doctors, taking up Byrde, found he had disregarded all the rules—rules, be it remembered, formulated after Byrde's time, just as our modern rules of spelling were made after Chaucer's time; and as Artemus Ward jocularly condemned Chaucer, and showed his wit in the joke, so the doctors seriously condemned Byrde, and showed their stupidity in their unconscious joke. They could understand one side of Tallis. His motet in forty parts, for instance: they knew the difficulties of writing such a thing, and they could see the ingenuity he showed in his various ways of getting round the difficulties. They could not see the really fine points of the forty-part motet: the broad scheme of the whole thing, and the almost Handelian way of massing the various choirs so as to heap climax on climax until a perfectly satisfying finish was reached. Still, there was something for them to see in Tallis; whereas in Byrde there was nothing for them to see that they had eyes to see, or to hear that they had ears to hear. They could see that he either wrote consecutive fifths and octaves, or dodged them in a way opposed to all the rules, that he wrote false relations with the most outrageous recklessness, that his melodies were irregular and not measured out by the bar; but they could not feel, could not be expected to feel, the marvellous beauty of the results he got by his dodges, the marvellous expressiveness of his music. These old doctors may be forgiven, and, being long dead, they care very little whether they are forgiven or not. But the modern men who parrot-like echo their verdicts cannot and should not be forgiven. We know now that the stiff contrapuntal school marked a stage in development of music which it was necessary that music should go through. The modern men who care nothing for rules—for instance Wagner and Tschaikowsky—could not have come immediately after Byrde; even Beethoven could not have come immediately after Byrde and Sweelinck and Palestrina, all of whom thought nothing of the rules that had not been definitely stated in their time. Before Beethoven—and after Beethoven, Wagner and all the moderns—could come, music had to go through the stiff scientific stage; a hundred thousand things that had been done instinctively by the early men had to be reduced to rule; a science as well as an art of music had to be built up. It was built up, and in the process of building up noble works of art were achieved. After it was built up and men had got, so to say, a grip of music and no longer merely groped, Beethoven and Wagner went back to the freedom and indifference to rule of the first composers; and the mere fact of their having done so should show us that the rules were nothing in themselves, nothing, that is, save



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temporary guide-posts or landmarks which the contrapuntal men set up for their own private use while they were exploring the unknown fields of music. We should know, though many of us do not, that it is simply stupid to pass adverse judgment on the early composers who did not use, and because they did not use, these guide-posts, which had not then been set up, though one by one they were being set up. For a very short time the rules of counterpoint were looked upon as eternal and immutable. During that period the early men were human-naturally looked upon as barbarians. But that period is long past. We know the laws of counterpoint to be not eternal, not immutable; but on the contrary to have been short-lived convention that is now altogether disregarded. So it is time to look at the early music through our own, and not through the eighteenth-century doctors' eyes; and when we do that we find the early music to be as beautiful as any ever written, as expressive, and quite as well constructed. There are, as I have said, people who to-day prefer Mr. Jackson in F and his friends to Byrde. What, I wonder, would be said if a literary man preferred, say, some eighteenth-century poetaster to Chaucer because the poetaster in his verse observed rules which Chaucer never dreamed of, because, to drag in Artemus Ward once again, the poetaster's spelling conformed more nearly to ours than Chaucer's!

The Mass is indeed noble and stately, but it is miraculously expressive as well. Its expressiveness is the thing that strikes one more forcibly every time one hears it. At first one feels chiefly its old-world freshness—not the picturesque spring freshness of Purcell and Handel, but a freshness that is sweet and grave and cool, coming out of the Elizabethan days when life, at its fastest, went deliberately, and was lived in many-gabled houses with trees and gardens, or in great palaces with pleasant courtyards, and the Thames ran unpolluted to the sea, and the sun shone daily even in London, and all things were fair and clean. It is old-world music, yet it stands nearer to us than most of the music written in and immediately after Handel's period, the period of dry formalism and mere arithmetic. There is not a sign of the formal melodic outlines which we recognise at once in any piece out of the contrapuntal time, not an indication that the Academic, "classical," unpoetic, essay-writing eighteenth century was coming. The formal outlines had not been invented, for rules and themes that would work without breaking the rules were little thought of. Byrde evades the rules in the frankest manner: in this Mass alone there are scores of evasions that would have been inevitably condemned a century afterwards, and might even be condemned by the contrapuntists of to-day. The eighteenth-century doctors who edited Byrde early in this century did not in the least understand why he wrote as he did, and doubtless would have put him right if they had thought of having the



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work sung instead of simply having it printed as an antiquarian curiosity. The music does not suggest the eighteenth century with its jangling harpsichords, its narrow, dirty streets, its artificiality, its brilliant candle-lighted rooms where the wits and great ladies assembled and talked more or less naughtily. There is indeed a strange, pathetic charm in the eighteenth century to which no one can be indifferent: it is a dead century, with the dust upon it, and yet a faint lingering aroma as of dead rose petals. But the old-world atmosphere of Byrde's music is, at least to me, something finer than that: it is the atmosphere of a world which still lives: it is remote from us and yet very near: for the odour of dead rose petals and dust you have a calm cool air, and a sense of fragrant climbing flowers and of the shade of full foliaged trees. All is sane, clean, fresh: one feels that the sun must always have shone in those days. This quality, however, it shares with a great deal of the music of the "spacious days" of Elizabeth. But of its expressiveness there is not too much to be found in the music of other musicians than Byrde in Byrde's day. He towered high above all the composers who had been before him; he stands higher than any other English musician who has lived since, with the exception of Purcell. It is foolish to think of comparing his genius with the genius of Palestrina; but the two men will also be reckoned close together by those who know this Mass and the Cantiones Sacrae. They were both consummate masters of the technique of their art; they both had a fund of deep and original emotion; they both knew how to express it through their music. I have not space to mention all the examples I could wish. But every reader of this article may be strongly recommended at once to play, even on the piano, the sublime passage beginning at the words "Qui propter nos homines," noting more especially the magnificent effect of the swelling mass of sound dissolving in a cadence at the "Crucifixus." Another passage, equal to any ever written, begins at "Et unam Sanctam Catholicam." There is a curious energy in the repetition of "Et Apostolicam Ecclesiam," and then a wistful sweetness and tenderness at "Confiteor unum baptisma." Again, the whole of the "Agnus" is divine, the repeated "miserere nobis," and the passage beginning at the "Dona nobis pacem," possessing that sweetness, tenderness and wonderful calm. But there is not a number that does not contain passages which one must rank amongst the greatest things in the world; and it must be borne in mind that these passages are not detached, nor in fact detachable, but integral, essential parts of a fine architectural scheme.

OUR LAST GREAT MUSICIAN (HENRY PURCELL, 1658-95)

I.



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Purcell is too commonly written of as “the founder of the English school” of music. Now, far be it from me to depreciate the works of the composers who are supposed to form the “English school.” I would not sneer at the strains which have lulled to quiet slumbers so many generations of churchgoers. But everyone who knows and loves Purcell must enter a most emphatic protest against that great composer being held responsible, if ever so remotely, for the doings of the “English school.” Jackson (in F), Boyce and the rest owed nothing to Purcell; the credit of having founded *them* must go elsewhere, and may beg a long time, I am much afraid, in the land of the shades before any composer will be found willing to take it. Purcell was not the founder but the splendid close of a school, and that school one of the very greatest the world has seen. And to-day, when he is persistently libelled, not more in blame than in the praise which is given him, it seems worth while making a first faint attempt to break through the net of tradition that has been woven and is daily being woven closer around him, to see him as he stands in such small records as may be relied upon and not as we would fain have him be, to understand his relation to his predecessors and learn his position in musical history, to hear his music without prejudice and distinguish its individual qualities. This is a hard task, and one which I can only seek to achieve here in the roughest and barest manner; yet any manner at all is surely much better than letting the old fictions go unreproved, while our greatest musician drifts into the twilight past, misunderstood, unloved, unremembered, save when an Abbey wants a new case for its organ, an organ on which Purcell never played, or a self-styled Purcell authority wishes to set up a sort of claim of part or whole proprietorship in him.

II.

Hardly more is known of Purcell than of Shakespeare. There is no adequate biography. Hawkins and Burney (who is oftenest Hawkins at second-hand) are alike rash, random, and untrustworthy, depending much upon the anecdote of old men, who were no more to be believed than the ancient bandsmen of the present day who tell you how Mendelssohn or Wagner flattered them or accepted hints from them. Cummings' life is scarcely even a sketch; at most it is a thumbnail sketch. Only ninety-five pages deal with Purcell, and of these at least ninety-four are defaced by maudlin sentimentality, or unhappy attempts at criticism (see the remarks on the Cecilia Ode) or laughable sequences of disconnected incongruities—as, for instance, when Mr. Cummings remarks that “Queen Mary died of small-pox, and the memory of her goodness was felt so universally,” etc. Born in 1658, Purcell lived in Pepys' London, and died in 1095, having written complimentary odes to three kings—Charles the Second, James the Second, and William the Third. Besides

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these complimentary odes, he wrote piles of instrumental music, a fair heap of anthems, and songs and interludes and overtures for some forty odd plays. This is nearly the sum of our knowledge. His outward life seems to have been uneventful enough. He probably lived the common life of the day—the day being, as I have said, Pepys' day. Mr. Cummings has tried to show him as a seventeenth century Mendelssohn—conventionally idealised—and he quotes the testimony of some “distinguished divine,” chaplain to a nobleman, as though we did not know too well why noblemen kept chaplains in those days to regard their testimony as worth more than other men's. The truth is, that if Purcell had lived differently from his neighbours he would have been called a Puritan. On the other hand, we must remember that he composed so much in his short life that his dissipations must have made a poor show beside those of many of his great contemporaries—those of Dryden, for instance, who used to hide from his duns in Purcell's private room in the clock-tower of St. James's Palace. I picture him as a sturdy, beef-eating Englishman, a puissant, masterful, as well as lovable personality, a born king of men, ambitious of greatness, determined, as Tudway says, to exceed every one of his time, less majestic than Handel, perhaps, but full of vigour and unshakable faith in his genius. His was an age when genius inspired confidence both in others and in its possessor, not, as now, suspicion in both; and Purcell was believed in from the first by many, and later, by all—even by Dryden, who began by flattering Monsieur Grabut, and ended, as was his wont, by crossing to the winning side. And Purcell is no more to be pitied for his sad life than to be praised as a conventionally idealised Mendelssohn. His life was brief, but not tragic. He never lacked his bread as Mozart lacked his; he was not, like Beethoven, tormented by deafness and tremblings for the immediate future; he had no powerful foes to fight, for he did not bid for a great position in the world like Handel. Nor was he a romantic consumptive like Chopin, with a bad cough, a fastidious regard for beauty, and a flow of anaemic melody. He was divinely gifted with a greater richness of invention than was given to any other composers excepting two, Bach and Mozart; and death would not take his gifts as an excuse when he was thirty-seven. Hence our Mr. Cummings has droppings of lukewarm tears; hence, generally, compassion for his comparatively short life has ousted admiration for his mighty works from the minds of those who are readier at all times to indulge in the luxury of weeping than to feel the thrill of joy in a life greatly lived. Purcell might have achieved more magnificent work, but that is a bad reason for forgetting the magnificence of the work he did achieve. But I myself am forgetting that the greatness of his music is not admitted, and that the shortness of his life is merely urged as an excuse for not finding it admirable. And remembering this, I assert that Purcell's life was a great and glorious one, and that now his place is with the high gods whom we adore, the lords and givers of light.



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III.

Before Purcell's position in musical history can be ascertained and fixed, it is absolutely necessary to make some survey of the rise of the school of which he was the close.

In our unmusical England of to-day it is as hard to believe in an England where music was perhaps the dominant passion of the people as it is to understand how this should have been forgotten in a more musical age than ours. Until the time of Handel's arrival in this country there was no book printed which did not show unmistakably that its writer loved music. It is a fact (as the learned can vouch) that Erasmus considered the English the most given up to music of all the peoples of Europe; and how far these were surpassed by the English is further shown by the fact that English musicians were as common in continental towns in those days as foreign musicians are in England nowadays. I refrain from quoting Peacham, North, Anthony Wood, Pepys, and the rest of the much over-quoted; but I wish to lay stress on the fact that here music was widespread and highly cultivated, just as it was in Germany in the eighteenth century. Moreover, an essential factor in the development of the German school was not wanting in England. Each German prince had his Capellmeister; and English nobles and gentlemen, wealthier than German princes, differing from them only in not being permitted to assume a pretentious title, had each his Musick-master. I believe I could get together a long list of musicians who were thus kept. It will be remembered that when Handel came to England he quickly entered the service of the Duke of Chandos. The royal court always had a number of musicians employed in the making or the performing of music. Oliver Cromwell retained them and paid them; Charles the Second added to them, and in many cases did not pay them at all, so that at least one is known to have died of starvation, and the others were everlastingly clamouring for arrears of salary. It was the business of these men (in the intervals of asking for their salaries) to produce music for use in the church and in the house or palace; that for church use being of course nearly entirely vocal—masses or anthems; that for house use, vocal and instrumental—madrigals and fancies (*i.e.* fantasias). As generation succeeded generation, a certain body of technique was built up and a mode of expression found; and at length the first great wave of music culminated in the works of Tallis and Byrde. Their technique and mode of expression I shall say something about presently; and all the criticism I have to pass on them is that Byrde is infinitely greater than Tallis, and seems worthy indeed to stand beside Palestrina and Sweelinck. Certainly anyone who wishes to have a true notion of the music of this period should obtain (if he can) copies of the D minor five-part mass, and the *Cantiones Sacrae*, and carefully study such numbers as the "Agnus Dei" of the former and the profound "Tristitia et anxietas" in the latter.



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The learned branch of the English school reached its climax. Meantime another branch, not unlearned, but caring less for scholastic perfection than for perfect expression of poetic sentiment, was fast growing. The history of the masque is a stale matter, so I will merely mention that Campion, and many another with, before, and after him, engaged during a great part of their lives in what can only be called the manufacture of these entertainments. A masque was simply a gorgeous show of secular ritual, of colour and of music—a kind of Drury Lane melodrama in fact, but as far removed from Drury Lane as this age is from that in the widespread faculty of appreciating beauty. The music consisted of tunes of a popular outline and sentiment, but they were dragged into the province of art by the incapacity of those who wrote or adapted them to touch anything without leaving it lovelier than when they lighted on it. Pages might be, and I daresay some day will be, written about Dr. Campion's melody, its beauty and power, the unique sense of rhythmic subtleties which it shows, and withal its curiously English quality. But one important thing we must observe: it is wholly secular melody. Even when written in the ecclesiastical modes, it has no, or the very slightest, ecclesiastical tinge. It is folk-melody with its face washed and hair combed; it bears the same relation to English folk-melody as a chorale from the "Matthew" Passion bears to its original. Another important point is this: whereas the church composers took a few Latin sentences and made no endeavour to treat them so as to make sense in the singing, but made the words wait upon the musical phrases, in Dr. Campion we see the first clear wish to weld music and poem into one flawless whole. To an extent he succeeded, but full success did not come till several generations had first tried, tried and failed. Campion properly belongs to the sixteenth century, and Harry Lawes, born twenty-five years before Campion died, as properly belongs to the seventeenth century. In his songs we find even more marked the determination that words and music shall go hand in hand—that the words shall no longer be dragged at the cart-tail of the melody, so to say. In fact, a main objection against Lawes—and a true one in many instances—is that he sacrificed the melody rather than the meaning of the poem. This is significant. The Puritans are held to have damaged church music less by burning the choir-books and pawning the organ-pipes than by insisting (as we may say) on One word one note. As a matter of fact, this was not exclusively a plank in the political platform of the Puritans. The Loyalist Campion, the Loyalist Lawes, and many another Loyalist insisted on it. Even when they did not write a note to each word, they took care not to have long roulades (divisions) on unimportant words, but to derive the accent of the music from that of the poem. This showed mainly two tendencies: first, one towards expression of poetic feeling and

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towards definiteness of that expression, the other towards the entirely new technique which was to supersede the contrapuntal technique of Byrde and Palestrina. In making a mass or an anthem or secular composition, the practice of these old masters was to start with a fragment of church or secular melody which we will call A; after (say) the trebles had sung it or a portion of it, the altos took it up and the trebles went on to a new phrase B, which dovetailed with A. Then the tenors took up A, the altos went on to B, the trebles went on to a new phrase C, until ultimately, if we lettered each successive phrase that appeared, we should get clear away from the beginning of the alphabet to X, Y, and Z. This, of course, is a crude and stiff way of describing the process of weaving and interweaving by which the old music was spun, for often the phrase A would come up again and again in one section of a composition and sometimes throughout the whole, and strict canon was comparatively rare in music which was not called by that name; but the description will serve. This technique proved admirable for vocal polyphony—how admirable we have all the Flemish and Italian and English contrapuntal music to show. But it was no longer available when music was wanted for the single voice, unless that voice was treated as one of several real parts, the others being placed in the accompaniment. A new technique was therefore wanted. For that new technique the new composers went back to the oldest technique of all. The old minstrels used music as a means of giving accent and force to their poems; and now, as a means of spinning a web of tone which should not only be beautiful, but also give utterance to the feeling of the poem, composers went back to the method of the minstrels. They disregarded rhythm more and more (as may be seen if you compare *Campion* with *Lawes*), and sought only to make the notes follow the accent of the poetry, thus converting music into conventionally idealised speech or declamation. *Lawes* carried this method as far as ever it has been, and probably can be, carried. When *Milton* said,

“Harry, whose tuneful and well-measured notes
First taught our English music how to span
Words with just note and accent,”

he did not mean that *Lawes* was the first to bar his music, for music had been barred long before *Lawes*. He meant that *Lawes* did not use the poem as an excuse for a melody, but the melody as a means of effectively declaiming the poet's verse. The poet (naturally) liked this—hence *Milton's* compliments. It should be noted that many of the musicians of this time were poets—of a sort—themselves, and wished to make the most of their verses; so that it would be a mistake to regard declamation as something forced by the poet, backed by popular opinion, upon the musician. With *Lawes*, then, what we may call the declamatory branch of the English school culminated. Except in his avowedly declamatory passages, *Purcell*

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did not spin his web precisely thus; but we shall presently see that his method was derived from the declamatory method. Much remained to be done first. Lawes got rid of the old scholasticism, now effete. But he never seemed quite sure that his expression would come off. It is hard at this day to listen to his music as Milton must have listened to it; but having done my best, I am compelled to own that I find some of his songs without meaning or comeliness, and must assume either that our ancestors of this period had a sense which has been lost, or that the music played a less important part compared with the poem than has been generally supposed. Lawes lost rhythm, both as an element in beauty and a factor in expression. Moreover, his harmonic resources were sadly limited, for the old device of letting crossing parts clash in sweet discords that resolved into as sweet or sweeter concords was denied him. What would be called nowadays the new harmony, the new rhythm and the new forms were developed during the Civil War and the Puritan reign. The Puritans, loving music but detesting it in their churches, forced it into purely secular channels; and we cannot say the result was bad, for the result was Purcell. John Jenkins and a host of smaller men developed instrumental music, and, though the forms they used were thrown aside when Charles II. arrived, the power of handling the instruments remained as a legacy to Charles's men. Charles drove the secular movement faster ahead by banning the old ecclesiastical music (which, it appears, gave him "the blues"), and by compelling his young composers to write livelier strains for the church, that is, church music which was in reality nothing but secular music. He sent Pelham Humphries to Paris, and when Humphries came back "an absolute Monsieur" (who does not remember that ever-green entry in the Diary?) he brought with him all that could possibly have been learnt from Lulli. He died at twenty-seven, having been Purcell's master; and though Purcell's imagination was richer, deeper, more strenuous in the ebb and flow of its tides, one might fancy that the two men had but one spirit, which went on growing and fetching forth the fruits of the spirit, while young Humphries' body decayed by the side of his younger wife's in the Thames-sodden vaults of Westminster Abbey.

IV.

A complete list of Purcell's compositions appears somewhat formidable at a first glance, but when one comes to examine it carefully the solidity seems somewhat to melt out of it. The long string of church pieces is made up of anthems, many of them far from long. The forty odd "operas" are not operas at all, but sets of incidental pieces and songs for plays, and some of the sets are very short. Thus Dryden talks of Purcell setting "my three songs," and there are only half a dozen "curtain-tunes," *i.e.* entr'actes. Many of the harpsichord pieces are of tiny proportions. The sonatas of

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three and four parts are no larger than Mozart's piano sonatas. Still, taking into account the noble quality that is constantly maintained, we must admit that Purcell used astonishingly the short time he was given. Much of his music is lost; more of it lies in manuscript at the British Museum and elsewhere. Some of it was issued last century, some early in this. Four expensive volumes have been wretchedly edited and issued by the Purcell Society, and those amongst us who live to the age of Methuselah will probably see all the accessible works printed by this body. Some half century ago Messrs. Novello published an edition of the church music, stupidly edited by the stupidest editor who ever laid clumsy fingers on a masterpiece. A shameful edition of the "King Arthur" music was prepared for the Birmingham Festival of 1897 by Mr. J.A. Fuller-Maitland, musical critic of "The Times." A publisher far-sighted and generous enough to issue a trustworthy edition of all Purcell's music at a moderate price has yet to be found.

Purcell's list is not long, but it is superb. Yet he opened out no new paths, he made no leap aside from the paths of his predecessors, as Gluck did in the eighteenth century and Wagner in the nineteenth. He was one of their school; he went on in the direction they had led; but the distance he travelled was enormous. Humphries, possibly Captain Cook, even Christopher Gibbons, helped to open out the new way in church music; Lawes, Matthew Lock, and Banister were before him at the theatres; Lock and Dr. Blow had written odes before he was weaned; the form and plan of his sonatas came certainly from Bassani, in all likelihood from Corelli also; from John Jenkins and the other writers of fancies he got something of his workmanship and art of weaving many melodies into a coherent whole, and a knowledge of Lulli would help him to attain terseness, and save him from that drifting which is the weak point of the old English instrumental writers; he was acquainted with the music of Carissimi, a master of choral effect. In a word, he owed much to his predecessors, even as Bach, Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven owed to their predecessors; and he did as they did—won his greatness by using to fine ends the means he found, rather than by inventing the means, though, like them, some means he did invent.

Like his predecessors Purcell hung between the playhouse, the church, and the court; but unlike most of them he had only one style, which had to serve in one place as in another. I have already shown the growth of the secular spirit in music. In Purcell that spirit reached its height. His music is always secular, always purely pagan. I do not mean that it is inappropriate in the church—for nothing more appropriate was ever written—nor that Purcell was insincere, as our modern church composers are insincere, without knowing it. I do mean that of genuine religious emotion, of the sustained ecstasy of Byrde and Palestrina, it shows no trace.

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I should not like to have to define the religious beliefs of any man in Charles II.'s court, but it would seem that Purcell was religious in his way. He accepted the God of the church as the savage accepts the God of his fathers; he wrote his best music with a firm conviction that it would please his God. But his God was an entity placed afar off, unapproachable; and of entering into communion with Him through the medium of music Purcell had no notion. The ecstatic note I take to be the true note of religious art; and in lacking and in having no sense of it Purcell stands close to the early religious painters and monk-writers, the carvers of twelfth century woodwork, and the builders of Gothic cathedrals. He thinks of externals and never dreams of looking for "inward light"; and the proof of this is that he seems never consciously to endeavour to express a mood, but strenuously seeks to depict images called up by the words he sets. With no intention of being flippant, but in all earnestness, I declare it is my belief that if Purcell had ever set the "Agnus Dei" (and I don't remember that he did) he would have drawn a frisky lamb and tried to paint its snow-white fleece; and this not because he lacked reverence, but because of his absolute religious naivete, and because this drawing and painting of outside objects (so to speak) in music was his one mode of expression. It should be clearly understood that word-painting is not descriptive music. Descriptive music suggests to the ear, word-painting to the eye. But the two merge in one another. What we call a higher note is so called because sounds produced by the mere rapid vibrations make every being, without exception, who has a musical ear, think of height, just as a lower note makes us all think of depth. Hence a series of notes forming an arch on paper may, and does, suggest an arch to one's imagination through the ear. It is perhaps a dodge, but Handel used it extensively—for instance, in such choruses as "All we like sheep," "When his loud voice" ("Jephtha"), nearly every choral number of "Israel in Egypt," and some of the airs. Bach used it too, and we find it—the rainbow theme in "Das Rheingold" is an example—in Wagner. But with these composers "word-painting," as it is called, seems always to be used for a special effect; whereas it is the very essence of Purcell's music. He has been reproved for it by the eminent Hullah, who prettily alludes to it as a "defect" from which other music composed at the time suffers; but the truth is, you might as well call rhyme a "defect" of the couplet or the absence of rhyme a "defect" of blank verse. It is an integral part of the music, as inseparable as sound from tone, as atoms from the element they constitute. But the question, why did Purcell write thus, and not as Mozart and Beethoven, brings me to the point at which I must show the precise relationship in which Purcell stood to his musical ancestors, and how in writing as he did he was merely carrying on and developing their technique.



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For we must not forget that the whole problem for the seventeenth century was one of technique. The difficulty was to spin a tone-web which should be at once beautiful, expressive, and modern—modern above all things, in some sort of touch with the common feeling of the time. I have told how the earlier composers spun their web, and how Lawes attained to loveliness of a special kind by pure declamation. In later times there was an immense common fund of common phrases, any one of which only needed modification by a composer to enable him to express anything he pleased. But Purcell came betwixt the old time and the new, and had to build up a technique which was not wholly his own, by following with swift steps and indefatigable energy on lines indicated even while Lawes was alive. Those lines were, of course, in the direction of word-painting, and I must admit that the first word-painting seems very silly to nineteenth century ears and eyes—eyes not less than ears. To the work of the early men Purcell's stands in just the same relation as Bach's declamation stands to Lawes'. Lawes declaims with a single eye on making clear the points of the poem: the voice rises or falls, lingers on a note or hastens away, to that one end. Bach also declaims—indeed his music is entirely based on declamation,—but as one who wishes to communicate an emotion and regards the attainment of beauty as being quite as important as expression. With him the voice rises or falls as a man's voice does when he experiences keen sensation; but the wavy line of the melody as it goes along and up and down the stave is treated conventionally and changed into a lovely pattern for the ear's delight; and as there can be no regular pattern without regular rhythm, rhythm is a vital element in Bach's music. So with Purcell, with a difference. The early "imitative" men had sought chiefly for dainty conceits. Pepys was the noted composer of "Beauty, Retire" and his joy when he went to church, "where fine music on the word trumpet" will be remembered. He doubtless liked the clatter of it, and liked the clatter the more for occurring on that word, and probably he was not very curious as to whether it was really beautiful or not. But Purcell could not write an unlovely thing. His music on the word trumpet would be beautiful (it is in "Bonduca"); and if (as he did) he sent the bass plunging headlong from the top to the bottom of a scale to illustrate "they that go down to the sea in ships," that headlong plunge would be beautiful too—so beautiful as to be heard with as great pleasure by those who know what the words are about as by those who don't. Like Bach, Purcell depended much on rhythm for the effect of his pattern; unlike Bach, his patterns have a strangely picturesque quality; through the ear they suggest the forms of leaf and blossom, the trailing tendril,—suggest them only, and dimly, vaguely,—yet, one feels, with exquisite fidelity. Thus Purcell, following those who, in sending the voice part along

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the line, pressed it up at the word “high” and down at “low,” and thus got an irregularly wavy line of tone or melody, solved the problem of spinning his continuous web of sound; and the fact that his web is beautiful and possesses this peculiar picturesqueness is his justification for solving the problem in this way. After all, his way was the way of early designers, who filled their circles, squares, and triangles with the forms of leaf and flower. And just as those forms were afterwards conventionalised and used by thousands who probably had no vaguest notion of their origin, so many of Purcell’s phrases became ossified and fell into the common stock of phrases which form the language of music. It is interesting to note that abroad Pasquini and Kuhlau went to work very much in Purcell’s fashion, and added to that same stock from which Handel and Bach and every subsequent composer drew, each adding something of his own.

It was not by accident that Purcell, with this astonishing fertility of picturesque phrases, should also have written so much, and such vividly coloured picturesque pieces—pieces, I mean, descriptive of the picturesque. Of course, to write an imitative phrase is quite another matter from writing a successful piece of descriptive music. But in Purcell the same faculty enabled him to do both. No poet of that time seems to have been enamoured of hedgerows and flowers and fields, nor can I say with certitude that Purcell was. Yet in imagination at least he loves to dwell amongst them; and not the country alone, the thought of the sea also, stirs him deeply. There need only be some mention of sunshine or rain among the leaves, green trees, or wind-swept grass, the yellow sea-beach or the vast sea-depths, and his imagination flames and flares. His best music was written when he was appealed to throughout a long work—as “The Tempest”—in this manner. Hence, it seems to me, that quality which his music, above any other music in the world, possesses: a peculiar sweetness, not a boudoir sweetness like Chopin’s sweetness, nor a sweetness corrected, like Chopin’s, by a subtle strain of poisonous acid or sub-acid quality, but the sweet and wholesome cleanliness of the open air and fields, the freshness of sun showers and cool morning winds. I am not exaggerating the importance of this element in his music. It is perpetually present, so that at last one comes to think, as I have been compelled to think this long time, that Purcell wrote nothing but descriptive music all his life. Of course it may be that the special formation of his melodies misleads one sometimes, and that Purcell in inventing them often did not dream of depicting natural objects. But, remembering the gusto with which he sets descriptive words, using these phrases consciously with a picturesque purpose, it is hard to accept this view. In all likelihood he was constituted similarly to Weber, who, his son asserts, curiously converted the lines and colours of trees and winding roads and all objects



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of nature into thematic material (there is an anecdote—apparently, for a wonder, a true one—that shows he took the idea of a march from a heap of chairs stacked upside down in a beer-garden during a shower of rain). But Purcell is infinitely simpler, less fevered, than Weber. Sometimes his melodies have the long-drawn, frail delicacy, the splendidly ordered irregularity of a trailing creeper, and something of its endless variety of leaf clustering round a central stem. But there is an entire absence of tropical luxuriance. A grave simplicity prevails, and we find no jewellery; showing Purcell to have been a supreme artist.

V.

So far I have spoken of his music generally, and now I come to deal (briefly, for my space is far spent) with the orchestral, choral, and chamber music and songs; and first with the choral music. I begin to fear that by insisting so strongly on the distinctive sweetness of Purcell's melody, I may have given a partially or totally wrong impression. Let me say at once, therefore, that delicate as he often was, and sweet as he was more often, although he could write melodies which are mere iridescent filaments of tone, he never became flabby or other than crisp, and could, and did, write themes as flexible, sinewy, unbreakable as perfectly tempered steel bands. And these themes he could lay together and weld into choruses of gigantic strength. The subject and counter-subject of "Thou art the King of Glory" (in the "Te Deum" in D), the theme of "Let all rehearse," and the ground bass of the final chorus (both in "Dioclesian"), the subjects of many of the fugues of the anthems, are as energetic as anything written by Handel, Bach or Mozart. And as for the choruses he makes of them, Handel's are perhaps loftier and larger structures, and Bach succeeds in getting effects which Purcell never gets, for the simple enough reason that Purcell, coming a generation before Bach, never tried or thought of trying to get them. But within his limits he achieves results that can only be described as stupendous. For instance, the chorus I have just mentioned—"Let all rehearse"—makes one think of Handel, because Handel obviously thought of it when he wrote "Fixed in His everlasting seat," and though Handel works out the idea to greater length, can we say that he gets a proportionately greater effect? I have not the faintest wish to elevate Purcell at Handel's expense, for Handel is to me, as to all men, one of the gods of music; but Purcell also is one of the gods, and I must insist that in this particular chorus he equalled Handel with smaller means and within narrower limits. It is not always so, for Handel is king of writers for the chorus, as Purcell is king of those who paint in music; but though Handel wrote more great choruses, his debt to Purcell is enormous. His way of hurling great masses of choral tone at his hearers is derived from Purcell; and so is the rhetorical plan of many of

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his choruses. But in Purcell, despite his sheer strength, we never fail to get the characteristic Purcellian touch, the little unexpected inflexion, or bit of coloured harmony that reminds that this is the music of the open air, not of the study, that does more than this, that actually floods you in a moment with a sense of the spacious blue heavens with light clouds flying. For instance, one gets it in the great “Te Deum” in the first section; again at “To thee, cherubim,” where the first and second trebles run down in liquid thirds with magical effect; once more at the fourteenth bar of “Thou art the King of Glory,” where he uses the old favourite device of following up the flattened leading note of the dominant key in one part by the sharp leading note in another part—a device used with even more exquisite result in the chorus of “Full fathom five.” Purcell is in many ways like Mozart, and in none more than in these incessantly distinctive touches, though in character the touches are as the poles apart. In Mozart, especially when he veils the poignancy of his emotion under a scholastic mode of expression, a sudden tremor in the voice, as it were, often betrays him, and none can resist the pathos of it. Purcell’s touches are pathetic, too, in another fashion—pathetic because of the curious sense of human weakness, the sense of tears, caused by the sudden relaxation of emotional tension that inevitably results when one comes on a patch of simple naked beauty when nothing but elaborate grandeur expressive of powerful exaltation had been anticipated. That Purcell foresaw this result, and deliberately used the means to achieve it, I cannot doubt. Those momentary slackenings of tense excitement are characteristic of the exalted mood and inseparable from it, and he must have known that they really go to augment its intensity. All Purcell’s choruses, however, are not of Handelian mould, for he wrote many that are sheer loveliness from beginning to end, many that are the very voice of the deepest sadness, many, again, showing a gaiety, an “unbuttoned” festivity of feeling, such as never came into music again until Beethoven introduced it as a new thing. The opening of one of the complimentary odes, “Celebrate this festival,” fairly carries one off one’s feet with the excess of jubilation in the rollicking rhythm and living melody of it. One of the most magnificent examples of picturesque music ever written—if not the most magnificent, at any rate the most delightful in detail—is the anthem, “Thy way, O God, is holy.” The picture-painting is prepared for with astonishing artistic foresight, and when it begins the effect is tremendous. I advise everyone who wishes to realise Purcell’s unheard-of fertility of great and powerful themes to look at “The clouds poured out water,” the fugue subject “The voice of Thy thunders,” the biting emphasis of the passage “the lightnings shone upon the ground,” and the irresistible impulse of “The earth was moved.”



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And the supremacy of Purcell's art is shown not more in these than in the succession of simple harmonies by which he gets the unutterable mournful poignancy of "Thou knowest, Lord," that unsurpassed and unsurpassable piece of choral writing which Dr. Crotch, one of the "English school," living in an age less sensitive even than this to Purcellian beauty, felt to be so great that it would be a desecration to set the words again. Later composers set the words again, feeling it no desecration, but possibly rather a compliment to Purcell; and Purcell's setting abides, and looks down upon every other, like Mozart's G minor and Beethoven's Ninth upon every other symphony, or the finale of Wagner's "Tristan" upon every other piece of love-music.

VI.

Purcell is also a chief, though not the chief, among song-writers. And he stands in the second place by reason of the very faculty which places him amongst the first of instrumental and choral writers. That dominating picturesque power of his, that tendency to write picturesque melodies as well as picturesque movements, compelled him to treat the voice as he treated any other instrument, and he writes page on page which would be at least as effective on any other instrument; and as more can be got out of the voice than out of any other instrument, and the tip-top song-writers got all out that could be got out, it follows that Purcell is below them. But only the very greatest of them have beaten him, and he often, by sheer perfection of phrase, runs them very close. Still, Mozart, Bach, and Handel do move us more profoundly. And an odd demonstration that Purcell the instrumental writer is almost above Purcell the composer for the voice, is that in such songs as "Halcyon Days" (in "The Tempest") the same phrases are perhaps less grateful on the voice than when repeated by the instrument. The phrase "That used to lull thee in thy sleep" (in "The Indian Queen") is divine when sung, but how thrilling is its touching expressiveness, how it seems to speak when the 'cellos repeat it! There are, of course, truly vocal melodies in Purcell (as there are in Beethoven and Berlioz, who also were not great writers for the voice), and some of them might almost be Mozart's. The only difference that may be felt between "While joys celestial" ("Cecilia Ode" of 1683) and a Mozart song, is that in Mozart one gets the frequent human touch, and in Purcell the frequent suggestion of the free winds and scented blossoms. The various scattered songs, such as "Mad Tom" (which is possibly not Purcell's at all) or "Mad Bess" (which certainly is), I have no room to discuss; but I may remark that the madness was merely an excuse for exhibiting a series of passions in what was reckoned at the time a natural manner. Quite possibly it was then thought that in a spoken play only mad persons should sing, just as Wagner insists that in music-drama only mad persons should speak; and as a good deal



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of singing was required, there were a good many mad parts. Probably Purcell would have treated all Wagner's characters, and all Berlioz's, as utterly and irretrievably mad. Nor have I space to discuss his instrumental music and his instrumentation, but must refer shortly to the fact that the overtures to the plays are equal to Handel's best in point of grandeur, and that in freedom, quality of melody, and daring, and fruitful use of new harmonies, the sonatas are ahead of anything attempted until Mozart came. They cannot be compared to Bach's suites, and they are infinitely fresher than the writings of the Italians whom he imitated. As for Purcell's instrumentation, it is primitive compared to Mozart's, but when he uses the instrument in group or batteries he obtains gorgeous effects of varied colour. He gets delicious effects by means of obligato instrumental parts in the accompaniments to such songs as "Charon the Peaceful Shade Invites"; and those who have heard the "Te Deum" in D may remember that even Bach never got more wonderful results from the sweeter tones of the trumpet.

VII.

Having shown how Purcell sprang from a race of English musicians, and how he achieved greater things than any man of his time, it remains only to be said that when, with Handel, the German flood deluged England, all remembrance of Purcell and his predecessors was swiftly swept away. His play-music was washed out of the theatres, his odes were carried away from the concert-room; in a word, all his and the earlier music was so completely forgotten that when Handel used anew his old devices connoisseurs wondered why the Italians and Germans should be able to bring forth such things while the English remained impotent. So Handel and the Germans were imitated by every composer, church or other, who came after, and all our "English music" is purely German. That we shall ever throw off that yoke I do not care to prophesy; but if ever we do, it will be by imitating Purcell in one respect only, that is, by writing with absolute simplicity and directness, leaving complexity, muddy profundity and elaborately worked-out multiplication sums to the Germans, to whom these things come naturally. The Germans are now spent: they produce no more great musicians: they produce only music which is as ugly to the ear as it is involved to the eye. It is high time for a return to the simplicity of Mozart, of Handel, of our own Purcell; to dare, as Wagner dared, to write folk-melody, and to put it on the trombones at the risk of being called vulgar and rowdy by persons who do not know great art when it is original, but only when it resembles some great art of the past which they have learnt to know. It was thus Purcell worked, and his work stands fast. And when we English awake to the fact that we have a music which ought to speak more intimately to us than all the music of the continental composers, his work will be marvelled at as a new-created thing,

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and his pieces will appear on English programmes and displace the masses of noisome shoddy which we revel in just now. It will then be recognised, as even the chilly Burney recognised a century ago, failing to recognise much else, that “in the accent of passion, and expression of English words, the vocal music of Purcell is ... as superior to Handel’s as an original poem to a translation.” Though this is slight praise for one of the very greatest musicians the world has produced.

BACH; AND THE “MATTHEW” PASSION AND THE “JOHN”

I.

More is known of our mighty old Capellmeister Bach than of Shakespeare; less than of Miss Marie Corelli. The main thing is that he lived the greater part of his obscure life in Leipzig, turning out week by week the due amount of church music as an honest Capellmeister should. Other Capellmeisters did likewise; only, while their compositions were counterpoint, Bach’s were masterworks. There lay the sole difference, and the square-toed Leipzig burghers did not perceive it. To them Master Bach was a hot-tempered, fastidious, crotchety person, endured because no equally competent organist would take his place at the price. So he worked without reward, without recognition, until his inspiration exhausted itself; and then he sat, imposing in massive unconscious strength as a spent volcano, awaiting the end. After that was silence: the dust gathered on his music as it lay unheard for a century. Haydn and Mozart and Beethoven hardly suspected their predecessor’s greatness. Then came Mendelssohn (to whom be the honour and the glory), and gave to the world, to the world’s great surprise, the “Matthew” Passion, as one might say, fresh from the composer’s pen. The B minor mass followed, and gradually the whole of the church and instrumental music; and now we are beginning dimly to comprehend Bach’s greatness.

II.

The “John” Passion and the “Matthew” Passion of Bach are as little alike as two works dealing with the same subject, and intended for performance under somewhat similar conditions, could possibly be; and since the “Matthew” version appeals to the modern heart and imagination as an ideal setting of the tale of the death of the Man of Sorrows, one is apt to follow Spitta in his curious mistake of regarding the differences between the two as altogether to the disadvantage of the “John.” Spitta, indeed, goes further than this. So bent is he on proving the superiority of the “Matthew” that what he sees as a masterstroke in that work is in the “John” a gross blunder; and, on the whole, the

pages on the “John” Passion are precisely the most fatuous of the many fatuous pages he wrote when he plunged into artistic criticism, leaving his own proper element of technical or historical criticism. This is a pity, for Spitta really had

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a very good case to spoil. The “Matthew” is without doubt a vaster, profounder, more moving and lovelier piece of art than the “John.” Indeed, being the later work of a composer whose power grew steadily from the first until the last time he put pen to paper, it could not be otherwise. But the critic who, like Spitta, sees in it only a successful attempt at what was attempted unsuccessfully in the “John,” seems to me to mistake the aim both of the “John” and the “Matthew.” The “John” is not in any sense unsuccessful, but a complete, consistent and masterly achievement; and if it stands a little lower than the “Matthew,” if the “Matthew” is mightier, more impressive, more overwhelming in its great tenderness, this is not because the Bach who wrote in 1722-23 was a bungler or an incomplete artist, but because the Bach who wrote in 1729 was inspired by a loftier idea than had come to the Bach of 1723. It was only necessary to compare the impression one received when the “John” Passion was sung by the Bach Choir in 1896 with that received at the “Matthew” performance in St. Paul’s in the same year, to realise that it is in idea, not in power of realising the idea, that the two works differ—differ more widely than might seem possible, seeing that the subject is the same, and that the same musical forms—chorus, chorale, song and recitative—are used in each.

Waking on the morrow of the “John” performance, my memory was principally filled with those hoarse, stormy, passionate roarings of an enraged mob. A careless reckoning shows that whereas the people’s choruses in the “Matthew” Passion occupy about ninety bars, in the “John” they fill about two hundred and fifty. “Barabbas” in the “Matthew” is a single yell; in the “John” it takes up four bars. “Let Him be crucified” in the “Matthew” is eighteen bars long, counting the repetition, while “Crucify” and “Away with Him” in the “John” amount to fifty bars. Moreover, the people’s choruses are written in a much more violent and tempestuous style in the earlier than in the later setting. In the “Matthew” there is nothing like those terrific ascending and descending chromatic passages in “Waere dieser nicht ein Ubelthaeter” and “Wir duerfen Niemand toeden,” or the short breathless shouts near the finish of the former chorus, as though the infuriated rabble had nearly exhausted itself, or, again, the excited chattering of the soldiers when they get Christ’s coat, “Lasst uns den nicht zertheilen.” Considering these things, one sees that the first impression the “John” Passion gives is the true impression, and that Bach had deliberately set out to depict the preliminary scenes of the crucifixion with greater fulness of detail and in more striking colours than he afterwards attempted in the “Matthew” Passion. Then, not only is the physical suffering of Christ insisted on in this way, but the chorales, recitatives, and songs lay still greater stress upon it, either directly, by actual description, or indirectly, by



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uttering with unheard-of poignancy the remorse supposed to be felt by mankind whose guilt occasioned that suffering. The central point in the two Passions is the same, namely, the backsliding of Peter; and in each the words, "He went out and wept bitterly," are given the greatest prominence; but one need only contrast the acute agony expressed in the song, "Ach mein Sinn," which follows the incident in the "John," with the sweetness of "Have mercy upon me," which follows it in the "Matthew," to gain a fair notion of the spirit in which the one work, and also the spirit in which the other, is written. The next point to note is, that while the "Matthew" begins with lamentation and ends with resignation, "John" begins and ends with hope and praise. In the former there is no chorus like the opening "Herr, unser, Herrscher," no chorale so triumphant as "Ach grosser Koenig," and certainly no single passage so rapturous as "Alsdann vom Tod erwecke mich, Dass meine Augen sehen dich, In aller Freud, O Gottes Sohn" (with the bass mounting to the high E flat and rolling magnificently down again). So in the "John" Passion Bach has given us, first, a vivid picture of the turbulent crowd and of the suffering and death of Christ; second, an expression of man's bitterest remorse; and, last and above all, an expression of man's hope for the future and his thankfulness to Christ who redeemed him. These are what one remembers after hearing the work sung; and these, it may be remarked, are the things that the seventeenth and eighteenth century mind chiefly saw in the sorrow and death of Jesus of Nazareth.

III.

The "Matthew" Passion arouses a very different mood from that aroused by the "John." One does not remember the turbulent people's choruses, nor the piercing note of anguish, nor any rapturous song or chorus; for all else is drowned in the recollection of an overwhelming utterance of love and human sorrow and infinite tenderness. Much else there is in the "Matthew" Passion, just as there is love and tenderness in the "John"; but just as these are subordinated in the "John" to the more striking features I have mentioned, so in the "Matthew" the noise of the people and the expression of keen remorse are subordinated to love and human tenderness and infinite sorrow. The small number and conciseness of the people's choruses have already been alluded to, and it may easily be shown that the penitential music is brief compared with the love music, besides having a great deal of the love, the yearning love, feeling in it. The list of penitential pieces is exhausted when I have mentioned "Come, ye daughters," "Guilt for sin," "Break and die," "O Grief," "Alas! now is my Saviour gone," and "Have mercy upon me"; and, on the other hand, we have "Thou blessed Saviour," the Last Supper music, the succeeding recitative and song, "O man, thy heavy sin lament," "To us He hath done all things," "For love



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my Saviour suffered," "Come, blessed Cross," and "See the Saviour's outstretched arm," every one of which, not to speak of some other songs and most of the chorales, is sheer love music of the purest sort. This, then, seems to me the difference between the "Matthew" Passion and its predecessor: in the "John" Bach tried to purge his audience in the regular evangelical manner by pity and terror and hope. But during the next six years his spiritual development was so amazing, that while remaining intellectually faithful to evangelical dogma and perhaps such bogies as the devil and hell, he yet saw that the best way of purifying his audience was to set Jesus of Nazareth before them as the highest type of manhood he knew, as the man who so loved men that He died for them. There is therefore in the "Matthew" Passion neither the blank despair nor the feverish ecstasy of the "John," for they have no part to play there. Human sorrow and human love are the themes. Whenever I hear a fine rendering of the "Matthew" Passion, it seems to me that no composer, not even Mozart, could be more tender than Bach. It is often hard to get into communication with him, for he often appeals to feelings that no longer stir humanity—such, for instance, as the obsolete "sense of sin,"—but once it is done, he works miracles. Take, for example, the scene in which Jesus tells His disciples that one of them will betray Him. They ask, in chorus, "Herr, bin ich's?" There is a pause, and the chorale, "*Ich bin's, ich sollte buessen,*" is thundered out by congregation and organ; then the agony passes away at the thought of the Redeemer, and the last line, "Das hat verdienet meine Seel," is almost intolerable in its sweetness. The songs, of course, appeal naturally to-day to all who will listen to them; but it is in such passages as this that Bach spoke most powerfully to his generation, and speaks now to those who will learn to understand him. Those who understand him can easily perceive the "John" Passion to be a powerful artistic embodiment of an eighteenth century idea; and they may also perceive that the "Matthew" is greater, because it is, on the whole, a little more beautiful, and because its main idea—which so far transcended the eighteenth century understanding that the eighteenth century preferred the "John"—is one of the loftiest that has yet visited the human mind.

HANDEL

Mr. George Frideric Handel is by far the most superb personage one meets in the history of music. He alone of all the musicians lived his life straight through in the grand manner. Spohr had dignity; Gluck insisted upon respect being shown a man of his talent; Spontini was sufficiently self-assertive; Beethoven treated his noble patrons as so many handfuls of dirt. But it is impossible altogether to lose sight of the peasant in Beethoven and Gluck; Spohr had more than a trace of the successful shopkeeper; Spontini's assertion often became mere insufferable



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bumptiousness. Besides, they all won their positions through being the best men in the field, and they held them with a proud consciousness of being the best men. But in Handel we have a polished gentleman, a lord amongst lords, almost a king amongst kings; and had his musical powers been much smaller than they were, he might quite possibly have gained and held his position just the same. He slighted the Elector of Hanover; and when that noble creature became George I. of England, Handel had only to do the handsome thing, as a handsome gentleman should, to be immediately taken back into favour. He was educated—was, in fact, a university man of the German sort; he could write and spell, and add up rows of figures, and had many other accomplishments which gentlemen of the period affected a little to despise. He had a pungent and a copious wit. He had quite a commercial genius; he was an impresario, and had engagements to offer other people instead of having to beg for engagements for himself; and he was always treated by the British with all the respect they keep for the man who has made money, or, having lost it, is fast making it again. He fought for the lordship of opera against nearly the whole English nobility, and they paid him the compliment of banding together with as much ado to ruin him as if their purpose had been to drive his royal master from the throne. He treated all opposition with a splendid good-humoured disdain. If his theatre was empty, then the music sounded the better. If a singer threatened to jump on the harpsichord because Handel's accompaniments attracted more notice than the singing, Handel asked for the date of the proposed performance that it might be advertised, for more people would come to see the singer jump than hear him sing. He was, in short, a most superb person, quite the grand seigneur. Think of Bach, the little shabby unimportant cantor, or of Beethoven, important enough but shabby, and with a great sorrow in his eyes, and an air of weariness, almost of defeat. Then look at the magnificent Mr. Handel in Hudson's portrait: fashionably dressed in a great periwig and gorgeous scarlet coat, victorious, energetic, self-possessed, self-confident, self-satisfied, jovial, and proud as Beelzebub (to use his own comparison)—too proud to ask for recognition were homage refused. This portrait helps us to understand the ascendancy Handel gained over his contemporaries and over posterity.

But his lofty position was not entirely due to his overwhelming personality. His intellect, if less vast, less comprehensive, than Beethoven's, was less like the intellect of a great peasant: it was swifter, keener, surer. Where Beethoven plodded, Handel leaped. And a degree of genius which did nothing for Bach, a little for Mozart, and all for Beethoven, did something for Handel. Without a voice worth taking into consideration, he could, and at least on one occasion did, sing so touchingly that the leading singer of the age dared not risk

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his reputation by singing after him. He was not only the first composer of the day, but also the first organist and the first harpsichord player; for his only possible rival, Sebastian Bach, was an obscure schoolmaster in a small, nearly unheard-of, German town. And so personal force, musical genius, business talent, education, and general brain power went to the making of a man who hobnobbed with dukes and kings, who ruled musical England with an iron rule, who threatened to throw distinguished soprano ladies from windows, and was threatened with never an action for battery in return, who went through the world with a regal gait, and was, in a word, the most astonishing lord of music the world has seen.

That this aristocrat should come to be the musical prophet of an evangelical bourgeoisie would be felt as a most comical irony, were it only something less of a mystery. Handel was brought up in the bosom of the Lutheran Church, and was religious in his way. But it was emphatically a pagan way. Let those who doubt it turn to his setting of "All we like sheep have gone astray," in the "Messiah," and ask whether a religious man, whether Byrde or Palestrina, would have painted that exciting picture on those words. Imagine how Bach would have set them. That Handel lived an intense inner life we know, but what that life was no man can ever know. It is only certain that it was not a life such as Bach's; for he lived an active outer life also, and was troubled with no illusions, no morbid introspection. He seemed to accept the theology of the time in simple sincerity as a sufficient explanation of the world and human existence. He had little desire to write sacred music. He felt that his enormous force found its finest exercise in song-making; and Italian opera, consisting nearly wholly of songs, was his favourite form to the finish. The instinct was a true one. It is as a song-writer he is supreme, surpassing as he does Schubert, and sometimes even Mozart. Mozart is a prince of song-writers; but Handel is their king. He does not get the breezy picturesqueness of Purcell, nor the entrancing absolute beauty that Mozart often gets; but as pieces of art, each constructed so as to get the most out of the human voice in expressing a rich human passion in a noble form, they stand unapproachable in their perfection. For many reasons the English public refused to hear them in his own time, and Handel, as a general whose business was to win the battle, not in this or that way, but in any possible way, turned his attention to oratorio, and in this found success and a fortune. In this lies also our great gain, for in addition to the Italian opera songs we have the oratorio choruses. But when we come to think of it, might not Buononcini and Cuzzoni laugh to see how time has avenged them on their old enemy? For Handel's best music is in the songs, which rarely find a singer; and his fame is kept alive by performances of "Israel in Egypt" at the Albert Hall, where (until lately) evangelical small grocers crowded to hear the duet for two basses, "The Lord is a man of war," which Handel did not write, massacred by a huge bass chorus.

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His “Messiah” is in much the same plight as Milton’s “Paradise Lost,” the plays of Shakespeare and the source of all true religion—it suffers from being so excessively well known and so generally accepted as a classic that few want to hear it, and none think it worth knowing thoroughly. A few years ago the late Sir Joseph Barnby went through the entire work in St. James’s Hall with his Guildhall students; but such a feat had not, I believe, been accomplished previously within living memory, and certainly it has not been attempted again since. We constantly speak of the “Messiah” as the most popular oratorio ever written; but even in the provinces only selections from it are sung, and in the metropolis the selections are cut very short indeed, frequently by the sapient device of taking out all the best numbers and leaving only those that appeal to the religious instincts of Clapham. I cannot resist the suspicion that but for the words of “He was despised,” “Behold, and see,” and “I know that my Redeemer liveth,” Clapham would have tired of the oratorio before now, and that but for its having become a Christmas institution, like roast beef, plum-puddings, mince-pies, and other indigestible foods, it would no longer be heard in the provinces. And perhaps it would be better forgotten—perhaps Handel would rather have seen it forgotten than regarded as it is regarded, than existing merely as an aid to evangelical religion or an after-dinner digestive on Christmas Day. Still, during the last hundred and fifty years, it has suffered so many humiliations that possibly one more, even this last one, does not so much matter. First its great domes and pillars and mighty arches were prettily ornamented and tinted by Mozart, who surely knew not what he did; then in England a barbarous traditional method of singing it was evolved; later it was Costa-mongered; finally even the late eminent Macfarren, the worst enemy music has ever had in this country, did not disdain to prepare “a performing edition,” and to improve Mozart’s improvements on Handel. One wonders whether Mozart, when he overlaid the “Messiah” with his gay tinsel-work, dreamed that some Costa, encouraged by Mozart’s own example, and without brains enough to guess that he had nothing like Mozart’s brains, would in like manner desecrate “Don Giovanni.” Like “Don Giovanni,” there the “Messiah” lies, almost unrecognisable under its outrageous adornments, misunderstood, its splendours largely unknown and hardly even suspected, the best known and the least known of oratorios, a work spoken of as fine by those who cannot hum one of its greatest themes or in the least comprehend the plan on which its noblest choruses are constructed.



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Rightly to approach the “Messiah” or any of Handel’s sacred oratorios, to approach it in any sure hope of appreciating it, one must remember that (as I have just said) Handel had nothing of the religious temperament, that in temperament he was wholly secular, that he was an eighteenth century pagan. He was perfectly satisfied with the visible and audible world his energy and imagination created out of things; about the why and wherefore of things he seems never to have troubled; his soul asked no questions, and he was never driven to accept a religious or any other explanation. It is true he went to church with quite commendable regularity, and wished to die on Good Friday and so meet Jesus Christ on the anniversary of the resurrection. But he was nevertheless as completely a pagan as any old Greek; the persons of the Trinity were to him very solid entities; if he wished to die on Good Friday, depend upon it, he fully meant to enter heaven in his finest scarlet coat with ample gold lace and a sword by his side, to make a stately bow to the assembled company and then offer a few apposite and doubtless pungent remarks on the proper method of tuning harps. Of true devotional feeling, of the ecstatic devotional feeling of Palestrina and of Bach, there is in no recorded saying of his a trace, and there is not a trace of it in his music. When he was writing the “Hallelujah Chorus” he imagined he saw God on His throne, just as in writing “Semele” he probably imagined he saw Jupiter on his throne; and the fact proves only with what intensity and power his imagination was working, and how far removed he was from the genuine devotional frame of mind. There is not the slightest difference in style between his secular and his sacred music; he treats sacred and secular subjects precisely alike. In music his intention was never to reveal his own state of mind, but always to depict some object, some scene. Now, never did he adhere with apparently greater resolution to this plan, never therefore did he produce a more essentially secular work, than in the “Messiah.” One need only consider such numbers as “All they that see Him” and “Behold the Lamb of God” to realise this; though, indeed, there is not a number in the oratorio that does not show it with sufficient clearness. But fully to understand Handel and realise his greatness, it is not enough merely to know the spirit in which he worked: one must know also his method of depicting things and scenes. He was wholly an impressionist—in his youth from choice, as when he wrote the music of “Rinaldo” faster than the librettist could supply the words; in middle age and afterwards from necessity, as he never had time to write save when circumstances freed him for a few days from the active duties of an impresario. He tried to do, and succeeded in doing, everything with a few powerful strokes, a few splashes of colour. Of the careful elaboration of Bach, of Beethoven, even of Mozart, there is nothing: sometimes in his impatience



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he seemed to mix his colours in buckets and hurl them with the surest artistic aim at his gigantic canvases. A comparison of the angels' chorus "Glory to God in the highest" in Bach's "Christmas Oratorio" with the same thing as set in the "Messiah" will show not only how widely different were the aims of the two men, but also throws the minute cunning of the Leipzig schoolmaster into startling contrast with the daring recklessness of the tremendous London impresario. Of course both men possessed wonderful contrapuntal skill; but in Bach's case there is time and patience as well as skill, and in Handel's only consummate audacity and intellectual grip. Handel was by far a greater man than Bach—he appears to me, indeed, the greatest man who has yet lived; but though he achieves miracles as a musician, his music was to him only one of many modes of using the irresistible creative instinct and energy within him. Any one who looks in Handel for the characteristic complicated music of the typical German masters will be disappointed even as the Germans are disappointed; but those who are prepared to let Handel say what he has to say in his own chosen way will find in his music the most admirable style ever attained to by any musician, the most perfect fusion of manner and matter. It is a grand, large, and broad style, because Handel had a large and grand matter to express; and if it errs at all it errs on the right side—it has too few rather than too many notes.

On the whole, the "Messiah" is as vigorous, rich, picturesque and tender as the best of Handel's oratorios—even "Belshazzar" does not beat it. There is scarcely any padding; there are many of Handel's most perfect songs and most gorgeous choruses; and the architecture of the work is planned with a magnificence, and executed with a lucky completeness, attained only perhaps elsewhere in "Israel in Egypt"—for which achievement Handel borrowed much of the bricks and mortar from other edifices. Theological though the subject is, the oratorio is as much a hymn to joy as the Ninth symphony; and there is in it far more of genuine joy, of sheer delight in living. Of the sense of sin—the most cowardly illusion ever invented by a degenerate people—there is no sign; where Bach would have been abased in the dust, Handel is bright, shining, confident, cocksure that all is right with the world. Mingled with the marvellous tenderness of "Comfort ye" there is an odd air of authority, a conviction that everything is going well, and that no one need worry; and nothing fresher, fuller of spring-freshness, almost of rollicking jollity, has ever been written than "Every valley shall be exalted." "And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed" is in rather the same vein, though a deeper note of feeling is struck. The effect of the alto voices leading off, followed immediately by the rest of the chorus and orchestra, is overwhelming; and the chant of the basses at "For the mouth of the Lord" is



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in the biggest Handel manner. But just as “He was despised” and “I know that my Redeemer liveth” tower above all the other songs, so three or four choruses tower above all the other choruses in not only the “Messiah,” but all Handel’s oratorios. “Worthy is the Lamb” stands far above the rest, and indeed above all choruses in the world save Bach’s very best; then comes “For unto us a Child is born”; and after that “And He shall purify,” “His yoke is easy,” and “Surely He hath borne our griefs”—each distinctive, complete in itself, an absolute piece of noble invention. “Unto us a Child is born” is written in a form devised by Handel and used with success by no other composer since, until in a curiously modified shape Tschaikowsky employed it for the third movement of his Pathetic symphony. The first theme is very simply announced, played with awhile, then the second follows—a tremendous phrase to the words “The government shall be upon His shoulders”; suddenly the inner parts begin to quicken into life, to ferment, to throb and to leap, and with startling abruptness great masses of tone are hurled at the listener to the words “Wonderful, Counsellor.” The process is then repeated in a shortened and intensified form; then it is repeated again; and finally the principal theme, delivered so naively at first, is delivered with all the pomp and splendour of full chorus and orchestra, and “Wonderful, Counsellor” thundered out on a corresponding scale. A scheme at once so simple, so daring and so tremendous in effect, could have been invented by no one but Handel with his need for working rapidly; and it is strange that a composer so different from Handel as Tschaikowsky should have hit upon a closely analogous form for a symphonic movement. The forms of the other choruses are dissimilar. In “He shall purify” there are two big climaxes; in “His yoke is easy” there is only one, and it comes at the finish, just when one is wondering how the splendid flow of music can be ended without an effect of incompleteness or of anti-climax; and “Surely He hath borne our griefs” depends upon no climactic effects, but upon the sheer sweetness and pathos of the thing.

Handel’s secular oratorios are different from anything else in the world. They are neither oratorios, nor operas, nor cantatas; and the plots are generally quaint.

Some years ago it occurred to me one morning that a trip by sea to Russia might be refreshing; and that afternoon I started in a coal-steamer from a northern seaport. A passport could hardly be wrested from hide-bound officialdom in so short a time, and, to save explanations in a foreign tongue at Cronstadt, the reader’s most humble servant assumed the lowly office of purser—wages, one shilling per month. The passage was rough, the engineers were not enthusiastic in their work, some of the seamen were sulky; and, in a word, the name of God was frequently in the skipper’s mouth. Otherwise he did not strike one as being a particularly religious man.



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Nevertheless, when Sunday evening came round he sat down and read the Bible with genuine fervour, spelling the hard words aloud and asking how they should or might be pronounced; and he informed me, by way of explaining his attachment to the Book, that he had solemnly promised his wife never to omit his weekly devotions while on the deep. Though I never shared the literary tastes of Mr. Wilson Barrett, the captain's unfathomable ignorance of the Gospels, Isaiah and the Psalms startled even me; but on the other hand he had an intimate acquaintance with a number of stories to be found only in the Apocrypha, with which he had thoughtfully provided himself. To gratify my curiosity he read me the tale of Susanna and the Elders. Being young, my first notion was that I had chanced on a capital subject for an opera; and I actually thought for ten minutes of commencing at once on a libretto. Later I remembered the censor, and realised for the first time that in England, when a subject is unfit for a drama, it is treated as an oratorio. As soon as possible I bought Handel's "Susanna" instead, and found that Handel curiously—or perhaps not curiously—had also been before me in thinking of treating the subject operatically. In fact "Susanna" is as much an opera as "Rinaldo," the only difference being that a few choruses are forcibly dragged in to give colour to the innocent pretence. Handel's librettist, whoever he was, did his work downright badly. That he glorifies the great institution of permanent marriage and says nothing of the corresponding great institution of the Divorce Court, is only what might be expected of the horrible eighteenth century—the true dark age of Europe; but surely even a composer of Handel's powers could scarcely do himself justice with such a choice blend of stupidity and cant religion as this—

"Chorus. How long, O Lord, shall Israel groan
In bondage and in pain?
Jehovah! hear Thy people moan,
And break the tyrant's chain!

"Joachim. Our crimes repeated have provok'd His rage, And now He scourges a
degen'rate age. O come, my fair Susanna, come, And from my bosom chase its
gloom," etc.

Or is the abrupt third line of Joachim's speech to be regarded as a masterstroke of characterisation? I will tell the whole story, to show what manner of subject has been thought proper for an oratorio. Joachim and Susanna are of course perfect monsters of fidelity; though it is only fair to say that Joachim's virtue is not insisted on, or, for that matter, mentioned. Joachim goes out of town—he says so: "Awhile I'm summoned from the town away"—and Susanna, instead of obeying his directions to entertain some friends, goes into a dark glade, whither the Elders presently repair. She declines their attentions; then they declare they caught her with an unknown lover, who fled; and she is condemned to death, the populace seeing naught but justice in the sentence. But

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before they begin to hurl the stones, Daniel steps forward and by sheer eloquent impudence persuades the people to have the case re-tried, with him for judge. He sends one elder out of court, and asks the other under what tree Susanna committed the indiscretion. The poor wretch, knowing no science, foolishly makes a wild shot instead of pleading a defective education, and says, "A verdant mastick, pride of all the grove." The other, in response to the same question, says, "Yon tall holm-tree." Incredible as it seems, on the strength of this error, which would merely gain a policeman the commendation of an average London magistrate, the two Elders are sent off to be hanged! Why, even the late Mr. Justice Stephen never put away an innocent man or woman on less evidence! But the chorus flatters Daniel just as the Press used to flatter Mr. Justice Stephen; Susanna is complimented on her chastity; and all ends with some general reflections—

"A virtuous wife shall soften fortune's frown,
She's far more precious than a golden crown."

Nothing is said about the market value of a virtuous husband. Probably the eighteenth century regarded such a thing as out of the question. As I have said, I tell this story to show what the British public will put up with if you mention the word oratorio. Voltaire's dictum needs revision thus: "Whatever is too improper to be spoken (in England) is sung, and whatever is too improper to be sung on the stage may be sung in a church."

Nevertheless, out of this wretched book Handel made a masterpiece. The tale of Susanna is not one in which a man of his character might be expected to take a profound interest; though it should always be remembered that hardly anything is known of his relations with the other sex save that he took a keen and lifelong interest in the Foundling Hospital. But so strong had the habit of making masterpieces become with him that he could not resist the temptation to create just one more, even when he had nothing better than "Susanna" to base it on; just as a confirmed drunkard cannot resist the temptation to get one drink more, even if he be accustomed to the gilded chambers of the West End, and must go for really the last to-night into the lowest drinking-saloon of the East. Some of the choruses are of Handel's best. The first, "How long, O Lord," shows that he could write expressive chromatic passages as well as Purcell and Bach; the second is surcharged with emotion; "Righteous Heaven" is picturesque and full of splendid vigour; "Impartial Heaven" contains some of the most gorgeous writing that even Handel achieved. But the last two choruses, and "The Cause is decided" and "Oh, Joachim," are common, colourless, barren; and were evidently written without delight, to maintain the pretext that the work was an oratorio. But it stands to this day, unmistakably an opera; and it is the songs that will certainly make it popular some day; for some



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of them are on Handel's highest level, and Handel's highest level has never been reached by any other composer. His choruses are equalled by Bach's, his dramatic strokes by Gluck's, his instrumental movements by Bach's and perhaps Lulli's; but the coming of Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Weber, and Wagner has only served to show that he is the greatest song-writer the world has known or is likely to know. Even Mozart never quite attained that union of miraculously balanced form, sweetness of melody, and depth of feeling with a degree of sheer strength that keeps the expression of the main thought lucid, and the surface of the music, so to speak, calm, when obscurity might have been anticipated, and some roughness and storm and stress excused. "Faith displays her rosy wing" is an absolutely perfect instance of a Handel song. Were not the thing done, one might believe it impossible to express with such simplicity—four sombre minor chords and then the tremolo of the strings—the alternations of trembling fear and fearful hope, the hope of the human soul in extremist agony finding an exalted consolation in the thought that this was the worst. As astounding as this is the quality of light and freshness of atmosphere with which Handel imbues such songs as "Clouds o'ertake the brightest day" and "Crystal streams in murmurs flowing"; and the tenderness of "Would custom bid," with the almost divine refrain, "I then had called thee mine," might surprise us, coming as it does from such a giant, did we not know that tenderness is always a characteristic of the great men, of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Wagner, and that the pettiness, ill-conditionedness, and lack of generous feeling observable in (say) our London composers to-day stamp them more unmistakably than does their music as small composers. If the poor fellows knew what they were about, they would at least conceal the littlenesses that show they are destined never to do work of the first order. The composer of the "Rex tremendae" (in the Requiem) wrote "Dove sono," Beethoven wrote both the finale of the Fifth symphony and the slow movement of the Ninth, Wagner both the Valkyries' Ride and the motherhood theme in "Siegfried," Handel "Worthy is the Lamb" and "Waft her, angels"; while your little malicious musical Mimes are absorbed in self-pity, and can no more write a melody that irresistibly touches you than they can build a great and impressive structure. And if Mozart is tenderest of all the musicians, Handel comes very close to him. The world may, though not probably, tire of all but his grandest choruses, while his songs will always be sung as lovely expressions of the finest human feeling.



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“Samson” is not his finest oratorio, though it may be his longest. It contains no “Unto us a Child is born” nor a “Worthy is the Lamb,” nor a “Now love, that everlasting boy”; but in several places the sublime is reached—in “Then round about the starry throne,” the last page of which is worth all the oratorios written since Handel’s time save Beethoven’s “Mount of Olives”; in “Fixed is His everlasting seat,” with that enormous opening phrase, irresistible in its strength and energy as Handel himself; and in the first section of “O first created beam.” The pagan choruses are full of riotous excitement, though there is not one of them to match “Ye tutelary gods” in “Belshazzar.” But there is little in “Belshazzar” to match the pathos of “Return, O God of hosts,” or “Ye sons of Israel, now lament.” The latter is a notable example of Handel’s art. There is not a new phrase in it: nothing, indeed, could be commoner than the bar at the first occurrence of “Amongst the dead great Samson lies,” and yet the effect is amazing; and though the “for ever” is as old as Purcell, here it is newly used—used as if it had never been used before—to utter a depth of emotion that passes beyond the pathetic to the sublime. This very vastness of feeling, this power of stepping outside himself and giving a voice to the general emotions of humanity, prevents us recognising the personal note in Handel as we recognise it in Mozart. But occasionally the personal note may be met. The recitative “My genial spirits fail,” with those dreary long-drawn harmonies, and the orchestral passage pressing wearily downwards at “And lay me gently down with them that rest,” seems almost like Handel’s own voice in a moment of sad depression. It serves, at anyrate, to remind us that the all-conquering Mr. Handel was a complete man who had endured the sickening sense of the worthlessness of a struggle that he was bound to continue to the end. But these personal confessions are scarce. After all, in oratorio Handel’s best music is that in which he seeks to attain the sublime. In his choruses he does attain it: he sweeps you away with the immense rhythmical impetus of the music, or overpowers you with huge masses of tone hurled, as it were, bodily at you at just the right moments, or he coerces you with phrases like the opening of “Fixed in His everlasting seat,” or the last (before the cadence) in “Then round about the starry throne.” It is true that with his unheard-of intellectual power, and a mastery of technique equal or nearly equal to Bach’s, he was often tempted to write in his uninspired moments, and so the chorus became with him more or less of a formula; but we may also note that even when he was most mechanical the mere furious speed at which he wrote seemed to excite and exalt him, so that if he began with a commonplace “Let their celestial concerts all unite,” before the end he was pouring forth glorious and living stuff like the last twenty-seven bars. So the pace at which he had to write in



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the intervals of bullying or coaxing prima donnas or still more petulant male sopranos was not wholly a misfortune; if it sometimes compelled him to set down mere musical arithmetic, or rubbish like "Honour and arms," and "Go, baffled coward," it sometimes drew his grandest music out of him. The dramatic oratorio is a hybrid form of art—one might almost say a bastard form; it had only about thirty years of life; but in those thirty years Handel accomplished wonderful things with it. And the wonder of them makes Handel appear the more astonishing man; for, when all is said, the truth is that the man was greater, infinitely greater, than his music.

HAYDN AND HIS "CREATION"

It is a fact never to be forgotten, in hearing good papa Haydn's music, that he lived in the fine old world when stately men and women went through life in the grand manner with a languid pulse, when the earth and the days were alike empty, and hurry to get finished and proceed to the next thing was almost unknown, and elbowing of rivals to get on almost unnecessary. For fifty years he worked away contentedly as bandmaster to Prince Esterhazy, composing the due amount of music, conducting the due number of concerts, taking his salary of some seventy odd pounds per annum thankfully, and putting on his uniform for special State occasions with as little grumbling as possible, all as a good bandmaster should. He had gone through a short period of roughing it in his youth, and he had made one or two mistakes as he settled down. He married a woman who worked with enthusiasm to render his early life intolerable, and begged him in his old age to buy a certain cottage, as it would suit her admirably when she became a widow. But he consoled himself as men do in the circumstances, and did not allow his mistakes to poison all his life, or cause him any special worry. His other troubles were not very serious. A Music Society which he wished to join tried to trap him into an agreement to write important compositions for it whenever they were wanted. Once he offended his princely master by learning to play the baryton, an instrument on which the prince was a performer greatly esteemed by his retainers. Such teacup storms soon passed: Prince Esterhazy doubtless forgave him; the Society was soon forgotten; and Haydn worked on placidly. Every morning he rose with or before the lark, dressed himself with a degree of neatness that astonished even that neat dressing age, and sat down to compose music. Later in each day he is reported to have eaten, to have rehearsed his band or conducted concerts, and so to bed to prepare himself by refreshing slumber for the next day's labours. At certain periods of the year Prince Esterhazy and his court adjourned to Esterhaz, and at certain periods they came back to Eisenstadt: thus they were saved by due variety from utter petrification. Haydn seems to have liked the life, and to have thought moreover that it was



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good for him and his art. By being thrown so much back upon himself, he said, he had been forced to become original. Whether it made him original or not, he never thought of changing it until his prince died, and for a time his services were not wanted at Esterhaz or Eisenstadt. Then he came to England, and by his success here made a European reputation (for it was then as it is now—an artist was only accepted on the musical Continent after he had been stamped with the hall-mark of unmusical England). Finally he settled in Vienna, was for a time the teacher of Beethoven, declared his belief that the first chorus of the “Creation” came direct from heaven, and died a world-famous man.

To the nineteenth century mind it seems rather an odd life for an artist: at least it strikes one as a life, despite Haydn’s own opinion, not particularly conducive to originality. To use extreme language, it might almost be called a monotonous and soporific mode of existence. Probably its chief advantage was the opportunity it afforded, or perhaps the necessity it enforced, of ceaseless industry. Certainly that industry bore fruit in Haydn’s steady increase of inventive power as he went on composing. But he only took the prodigious leap from the second to the first rank of composers after he had been free for a time from his long slavery, and had been in England and been aroused and stimulated by new scenes, unfamiliar modes of life, and by contact with many and widely differing types of mind. Some of his later music makes one think that if the leap—a leap almost unparalleled in the history of art—had been possible twenty years sooner, Haydn might have won a place by the side of Mozart and Handel and Bach, instead of being the lowest of their great company. On the other hand, one cannot think of the man—lively, genial, kind-hearted, garrulous, broadly humorous, actively observant of details, careful in small money matters—and assert with one’s hand on one’s heart that he was cast in gigantic or heroic mould. That he had a wonderful facility in expressing himself is obvious in every bar he wrote: but it is less obvious that he had a great deal to express. He had deep, but not the deepest, human feeling; he could think, but not profoundly; he had a sense of beauty, delicate and acute out of all comparison with yours or mine, reader, but far less keen than Mozart’s or Bach’s. Hence his music is rarely comparable with theirs: his matter is less weighty, his form never quite so enchantingly lovely; and, whatever one may think of the possibilities of the man in his most inspired moments, his average output drives one to the reluctant conclusion that on the whole his life must have been favourable to him and enabled him to do the best that was in him. Yet I hesitate as I write the words. Remembering that he began as an untaught peasant, and until the end of his long life was a mere bandmaster with a small yearly salary, a uniform, and possibly (for I cannot



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recall the facts) his board and lodging, remembering where he found the symphony and quartet and where he left them, remembering, above all, that astonishing leap, I find it hard to believe in barriers to his upward path. It is in dignity and quality of poetic content rather than in form that Haydn is lacking. Had the horizon of his thought been widened in early or even in middle life by the education of mixing with men who knew more and were more advanced than himself, had he been jostled in the crowd of a great city and been made to feel deeply about the tragi-comedy of human existence, his experiences might have resulted in a deeper and more original note being sounded in his music. But we must take him as he is, reflecting, when the unbroken peacefulness of his music becomes a little tiresome, that he belonged to the “old time before us” and was never quickened by the newer modes of thought that unconsciously affected Mozart and consciously moulded Beethoven; and that, after all, his very smoothness and absence of passion give him an old-world charm, grateful in this hot and dusty age. If he was not greatly original, he was at least flawlessly consistent: there is scarce a trait in his character that is not reflected somewhere in his music, and hardly a characteristic of his music that one does not find quaintly echoed in some recorded saying or doing of the man. His placid and even vivacity, his sprightliness, his broad jocular, his economy and shrewd business perception of what could be done with the material to hand, his fertility of device, even his commonplaceness, may all be seen in the symphonies. At rare moments he moves you strongly, very often he is trivial, but he generally pleases; and if some of the strokes of humour—quoted in text-books of orchestration—are so broad as to be indescribable in any respectable modern print, few of us understand what they really mean, and no one is a penny the worse.

The “Creation” libretto was prepared for Handel, but he did not attempt to set it; and this perhaps was just as well, for the effort would certainly have killed him. Of course the opening offers some fine opportunities for fine music; but the later parts with their nonsense—Milton’s nonsense, I believe—about “In native worth and honour clad, With beauty, courage, strength, adorned, Erect with front serene he stands, A *man*, the Lord and King of Nature all,” and the suburban love-making of our first parents, and the lengthy references to the habits of the worm and the leviathan, and so on, are almost more than modern flesh and blood can endure. It must be conceded that Haydn evaded the difficulties of the subject with a degree of tact that would be surprising in anyone else than Haydn. In the first part, where Handel would have been sublime, he is frequently nearly sublime, and this is our loss; but in the later portion, where Handel would have been solemn, earnest, and intolerably dull, he is light, skittish, good-natured, and sometimes jocular, and



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this is our gain, even if the gain is not great. The Representation of Chaos is a curious bit of music, less like chaos than an attempt to write music of the Bruneau sort a century too soon; but it serves. The most magnificent passage in the oratorio immediately follows, for there is hardly a finer effect in music than that of the soft voices singing the words, "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters," while the strings gently pulse; and the fortissimo C major chord on the word "light," coming abruptly after the piano and mezzo-forte minor chords, is as dazzling in its brilliancy to-day as when it was first sung. The number of unisons, throwing into relief the two minor chords on C and F, should be especially noted. The chorus in the next number is poor, matched with this, though towards the end (see bars 11 and 12 from the finish) Haydn's splendid musicianship has enabled him to redeem the trivial commonplace with an unexpected and powerful harmonic progression. The work is singularly deficient in strong sustained choruses. "Awake the harp" is certainly very much the best; for "The heavens are telling" is little better than Gounod's "Unfold, ye everlasting portals" until the end, where it is saved by the tremendous climax; and "Achieved is the glorious work" is mostly mechanical, with occasional moments of life. As for the finale, it is of course light opera. On the whole the songs are the most delightful feature of the "Creation," and the freshness of "With verdure clad," and the tender charm of the second section of "Roaming in foaming billows," may possibly be remembered when Haydn is scarcely known except as an instrumental composer. The setting of "Softly purling, glides on, thro' silent vales, the limpid brook" is indeed perfect, the phrase at the repetition of "Thro' silent vales" inevitably calling up a vision, not of a valley sleeping in the sunlight, for of sunlight the eighteenth century apparently took little heed, but of a valley in the dark quiet night, filled with the scent of flowers, and the far-off murmur of the brook vaguely heard. The humour of the oratorio consists chiefly of practical jokes, such as sending Mr. Andrew Black (or some other bass singer) down to the low F sharp and G to depict the heavy beasts treading the ground, or making the orchestra imitate the bellow of the said heavy beasts, or depicting the sinuous motion of the worm or the graceful gamboling of the leviathan. It has been objected that the leviathan is brought on in sections. The truth, of course, is that the clumsy figure in the bass is not meant to depict the leviathan himself, but his gambolings and the gay flourishings of his tail. It is hard to sum up the "Creation," unless one is prepared to call it great and never go to hear it. It is not a sublime oratorio, nor yet a frankly comic oratorio, nor entirely a dull oratorio. After considering the songs, the recitatives, the choruses, in detail, it really seems to contain very little. Perhaps it may be described as a third-rate oratorio, whose interest is largely historic and literary.



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MOZART, HIS “DON GIOVANNI” AND THE REQUIEM

It may well be doubted whether Vienna thought even so much of Capellmeister Mozart as Leipzig thought of Capellmeister Bach. Bach, it is true, was merely Capellmeister; he hardly dared to claim social equality with the citizens who tanned hides or slaughtered pigs; and probably the high personages who trimmed the local Serene Highness's toe-nails scarcely knew of his existence. Still, he was a burgher, even as the killers of pigs and the tanners of hides; he was thoroughly respectable, and probably paid his taxes as they came due; if only by necessity of his office, he went to church with regularity; and on the whole we may suppose that he got enough of respect to make life tolerable. But Mozart was only one of a crowd who provided amusement for a gay population; and a gay population, always a heartless master, holds none in such contempt as the servants who provide it with amusement. So Mozart got no respect from those he served, and his Bohemianism lost him the respect of the eminently respectable. He lived in the eighteenth century equivalent of a “loose set”; he was miserably poor, and presumably never paid his taxes; we may doubt whether he often went to church; he composed for the theatre; and he lacked the self-assertion which enabled Handel, Beethoven, and Wagner to hold their own. Treated as of no account, cheated by those he worked for, hardly permitted to earn his bread, he found life wholly intolerable, and as he grew older he lived more and more within himself and gave his thoughts only to the composition of masterpieces. The crowd of mediocrities dimly felt him to be their master, and the greater the masterpieces he achieved the more vehemently did Salieri and his attendants protest that he was not a composer to compare with Salieri. The noise impressed Da Ponte, the libretto-monger, and he asked Salieri to set his best libretto and gave Mozart only his second best; and thus by a curious irony stumbled into his immortality through sheer stupidity, for his second best libretto was “Don Giovanni”—of all possible subjects precisely that which a wise man would have given to Mozart. When Mozart laid down the pen after the memorable night's work in which he transferred the finished overture from his brain to the paper, he had written the noblest Italian opera ever conceived; and the world knew it not, yet gradually came to know. But the full fame of “Don Giovanni” was comparatively brief, and at this time there seems to be a hazy notion that its splendours have waned before the blaze of Wagner, just as the symphonies are supposed to have faded in the brilliant light of Beethoven. At lectures on musical history it is reverently spoken of; but it is seldom sung, and the public declines to go to hear it; and, though few persons are so foolish as to admit their sad case, I suspect that more than a few agree with the sage critic who told us not long since that Mozart was



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a little *passee* now. Is it indeed so? Well, Mozart lived in the last days of the old world, and the old world and the thoughts and sentiments of the old world are certainly a little *passes* now. But if you examine "Don Giovanni" you must admit that the Fifth and Ninth symphonies, "Fidelio," "Lohengrin," the "Ring," "Tristan," and "Parsifal" have done nothing to eclipse its glories, that while fresh masterpieces have come forth, "Don Giovanni" remains a masterpiece amongst masterpieces, that in a sense it is a masterpiece towards which all other masterpieces stand in the relation of commentaries to text. And though this, perhaps, is only to call it a link in a chain, yet it is curious to note how very closely other composers have followed Mozart, and how greatly they are indebted to him. Page upon page of the early Beethoven is written in the phraseology of the later Mozart; in nearly every bar of "Faust," not to mention "Romeo and Juliette," avowedly the fruit of a long study of "Don Giovanni," a faint echo of Mozart's voice comes to us with the voice of Gounod; Anna's cries, "Quel sangue, quella piaga, quel volto," with the creeping chromatic chords of the wood-wind, have the very accent of Isolda's "'Tis I, belov'd," and the solemn phrase that follows, in Tristan's death-scene. Apart from its influence on later composers, there is surely no more passionate, powerful, and moving drama in the world than "Don Giovanni." Despite the triviality of Da Ponte's book, the impetus of the music carries along the action at a tremendous speed; the moments of relief occur just when relief is necessary, and never retard the motion; the climaxes are piled up with incredible strength and mastery, and have an emotional effect as powerful as anything in "Fidelio" and equal to anything in Wagner's music-dramas; and most stupendous of all is the finale, with its tragic blending of the grotesque and the terrible. Or, if one considers detail, in no other opera do the characters depict themselves in every phrase they utter as they do in "Don Giovanni." The songs stamp Mozart as the greatest song-writer who has lived, with the exception of Handel, whose opera songs are immeasurably beyond all others save Mozart's, and a little beyond them. The mere musicianship is as consummate as Bach's, for, like Bach, Mozart possessed that facility which is fatal to many men, but combined with it a high sincerity, a greedy thirst for the beautiful, and an emotional force that prevented it being fatal to him. For delicacy, subtlety, due brilliancy, and strength, the orchestral colouring cannot be matched. And no music is more exclusively its own composer's, has less in it of other composers'. Beethoven is Beethoven *plus* Mozart, Wagner is Wagner *plus* Weber and Beethoven; but from every page of Mozart's scores Mozart alone looks at you, with sad laughter in his eyes, and unspeakable tenderness, the tenderness of the giants, of Handel, Bach, and Beethoven, though perhaps Mozart is tenderest of them

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all. He cannot write a comic scene for a poor clownish Masetto without caressing him with a divinely beautiful “Cheto, cheto, mi vo’ star,” and in presence of death or human distress the strangest, sweetest things fall from his lips. And finally, he is always the perfect artist without reproach; there is nothing wanting and nothing in excess; as he himself said on one occasion, his scores contain exactly the right number of notes. This is “Don Giovanni” as one may see it a century after its birth: a faultless masterpiece; yet (in England at least) it only gets an occasional performance, through the freak of a prima donna, who, as the sage critic said of Mozart, is undoubtedly “a little *passee* now.”

After all, this is hardly surprising. Perfect art wants perfect listeners, and just now we are much too eager for excitement, too impatient of mere beauty, to listen perfectly to perfect music. And there are other reasons why “Don Giovanni” should not appeal to this generation. For many years it was the sport of the prima donna, and conductors and singers conspired to load it with traditional Costamongery, until at last the “Don Giovanni” we knew became an entirely different thing from the “Don Giovanni” of Mozart’s thought. Not Giovanni but Zerlina was the principal figure; the climax of the drama was not the final Statue scene, but “Batti, batti”; Leporello’s part was exaggerated until the Statue scene became a pantomime affair with Leporello playing pantaloon against Giovanni’s clown. Such an opera could interest none but an Elephant and Castle audience, and probably only the beauty of the music prevented it reaching the Elephant and Castle long ago. So low had “Don Giovanni” fallen, when, quite recently, serious artists like Maurel tried to take it more seriously and restore it to its rightful place. Only, unfortunately, instead of brushing away traditions and going back to the vital conception of Mozart, they sought to modernise it, to convert it into an early Wagner music-drama. The result may be seen in any performance at Covent Garden. The thing becomes a hodge-podge, a mixture of drama, melodrama, the circus, the pantomime, with a strong flavouring of blatherskite. The opera *is* largely pantomime—it was intended by Mozart to be pantomime; and the only possible way of doing it effectively is to accept the pantomime frankly, but to play it with such force and sincerity that it is not felt to be pantomime. And the real finale should be sung afterwards. Probably many people would go off to catch their trains. But, after all, Mozart wrote for those who have no trains to catch when this masterpiece, the masterpiece of Italian opera, is sung as he intended it to be sung.



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The Requiem is a very different work. There is plenty of the gaiety and sunshine of life in "Don Giovanni." The Requiem is steeped in sadness and gloom, with rare moments of fiery exaltation, or hysterical despair; at times beauty has been almost—almost, but never quite—driven from Mozart's thought by the anguish that tormented him as he wrote. While speaking of Bach's "Matthew" Passion, I have said it "was an appeal, of a force and poignancy paralleled only in the Ninth symphony, to the emotional side of man's nature ... the aesthetic qualities are subordinated to the utterance of an overwhelming emotion." Had I said "deliberately subordinated" I should have indicated the main difference as well as the main likeness between Bach's masterwork and Mozart's. The aesthetic qualities are subordinated to the expression of an overwhelming emotion in the Requiem, but not deliberately: unconsciously rather, perhaps even against Mozart's will. Bach set out with the intention of using his art to communicate a certain feeling to his listeners; Mozart, when he accepted the order for a Requiem from that mysterious messenger clad in grey, thought only of creating a beautiful thing. But he had lately found, to his great sorrow, that his ways were not the world's ways, and fraught with even graver consequences was the world's discovery that its ways were not Mozart's. Finding all attempts to turn him from his ways fruitless, the world fought him with contempt, ostracism, and starvation for weapons; and he lacked strength for the struggle. There had been a time when he could retire within himself and live in an ideal world of Don Giovannis and Figaros. But now body as well as spirit was over-wearied; spirit and body were not only tired but diseased; and when he commenced to work at the Requiem the time was past for making beautiful things, for his mind was preoccupied with death and the horror of death—the taste of death was already in his mouth. Had death come to him as to other men, he might have met it as other men do, heroically, or at least calmly, without loss of dignity. But it came to him coloured and made fearful by wild imaginings, and was less a thought than an unthinkable horror. He believed he had been poisoned, and Count Walsegg's grey-clad messenger seemed a messenger sent from another world to warn him of the approaching finish. As he said, he wrote the Requiem for himself. In it we find none of the sunshine and laughter of "Don Giovanni," but only a painfully pathetic record of Mozart's misery, his despair, and his terror. It is indeed a stupendous piece of art, and much of it surpassingly beautiful; but the absorbing interest of it will always be that it is a "human document," an autobiographical fragment, the most touching autobiography ever penned.



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The pervading note of the whole work is struck at the beginning of the first number. Had Mozart seen death as Handel and Bach saw it, as the only beautiful completion of life, or even as the last opportunity given to men to meet a tremendous reality and not be found wanting, he might have written a sweetly breathed prayer for eternal rest, like the final chorus of the "Matthew" Passion, or given us something equal or almost equal to the austere grandeur of the Dead March in Saul. But he saw death differently, and in the opening bar of the "Requiem aeternam" we have only sullen gloom and foreboding, deadly fear begotten of actual foreknowledge of things to come. The discord at the fifth bar seems to have given him the relief gained by cutting oneself when in severe pain; and how intense Mozart's pain was may be estimated by the vigour of the reaction when the reaction comes; for though the "Te decet hymnus" is like a gleam of sweet sunshine on black waters, the melody is immediately snatched up, as it were, and, by the furious energy of the accompaniment, powerful harmonic progressions, and movement of the inner parts (note the tenor ascending to the high G on "orationem"), made expressive of abnormal glowing ecstasy. To know Mozart's mood when he wrote the Requiem is to have the key to the "Kyrie." His artistic sense compelled him to veil the acuteness of his agony in the strict form of a regular fugue; but here, as everywhere else in the Requiem, feeling triumphs over the artistic sense; and by a chromatic change, of which none but a Mozart or a Bach would have dreamed, the inexpressive formality of the counter-subject is altered into a passionate appeal for mercy. In no other work of Mozart known to me does he ever become hysterical, and in the Requiem only once, towards the end of this number, where the sopranos are whirled up to the high A, and tenors and altos strengthen the rhythm; and even here the pause, followed by that scholastic cadence, affords a sense of recovered balance, though we should observe that the raucous final chord with the third omitted is in keeping with the colour of the whole number, and not dragged in as a mere display of pedantic knowledge. The "Dies Irae" is magnificent music, but the effect is enormously intensified by Mozart first (in the "Kyrie") making us guess at the picture by the agitation of mind into which it throws him, and then suddenly opening the curtain and letting us view for ourselves the lurid splendours; and surely no more awful picture of the Judgment was ever painted than we have here in the "Dies Irae," "Tuba minim," "Rex tremendae," and the "Confutatis." The method of showing the obverse of the medal first, and then astonishing us with the sudden magnificence of the other side, is an old one, and was an old one even in Mozart's time, but he uses it with supreme mastery, and results that have never been equalled. The most astonishing part of the "Confutatis" is the prayer at the finish, where strange cadence

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upon cadence falls on the ear like a long-drawn sigh, and the last, longer drawn than the rest, “gere curam mei finis,” followed by a hushed pause, is indeed awful as the silence of the finish. Quite as great is the effect of the same kind in the “Agnus Dei,” which was either written by Mozart, or by Sussmayer with Mozart’s spirit looking over him. Written by Mozart, the Requiem necessarily abounds in tender touches: the trebles at “Dona eis” immediately after their first entry; the altos at the same words towards the end of the number, and at the twenty-eighth bar of the “Kyrie”; the first part of the “Hostias,” the “Agnus Dei,” the wonderful “Ne me perdas” in the “Recordare.” And if one wants sheer strength and majesty, turn to the fugue on “Quam olim Abrahae,” or the C natural of the basses in the “Sanctus.” But the prevailing mood is one of depressing sadness, which would become intolerable by reason of its monotony were it possible to listen to the Requiem as a work of art merely, and not as the tearful confessions of one of the most beautiful spirits ever born into the world.

“FIDELIO”

As an enthusiastic lover of “Fidelio” I may perhaps be permitted to put one or two questions to certain other of its lovers. Is it an opera at all?—does it not consist of one wonderfully touching situation, padded out before and behind,—before with some particularly fatuous reminiscences of the old comedy of intrigue, behind with some purely formal business and a pompous final chorus? “Fidelio” exists by reason of that one tremendous scene: there is nothing else dramatic in it: however fine the music is, one cannot forget that the libretto is fustian and superfluous nonsense. Had Beethoven possessed the slightest genius for opera, had he possessed anything like Mozart’s dramatic instinct (and of course his own determination to touch nothing but fitting subjects), he would have felt that no meaner story than the “Flying Dutchman” would serve as an opportunity to say all that was aroused in his heart and in his mind by the tale of Leonora. As he had no genius whatever for opera, no sense of the dramatic in life, the tale of Leonora seemed to him good enough; and, after all, in its essence it is the same as the tale of Senta. The Dutchman himself happens to be more interesting than Florestan because of his weird fate; but he is no more the principal character in Wagner’s opera than Florestan is the principal character in Beethoven’s opera. The principal character in each case is the woman who takes her fate into her own hands and fearlessly chances every risk for the sake of the man she loves. And just as Wagner wrote the best passage in the “Dutchman” for the moment when Senta promises to be faithful through life and death, so Beethoven in the prison scene of “Fidelio” wrote as tremendous a passage as even he ever conceived for the moment when Leonora makes up her mind at all costs to save the life of the wretched prisoner whose grave she is



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helping to dig. The tale is simple enough—there is scarcely enough of it to call a tale. Leonora's husband, Florestan, has somehow fallen into the power of his enemy Pizarro, who imprisons him and then says he is dead. Leonora disbelieves this, and, disguising herself as a boy and taking the name of Fidelio, hires herself as an assistant to Rocco, the jailer of the fortress in which Florestan is confined. At that time the news arrives that an envoy of the king is coming to see that no injustice is being done by Pizarro. Pizarro has been hoping to starve Florestan slowly to death; but now he sees the necessity of more rapid action. He therefore tells Rocco to dig a grave in Florestan's cell, and he himself will do the necessary murder. This brings about the great prison scene. Florestan lies asleep in a corner; Leonora is not sure whether she is helping to dig his grave or the grave of some other unlucky wretch; but while she works she takes her resolution—whoever he may be, she will risk all consequences and save him. Pizarro arrives, and is about to kill Florestan, when Leonora presents a pistol to his head; and, before he has quite had time to recover, a trumpet call is heard, signalling the arrival of the envoy. Pizarro knows the game is up, and Florestan that his wife has saved him. This, I declare, is the only dramatic scene in the play—here the thing ends: excepting it, there is no real incident. The business at the beginning, about the jailer's daughter refusing to have anything more to do with her former sweetheart, and falling in love with the supposed Fidelio, is merely silly; Rocco's song, elegantly translated in one edition, "Life is nothing without money"—Heaven knows whether it was intended to be humorous—is stupid; Pizarro's stage-villainous song of vengeance is unnecessary; the arrangement of the crime is a worry. These, and in fact all that comes before the great scene, are entirely superfluous, the purest piffle, very tiresome. Most exasperating of all is the stupid dialogue, which makes one hope that the man who wrote it died a painful, lingering death. But, in spite of it all, Beethoven, by writing some very beautiful music in the first act, and by rising to an astonishing height in the prison scene and the succeeding duet, has created one of the wonders of the music-world.

Being a glorification of woman—German woman, although Leonora was presumably Spanish—"Fidelio" has inevitably become in Germany the haus-frau's opera. Probably there is not a haus-frau who faithfully cooks her husband's dinner, washes for him, blacks his boots, and would even brush his clothes did he ever think that necessary, who does not see herself reflected in Leonora; probably every German householder either longs to possess her or believes that he does possess her. Consequently, just as Mozart's "Don Giovanni" became the playground of the Italian prima donna, so has "Fidelio" become the playground of that terrible apparition,



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the Wifely Woman Artist, the singer with no voice, nor beauty, nor manners, but with a high character for correct morality, and a pressure of sentimentality that would move a traction-engine. I remember seeing it played a few years ago, and can never forget a Leonora of sixteen stones, steadily singing out of tune, in the first act professing with profuse perspiration her devotion to her husband (whose weight was rather less than half hers), and in the second act nearly crushing the poor gentleman by throwing herself on him to show him that she was for ever his. A recent performance at Covent Garden, arranged specially, I understand, for Ternina, was not nearly so bad as that; but still Ternina scared me horribly with the enormous force of her Wifely Ardour. It may be that German women are more demonstrative than English women in public; but, for my poor part, too much public affection between man and wife always strikes me as a little false. Besides, the grand characteristic of Leonora is not that she loves her husband—lots of women do that, and manage to love other people's husbands also—but that, driven at first by affection and afterwards by purely human compassion, she is capable of rising to the heroic point of doing in life what she feels she must do. Of course she may have been an abnormal combination of the Wifely Woman with the heroic woman; but one cannot help thinking that probably she was not—that however strong her affection for Florestan, she would no sooner get him home than she would ask him how he came to be such a fool as to get into Pizarro's clutches. Anyhow, Ternina's conception of Leonora as a mixture of the contemptible will-less German haus-frau with the strong-willed woman of action, was to me a mixture of contradictions. Yet, despite all these things, the opera made the deep impression it does and always will make.

That impression is due entirely to the music and not to the drama. Dramatic music, in the sense that Mozart's music, and Wagner's, is dramatic, it is not. There is not the slightest attempt at characterisation—not even such small characterisation as Mozart secured in his "La ci darem," with Zerlina's little fluttering, agitated phrases. Nor, in the lighter portions, is there a trace of Mozart's divine intoxicating laughter, of the sweet sad laugh with which he met the griefs life brought him. There is none of Mozart's sunlight, his delicious, fresh, early morning sunlight, in Beethoven's music; when he wrote such a number as the first duet, intended to be gracefully semi-humorous, he was merely heavy, clumsy, dull. But when the worst has been said, when one has writhed under the recollection of an adipose prima donna fooling with bear-like skittishness a German tenor whose figure and face bewray the lager habit, when one has shuddered to remember the long-winded idiotic dialogue, the fact remains firmly set in one's mind that one has stood before a gigantic work of art—a work whose every defect is redeemed

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by its overwhelming power and beauty and pathos. There has never been, nor does it seem possible there ever will be, a finer scene written than the dungeon scene. It begins with the low, soft, throbbing of the strings, then there is the sinister thunderous roll of the double basses; then the old man quietly tells Leonora to hurry on with the digging of the grave, and Leonora replies (against that wondrous phrase of the oboes). After that, the old man continues to grumble; the dull threatening thunder of the basses continues; and Leonora, half terrified, tries to see whether the sleeping prisoner is her husband. Then abruptly her courage rises; her short broken phrases are abandoned; and to a great sweeping melody she declares that, whoever the prisoner may be, she will free him. These twenty bars are as great music as anything in the world: they even leave Senta's declaration in the "Dutchman" far behind; they are at once triumphant and charged with a pathos nearly unendurable in its intensity. The scene ends with a strange hushed unison passage like some unearthly chant: it is the lull before the breaking of the storm. The entry of Pizarro and the pistol business are by no means done as Wagner or Mozart would have done them. The music is always excellent and sometimes great, but persistently symphonic and not dramatic in character. However, it serves; and the strength of the situation carries one on until the trumpet call is heard, and then we get a wonderful tune such as neither Mozart nor Wagner could have written—a tune that is sheer Beethoven. The finale of the scene is neither here nor there; but in the duet between Leonora and Florestan we have again pure Beethoven. There is one passage—it begins at bar 32—which is the expression of the very soul of the composer; one feels that if it had not come his heart must have burst. I have neither space nor inclination to rehearse all the splendours of the opera, but may remind the reader of Florestan's song in the dungeon, Leonora's address to Hope, and the hundred other fine things spread over it. It is symphonic, not dramatic, music; but it is at times unspeakably pathetic, at times full of radiant strength, and always an absolutely truthful utterance of sheer human emotion. Wagner hit exactly the word when he spoke of the *truthful* Beethoven: here is no pose, no mere tone-weaving, but the precise and most poignant expression of the logical course taken by the human passions.

SCHUBERT

Excepting during his lifetime and for a period of some thirty years after his death, Schubert cannot be said to have been neglected; and last year there was quite an epidemic of concerts to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of his birth. Centenary celebrations are often a little disconcerting. They remind one that a composer has been dead either a much shorter or a much longer time than one supposed; and one gets down Riemann's "Musical Dictionary"



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and realises with a sigh that the human memory is treacherous. Who, for instance, that is familiar with Schubert's music can easily believe that it is a hundred years since the composer was born and seventy since he died? It is as startling to find him, as one might say, one of the ancients as it is to remember that Spohr lived until comparatively recent times; for whereas Spohr's music is already older than Beethoven's, older than Mozart's, in many respects quite as old as Haydn's, much of Schubert's is as modern as Wagner's, and more modern than a great deal that was written yesterday. This modernity will, I fancy, be readily admitted by everyone; and it is the only one quality of Schubert's music which any two competent people will agree to admit. Liszt had the highest admiration for everything he wrote; Wagner admired the songs, but wondered at Liszt's acceptance of the chamber and orchestral music. Sir George Grove outdoes Liszt in his Schubert worship; and an astonishing genius lately rushed in, as his kind always does, where Sir George would fear to tread, boldly, blatantly asserting that Schubert is "the greatest musical genius that the Western world has yet produced." On the other hand, Mr. G. Bernard Shaw out-Wagners Wagner in denunciation, and declares the C symphony childish, inept, mere Rossini badly done. Now, I can understand Sir George Grove's enthusiasm; for Sir George to a large extent discovered Schubert; and disinterested art-lovers always become unduly excited about any art they have discovered: for example, see how excited Wagner became about his own music, how rapt Mr. Dolmetsch is in much of the old music. But I can understand Wagner's attitude no better than I can the attitude of Mr. Shaw. I should like to have met Wagner and have said to him, "My dear Richard, this disparaging tone is not good enough: where did you get the introduction to 'The Valkyrie'?—didn't that long tremolo D and the figure in the bass both come out of 'The Erl-king'? has your Spear theme nothing in common with the last line but one of 'The Wanderer'? or—if it is only the instrumental music you object to—did you learn nothing for the third act of 'The Valkyrie' from the working-out of the Unfinished Symphony? did you know that Schubert had used your Mime theme in a quartet before you? do you know that I could mention a hundred things you borrowed from Schubert? Go to, Richard: be fair." Having extinguished Richard thus, and made his utter discomfiture doubly certain by handing him a list of the hundred instances, I should turn to Mr. Shaw and say, "My good G.B.S., you understand a good deal about politics and political economy, Socialism, and Fabians, painting and actors [and so on, with untrue and ill-natured remarks *ad lib.*], but evidently you understand very little about Schubert. That 'Rossini crescendo' is as tragic a piece of music as ever was written." Yet, after dismissing the twain in this friendly manner, I should have an uneasy feeling that there was some



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good reason for their lack of enthusiasm for Schubert. The very fact of there being such wide disagreement about the value of music that is now so familiar to us all, points to some weakness in it which some of us feel less than others; and I, poor unhappy mortal, who in my unexcited moments neither place Schubert among the highest gods, like Liszt and Sir George Grove, nor damn him cordially, like Wagner and Mr. Shaw, cannot help perceiving that along with much that is magnificently strong, distinguished, and beautiful in his music, there is much that is pitifully weak, and worse than commonplace. The music is like the man—the oddest combination of greatness and smallness that the world has seen. Like Wagner and Beethoven, Schubert was strong enough to refuse to earn an honest living; yet he yielded miserably to publishers when discussing the number of halfpence he should receive for a dozen songs. He had energy enough to go on writing operas, but apparently not intelligence to see that his librettos were worth setting, or to ensure that anything should come of them when they were set. He thought, rightly or wrongly, that he needed more counterpoint, yet continued to compose symphonies and masses without it, vaguely intending to the very end to take lessons from a sound teacher. He had spirit enough to fall in love (so far as stories may be relied on), but not to make the lady promise to marry him, nor yet resolutely to cure himself of his affliction. He had courage to face the truth, as he saw it, and he found life bitter, and not worth enduring; yet he could not renounce it, like Beethoven, nor end it as others have done. As in actual life, so in his music; having once started anything, he seemed quite unable to make up his mind to fetch it to a conclusion. He was like a man who lets himself roll down a hill because it is easier to keep on rolling than to stop. He repeats his melodies interminably, and then draws a double bar and sets down the two fatal dots which mean that all has to be played again. If the repeat had not been a favourite resort of lazy composers before his time he would have invented it, not because he was lazy, but because he wanted to go on and could not afford infinite music-paper. Hence his music at its worst is the merest drivel ever set down by a great composer; hence at anything but its best it lacks concentrated passion and dramatic intensity; more than any other composer's it has one prevailing note, a note of deepest melancholy; and therefore, when a few pieces are known, most of the rest seem barren of what is wanted by those who seek chiefly in music the expression of all the human passions.



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Of his lengthiness, his discursiveness, Schubert might possibly have been cured, but not of his melancholy: it is the very essence of his music, as it was of his being. "The Wanderer" is his typical song: he was himself the wanderer, straying disconsolately, helplessly, hopelessly through a strange, chilly, unreal world, singing the saddest and sometimes the sweetest songs that ever entered the ears of men. That his home and his happiness lay close at hand counts for nothing; for he did not and could not know that he was the voice of the eighteenth century, worn out and keenly sensible of the futility of the purely intellectual life. Even had he arrived at a consciousness of the truth that the cure for his despair lay in throwing over the antiquated forms, modes, and ideas of the eighteenth century and living a nineteenth century life, free and conscienceless in nature's way, he would have been little better off; for the tendencies of many generations remained strong in him; and besides, had he the physical energy for a free, buoyant, joyous existence, was he not physiologically unfit for happiness? He lived with an ever-present consciousness of his impotence to satisfy his deepest needs. He was even destitute of that sense of the immeasurable good to come which of old time found expression in the fiction of a personal immortality, and in the nineteenth century in the complacent acceptance of full and vigorous life, with death as a noble and fitting close. Life and death alike were tragic, because hopeless, to Schubert. His career, if career it can be called, is infinitely touching. His helplessness moves one to pity, odd though it seems that one in some ways so strong should also in so many ways be so weak; and his death was as touching as his life. Of all the composers he met death with least heroism. Mozart, it is true, shrieked hysterically; but death to his diseased mind was merely an indescribable horror; and the fact of his hysteria proves his revolt against fate. Beethoven, during a surgical operation shortly before the end, saw the stream of water and blood flowing from him, and found courage to say, "Better from the belly than the pen;" and as he lay dying and a thunderstorm broke above the house, he threatened it with his clenched fist. Schubert learnt that he was to die, and turned his face to the wall and did not speak again. It is hard to say whether his music was sadder when he sang of death than when he sang of life. Even in his rare moments of good spirits one catches stray echoes of his prevailing note, and realises how completely his despair dominated him. He could not sing of love or fighting or of the splendours of nature without betraying his deep conviction of the futility of all created things. It is characteristic that his major melodies should often be as sad and wailing as his minor, and that his scherzos and other movements, in which he has deliberately set out to be light-hearted, should often be ponderous and without the nervous energy he manifests when he gives his familiar feelings free play.



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Despite its incessant plaintive accent, his music is saved by the endless flow of melody, often lovely, generally characteristic, though sometimes common, in which Schubert continually expressed anew his one mood; and he was placed among the great ones by the miraculous facility he possessed of extemporising frequent passages of extraordinary power and bigness. At least half of his songs are poor—for a composer capable of rising to such heights; but of the remainder at least half are nearly equal to any songs in the world for sweetness, strength, and accurate expressiveness, while a few approach so close to Handel's and Mozart's that affection for the composer presses one hard to put them on the same level. But, compared with those high standards, Schubert, even at his best, is unmistakably felt to be second-rate, while his average—always comparing it with the highest—cannot truly be said to be more than fourth-rate. That he stands far above Mendelssohn and Schumann, and perhaps a little above Weber, almost goes without saying; for those composers have no more of the great style, the style of Handel and Mozart, and Bach and Beethoven at their finest, than Schubert, and they lack the lovely irresistibly moving melody and the bigness. But it must be recognised that Schubert never rose to a style of sustained grandeur and dignity; he was always colloquial, paying in this the penalty for the extreme facility with which he composed ("I compose every morning, and when I have finished one thing I commence something fresh"). Compose is scarcely the word to use: he never composed in the ordinary sense of the word; he extemporised on paper. Even when he re-wrote a song, it meant little more than that, dissatisfied with his treatment of a theme, he tried again. He never built as, for instance, Bach and Beethoven built, carefully working out this detail, lengthening this portion, shearing away that, evolving part from part so that in the end the whole composition became a complete organism. There is none of the logic in his work that we find in the works of the tip-top men, none of the perfect finish; but, on the contrary, a very considerable degree of looseness, if not of actual incoherence, and many marks of the tool and a good deal of the scaffolding. But, in spite of it all, the greatness of many of his movements seems to me indisputable. In a notice of "The Valkyrie," Mr. Hichens once very happily spoke of the "earth-bigness" of some of the music, and this is the bigness I find in Schubert at his best and strongest. When he depicts the workings of nature—the wind roaring through the woods, the storm above the convent roof, the flash of the lightning, the thunderbolt—he does not accomplish it with the wonderful point and accuracy of Weber, nor with the ethereal delicacy of Purcell, but with a breadth, a sympathy with the passion of nature, that no other composer save Wagner has ever attained to. He views natural phenomena through a human temperament, and so infuses human emotion

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into natural phenomena, as Wagner does in “The Valkyrie” and “Siegfried.” The rapidly repeated note, now rising to a roar and now falling to a subdued murmur, in “The Erlking” was an entirely new thing in music; and in “The Wanderer” piano fantasia, the working-out of the Unfinished symphony, and even in some of the chamber music, he invented things as fresh and as astounding. And when he is simply expressing himself, as at the beginning of the Unfinished, and in the first and last movements of the big C symphony, he often does it on the same large scale. The second subject of the C symphony finale, with its four thumps, seems to me to become in its development, and especially in the coda, all but as stupendous an expression of terror as the music in the last scene of “Don Giovanni,” where Leporello describes the statue knocking at the door. In short, when I remember Schubert’s grandest passages, and the unspeakable tenderness of so many of his melodies, it is hard to resist the temptation to cancel all the criticism I have written and to follow Sir George Grove in placing Schubert close to Beethoven.

WEBER AND WAGNER

There are critics, I suppose, prepared to insist that Weber, like Mozart, is a little *passe* now. And it is true that no composer, save Mozart, is at once so widely accepted and so seldom heard; for even Bach is more frequently played and less generally praised. At rare intervals Richter, Levi, or Mottl play his overtures; the pieces for piano and orchestra are occasionally dragged out to display the prowess of a Paderewski or a Sauer; and one or another of the piano sonatas sometimes finds its way into a Popular Concert programme. But the pieces thus made familiar to the public may be counted on one’s ten fingers; and the operas are scarcely sung at all, though they contain the finest music that Weber wrote. The composers who have lived since Weber, even if they differed on every other subject and did not agree as to the value of his instrumental music, united to sing a common song in praise of the operas. Indeed, so enthusiastic were they, that after listening to them anyone who does not know his Weber well may easily experience a certain disappointment on looking carefully for the first time at the scores of “Der Freischuetz,” “Oberon,” and “Euryanthe”; and it is perhaps because they have experienced that disappointment, that some critics whose opinions are worth considering have come to think that a faith in Weber is nothing more than a part of the creed learned by every honest Wagnerite at the Master’s knee. But it need be nothing so foolish, so baseless. If you look, and look rightly, for the right thing in Weber’s music, disappointment is impossible; though I admit that the man who professes to find there the great qualities he finds in Mozart, Beethoven, or any of the giants, must be in a very sad case. Grandeur, pure beauty, and high expressiveness are alike wanting.



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You look as vainly for such touches as the divine last dozen bars "Or sai chi l'onore" in "Don Giovanni," or the deep emotion of the sobbing bass at "the first fruits of them that sleep" in "I know that my Redeemer liveth," as for the stately splendour of "Come and thank Him" in the "Christmas Oratorio," or the passion of "Tristan." His music never develops in step with the movement of the drama he treats: if he writes a tragic scene, he is apt to commence with a scream; and if he is not at his best, then the scream may degenerate into a whimper before the moment for the climax has arrived. Like Spohr, with whom he had much in common, despite the difference between his mercurial temperament and the pedagogic gravity of the composer of "The Last Judgment," he set great store upon his learning, and was fond of trivial themes that admitted of obvious contrapuntal treatment. Even when he avoided that failing, his music is often uncouth and ponderous, while on its surface lies a superfluous, highly-coloured froth. The basses move with leaden-footed reluctance; the melodies consist largely of ineffective arpeggios on long-drawn chords; the embroidery seems greatly in excess of modest needs. All this may be conceded without affecting Weber's claim to a place amongst the composers; for that claim is supported in a lesser degree by the gifts which he shared, even if his share was small, with the greater masters of music, than by his miraculous power of vividly drawing and painting in music the things that kindled his imagination. Drawing and painting, I say; for whereas the other musicians sang the emotions that they experienced, Weber's music gives you the impression that he depicted the things he saw, that melody and harmony were to him as lines and colours to the painter. He is first, and perhaps greatest, of all the musicians who have attempted landscape; and that froth of seemingly superfluous colour and excess of melodic embroidery, instead of being in excess and superfluous, are the very essence of his music. Being a factor of the Romantic movement, that mighty rebellion against the tyranny of a world of footrules and ledgers, he lived and worked in a world where two and two might make five or seven or any number you pleased, and where footrules were unknown; he took small interest in drama taken out of the lives of ordinary men and enacted amidst everyday surroundings; his imagination lit up only when he thought of haunted glens and ghouls and evil spirits, the fantastic world and life that goes on underneath the ocean, or of men or women held by ghastly spells. Hence his operas are not so much musical dramas as series of tableaux, gorgeous glowing pictures of unheard-of things; in them we must expect only to find the elfish, the fantastic, the wild and weird and grotesquely horrible; and to look for drama, captivating loveliness, and emotional utterance, is to look for qualities which Weber did not try to attain, or only in a small measure



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and not very successfully. And if we consider carefully the remarks of the best critics amongst the later masters, Berlioz and Wagner, we can see that they knew Weber had not attained these high qualities,—that what they grew enthusiastic over was his astonishing pictorial gift, shown, first, in the pictures his imagination presented to him, and second, in the way he projected those pictures on to the music-paper before him, using the common musician's devices of his day to suggest line, colour, space, and atmosphere.

The precise provocation of this essay was a certain performance of "Lohengrin." During the first act the drama proceeded with charming, almost Mozartean, smoothness; and I was surprised to find that the smoother it went the more irresistibly the music reminded me of Weber, until I remembered that "Lohengrin" is Wagner's most Weberish opera, and that in his youth Wagner heard Weber sung, not as he is sung now—that is, like an early Wagner music-drama—but as Weber intended it to be sung, like a later Mozart opera. For Weber stood very near to Mozart, modern as he often seems. He was born before Mozart died; he worshipped him, and absolutely refused to speak to Salieri because Salieri had been Mozart's enemy; and it is easy to see, when once we rid ourselves of the idea that he was a rudimentary music-dramatist, that in his music he adhered as closely to Mozartean simplicity as his very different genius would permit. Perhaps, after all, it is his greatest glory that he is the connecting link between Mozart and Wagner, between the greatest composer born into the eighteenth century and the greatest born into the nineteenth; for the musical-pictorial art which he evolved from Mozart's technique was used by Wagner with only the slightest modifications in the making of his music-dramas. But whereas Weber was a factor in the Romantic movement when it was most magnificently unreasonable, Wagner came later, and, though he felt the force of the current, it did not carry him into the absurdities that weaken—for they do weaken—much of Weber's work. Wagner has been described as Weber, as Weber might have become; but the truth is that he was Weber's younger brother, who took Weber's art and used it to nobler ends with a degree of intellect, dramatic power, invention, and passion which Weber did not possess. To Weber the scenery was the important thing, and humanity almost seemed to be dragged in because the human voice was indispensable; but Wagner, going back to Mozart, restored humanity to its proper place, thus making his opera into real drama, and kept the fantastic creatures who haunted Weber's woods and glens and streams only as emblems of the natural forces that war for or against humanity. Above all, he got rid of Weber's stage villains—for Samiel is merely the stage villain of commerce; and, instead of the dusk and shadow in which Weber's fancy loved to roam, he gives us sunlight and the sweet air. "Lohengrin" is full of



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sunlight and freshness; full, too, of a finer mystery than ever Weber dreamed of—the mystery with which the most delicate German imagination invested the broad rivers that flowed through the black forests from some far-away land of unchangeable stillness and beauty, some “land of eternal dawn,” as Wagner calls it. No more Mozartean music is in existence, save Mozart’s own, than that first act of “Lohengrin,” where Wagner, by dint of being Weberish, came nearer to Mozart than ever Weber came; for Weber never wrote anything which, regarded as absolute music, apart from its emotional significance, or the picture it suggests to the inner eye, is so purely beautiful as, for instance, the bit of chorus sung after Lohengrin concludes his little arrangement with Elsa. Both the first and the second acts are full of such melodies, any two of which would prove Wagner to be the greatest melody-writer of the century; and those critics who say that Verdi is greater because his melodies are more like Mozart’s in form, would have said, had they lived last century, that Salieri was greater than Mozart because Salieri’s melodies were more like Hasse’s in form. Perhaps the last act might be quite as exquisite on the stage, for it is even more exquisite in the score; but that we shall not know until our operatic singers abandon their vanity and their melodrama, and by reading an occasional book, and sometimes going out into the world, learn how much they themselves would gain if they always worked with artistic sincerity.

ITALIAN OPERA, DEAD AND DYING

All art forms are conventions, and all conventions appear ridiculous when they are superseded by new ones. The old Italian opera form is laughed at to-day as an absurdity by Wagnerians, who see nothing absurd in a many-legged monster with a donkey’s head uttering deep bass curses through a speaking-trumpet; and perhaps tomorrow the Wagnerian music-drama and the many-legged monsters will be laughed at by the apostles of a new and equally absurd convention. It is absolutely the first condition of the existence of an art that one shall be prepared to tolerate things ludicrously unlike anything to be found in real life; and when (for instance) you have swallowed the camel of allowing the heroes and heroines to sing their woes at all, it is a little foolish to strain at the gnat of permitting them to sing in this rather than in that way, when both ways are alike preposterous. It is not, therefore, on the score of its inherent absurdity that I should throw brickbats at Italian opera, any more than with the female dress of to-day before my eyes I should insist that the women who wore the fashions of ten years ago were only fit to be incarcerated in a lunatic asylum; knowing, as I do, that the dress of ten years ago was not—and could not be—more absurd than the dress of to-day. The only reasonable objection that can be brought against Italian opera is that when it is sincere it offers what no one wants, and that when it tries to offer what everyone wants it is not sincere. I cannot quite understand what this means, but will endeavour to explain.



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Italian opera was moulded to its present form chiefly by Gluck, before whose time it was less irrational than it became later. In the beginning it was music-drama of a pedantic kind; then it served as the opportunity for setting singers to deliver a series of beautiful songs for the delectation of an audience largely seated in the wings; and finally Gluck, with his immense dramatic instinct and lack of lyrical invention, saw that by securing a story worth the telling, and telling it well, and inserting songs and concerted pieces only in situations where strong feelings demanded expression, and making his songs truthful expressions of those feelings, a form might be created which would enable him to lever out the best that was in him. Of these three periods of opera, the second was the luckiest; for then the form entirely fulfilled its purpose. The sole function of the story was to provide a motive for song after song; so that no one was scandalised or moved to laughter when the death of the hero was re-enacted because his death-song pleased the audience, or when the telling of the story was interrupted on any other equally ridiculous pretext. The characters were the merest puppets, or shadows of puppets; and there was no reason why Julius Caesar should not be a male soprano and sing charmingly feminine florid airs. In a word, there was no drama nor pretence of drama in the old Italian form; and those who can accept it as it is will find in many old Italian writers some perfect music of its sort, and in the Italian operas of Handel the divinest songs ever written—songs even more divine than Mozart's. But the childish delight in lovely melodies and in absolute perfection of vocal art, at its highest in the early part of the eighteenth century, died out rapidly after 1750; and Italian opera became the medium of the vulgarest instead of the most refined kind of ear-tickling. How Gluck rebelled, and determined to "reform" the opera stage, and how in reforming it he was impelled to a large extent by a desire to find a medium through which he could express himself, are matters well enough known to everyone nowadays. Like every other teacher, he left no disciples; for Mozart, the next master of Italian opera, was a hundred thousand miles away from him in intention, in method, and in achievement. He commenced where Gluck ended his pre-Reformation period; and all his life his intention was to please first, and only in the second place to express himself. But so splendid were his gifts, so inevitably did he fit the lovely word to the thrilling thought, so lucky was he in the libretto of "Don Giovanni" (the luckiest libretto ever devised), that he went clean ahead not only of Gluck but of Beethoven and every composer who has written opera since.

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His operas stand at the parting of the ways. In them we find the fullest measure of dramatic truth combined with the most delicious ear-tickling. But it is safe to say that Mozart is the only composer of Italian operas who ever succeeded in combining the two things thus, for in Gluck there is short measure of sheer beauty, and in Handel—who used the oldest form—no attempt at drama. Mozart, like Gluck, had no disciples—only the second-rate men have disciples; but their example, and the tendency which they represented, had a curious result. Before their time all opera-writers had been avowed ear-ticklers. But after them, and especially after Mozart, the old line of composers may be observed to have split up into two lines, the one doing the old ear-tickling business, the other trying to express dramatic movement, and their thought and feeling, in the old medium. The first of these lines has not been broken to this day: Rossini came, and, after Rossini, Donizetti, Auber, Bellini, Meyerbeer, and the rest; and ear-tickler follows ear-tickler unto this day. The second line in its turn quickly split into those who, not content with the form, sought to alter it, and those who, quite content with it, went gaily on, turning out opera after opera, dealing with modern subjects in the old-fashioned way. Of these last Gounod must be reckoned the chief; and he began, not where Mozart left off, but with the Mozartean method of the “Don Giovanni” period. Now, it is of the very essence of the Italian opera of the Gluck-cum-Mozart model that it enables a composer to represent moments. The drama does not unfold gradually, as it does in the music-play, with its continuous flow of music marking the subtlest changes. It unfolds in jerks, each number advancing it a stage; so that Gluck never got any appearance of continuity whatever, while Mozart got it only by the consummate tact with which he arranged his pictures, and by the exciting pace at which he passes them before us. The figures seem to move, as in the Kinetoscope, or its forerunner the Wheel of Life: the Mozartean opera, when most dramatic, is a musical Wheel of Life. Gounod possessed neither Mozart’s tact nor his fiery energy. Neither was called for in “Faust,” which is not a drama, but a series of scenes, of crucial moments, from a drama; and since the moments were moments charged with the one feeling which Gounod appears to have felt very strongly or to have had the faculty for expressing, he is here at his very best. There was nothing spiritual in love as Gounod knew it—it was purely animal, though delicately animal; and Marguerite remains, and will remain, as the final expression of the most refined and voluptuous form of sensuality. What he had done in “Faust” he attempted to do again, with sundry differences, in “Romeo and Juliet”; and here the method which had served him so faithfully and so well in “Faust” utterly broke down. In “Faust” there were virtually but two characters, Faust and Marguerite,



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while in "Romeo" the stage was encumbered with Tybalt, Capulet, Mercutio, Laurent; and what would have been Mozart's opportunity was his undoing. He could give none of them pungent or characteristic language; they are the merest Italian operatic puppets; and it is only when they are off the stage that the opera shows any signs of life. In the story of "Romeo" the passion is of a far more fiery quality than in that of "Faust"; and whereas in "Faust" the passion, once aroused, remains at an even level until the finale, where it becomes a little more intense, in "Romeo" it is passion which gradually amounts to a tremendous climax in the Balcony scene, and in the Bedroom scene is strangely blended with chilly forebodings of death. The Mozartean method did not permit Gounod to depict these metamorphoses and blendings of feeling. Mozart himself would have been hard pressed to do it; and, for want of the only method that might have enabled Gounod to do it,—the Wagnerian method of continuous development of typical themes,—the unfolding of the drama hangs fire in every scene, not a scene ends at a higher pitch of feeling than it began. The last scene of all, the scene where a more sincere composer would have made his most stupendous effect, demanded at least sympathy with emotions for which Gounod at no time showed the slightest sympathy. He could give us the erotic fervour with which Romeo looks death in the eyes, but the mood preceding and indeed leading up to that fervour he could not give us—the mood which finds the world barren, ugly, and so repellent that death itself appears beautiful by comparison, the mood to which Christianity makes its strongest appeal. But it was not the subject which led to Gounod's failure in "Romeo and Juliet." He failed in every opera excepting "Faust," and he failed because, lacking perfect sincerity and perfect knowledge of his own powers, he endeavoured to express feelings he had never experienced, in a form which he would have felt at once to be inadequate had he experienced them for ever so brief a moment. As Gounod failed in "Romeo," and failed in every other opera, so every modern composer who tries to treat dramatic subjects in the old undramatic form has failed, and will fail. The Italian opera was well enough for the purpose it was devised to serve; but as soon as composers seek to put strenuous action, elaborately worked-out situations, and the gradual growth and change of human passion into it, we feel that there must be a lack of artistic sincerity somewhere. Italian opera may offer all these things, the things that the age wants in its opera, but it can never be sincere in offering them, and art is the one place where insincerity is intolerable.



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But those who have heard “Romeo and Juliet” may possibly prefer even the insincere and unsatisfactory form of Italian opera which it represents to the perfectly sincere and perfectly satisfactory kind represented, say, by “La Favorita.” For, as I said, when Italian opera is sincere it offers what no one wants—ear-tickling, and ear-tickling, moreover, of a sort which is gone completely out of fashion. Donizetti was a genuine descendant of the true line of opera-composers upon whom Gluck laid his curse, and he spent his life in devising pleasant noises to make his patrons’ evenings pass agreeably. I cannot believe that anyone ever yet understood what “La Favorita” is all about, or that anyone ever wanted to understand. It is a series of songs of the inanest and insanest sort, without a single expressive bar, or a single tone-pattern which is beautiful regarded simply as a pattern. Even the famous “Spirito Gentil” is merely a stream of the brackish water that flowed, day and night, from Donizetti’s pen, only it happens to be a little clearer than usual. But those tunes, so feeble and insipid now, pleased the ears of the time when Lord Steyne went to the opera for a momentary respite from boredom and to recruit his harem from the ballet corps; and Donizetti wrote them with no intention of posing as a grand composer, but simply as a humble purveyor of sweetmeats. In those days there was no music-hall, and the opera had to serve its purpose: hence the slight confusion which results in Donizetti, poor soul, being thought a better man than Mr. Jacobi is thought at the present time, although Mr. Jacobi cannot have less than a thousand times Donizetti’s brains and invention. Mr. Jacobi’s music is capital in its place; but I doubt whether it will be revived fifty years hence; and but for the fact that Donizetti was an opera-composer—and Mozart and Gluck were opera-composers too!—it is pretty certain that not the united prayers of Patti, Albani, Melba, and Eames would induce any operatic management to resurrect “La Favorita.” Even up-to-date ear-tickling is not popular now in the opera-house: we go to the music-hall for it; and we don’t want to pay a guinea at the opera to be tickled in a way that arouses no pleasurable sensations. Those terrific tonic and dominant passages for the trombones, sounding like the furious sawing of logs of wood, only make us laugh; and pretty tootlings of the flutes have long been done better, and overdone, elsewhere. Donizetti is amongst the dead whom no resurrection awaits.

VERDI YOUNG, AND VERDI YOUNGER

And first, for the sake of chronology, Verdi younger. “La Traviata” was produced in 1853, says the learned Grove, which I have consulted on the point, and “Aida” not till 1871. And though Verdi was not young, for an ordinary man, in 1871, he was very young indeed for the composer of “Falstaff” and “Otello”; while in the “Traviata” period one can scarcely say he was doing more than



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cutting his teeth, and not his wisdom teeth. One finds it difficult to understand how ever the thing came to be tolerated by musicians. Of course the desire to find a counterblast to Wagner has done much for Verdi; but while one can understand how Dr. Stanford and others hoped to sweep away "Parsifal" with "Otello" and "Falstaff," it is not so easy to see what on earth they proposed to do with "Traviata." It won fame and cash for its composer in the old days when people went to the opera for lack of the music-hall, not yet invented; when Costa still lorded it not over living musical London merely, but over all the deceased masters, and without compunction added trombones to Mozart's scores, and defiled every masterwork he touched with his unspeakable Costamongery; when Wagner was either unheard of or regarded as a dangerous lunatic and immoral person; and it shows every sign of having been written to please the opera-goers of those days. Curiously, the critics of the time, in the words of the "Daily Telegraph," saw in "the Bayreuth master another form of Bunyan's man with the muck-rake," who "never sought to disguise the garbage he found in the Newgate Calendar of Mythland, or set his imagination to invent," and they were disgusted, also like the "Daily Telegraph," by "approaching incest" in "The Valkyrie"; yet they saw no harm whatever in the charming story of "Traviata"—the story of a harlot who reforms to the extent of retaining only one lover of her many, and who dies of consumption when that one's father does his best to drive her out upon the streets again by making her give up his son. Far from condemning the story myself, I am glad Verdi or his employers had the courage to go boldly to Dumas for it; only, let us be cautious how we condemn the morality of other opera-stories while praising the immorality of this. Let us see how Verdi has handled it. The opera is built after the same hybrid model as Gounod's "Romeo"; it is neither frankly the old Italian opera, existing for the sake of its songs, nor the later form in which the songs exist for the sake of the drama, but an attempt to combine the songs with the continuous working out of a dramatic impulse in the modern manner. But the attempt is far less successful than in "Romeo"; and indeed it is a faint-hearted one. Whenever a song occurs, the action is suspended, and all the actors save the lucky vocalist of the minute are at their wits' end to know where to look, and what to do with their hands, feet—their whole persons in fact—and the parts they are playing. And the songs are far from being expressive of the feeling of the situation that is supposed to call them up. The drinking tune in the first act is lively and appropriate enough; and not much more can be said against Violetta's song, "Ah! fors' e lui," than that while rather pretty its endless cadenzas are more than rather absurd. But in the next act Alfredo sings of the dream of his life to a pretty melody until he is interrupted by



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his sweetheart's maid, who tells him that his joy is at an end, and then he howls "O mio rimorso" to a march-tune of the rowdiest kind. Equally undramatic, untrue, false in feeling, are the sentimental ditties sung by Alfredo's father. The last act is best; but I must say that I have always found it a tedious business to watch Albani die of consumption. At the production of the piece, a soprano who must have looked quite as healthy played Violetta, and it is recorded that, when the doctor told how rapidly she was wasting away and announced her speedy decease, the theatre broke into uproarious merriment. I respect Madame Albani too highly to break into uproarious merriment at her pretence of consumption; but no one is better pleased when the business is over, although the music is more satisfactory here than in any other portion of the opera. Anyone who has sat at night with a friend down with toothache or cholera will recognise the atmosphere of the sickroom at once. But it is not pleasant enough to atone for the rest of the opera. For, to sum up, there is small interest in the drama, and, on the whole, smaller beauty in the music, of "La Traviata." It was made, as bonnets were made, to sell in the fifties; like the bonnets sold in the fifties, it is hopelessly out of date now; and it wants the inherent vitality that keeps the masterworks alive after the fashion in which they were written has passed away. The younger Verdi is not, after all, so vast an improvement on Donizetti and Bellini. His melodies are too often sadly sentimental, and any freshness with which he may have endowed them has long since faded. True, they occasionally have a terseness and pungency, a sheer brute force, which those other composers never got into their insipid tunes; while, on the other hand, Verdi rarely shows his strength without also showing a degree of vulgarity from which Bellini and Donizetti were for the most part free.

"Aida" is a different matter, though not so very different a matter. Here we have the young Verdi—Verdi in his early prime, for he was only fifty-eight; here also we have a story more likely to stir his rowdy imagination, if not more susceptible of effective treatment in the young Verdi manner. The misfortune is that the book is a very excerebrose affair. The drama does not begin until the third act: the two first are yawning abysses of sheer dulness. Who wants to see that Radames loves Aida, that Amneris, the king's daughter, loves Radames, that Aida, a slave, is the daughter of the King of the Ethiopians, that Radames goes on a war expedition against that king, beats him and fetches him back a prisoner, that the other king gives Radames his daughter in marriage, that Radames, highly honoured, yet wishes to goodness he could get out of it somehow? A master of drama would begin in the third act, reveal the whole past in a pregnant five minutes, and then hold us breathless while we watched to see whether Radames would yield



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to social pressure, marry Amneris, and throw over Aida, or yield to passion, fly with Aida, and throw over his country. All this shows the bad influence of Scribe, who usually spent half his books in explaining matters as simple and obvious as the reason for eating one's breakfast. Verdi knew this as well as anyone, and used the two first acts as opportunities for stage display. For "Aida" was written to please the Khedive of Egypt; and Verdi, always keenly commercial, probably knew his man. Now, when the masters of opera—Handel, Gluck, Mozart, Weber—got hold of a bad book, they nearly invariably "faked" it by getting swiftly over the weak points and dwelling on the strong; and, above all, they flooded the whole thing with a stream of delicious melody that hypnotises one, and for the time puts fault-finding out of the question. Not so Verdi. He wrote to please his audience, and he knew that what one can only call dark-skinned local colour was still fresh in spite of "L'Africaine," and that the vulgar would find delight in a blaze of glaring banners and showy spectacle. So he set the two first acts as they stood, trusting to local colour and spectacle to make them popular; and, as we know, at the time they were popular, and the populace exalted Verdi far above such second-rate fellows as Mozart and Beethoven. But now, when local colour has been done to death, and when it has had a quarter of a century to bleach out of Verdi's canvases, what remains to interest, I do not say to touch, one? Certainly not the expression of Radames' or Aida's love, for here as everywhere Verdi fails to communicate any new phase of emotion, but (precisely as he did in "Falstaff" and "Otello") has written music which indicates that he had some inkling of the emotion of the scene, and could write strains calculated not to prevent the scene making its effect. That Verdi has no well-spring of original feeling, perhaps explains why he is so poor in the scenes with Radames, Amneris, and Aida. (Also, perhaps, it explains why he has fallen back in his best period upon masterpieces of dramatic art for his librettos. It is almost outside human possibility to add anything to "Falstaff" or "Otello"; and such success as Verdi has made with them is the result of writing what is, after all, only glorified incidental music—music which accompanies the play. To class these accompaniments with the masterpieces of original opera is surely the most startling feat of modern musical criticism.) Moreover, the plan of writing each scene in a series of detached numbers—for, even where song might flow naturally into song, the two are quite detached—breaks up the interest as effectually as it does in "Traviata"; and the songs do not themselves interest. Verdi's music is not based, like the masters', upon the inflexions of the human voice under stress of sincere feeling, but upon figures and passages easily executed upon certain instruments. The great composers strove to make instruments speak in the accent of the



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human voice, while Verdi has always tried to make the voice sound like an instrument. His roulades and cadenzas, for example, sound prettier on the clarinet than on the voice, as one hears when he sets the one chasing the other in "Traviata"; and if only our orchestral players would take the trouble to play with the same expression as the stage artists sing, we might soon be content to have a repetition (with a difference) of the feat of the old-world conductor who, in the absence of the hero, played the part upon the harpsichord with universal applause. The stock patterns out of which the songs are made soon grow old-fashioned, and are superseded by fresh ones: hence Verdi's songs are the earliest portions of his operas to wither. There are two powerful scenes in "Aida"—the second of the second act, and the final in the last act. The last is certainly terribly repulsive at the first blush; but the weird chant of the priestesses in the brightly-lit temple, where the workmen are closing the entrance to the vault underneath in which we see Radames left to die, contrasts finely with the sweet music that accompanies the declaration of Aida that she has hidden there to die with him; and, while guessing at the splendour of the music Wagner might have given us here, one may still admit Verdi to have succeeded well in a smaller way than Wagner's. But on the whole "Aida" is to be heard once and have done with, for save these scenes there is little else in it to engage one. Aida is alive, but Amneris is a hopeless piece of machinery—something between the stage conception of a princess and the Lady with the Camellias, any difference in modesty being certainly not in favour of Amneris. The music very rarely rises above commonness—that commonness which is proclaimed in every bar of Verdi's instrumentation, and in his shameless Salvation Army rhythms; and it is sometimes (as in the Priest's solo with chorus in the last scene of the second act) odiously vulgar. "Aida" is more dramatic than "Traviata," has more of Verdi's brusque energy, less of his sentimentality; but it has none of the youthful freshness of his latest work. The young Verdi has already aged—how long will the old Verdi remain young?

"THE FLYING DUTCHMAN"

Wagner took "The Flying Dutchman", "Tannhaeuser," and "Lohengrin," in three long running steps; from "Lohengrin" he made a flying leap into the air, and, after spending some five or six years up there, he landed safely on "The Nibelung's Ring." The leap was a prodigious one, and you may search history in vain for its like; and still more astounding was it if you reckon from the point where the run was commenced. "The Flying Dutchman" was avowedly that point. "Die Feen" is boyish folly, and "Rienzi" an attempt to out-Meyer Meyerbeer. But in the "Dutchman" Wagner sought seriously to realise himself, to find the mode of best expressing the best that was in him. That mode he found in "The Rheingold" and mastered in "The Valkyrie," with its continuous development and transmogrification of themes. And (to discard utterly my former metaphor) after steeping oneself for several nights in that last great river of melody, wide and deep and clear, it is interesting to be led suddenly to its source, and see it bubbling up with infinite energy, a good deal of frothing, and some brown mud.



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Compared with “The Valkyrie,” “The Flying Dutchman” is ill-contrived and stagy. It is flecked here and there with vulgarity. It has far less of pure beauty; it has only its moments, whereas “The Valkyrie” gives hours of unbroken delight. “The Valkyrie” appeals to the primary instincts of our nature—instincts and desires that will remain in us so long as our nature is human; while for a large part of its effect the “Dutchman” trusts to a feeling which is elusive at all times and has no permanent hold upon us. Horror of the supernatural is not very deeply rooted in us, after all. Modern training tends to eliminate it altogether. In later life Goethe could not call up a single delightful shiver. There are probably not half a dozen stories in the world from which we can get it a second time. The unexpected plays a part in producing it, and the same means does not produce it twice with anything approaching the same intensity. Hence the Dutchman’s phantom ship must be more ghost-like at each representation, its blood-red sails a bloodier red; and in the long-run, do what the stage carpenters will, we coldly sit and compare their work with previous ships. True, the music which accompanies its entry is always impressively ghastly; yet, while we know this, we are acutely conscious that our feeling is more or less a laudable make-believe—a make-believe that requires some little effort. Then Heine’s notion, which seemed so brilliant at first, that the Dutchman could be redeemed by the unshakable love of a woman, has now all the disagreeable staleness of a decrepit and obvious untruth. It has no essential verity to give it validity, it is no symbol of a fact which is immediately and deeply felt to be a fact. The condition of redemption is entirely arbitrary: it might as reasonably be that the Dutchman should find a woman who would not shrink from eating his weather-stained hat. What was it to the Dutchman’s damned soul if all the women in the world swore to love him eternally, so long as he was unable to love one of them? The true Wandering Jew is not the unloved man, but the man who cannot love, who is destitute of creative emotion and cannot build up for himself a world in which to dwell, but must needs live in hell—a world that others make, a world where he has no place. Wagner knew this, and makes the Dutchman fall in love with Senta; and that only leaves the drama more than ever in a muddle. One wants a reason for his suddenly being able to love. It cannot be because Senta promises to love him till death; for he has had hundreds of fruitless love-affairs before, and knows that all women promise that, and some of them mean it. Besides, the highest moment of the drama ought either to arrive when he feels love dawning in his loveless heart, or when he renounces his chance of salvation and sails away to eternal torment, believing that Senta made her promise in a passing fit of enthusiasm; and at one or other of those moments we ought to have



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some sign that he is redeemed. There is no such sign. The phantom ship falls to pieces, and the Dutchman is freed from his curse when Senta casts herself into the waves; and the highest moment of the whole drama is that in which the dreamy monomaniac, the modern Jeanne d'Arc, the real heroine of the opera, wins her own salvation, masters the world and makes it her heaven, by taking her fate in both hands and setting out to do the thing she feels most strongly impelled to do. If the Dutchman's salvation depends on himself, it is evidently unnecessary for Senta to be drowned; if it depends upon her, it only shows that Wagner, writing fifty years ago, and dazzled by the brilliance of a new idea, could not see so clearly as can be seen to-day that Senta was her own and not the Dutchman's saviour; and if (as it apparently does) it depends upon both Dutchman and Senta, then, at a performance at least, one can merely feel that something in the drama is very much askew, without knowing precisely what.

In minor respects "The Flying Dutchman" falls considerably short of perfection, even of reasonableness. For example, the comings and goings of Daland are fearfully stagy. But worst of all are the arrangements of the first act. I can go as far as most people in accepting stage conventions. If Wagner brought on a four-eyed, eight-horned, twenty-seven-legged monster and called it a Jabberwock, I should not so much as ask why the legs were not all in pairs, like the horns and eyes, so long as I saw in the animal's habits a certain congruity, a conformity to what I would willingly regard as Jabberwock nature. But who can pretend to believe in a ship which comes against the rocks in a storm and anchors there while the captain goes ashore to see whether shipwreck is imminent? That the majority of opera-goers cannot live near the sea is self-evident, and that few of them should ever have seen a shipwreck unavoidable; but surely anyone who has crossed the Channel must have a vague suspicion that to place this vessel against the rocks in a tempest is the last thing a seaman would dream of doing, and that, if he were driven there and managed to get ashore, he would call his men after him (if they needed calling), and trouble neither about casting anchor nor going aboard again. The thing is ludicrously stagy. I suppose that Wagner was too sea-sick to observe what happened during his weeks of roughing it in the North Sea. But the second scene is admirable. That monotonous drowsy hum of the Spinning song is exactly what is needed to put one in the mood for sympathising with Senta and her dreams. With the third there is an occasional return to the bad stagecraft of Scribe; but there are also hints of the simple directness of the later Wagner.



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The music is like the stagecraft: now and then simply dramatic, now and then stagily undramatic; sometimes rich and splendid, sometimes threadbare and vulgar. And by this I do not mean that the old-fashioned set pieces are of necessity bad, and the freer portions necessarily good. Good and bad may be found in the new and the old Wagner alike. That sailor's dance is to me as odious as anything in Meyerbeer, and the melody which ends the love-duet is scarcely more tolerable. On the other hand, not even in "The Valkyrie" did Wagner write more picturesquely weird music than most of the first act. The shrilling of the north wind, the roaring of the waves, the creaking of cordage, the banging of booms, an uncanny sound in a dismal night at sea,—these are suggested with wonderful vividness. At times Wagner gives us gobbets of unassimilated Weber and Beethoven, but some passages are as original as they are magnificent. The finest bars in the work are those in which Senta declares her faith in her "mission," and the Dutchman yields himself to unreasoning adoration. Other moods came to Wagner, but never again that mood of rapturous self-effacement. It is perhaps a young man's mood; certainly it is identical with the ecstasy with which one contemplates a perfect piece of art, or a life greatly lived; and here it finds splendid expression.

"LOHENGRIN"

"Lohengrin" has been sung scores of times at Covent Garden in one fashion or another; but I declare that we heard something resembling the real "Lohengrin" for the first time when the late Mr. Anton Seidl crossed the Atlantic to conduct it and other of Wagner's operas. We had come to regard it as a pretty opera—an opera full of an individual, strange, indefinable sweetness; but Mr. Anton Seidl came all the way from New York city to show us how out of sweetness can come forth strength. Mr. Seidl was a Wagner conductor of the older type, and with some of the faults of that type; he knew little or nothing of the improvements in the manner of interpreting Wagner's music effected by Mottl, Levi, and that stupendous creature Siegfried Wagner; he was a survival of the first enthusiastic reaction against Italian ways of misdoing things; and he was, if anything, a little too strongly inclined to go a little too far in the opposite direction to the touch-and-go conductors. But there is so much of sweetness and delicacy in "Lohengrin" that the whole opera, including the sweet and delicate portions, actually gains from a forceful and manly handling—gains so immensely that, as already said, those of us who heard it under Mr. Seidl's direction must have felt that here, at last, was the true "Lohengrin," the "Lohengrin" of Wagner's imagination. It was a pleasure merely to hear the band singing out boldly, getting the last fraction of rich tone out of each note, in the first act; to hear the string passages valiantly attacked, and the melodies treated with breadth, and the trumpets and trombones playing out with all their



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force when need was, holding the sounds to the end instead of letting them slink away ashamed in the accepted Italian style. And not only were these things in themselves delightful—they also served to make the drama doubly powerful, and the tender parts of the music doubly tender, to show how splendid in many respects was Wagner's art in the "Lohengrin" days, and to prove that Maurel's way of doing the part of Telramund some years ago was, as Maurel's way of doing things generally are, perfectly right. Maurel, it will be remembered, stuck a red feather in his cap; and the eternally wise critics agreed in thinking this absolutely wrong. They told him the feather was out of place—it made him appear ridiculous, and so on. Maurel retorted that he was playing the part of a fierce barbarian chief who would not look, he thought, like a gilded butterfly, and that his notion was to look as ferocious as he could. Now the odd thing is, that though Maurel was right, we critics were in a sense right also. As the music used to be played, a Telramund one degree nearer to a man than the average Italian baritone seemed ludicrously out of place; and when, in addition, the Lohengrin was a would-be lady-killer without an inch of fight in him, Henry the Fowler a pathetic heavy father, and Elsa a sentimental milliner, there was something farcical about Maurel's red feather and generally militant aspect. What we critics had not the brains to see was that the playing of the music was wrong, and that Maurel was only wrong in trying to play his part in the right manner when Lohengrin, Elsa, King, and conductor were all against him in their determination to do their parts wrong. Mr. Bispham follows in Maurel's footsteps, as he frequently does, in a modified costume, but when for the first time the orchestra played right he would not have seemed ridiculous had he stuck Maurel's red feather into his helmet. The whole scene became a different thing: we were thrown at once into the atmosphere of an armed camp full of turbulent thieves and bandits itching for fighting, and wildly excited with rumours of conflicts near at hand. Amidst all this excitement, and amidst all the unruly fighters, Telramund, strongest, fiercest, most unruly of them all, has to open the drama; and to command our respect, to make us feel that it is he who is making the drama move, that it is because all the barbarians are afraid of him that the drama begins to move at all, he cannot possibly look too ferocious and hot-blooded, too strong of limb and tempestuous of temper. The proof that this (Seidl's) reading of the opera was the right one, was that, in the first place, the drama immediately interested you instead of keeping you waiting for the entry of Elsa; and, in the second place, that the noisy, energetic playing of the opening scene threw the music of Elsa and Lohengrin into wonderfully beautiful relief—a relief which in the old way of doing the opera was very much wanting. To play "Lohengrin" in the old way is to



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deny Wagner the astonishing sense of dramatic effect he had from the beginning; to play it as Seidl played it is to prove that the conductor appreciates the perfection of artistic sense that led, compelled, Wagner to set the miraculous vision of Lohengrin against a background made up of such stormy scenes. Had Seidl kept his vigour for the stormy scenes, and given us a finer tenderness in the prelude, the love-music, and Lohengrin's account of himself, his rendering would have been a flawless one.

And even as Seidl interpreted it, the supreme beauty of the music, the sweetness of it as well as its strength, were manifest as they have never been manifest before. "Lohengrin" is surely the most beautiful, the fullest of sheer beauty, of all Wagner's operas. Some thirty or forty years hence those of us who are lucky enough still to live in the sweet sunlight will begin to feel that at last it is becoming feasible to take a fair and reasonable view of Wagner's creative work; and we shall probably differ about verdicts which the whole musical world of to-day would agree only in rejecting. Old-school Wagnerites and anti-Wagnerites will have gone off together into the night, and the echo of the noise of all their feuds will have died away. No one will venture to talk of the "teaching" of "Parsifal" or any other of Wagner's works; the legends from which he constructed his works will have lost their novelty. The music-drama itself will be regarded by the Academics (if there are any left) with all the reverence due to the established fact, and possibly it may be suffering the fierce assault of the exponents of a newer and nobler form. Then the younger critics will arise and take one after another of the music-dramas and ask, What measure of beauty is there, and what dramatic strength, what originality of emotion? and in a few minutes they will scatter hundreds of harmless and long-cherished illusions that went to make life interesting. In that day of wrath and tribulation may I be on the right side, and have energy to go forward, giving up the pretence of what I can no longer like, and boldly saying that I like what I like, even should it happen to be unpopular. May I never fall so low as to be talked of as a guardian of the accepted forms and laws. But even if it should prove unavoidable to relinquish faith in Bach, in Beethoven, in Wagner, yet it is devoutly to be hoped that it will never be necessary to give up a belief in "Lohengrin"; for in that case my fate is fixed—I shall be among the reactionaries, the admirers of the thing that cannot be admired, the lovers of the unlovable. But indeed it is incredible that "Lohengrin" should ever cease to seem lovely—lovely in idea and in the expression of the idea. The story is one of the finest Wagner ever set; it remains fresh, though it had been told a hundred times before. The maiden in distress—we know her perfectly well; the wicked sorceress who has got her into distress—we know her quite as well; the celestial knight who rescues



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her—we know him nearly as well. But the details in which “Lohengrin” differs from all other tales of the same order are precisely those that make it the most enchanting tale of them all. Lohengrin, knight of the Grail, redeemer, yet with a touch of tragedy in his fate, drawn down the river in his magic boat by the Swan from a far mysterious land, a land of perpetual freshness and beauty, is an infinitely more poetic notion than the commonplace angel flapping clumsily down from heaven; and even if we feel it to be absurd that he should have to beg his wife to take him on trust, yet, after all, he takes his wife on trust, and he tells her at the outset that he cannot reveal the truth about himself. Elsa is vastly preferable to the ordinary distressed mediaeval maiden, if only because a woman who is too weak to be worth a snap of the fingers does move us to pity, whereas the ordinary mediaeval is cut out of pasteboard, and does not affect us at all. The King is perhaps merely a stage figure; Ortrud is just one degree better than the average witch of a fairy story; but Frederic, savage and powerful, but so superstitious as to be at the mercy of his wife, is human enough to interest us. And Wagner has managed his story perfectly throughout, excepting at the end of the second act, where that dreary business of Ortrud and Frederic stopping the bridal procession is a mere reminiscence of the wretched stagecraft of Scribe, and quite superfluous. But if there is a flaw in the drama, there cannot be said to be one in the music. The mere fact that, save two numbers, it is all written in common time counts for absolutely nothing against its endless variety. Wagner never again hit upon quite so divine and pure a theme as that of the Grail, from which the prelude is evolved; the Swan theme at once carries one in imagination up the ever-rippling river to that wonderful land of everlasting dawn and sacred early morning stillness; and nothing could be more effective, as background and relief to these, than the warlike music of the first act, and the ghastly opening of the second act, so suggestive of horrors and the spells of Ortrud winding round Frederic’s soul. Then there is Elsa’s dream, the magical music of Lohengrin’s tale, the music of the Bridal procession in the second act, the great and tender melody first sung by Elsa and Ortrud, and then repeated by the orchestra as Ortrud allows Elsa to lead her into the house, the whole of the Bridal-chamber duet, and perhaps, above all, Lohengrin’s farewell. To whatever page of the score you turn, there is perfect beauty—after the first act not a great deal that is powerful or meant to be powerful, but melody after melody that entrances you merely as absolute music without poetic significance, and that seems doubly entrancing by reason of the strange, remote feeling with which it is charged, and its perpetual suggestion of the broad stream flowing ceaselessly from far-away Montsalvat to the sea. “Lohengrin” is a fairy-story imbued with seriousness and tender human emotion, and the music is exactly adapted to it.



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“TRISTAN AND ISOLDA”

Says Nietzsche (pretending to put the words into the mouth of another), “I hate Wagner, but I no longer stand any other music”; and though the saying is entirely senseless to those who do hate Wagner, the feeling that prompted it may be understood by all who love him and who stand every other music, so long as it is real music. Immediately after listening to “Tristan and Isolda” all other operas seem away from the point, to be concerned with the secondary issues of life, to babble without fervour or directness of unessential matters. This does not mean that “Tristan” is greater than “Don Giovanni” or the “Matthew” Passion—for it is not—but that it speaks to each of us in the most modern language of the most engrossing subject in the world, of oneself, of one’s own soul. Who can stay to listen to the sheer loveliness of “Don Giovanni,” or follow with any sympathy the farcical doom of that hero, or who, again, can be at the pains to enter into the obsolescent emotions and mode of expression of Bach, when Wagner calls us to listen concerning the innermost workings of our own being, and speaks in a tongue every word of which enters the brain like a thing of life? For one does not have to think what Wagner means: so direct, so penetrating, is his speech, that one becomes aware of the meaning without thinking of the words that convey it. Nietzsche is right when he says Wagner summarises modernism; but he forgot that Wagner summarises it because he largely helped to create it, to make it what it is, by this power of transferring his thought and emotion bodily, as it were, to other minds, and that he will remain modern for long to come, inasmuch as he moulds the thought of the successive generations as they arise.

“Tristan and Isolda” is one of the world’s half-dozen stupendous appeals in music to the emotional side of man’s nature; it stands with the “Matthew” Passion, the Choral Symphony, and Mozart’s Requiem, rather than with “Don Giovanni,” or “Fidelio,” or “Tannhaeuser;” like the Requiem, the Choral Symphony, the “Matthew” Passion, there are pages of unspeakable beauty in it; but, like them also, its main object is not to please the ear or the eye, but to communicate an overwhelming emotion. That emotion is the passion of love—the elemental desire of the man for the woman, of the woman for the man; and to the expression of this, not in one phase alone, like Gounod in his “Faust,” but in all its phases. It is a glorification of sex attraction: nevertheless, it refutes Tannhaeuser or Venus as completely as it refutes Wolfram or Elizabeth. Tannhaeuser, we know, would have it that love was wholly of the flesh, Wolfram that it was solely of the spirit. That there is no love which does not commence in the desiring of the flesh, and none, not even the most spiritual, which does not consist entirely in sex passion, that the two, spiritual and fleshly love, are merely different phases of one and the same passion, Wagner had learnt when he came to



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create "Tristan." And in "Tristan" we commence with a fleshly love, as intense as that Tannhaeuser knew; but by reason of its own energy, its own excess, it rises to a spiritual love as free from grossness as any dreamed of by Elizabeth or Wolfram, and far surpassing theirs in exaltation. This change he depicted in a way as simple as it was marvellous, so that as we watch the drama and listen to the music we experience it within ourselves and our inner selves are revealed to us. Nothing comes between us and the passions expressed. Tristan and Isolda are passion in its purest integrity, naked souls vibrating with the keenest emotion; they have no idiosyncrasies to be sympathised with, to be allowed for; they are generalisations, not characters, and in them we see only ourselves reflected on the stage—ourselves as we are under the spell of Wagner's music and of his drama. For "Tristan" seems to me the most wonderful of Wagner's dramas, far more wonderful than "Parsifal," far more wonderful than "Tannhaeuser." There is no stroke in it that is not inevitable, none that does not immensely and immediately tell; and, despite its literary quality, one fancies it could not fail to make some measure of its effect were it played without the music. Think of the first act. The scene is the deck of the ship; the wind is fresh, and charged with the bitterness of the salt sea; and Isolda sits there consumed with burning anger and hate of the man she loves, whose life she spared because she loved him, and who now rewards her by carrying her off, almost as the spoil of war, to be the wife of his king. It has been said that Tolstoi asserted for the first time in "The Kreuzer Sonata" that hate and love were the same passion. But the truth is, Wagner knew it long before Tolstoi, just as Shakespeare knew it long before Wagner; and the whole of this first act turns on it. Isolda sends for Tristan and tells him he has wronged her, and begs him to drink the cup of peace with her. Tristan sees precisely what she means, and, loving her, drinks the proffered poison as an atonement for the wrong he has done her, and for his treachery to himself in winning her, for ambition's sake, as King Mark's bride instead of taking her as his own. But the moment her hatred is satisfied Isolda finds life intolerable without it, without love; her love a second time betrays her; and she seizes the poison and drinks also. Then comes the masterstroke. Done with this world, with nothing but death before them, the two confess their long-pent love; in their exalted state passion comes over them like a flood; in the first rush of passion, honour, shame, friendship seem mere names of illusions, and love is the only real thing in life; and finally, the death draught being no death draught, but a slight infusion of cantharides, the two passionately cling to each other, vaguely wondering what all the noise is about, while the ship reaches land and all the people shout and the trumpets blow.



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What is the stagecraft of Scribe compared with this? how else could the avowal of love be brought about with such instant and stupendous effect? Quite as amazing is the second act. Almost from the beginning to close on the end the lovers fondle each other, in a garden before an old castle in the sultry summer night; and just as their passion reaches its highest pitch, Mark breaks in upon them. For Tristan, at least, death is imminent; and the mere presence of death serves to begin the change from the desire of the flesh to the ecstatic spiritual passion. That change is completed in the next act, where we have the scene laid before Tristan's deserted and dilapidated castle in Brittany, with the calm sea in the distance (it should shine like burnished steel); and here Tristan lies dying of the wound he received from Melot in the previous scene, while a melody from the shepherd's pipe, the saddest melody ever heard, floats melancholy and wearily through the hot, close, breathless air. Kurvenal, his servant, has sent for Isolde to cure him as she had cured him before; and when at last she comes Tristan grows crazy with joy, tears the bandages from his wounds, and dies just as she enters. This finishes the metamorphosis begun in the second act: after some other incidents, Isolde, rapt in her spiritual love, sings the death-song and dies over Tristan's body. What is the libretto of "Otello" or of "Falstaff" compared with this libretto? From beginning to end there is not a line, not an incident, in excess. Anyone who is wearied by King Mark's long address when he comes on the guilty pair, has failed to catch the drift of the whole opera—failed to see that two souls like Tristan and Isolde, wholly swayed by love, must find Mark's grief wholly unintelligible, and have no power of explaining themselves to those not possessed with a passion like theirs, or of bringing themselves into touch with the workaday world of daylight, and that all Mark's most moving appeal means to them is that this world, where such annoyances occur, is not the land in which they fain would dwell. They live wholly for their illusion, and if it is forbidden to them in life they will seek death; nothing—not honour, shame, the affection of Mark, the faithfulness of Kurvenal, least of all, life—is to be considered in comparison with their love; their love is the love that is all in all. It is entirely selfish: Mark is as much their enemy as Melot, his affection more to be dreaded than the sword of Melot.

Perhaps I have given the drama some of the credit that should go to the music; and at least there is not a dramatic situation which the music does not immeasurably increase in power. But indeed the two are inseparable. The music creates the mood and holds the spectator to it so that the true significance of the dramatic situation cannot fail to be felt; while the dramatic situation makes the highest, most extravagant flights of the music quite intelligible,



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reasonable. It cannot be said that the music exists for the sake of the drama any more than the drama exists for the music: the drama lies in the music, the music is latent in the drama. But to the music the wild atmosphere of the beginning of the first act is certainly due; and though I have said that possibly "Tristan" might bear playing without the music, it must be admitted that it is hard to think of the fifth scene without that tremendous entrance passage—that passage so tremendous that even Jean de Reszke dare hardly face it. To the music also the passion and fervent heat of the second act are due, and the thunderous atmosphere, the sense of impending fate, in the last, and the miraculous sweetness and intensity of Tristan's death-music, and the sublime pathos of Isolda's lament. Since Mozart wrote those creeping chromatic chords in the scene following the death of the Commendatore in "Don Giovanni," nothing so solemn and still, so full of the pathetic majesty of death, as the passage following the words "with Tristan true to perish" has been written. This is perhaps Wagner's greatest piece of music; and certainly his loveliest is Tristan's description of the ship sailing over the ocean with Isolda, where the gently swaying figure of the horns, taken from one of the love-themes, and the delicious melody given to the voice, go to make an effect of richness and tenderness which can never be forgotten. The opening of the huge duet is as a blaze of fire which cannot be subdued; and when at last it does subside and a quieter mood prevails we get a long series of voluptuous tunes the like of which were never heard before, and will not be heard again, one thinks, for a thousand years to come. And in the strangest contrast to these is the earlier part of the third act, where the very depths of the human spirit are revealed, where we are taken into the darkness and stand with Tristan before the gates of death. But indeed all the music of "Tristan" is miraculous in its sweetness, splendour, and strength; and yet one scarcely thinks of these qualities at the moment, so entirely do they seem to be hidden by its poignant expressiveness. As I have said, it seems to enter the mind as emotion rather than as music, so penetrating is it, so instantaneous in its appeal. There never was music poured out at so white a white heat; it is music written in the most modern, most pungent, and raciest vernacular, with utter impatience of style, of writing merely in an approved manner. It is beyond criticism. It is possible to love it as I do; it is possible to hate it as Nietzsche did; but while this century lasts, it will be impossible to appreciate it sufficiently to wish to criticise it and yet preserve one's critical judgment with steadiness enough to do it.

"SIEGFRIED"



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In all Wagner's music-plays there is shown an astonishing appreciation of the value and effect of scenery and of all the changes of weather and of skies and waters, not only as a background to his drama but as a means of making that drama clearer, of getting completer and intenser expression of the emotions for which the persons in the drama stand. The device is not so largely used in "Tristan" as in the other music-plays, yet the drama is enormously assisted by it. In the "Ring" it is used to such an extent that the first thing that must strike everyone is the series of gorgeously coloured pictures afforded by each of the four plays. For instance, no one can ever forget the opening of "The Valkyrie"—the inside of Hunding's house built round the tree, the half-dead fire flickering, while we listen to the steady roar of the night wind as the tempest rushes angrily through the forest—nor the scene that follows, when through the open door we see all the splendours of the fresh spring moonlight gleaming on the green leaves still dripping with cold raindrops. The terror and excitement of the second act are vastly increased by the storm of thunder and lightning that rages while Siegmund and Hunding fight. A great part of the effect of the third act is due to the storm that howls and shrieks at the beginning and gradually subsides, giving way to the soft translucent twilight, that in turn gives way to the clear spring night with the dark blue sky through which the yellow flames presently shoot, cutting off Bruennhilde from the busy world. The same pictorial device is used throughout "Siegfried" with results just as magnificent in their way; though the way is a very different one. The drama of "The Valkyrie" is tragedy—chiefly Wotan's tragedy (the relinquishing first of Siegmund, and his hope in Siegmund, then of Bruennhilde)—but incidentally the tragedy of Siegmund's life and his death, of Siegmund's loneliness and of Bruennhilde's downfall; and at least one of the scenic effects—the fire at the end—was thrown in to relieve the pervading gloom, and in obedience to Wagner's acute sense of the wild beauty of the old legend, rather than to illustrate and assist the drama. It is sheer spectacle, but how magnificent compared with that older type of spectacle which chiefly consisted of brass bands and ladies insufficiently clothed! "Siegfried," on the other hand, contains no tragedy save the destruction of a little vermin. It is the most glorious assertion ever made of the joy and splendour and infinite beauty to be found in life by those who possess the courage to go through it in their own way, and have the overflowing vitality and strength to create their own world as they go. Siegfried is the embodiment of the divine energy that makes life worth living; and in the scenery, as in the tale and the music of the opera, nothing is left out that could help to give us a vivid and lasting impression of the beauty, freshness, strangeness, and endless interest of life. Take the first

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scene—the cave with the dull red forge—fires smouldering in the black darkness, and the tools of the smith's trade scattered about, and, seen through the mouth of the cave, all the blazing colours of the sunlit forest; or again the second—the darkness, then the dawn and the sunrise, and lastly the full glory of the summer day near Fafner's hole in a mysterious haunted corner of the forest; or the third—a far-away nook in the hills, where the spirit of the earth slumbers everlastingly; or the final scene—the calm morning on Bruennhilde's fell, the flames fallen, and all things transfigured and made remote by the enchantment of lingering mists,—these scenes form a background for the dramatic action such as no composer dreamed of before, nor will dream of again until we cease to dwell in dusty stone cities and learn once again to know nature and her greatest moods as our forefathers knew them. Had Wagner not lived in Switzerland and gone his daily walks amongst the mountains, the "Ring" might have been written; but certainly it would have been written very differently, and probably not half so well.

I have so often insisted on the pictorial power of Wagner's music, that, save for one quality of the pictures in the "Ring," and especially in "Siegfried," it would be unnecessary to say more about it now. That quality is their old-world atmosphere, their power of filling us with a sense of the old time before us. When the fire plays round Bruennhilde's fell—Hinde Fell, Morris calls it—lighting the icy tops of the farthest hills, or when Mime and Alberich squabble in the dark of early morning at the mouth of Fafner's hole, or again when the Wanderer comes in and scarifies Mime out of his wits, we are taken back to the remotest and dimmest past, to the beginnings of time, to a time that never existed save in the imagination of our forebears. This may be partly the result of our unconscious perception of the fact that these things never happen nowadays, and partly the result of our having been familiar with the story of Bruennhilde and the gods since earliest boyhood; but it is in the main due to Wagner's intense historical sense, his sense of the past, and to his unapproached power of expressing in music any feeling or combination of feelings he experienced. So cunningly do music and scenery work together that we credit the one with what the other has done; but, wonderful though the pictures of "Siegfried" are, there cannot be a doubt that the atmosphere we discover in them reaches us through the ear from the orchestra. Besides giving us a series of singularly apposite and significant pictures, Wagner has reproduced the very breath and colour of the old sagas; he has re-created the atmosphere of a time that never was; and it is this remote atmosphere which lends to "Siegfried" and all the "Ring" a great part of their enchantment. Fancy what it might have been, this long exposition of sheer Schopenhauerism in three dramas and a fore-play! imagine what Parry or Stanford

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or Mackenzie would have made of it! And then think of what the “Ring” actually is, and especially of the splendour and weirdness of some parts the “dulness” of which moves dull people to dull grumbling. For example, a great many persons share Mime’s wish for the Wanderer to go off almost as soon as he comes on, “else no Wanderer can he be called.” They tell us that this scene breaks the action, neglecting the trifling fact that were it omitted the remainder of the act would be inconsequent nonsense, only worthy to rank with the librettos of English musical critics, and that the truth happens to be that nearly the whole of the subsequent drama grows out of it. In itself it is a scene of peculiar power, charged to overflowing with the essence of the Scandinavian legends. The notion of the god, “one-eyed and seeming ancient,” wandering by night through the wild woods, clad in his dark blue robe, calling in here and there and creating consternation in the circle gathered round the hearth, is one of the most poetic to be found in the Northern mythology; and the music which Wagner has set to his entry and his conversation cannot be matched for unearthliness unless you turn to the Statue music in “Don Giovanni,” where you find unearthliness of a very different sort. The scene with Erda in the mountains is even more wonderful, so laden is the music with the Scandinavian emotional sense of the impenetrable mystery of things. The scene between Mime and Alberich, or Alberich and the Wanderer, gives us the old horror of the creeping maleficent things that crawled by night about the brooks and rock-holes. It is true this last will bear cutting a little; for Wagner being a German, but having, what is uncommon in the German, an acute sense of balance of form, always tried to get balance by lengthening parts which were already long enough, in preference to cutting parts that were already too long. Hence much padding, which a later generation will ruthlessly amputate.

All these things are the accessories, the environment, of the principal figure; and their presence is justified by their beauty, significance, and interest, and also by their being necessary for the development of the larger drama of the whole “Ring.” But in following “Siegfried” that larger drama cannot altogether be kept in mind: it is the hero that counts first, and everything else is accessory merely to him. That Wagner, in spite of his preoccupation with the tragedy of Wotan, should have accomplished this, proves how wonderful and how true an artist he was. Siegfried is the incarnation, as I have said, of the divine energy which enables one to make the world rich with things that delight the soul; he is Wagner’s healthiest, sanest, perhaps most beautiful creation; he is certainly the only male in all Wagner’s dramas who is never in any danger of becoming for ever so brief a moment a bore, whose view of life is always so fresh and novel and at the same time so essentially human that he interests

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us both in himself and in the world we see through his eyes. Never had an actor such opportunities as here. The entry with the bear exhibits the animal strength and spirits of the man, and the inquiries about his parents, his purely human feeling; his temper with Mime the unsophisticated boy's petulant intolerance of the mean and ugly; the forging of the sword the coming power and determination of manhood. The killing of the dragon is unavoidably rather ridiculous; but the scene with the bird is fascinating by its naturalness and simplicity as well as its tenderness and sheer sweetness. Finally, after the scene with the Wanderer, the scene of the awakening of Bruennhilde affords an opportunity for love-making, and it is love-making of so unusual a sort that one does not feel it to be an anti-climax after all the big things that have gone before. In fact, not even Tristan has things quite so much to himself, nor is given the opportunity of expressing so many phases of emotion and character. And the music Siegfried has to sing is the richest, most copious stream of melody ever given to one artist; in any one scene there is melody enough to have made the fortune of Verdi or any other Italian composer who wrote tunes for the tenor and prima donna; not even Mozart could have poured out a greater wealth of tune—tune everlastingly varying with the mood of the drama. Every scene provides a heap of smaller tunes, and then there are such big ones as the Forge song, Siegfried's meditation in the forest and the conversation with the bird, and the awakening of Bruennhilde—every one absolutely new and tremulous with intense life.

“THE DUSK OF THE GODS”

Quite a fierce little controversy raged a little while ago in the columns of the “Daily Chronicle,” and all about the “meaning” of “The Dusk of the Gods” and the behaviour of Bruennhilde. Mr. Shaw played Devil's Advocate for Wagner, declaring “The Dusk of the Gods” to be irrelevant and operatic (as if that mattered); and Mr. Ashton Ellis and Mr. Edward Baughan, two mad Wagnerians, rushed in to protect Wagner from Mr. Shaw (as if he needed protection). In reading the various letters, my soul was moved to admiration and reverent awe by the ingenuity displayed by the various correspondents in their endeavours to make the easy difficult, the perfectly plain crooked. Wagner took enormous pains to make Bruennhilde a living character—that is to say, to show us her inmost soul so vividly that we know why she did anything or everything without even thinking about it; he set her on the stage, where we see her in the flesh behaving precisely as any woman—of her period—would behave. And then these excellent gentlemen come along and tell us that because Wagner at one time or another thought of handling her story, and the story of Wotan and Siegfried, in this or that way, therefore Wagner “meant” this or that, and failed or succeeded, or changed his original plan or held fast to it. All these things have nothing to do with the drama



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that is played on the stage: by that alone, and by none of his earlier ideas, is Wagner to be judged: he is to be judged by the effect and conviction of the finished play. Now, it seems to me that in the finished play Bruennhilde is neither “a glorious woman”—*i.e.* an Adelphi melodramatic heroine—nor “a deceitful, vindictive woman”—*i.e.* an Adelphi melodramatic villainess. Also, while considered by itself “The Dusk of the Gods” is interesting mainly on account of the music, considered in association, as Wagner wished, and as one must—for, after all, it is but the final act of a stupendous drama, and it is unfair and foolish to consider any one act of a drama alone—with the other minor dramas of the greater drama, “The Nibelung’s Ring,” it is dramatically not only interesting, absorbing, but absolutely indispensable, true, inevitable. It is true enough that the “Ring” suffered somewhat through the fact that Wagner took nearly a quarter of a century to carry out his plan, and during this period his views on life changed greatly; yet nevertheless “The Dusk of the Gods” stands as the noble—in fact, the only possible—conclusion to a story which is, on the whole, splendidly told.

When seeing “The Valkyrie,” one thinks of Sieglinde or Siegmund or Bruennhilde; when listening to “Siegfried,” one thinks of Siegfried and Bruennhilde and no others; but when one thinks of the complete “Ring,” the person of the drama most forcibly forced before the eye of the imagination, the person to whom one realises that sympathy is chiefly due, is Wotan. Wotan, not Siegfried or Siegmund, is the hero of the “Ring.” His tragedy—if it is indeed a tragedy to emerge from the battle in the highest sense of the word triumphant—includes the tragedy of Siegfried and Siegmund, Sieglinde and Bruennhilde—in fact, the tragedy of all the smaller characters of the play. “The Rheingold,” in spite of its glorious music, is entirely superfluous—dramatically, at all events, it is superfluous—but there, anyhow, the problem which we could easily understand without it is stated. Wotan, who has been placed at the head of affairs by the three blind fates, has caught the general disease of wishing to gain the power to make others do his will. So anxious is he for that authority that he not only makes a bargain for it with the powers of stupidity—the giants, the brute forces of nature—which bargain is afterwards and could never be anything but his ruin, but also he stoops to a base subterfuge to gain it, and with the help of Loge, fire, the final destroyer, he does gain it. So determined was Wagner to make his point clear, that even in “The Rheingold,” the superfluous drama, he made it several times superfluously. He was not content to let his point make itself—the humanitarian, the preacher of all that makes for the highest humanity, was too strong in him for that: it was a little too strong even for the artist in him: he must needs make the powers of darkness lay a curse on power



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over one's fellow-beings, the Ring standing as the emblem of that power. While Wotan takes the power, his deepest wisdom, which is to say, his intuition—represented by the spirit of the earth, Erda—rises against him and tells him he is committing the fatal mistake, and he yields to the extent of letting the giants have the supreme power. But he thinks, just as you and I, reader, might think, that by some quaint unthinkable device he can evade the tremendous consequence of his own act; and, instead of at once looking at the consequence boldly and saying he will face it, he elaborates a plan by which no one will suffer anything, while he, Wotan, will gain the lordship of creation. From this moment his fate becomes tragic. The complete man, full of rich humanity—for whom Wotan stands—cannot exist, necessarily ceases to exist, if he is compelled to deny the better part of himself, as Peter denied Jesus of Nazareth. And in consequence of his own act Wotan has immediately to deny the better part of himself, to make war on his own son Siegmund, and then on his own daughter Bruennhilde: he destroys the first and puts away from him for ever Bruennhilde, who is incarnate love. The grand tragic moment of the whole cycle is the laying to sleep of Bruennhilde. Wotan knows that life without love is no life, and he is compelled to part from love by the very bargain which enables him to rule. Rather than live such a life, he deliberately, solemnly wills his own death; and a great part of “Siegfried” and the whole of “The Dusk of the Gods” are devoted to showing how his death, and the death of all the gods, comes about through Wotan's first act. In “Siegfried” and “The Dusk of the Gods” there is no tragedy—how can there be any tragedy in the fate of the man who faithfully follows the impulse that makes for his highest and widest satisfaction, for the fullest exercise of his beneficent energies, for the man who says I will do this or that because I know and feel it is the best I can do? “The Dusk of the Gods” is Wotan's most splendid triumph; he deliberately yields place to a new dynasty, because he knows that to keep possession of the throne will mean the continual suppression of all that is best in him, as he has had already to suppress it. Incidentally there are many tragedies in the “Ring.” The murder of Siegmund by Hunding, aided by Wotan, before Sieglinde's eyes; the hideous incident of Siegfried winning his own wife to be the wife of his friend Gunther; the stabbing of Siegfried by Hagen; Bruennhilde's telling Gutrune that she, Gutrune, was never the wife of Siegfried,—all these are terrible enough tragedies. Bruennhilde's is the most terrible of them all, though she too takes her fate into her hands, and by willing the right thing, and doing it, goes victorious out of life. What there is difficult to understand about her, why she should be accused of deceit and have her conduct explained, I can hardly guess. In “The Valkyrie” she is a goddess; but when she offends

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Wotan by disobeying him and walking clean through all the Commandments, he is bound, for the maintenance of his power, to punish her. So he takes away her godhead, and she is thenceforth simply a woman. Siegfried treats her treacherously—as she necessarily thinks—and she very naturally takes vengeance on him. Mr. Shaw speaks as though he wished her to be a bread-and-butter miss; but a woman of Bruennhilde's type, a daughter of the high gods, could scarcely be that.

In short, "The Dusk of the Gods" seems to me perfectly clear, and in no more need of explanation than "The Valkyrie" or "Siegfried." Of course there are a thousand loose ends in the "Ring," as there are in life itself; but to count them and find out what they all mean would occupy one for an eternity. To throw away "The Dusk of the Gods" because one cannot understand the loose ends, is ridiculous; instead of wishing there were fewer of them, I wish Wagner had been more careless, less German, and left more. It was through his endeavours to get unity, to show the close relation of each incident to every other incident, that he nearly came to utter grief. The drama was so gigantic, to secure sympathy for Wotan it was so necessary to secure sympathy for the minor characters whose story helps to make up Wotan's story, that Wagner seemed perpetually afraid that the real, main drama would be forgotten. And it is true that the story of Siegmund and Sieglinde, or of Siegfried and Bruennhilde, absorbs one for a time so completely that one forgets all about Wotan and his woes. So Wagner came near to spoiling one of the most tremendous achievements of the human mind, by shoving old Wotan on to the stage again and again to recapitulate his troubles. But of these interruptions "The Dusk of the Gods" has none. The story proceeds swiftly, inevitably to the end; from the first bar to the last, the music is as splendid as any Wagner ever wrote. It is the fitting conclusion to the vision of life presented in the "Ring": it is a funeral chant, mournful, sombre, but triumphant. The seed has been sown, the crop has grown and ripened and been harvested, and now the thing is over: a chill wind pipes over the empty stubble-land where late the yellow corn stood and the labourers laboured: there is nothing more: "ripeness is all" that life offers or means.

"PARSIFAL"

"Parsifal" is an immoral work. One cannot for a moment suppose that Wagner, who had written "Tristan" and "Siegfried," meant to preach downright immorality, or that he meant "Parsifal" to stand as anything more than the expression of a momentary mood, the mood of the exhausted, the effete man, the mood which follows the mood of "Tristan" as certainly as night follows day. Nevertheless, in so far as "Parsifal" says anything to us, in so far as it brings, in Nonconformist cant, "a message," it is immoral and vicious, just as in so far as "Siegfried" carries a message it is entirely moral, healthful, and sane.



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It is useless to quibble about this, seeking to explain away plain things: the truth remains that “Siegfried” is a glorification of one view of life, “Parsifal” of its direct opposite and flat contradiction; and anyone who accepts the one view must needs loathe the other as sinful. To me the “Siegfried” view of life commends itself; and I unhesitatingly assert the sinfulness of the “Parsifal” view. The two operas invite comparison; for at the outset their heroes seem to be the same man. Siegfried and Parsifal are both untaught fools; each has his understanding partly enlightened by hearing of his mother’s sufferings and death (compare Wordsworth’s “A deep distress hath humanised my soul”); each has his education completed by a woman’s kiss. All this may seem very profound to the German mind; but to me it is crude, a somewhat too obvious allegory, partly superficial, partly untrue, a survival of windy sentimental mid-century German metaphysics, like the Wagner-Heine form of “The Flying Dutchman” story, and the Wagner form of the “Tannhaeuser” story. However, I am willing to believe that Siegfried, when he kisses Bruennhilde on Hinde Fell, and Parsifal, when Kundry kisses him in Klingsor’s magic garden, has each his full faculties set in action for the first time. And then? And then Siegfried, with his fund of health and vitality, sees that the world is glorious, and joyfully presses forward more vigorously than ever on the road that lies before him, never hesitating for a moment to live out his life to the full; while Parsifal, lacking health and vitality—probably his father suffered from rickets—sees that the grief and suffering of the world outweigh and outnumber its joys, and not only renounces life, but is so overcome with pity for all sufferers as to regard it as his mission to heal and console them. And having healed and consoled one, he deliberately turns from the green world, with its trees and flowers, its dawn and sunset, its winds and waters, and shuts himself in a monkery which has a back garden, a pond and some ducks. There is only one deadly sin—to deny life, as Nietzsche says: carefully to pull up all the weeds in one’s garden, but to plant there neither flower nor tree—and this is what “Parsifal” glorifies and advocates.

Now, far be it from me to go hunting a moral tendency in a work of art, and to praise or blame the art as I chance to like or dislike the tendency. I am in a state of perfect preparedness to see beauty in a picture, even if the subject is to me repulsive. But in the case of a picture it is possible to say, “Yes, very pretty,” and pass on. In the case of a story, a play, or a music-drama, you cannot. You are tied to your seat for one or two or three mortal hours; and however perfect may be the art with which music-drama or play or story is set before you, if the subject revolts or bores you, you soon sicken of the whole business. And in the highest kind of story, play, or music-drama,



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subject and treatment merge inseparably one in the other, substance and form are one; for the idea is all in all, and the complete idea cannot be perceived apart from the dress which makes it visible. Besides, in the Wagnerian music-drama, it is intended that beauty of idea and of arrangement of ideas shall be as of great importance as beauty of ornament. Wagner certainly intended "Parsifal" to be such a music-drama; and indeed the idea is only too clearly visible. The main idea of the "Ring" is so much obscured by the subsidiary ideas twined about it that very few people know that the real hero is Wotan, and the central drama Wotan's tragedy, that Siegmund and Sieglinde, Siegfried and Bruennhilde, and their loves—all the romance and loveliness that enchant us—are merely accessory. But in "Parsifal" there is nothing superfluous, no rich and lovely embroidery on the dress of the idea to divert us from the idea itself—the idea is as nearly nude as our limited senses and our modern respectability permit. And the idea being what it is, it follows that the play, after the drama once commences, is not only immoral, but also dispiriting and boring, and, to my thinking, inconsequential and pointless. The first act, the exposition, is from beginning to end magnificent: never were the lines on which a drama was to develop more gorgeously, or in more masterly fashion, set forth. Had Wagner seen that Amfortas was merely a hypochondriac, a stage Schopenhauer, imagining all manner of wounds and evils where no evils or wounds existed, had he made Parsifal a Siegfried, and sent him out into the world to learn this, and brought him back to break up the monastery, to set Amfortas and the knights to some useful labour, and to tell them that the sacred spear, like Wotan's spear, had power only to hurt those who feared it, then we might have had an adequate working-out of so noble a beginning. Instead of this, Kundry kisses Parsifal, Parsifal squeals, and we see him in a moment to be only an Amfortas who has had the luck not to stumble; and he, the poor fool who is filled with so vast a pity because he sees (what are called) good and evil in entirely wrong proportion—as, in fact, a hypochondriac sees them—he, Parsifal, this thin-blooded inheritor of rickets and an exhausted physical frame, is called the Redeemer, and becomes head of the Brotherhood of the Grail. Beside this inconsequence, all other inconsequences seem as nothing. One might ask, for instance, how, seeing that no man can save his brother's soul, Parsifal saves the soul of Amfortas? This is a fallacy that held Wagner all his life. We find it in "The Flying Dutchman"; it is avoided in "Tannhaeuser"—for, thank the gods, Tannhaeuser is *not* saved by that uninteresting young person Elizabeth; it plays a large part in the "Ring"; it is the culmination of the drama of "Parsifal." Had Wagner thought more of Goethe and less of the Frankfort creature who formulated his hypo-chondriacal nightmares, and



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called the result a philosophy, he might have learnt that no mentally sick man ever yet was cured save by the welling-up of a flood of emotional energy in his own soul. He might also have seen that Parsifal is as much the spirit that denies as Mephistopheles. But these points, and many others, may go as, comparatively, nothings. The first act of "Parsifal" is unsurpassable, the second is an anti-climax, and the third, excepting the repentance of Kundry, which is pathetic, and strikes one as true, a more saddening anti-climax. There is one last thing to say before passing to the music, and this is that "Parsifal" is commonly treated with respect as a Christian drama—a superior "Sign of the Cross." I happen, oddly enough, to know the four Gospels exceedingly well; and I find nothing of "Parsifal" in them. It is much nearer to Buddhism in spirit, in colour: it is a kind of Germanised metaphysical Buddhism. Schopenhauer, not Christ, is the hero; and Schopenhauer was only a decrepit Mephistopheles bereft of his humour and inverted creative energy.

After hearing the whole opera twice, with all the supposed advantages of the stage, the main thing borne in upon me is that the stage and actors and accessories, far from increasing the effect of the music, actually weaken it excepting in the first act. In that act there is not a word or a note to alter. The story compels one's interest, and the music is rich, tender, and charged with a noble passion. Even the killing of the duck—it is supposed to be a swan, but it is really a duck—is saved from becoming ludicrous by the deep sincerity of the music of Gurnemanz's expostulations. The music, too, with the magnificent trombone and trumpet calls and deep clangour of cathedral bells, prevents one thinking too much of the absurdity of the trees, mountains, and lake walking off the stage to make the change to the second scene. On reflection, this panorama seems wholly meaningless and thoroughly vulgar; and even in the theatre one wonders vaguely what it is all about—for Gurnemanz's explanation about time and space being one is sheer metaphysical shoddy, a mere humbugging of an essentially uncultured German audience; but one does not mind it, so full is the accompaniment of mystical life and of colour, of a sense of impending great things. The whole cathedral scene—I would even include the caterwaulings of Amfortas—is sincere, impressive, and filled with a reasonable degree of mysticism. There is no falling off in the second act until after the enchanting waltz and Kundry's wondrously tender recital of the woes suffered by Parsifal's mother (here the melody compares in loveliness with the corresponding portion of "Siegfried"); indeed, the passion and energy go on increasing until Parsifal receives Kundry's kiss, and then at once they disappear. Between this point and the end of the act there is scarcely a fine passage. Every phrase is insincere, not because Wagner wished to be insincere, but because

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he tried to express dramatically a state of mind which is essentially undramatic. Parsifal is supposed to transcend almost at one bound the will to live, to rise above all animal needs and desires; and though no human being can transcend the will to live, any more than he can jump away from his shadow—for the phrase means, and can only mean, that the will to live transcends the will to live—yet I am informed, and can well believe, that those who imagine they have accomplished the feat reach a state of perfect ecstasy. Wagner knew this; he knew also that ecstasy, as what can only be called a static emotion, could not be expressed through the medium that serves to express only flowing currents of emotion; he himself had pointed out, that for the communication of ecstatic feeling, only polyphonic, non-climatic, rhythmless music of the Palestrina kind served; and yet, by one of the hugest mistakes ever made in art, he sought to express precisely that emotion in Parsifal's declamatory phrases. The thing cannot be done; it has not been done; all Parsifal's bawling, even with the help of the words, avails nothing; and the curtain drops at the end of the second act, leaving one convinced that the drama has untimely ended, has got into a cul-de-sac. And in a cul-de-sac it remains. There is much glorious music in the last act; the "Good Friday music" is divine; the last scene is gorgeously led up to; and the music of it, considered only as music, is unsurpassable. But heard at the end of a drama so gigantically planned as "Parsifal," it is unsatisfying and disappointing. It is to me as if the "Ring" had closed on the music of Neid-hoehle with the squabbings of Alberich and Mime. The powers that make for evil and destruction have won; one knows that Parsifal is eternally damned; he has listened and succumbed, even as Wagner himself did, to the eastern sirens' song of the ease and delight of a life of slothful renunciation, self-abnegation, and devotion to "duty." The music of the last scene sings that song in tones of infinite sweetness; but it cannot satisfy you; you turn from the enchanted hall, with its holy cup and spear and dove, its mystic voices in the heights, its heavy, depressing, incense-laden atmosphere; and you hasten into the night, where the winds blow fresh through the black trees, and the stars shine calmly in the deep sky, just as though no "Parsifal" had been written.

"Parsifal" does not imply that Wagner in his old age went back on all he had thought and felt before. Born in a time when the secret of living had not been rediscovered, when folk still thought the victory, and not the battle, the main thing in life, he always sought a creed to put on as a coat-of-mail to protect him from the nasty knocks of fate. Nowadays we do not care greatly for the victory, and we go out to fight with a light heart, commencing where Wagner and all the pessimists ended. Wagner wanted the victory, and also, lest he should not gain



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it, he wanted something to save him from despair. That something he found in pessimism. In his younger days—indeed until near the last—he forgot all about it in his hours of inspiration, and worked for no end, but for the sheer joy of working. But towards the end of his life, when his inspiration came seldomer and with less power, he worked more and more for the victory, and became wholly pessimistic, throwing away his weapons, and hiding behind self-renunciation as behind a shield. He won a victory more brilliant than ever Napoleon or Wellington or Moltke won; and in the eyes of all men he seemed a great general. But life had terrified him; he had trembled before Wotan's—or Christ's—spear; in his heart of hearts he knew himself a beaten man; and he wrote "Parsifal."

BAYREUTH IN 1897

To Bayreuth again, through dirty, dusty, nasty-smelling, unromantic Germany, along the banks of that shabby—genteel river known as the Rhine, watching at every railway station the wondrously bulky haus-fraus who stir such deep emotions in the sentimental German heart; noting how the disease of militarism has eaten so deeply into German life that each railway official is a mere steam-engine, supplied by the State with fuel in case he should some day be needed; eating the badly and dirtily cooked German food, —how familiar it all seems when one does it a second time! One week in Bayreuth was the length of my stay in 1896; yet I seem to have spent a great part of my younger days here. The theatre is my familiar friend in whom I never trust; the ditch called the river has many associations, pleasant and other; I go up past the theatre into the wood as to a favourite haunt of old time; I lunch under the trees and watch the caterpillars drop into my soup as though that were the commonest thing in the world; I wander into the theatre and feel more at home than ever I do at Covent Garden; I listen to the bad—but it is not yet time for detailed criticism. All I mean is, that the novelty of Bayreuth, like the novelty of any other small lifeless German town, disappears on a second visit; that though the charm of the wood, of the trumpet calls at the theatre, of the greasy German food, and the primitive German sanitary arrangements, remains, it is a charm that has already worn very thin, and needs the carefulest of handling to preserve. Whether, without some especial inducement, the average mortal can survive Bayreuth a third time, is, to me, hardly a question. As for my poor self, it suits me admirably—certainly I could stand Bayreuth half a dozen times. I like the life—the way in which the hours of the day revolve round the evening performance, the real idleness, passivity, combined with an appearance of energy and activity; I like to get warm by climbing the hill and then to sit down and cool myself by drinking lager from a huge pot with a pewter lid, dreamily speculating the while on the possibility of my ever growing as



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fat as the average German; I like to sit in a cafe with my friends till three in the morning, discussing with fiery enthusiasm unimportant details of the performance we have lately endured; I like being hungry six times a day. All these trifles please me, and please others. But the majority of the crowd of visitors are not pleased by them; and what can they do in Bayreuth after the freshness of novelty is worn off? They go to Villa Wahnfried and look for a few seconds at the spot where Wagner is buried—as I heard it said, like a cat in a back garden; they look for a few seconds at the church; they lunch; they buy and partly read the English papers; and then? Inevitably the intelligent reader will say, the opera in the evening. And I, who have been to the opera in the evening, gasp and remark, Really!

Lest this ejaculation be entirely misinterpreted by the irreverent, let it be said at once that the performances are not, on the whole, very bad. But I wish to consider whether they are of a quality and distinction sufficient to drag one all the way from England, and to compensate those who find the day dull for the dulness of the day, whether they are what Bayreuth claims them to be—the best operatic representations in the world, the best that could possibly be given at the present time. The circular sent out by amiable Mr. Schulz-Curtius states that, “while not guaranteeing any particular artists, the aim of Bayreuth will be to secure the best artists procurable” (or words to that effect). Is this genuinely the aim of Bayreuth, and does Bayreuth come near enough to the mark to make some thousands of English people think they have spent their time, money, and energy well in coming here? For my part I say Yes: even were the representations a good deal poorer, they form, as I have said, a centre for the day; I rise in the morning with them before me, and make all my arrangements—my lunches, discussions, and lagers—so as to reach the theatre at four o’clock; they save me from a life without an object, and add a zest to everything I do; they correspond to the trifling errand which renders a ten-mile walk in the country an enjoyment. But those who come here for nothing but the theatre, who do not feel the charm of the Bayreuth life, will, I am much afraid, answer No. Had I no friends here, or did I not enjoy their company and conversation, if my stomach refused lager and I could not smoke ten-pfennig German cigars, if I were not violently hungry every two hours, I am very much afraid I should answer No. The working of the scenic arrangements is, of course, as perfect as ever. Of course there are one or two mistakes,—stage machinists, after all, are built of peccable clay,—but these occur so seldom that one can sit with a feeling of security that is not possible at Covent Garden. In “The Valkyrie” the fire does not flare up ten minutes late; the coming of evening does not suggest an unexpected total eclipse of the sun; the



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thing that the score indicates is done, and not, as generally happens at Covent Garden, the reverse thing. The colours of the scenery are likewise as intolerably German as ever—the greens coarse and rank, the yellows bilious, the blues tinged with a sickly green, the reds as violent as the dress of the average German frau. On the other hand, many of the effects are wonderful—the mountain gorge where Wotan calls up Erda, Mime's cave, the depths of the Rhine, the burning of the hall of the Gibichungs. But the most astounding and lovely effects in the setting of the drama will not avail for long without true, finished, and beautiful art in the singing and acting; and, with a few exceptions, the singers do not give us anything approaching true, finished, and beautiful art. The exceptions are Van Rooy, Brema, Gulbranson, Brema, and Schumann-Heink. Van Rooy has a noble voice, admirably suited to Wotan, and he both sings and acts the part with a majesty and pathos beyond anything dreamed of by any other Wotan I have heard. He appears to have been the success of the Festival; and certainly so strong and exquisite an artist deserves all the success he can gain in Bayreuth. Brema's Fricka is noble and full of charm; Schumann-Heink sings the music of Erda with some sense of its mystery and of Waltraute in "Siegfried" with considerable passion; and Gulbranson has vastly improved her impersonation of Bruennhilde since last year. She is still unmistakably a student, but no one can doubt that she will develop into a really grand artist if she avoids ruining her fine voice by continually using it in a wrong way. Her Bruennhilde is just now very beautiful and intensely pathetic, but it owes less to her art than her personality. She does not interpret Bruennhilde—rather she uses the part as a vehicle for her private emotions; to an inordinate degree she reads into it her real or imaginary experience; and she has not learnt the trick of turning her feelings into the proper channels provided, so to say, by the part—of so directing them that Gulbranson disappears behind Bruennhilde. Still, it is a great thing to find an artist of such force and passion and at the same time such rare delicacy; and I expect to come here in 1899 and hear an almost perfect rendering of Bruennhilde. As for the rest of the singers, the less said about most of them the better. They have no voices worth the mentioning; the little they do possess they have no notion of using rightly; and their acting is of the most rudimentary sort. We hear so much of the fine acting which is supposed to cover the vocal sins of Bayreuth that it cannot be insisted on too strongly that the acting here is not fine. I can easily imagine how Wagner, endeavouring to get his new notion into the heads of the stupid singers who are still permitted to ruin his music because they are now veterans, would fume and rage at the Italian "business"—the laying of the left hand on the heart and of the right on the pit of the stomach—with which incompetent



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actors always fill up their idle intervals, and how he would beg them, in Wotan's name, rather to do nothing than do that. But to take the first bungling representation of the "Ring" as an ideal to be approached as closely as possible, to insist on competent actors and actresses standing doing nothing when some movement is urgently called for, is to deny to Wagner all the advantages of the new acting which modern stage singers have learnt from his music. The first act of "The Valkyrie," for example, will be absurd so long as Sieglinde, Hunding, and Siegmund are made to stand in solemn silence, as beginners who cannot hear the prompter's voice, until Sieglinde has mixed Hunding's draught. And some of the gestures and postures in which the singers are compelled to indulge are as foolish as the foolishest Italian acting. Who can help laughing at the calisthenics of Wotan and Bruennhilde at the end of "The Valkyrie," or at Wotan's massage treatment of Bruennhilde in the second act? The Bayreuth acting is as entirely conventional as Italian acting, and scarce a whit more artistic and sane. Even the fine artists are hampered by it; and the lesser ones are enabled to make themselves and whole music-dramas eminently ridiculous. On the whole, perhaps, acting and singing were at their best in "Siegfried." In "The Rheingold" some of the smaller parts—such as Miss Weed's Freia—were handsomely done; the Mime was also excellent; but I cannot quite reconcile myself to Friedrichs' Alberich. "The Dusk of the Gods" was marred by Burgstaller, and "The Valkyrie" by the two apparently octogenarian lovers. That is Bayreuth's way. It promises us the best singers procurable, and gives us Vogl and Sucher, who undoubtedly were delightful in their parts twenty years ago; and it would be shocked to learn that its good faith is questioned so far as lady artists are concerned. Whether it is fair to question it is another matter. In Germany feminine beauty is reckoned by hundredweights. No lady of under eighteen stones is admired; but one who is heavier than that, instead of staying at home and looking after her grandchildren, is put into a white dress and called Sieglinde, or into a brown robe and called Kundry; and a German audience accepts her as a revelation of ideal loveliness through the perfection of human form.

The Germans are devoid of a sense of colour, they are devoid of a sense of beauty in vocal tone, and I am at last drawing near to the conclusion that they have no sense of beauty in instrumental tone. Throughout this cycle the tone of many of the instruments has been execrable; many of them have rarely been even in approximate tune. The truth is that the players do not play well unless a master-hand controls them; and a master-hand in the orchestra has been urgently wanted. Instead of a master-hand we have had to put up with Master Siegfried Wagner's hand (he now uses the right), and in the worst moments we have wished there was no hand at all, and in the best we



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have longed passionately for another. I do not propose to discuss his conducting in detail. Under him the band has played with steady, unrelenting slovenliness and inaccuracy; the music has been robbed of its rhythm, life, and colour; and many of the finest numbers—as, for example, the Valkyrie's Ride, the prelude to the third act of "Siegfried," the march in "The Dusk of the Gods"—have been deliberately massacred. One cannot criticise such conducting: it does not rise near enough to competence to be worthy of criticism. But one has a right to ask why this young man, who should be serving an apprenticeship in some obscure opera-house, is palmed off on the public as "the best artist procurable"? He scarcely seems to possess ordinary intelligence. I had the honour of being inadvertently presented to him, and he asked me, should I write anything about Bayreuth, to say that he objected very much to the Englishmen who came in knickerbockers—in bicycle costume. When I mildly suggested that if they came without knickerbockers or the customary alternative he would have better reason to complain, he asserted that he and his family had a great respect for the theatre, and it shocked them to find so many Englishmen who did not respect it. I mention this because it shows clearly the spirit in which Bayreuth is now being worked. The Wagner family are not shocked when Wagner's music is caricatured by an octogenarian tenor or a twenty-stone prima donna; they are shocked when in very hot weather a few people wear the costume in which they suffer least discomfort. So the place is becoming a mere fashionable resort, that would cause Wagner all the pangs of Amfortas could he come here again. The women seem to change their dresses for every act of the opera; the prices of lodgings, food, and drinks are rapidly rising to the Monte Carlo standard; a clergyman has been imported to preach on Sunday to the English visitors; one sees twenty or thirty fashionable divorce cases in process of incubation; and Siegfried Wagner conducts. With infinite labour Wagner built this magnificent theatre, the most perfect machine in the world for the reproduction of great art-works; and Mrs. Wagner has given it as a toy to her darling son that he may amuse himself by playing with it. And, like a baby when it gets a toy, Siegfried Wagner is breaking it to pieces to see what there is inside. Unless it is taken from him until he has spent a few years in learning to play upon instead of with it, Bayreuth will quickly be deserted. Already it is in decadence. I shall always come to Bayreuth, for reasons already given; but fashions change, and the people who come here because it is the fashion will not be long in finding other resorts; and those who want only to see the music-plays adequately performed will have learnt that this is not the place for them. With one voice the ablest German, French, and Dutch critics are crying against the present state of things; and it is certainly the duty of every English lover of



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Wagner to refuse to take tickets for the performances that are to be conducted by Wagner's son. Bayreuth promises us the best artists. Whether some of the singers are or are not the best artists is largely a matter of taste. But that Siegfried Wagner is the best conductor procurable in Germany is too preposterous a proposition to be considered for a moment. He may be some day; but that day is far off.

As for the representation of "Parsifal," I should not trouble to discuss it had not Mr. Chamberlain's book on Wagner lately come my way. It shows me that the old game is being pursued as busily as ever. Since Wagner's death the world has been carefully and persistently taught that only Bayreuth can do justice to "Parsifal"; and since the world believes anything if it is said often enough, it has come to think it sheer blasphemy to dream of giving "Parsifal" elsewhere than at Bayreuth. "Parsifal" is not an opera—it is a sacred revelation; and just as the seed of Aaron alone could serve as priests in the sacred rites of the temple at Jerusalem, so only the seed of Wagner can serve as priests—that is to say, as chief directing priests—when "Parsifal" is played. Thus declare the naive dwellers in Villa Wahnfried, modestly forgetting the missing link in the chain of argument which should prove them alone to be the people qualified to perform "Parsifal"; and I regret to observe the support they receive from a number of Englishmen and Scotchmen, who are grown more German than the Germans, and just as religiously forget to make any reference to this missing link of proof. But these Germanised Scotchmen and Englishmen work hard for Bayreuth: now they whisper in awestruck tones of the beauty and significance of "Parsifal"; now they howl at the unhappy writers in the daily and weekly Press who dare to find little significance and less beauty in the Bayreuth representation; and, to do them bare justice, until lately they have been fairly successful in persuading the world to think with them. Verily, they have their reward—they partake of afternoon tea at Villa Wahnfried; they enjoy the honour of bowing low to the second Mrs. Wagner; Wagner's legal descendants cordially take them by the hand. And they go away refreshed, and again spread the report of the artistic and moral and religious supremacy of Bayreuth; and the world listens and goes up joyfully to Bayreuth to be taxed—one pound sterling per head per "Parsifal" representation. The performances over, the world comes away mightily edified, having seen nothing with its own eyes, heard nothing with its own ears, having understood nothing at all;—having, in fact, so totally miscomprehended everything as to think "Parsifal" a Christian drama; having been too deaf to realise that the singers were frequently out of the key, and too blind to observe that the scenery in the second act resembled a cheap cretonne, and that many of the flower-maidens were at least eight feet in circumference. On the way



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home the world whiles away the long railway journey by reading metaphysical disquisitions on "Parsifal' and the Ideal Woman," "'Parsifal' and the Thing-in-Itself," "The Swan in 'Parsifal' and its Relation to the Higher Vegetarianism." It knows the name of every leit-motif, and can nearly pronounce the German for it; it can refer to the Essay on Beethoven apropos of Kundry's scream (or yawn) in the second act; it can chat learnedly of Klingsor, in pathetic ignorance of his real offence, and explain why Amfortas has his wound on the right side, although the libretto distinctly states it to be situated on the left. It is a fact that this year a lady was heard to ask why Parsifal quarrelled with his wife in the second act. (I might mention that an admirer of "Parsifal" asked me who the dark man was in the first act of "The Valkyrie," and whether Sieglinde or Bruennhilde was burnt in the last.) The which is eminently amusing, and conjures up before one a vision of Richard, not wailing, like the youth in Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound," for the faith he kindled, but gazing patiently, rather wearily, with a kindly ironical smile, on the world he conquered, on the world that adores him *because* it fails to understand him.

Happily, it is not my business to reform the world; and writing in October, when so many of the idealists who felt with Parsifal in his remorse about the duck-shooting episode are applying the lesson by wantonly slaughtering every harmless creature they can hit, it would be superfluous to point out in any detail how very wrong and absurd is the world's estimate of the Bayreuth performance. In fact, were it my object to assist in the destruction of Bayreuth, no better plan could be found than that of approving cordially of everything Bayreuth does. For it is fast driving away all sincere lovers of Wagner; it lives now on fashionable ladies, betting men, and bishops: when the fashion changes and these depart, the Bayreuth festivals will come to an end. Bayreuth is only an affectation; not one pilgrim in a hundred understands the "Ring" or "Parsifal"; not one in a thousand is really impressed by anything deeper than the mere novelty of the business. Visitors go and are moved by the shooting of the duck (the libretto calls it a swan, but the management chooses to use a duck); they talk of Wagner's love of animals and of how they love animals themselves; they go straight from Bayreuth to Scotland and show their love in true sportsmanlike fashion by treating animals, birds, and fishes with a degree of cruelty so appalling as to disgust every right-thinking and right-feeling man and woman; and they tell you that the stag likes to be disembowelled, the bird to have its wings shattered, the fish to be torn to pieces in its agonised struggle for life. Or, having been moved by the consequences of sin, they straightway go and prepare cases for the divorce courts; having appreciated the purity and peace of monastery life and a daily communion service,



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they return without hesitation or sense of inconsistency to their favourite modes of gambling; having revelled in the most lovely music in the world, they proceed to listen nightly to the ugliest and silliest music in the world. Their appreciation of Bayreuth is a sham; they would cheerfully go elsewhere—say to Homburg—if Bayreuth were shut up; and before long they will go to Homburg or elsewhere, whether Bayreuth is shut up or not.

A NOTE ON BRAHMS

It is not an exaggeration to say that probably there are not a dozen musicians in Europe who have formed any precise and final opinion as to where Brahms should be placed. One gets to know him very slowly. His appearance and manner (so to speak), so extremely dignified, are very much in his favour; but when one tries to get to terms of intimacy with him he has a fatal trick of repelling one by that “austerity” or chilliness of which we have heard so much. And the worst of it is that too frequently a sharp suspicion strikes one that there is little behind that austere manner—that his reticence does not so much imply matter held in reserve as an absence of matter. I do not mean by this that Brahms was a paradoxical fool who was clever enough to hold his tongue lest he was found out, nor even that he purposely veiled his lack of meaning. On the contrary, a composer who wished more devoutly to be sincere never put pen to paper. But he had not the intellect of an antelope; and he took up in all honesty a role for which he had only the slightest qualification. The true Brahms, the Brahms who does not deceive himself, is the Brahms you find in many of the songs, in some of the piano and chamber music, in the smaller movements of his symphonies, and in certain passages of his overtures; and I have no hesitation whatever in asserting (though the opinion is subject to revision) that his songs are much the most satisfactory things he did. Here, unweighted by a heavy sense of a mission, he either revels in making beautiful—though never supremely beautiful—tunes for their own sake, or he actually expresses with beauty and considerable fidelity certain definite emotions. Had he written nothing but such small things—songs, piano pieces, Allegrettos like that in the D symphony—his position might be a degree lower in the estimation of dull Academics who don't count, but he would be accepted at something like his true value by the whole world, and the whole world would be the better for oftener hearing many lovely things. But merely to be a singer of wonderful songs was not sufficient for Brahms: he wanted to be a great poet, a new Beethoven. It was a legitimate ambition. The kind of music Brahms really loved was the kind of which Beethoven's is the most splendid example; and he wanted to create more of the same kind. He doubtless thought he could; in his early days Robert Schumann predicted that he would; and in his later days his intimate friend Hanslick and a small herd



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of followers asserted that he did. He was run as the prophet of the classical school with all the force of all who hated Wagner and had not brains enough to understand either Brahms' or Wagner's music; he became the god of all the musical dullards in Europe; and it is small wonder that he took himself with immense seriousness. A little more intelligence, ever so little more, would have shown him that, despite the noise of those who perhaps admired him less than they dreaded Wagner, he was not the man they said he was. He had not a great matter to utter; what he had he could not utter in the classical form; yet he tried to write in classical form. If ever a musician was born a happy, careless romanticist, that musician was Brahms—he was even a romanticist in the narrower sense, inasmuch as he was fond rather of the gloomy, mysterious, and dismal than of sunlight and the blue sky; and whenever his imagination warmed he straightway began breaking the bonds in which he had endeavoured to work. But that miserable article of Schumann—deplorable gush that has been tolerated, nay, admired, only because it is Schumann's—the evil influence of the pseudo-classicism of Mendelssohn and his followers, the preposterous over-praise of Hanslick,—these things drove Brahms into the mistake never made by the really able men. Wilkes denied that he ever was a Wilksite; Wagner certainly never was a Wagnerite; there are people who ask whether Christ was ever a Christian. But Brahms became more and more a devoted Brahmsite; he accepted himself as the guardian of the great classical tradition (which never existed); and he wrote more and more dull music. It is idle to tell me he is austere when my inner consciousness tells me he is merely barren, and idler to ask me feel beauty when my ears report no beauty to me. He had no original emotion or thought: whenever his music is good it will be found that he has derived the emotion from a poem, or else that there is no emotion but only very fine decorative work. In most of his bigger works—the symphonies, the German Requiem, the Serious songs he wrote in his later days—he sacrificed the beauty he might have attained to the expression of emotions he never felt; he assumed the pose and manner of a master telling us great things, and talked like a pompous duffer. An exception must be made: one emotion Brahms had felt and did communicate. It was his tragedy that he had no original emotion, no rich inner life, but lived through the days on the merely prosaic plane; and he seems to have felt that this was his tragedy. Anyhow, the one original emotion he brought into music is a curious mournful dissatisfaction with life and with death. The only piece of his I know in which the feeling is intolerably poignant, seems to cut like a knife, is his setting of that sad song of Goethe's about the evening wind dashing the vine leaves and the raindrops against the window pane; and in this song, as also in the movement in one of the quartets



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evolved from the song, the mournfulness becomes absolutely pitiable despair. Brahms was not cast in the big mould, and he spent a good deal of his later time in pitying himself. It is curious that one of his last works was the batch of Serious songs, which consist of dismal meditations on the darkness and dirt of the grave and feebly-felt hopes that there is something better on the other side. That does not strike one as in the vein of the big men.

Much of Brahms' music is bad and ugly music, dead music; it is a counterfeit and not the true and perfect image of life indeed; and it should be buried or cremated at the earliest opportunity. But much of it is wonderfully beautiful—almost but never quite as beautiful as the great men at their best. There are passages in the Tragic overture that any composer might be proud to have written. If the opening of the D symphony is thin, unreal, an attempt at pastoral gaiety which has resulted merely in lack of character, at anyrate the second theme is delightful; if the opening of the slow movement is also twaddle, there are pleasant passages later on; the dainty allegretto is as fresh and fragrant as a wild rose; and the finale, though void of significance, is full of an energy rare in Brahms. Then there are many of the songs in which Brahms' astonishing felicity of phrase, and his astounding trick of finding expression for an emotion when the emotion has been given to him, enable him almost to work miracles. And it must be remembered that all his music is irreproachable from the technical point of view. Brahms is certainly with Bach, Mozart, and Wagner in point of musicianship: in fact, these four might be called the greatest masters of sheer music who have lived. A Brahms score is as wonderful as a Wagner score; from beginning to end there is not a misplaced note nor a trace of weakness; and one stands amazed before the consummate workmanship of the thing. The only difference between the Wagner score and the Brahms score is, that while the former is always alive, always the product of a fervent inner life, the latter is sometimes alive too, but more frequently as dead as a door-mat, the product of extreme facility and (I must suppose) an extraordinary inherited musical instinct divorced from exalted thought and feeling. The difference may be felt when you compare a Brahms and a Tschaikowsky symphony. Although in his later years Tschaikowsky acquired a mastery of the technique of music, and succeeded in keeping his scores clear and clean, he never arrived at anything approaching Brahms' certainty of touch, and neither his scoring nor his counterpoint has Brahms' perfection of workmanship. Yet one listens to Tschaikowsky, for the present at least, with intense pleasure, and wants to listen again. I have yet to meet anyone who pretends to have received any intense pleasure from a Brahms symphony.

Brahms is dead; the old floods of adulation will no longer be poured forth by the master's disciples; neither will the enemies his friends made for him have any reason to depreciate his music; and ultimately it will be possible to form a fair, unbiassed judgment on him. This is a mere casual utterance, by the way.



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ANTON DVORAK

I remember the Philharmonic in its glory one evening, when it had a couple of distinguished foreigners to a kind of musical high tea, very bourgeois, very long and very indigestible. One of the pair of distinguished foreigners was Mr. Sauer; the other, Dvorak, was the hero of the evening. Now, whatever one may think of Dvorak the musician, it is impossible to feel anything but sympathy and admiration for Dvorak the man. His early struggles to overcome the attendant disadvantages of his peasant birth; his unheard-of labours to acquire a mastery of the technique of his art when body and brain were exhausted by the work of earning his daily bread in a very humble capacity; his sickening years of waiting, not for popular recognition merely, but for an opportunity of showing that he had any gifts worthy of being recognised,—these command the sympathy of all but those happy few who have found life a most delicate feather-bed. Dvorak has honestly worked for all that has come to him, and the only people who will carp or sneer at him are those who have gained or wish to gain their positions without honest work. There could be no conjecture wider of the mark than that of his success being due to any charlatan tricks in his music or in his conduct of life. No composer's music—not Bach's, nor Haydn's, nor even Mozart's—could be a more veracious expression of his inner nature; and if Dvorak's music is at times odd and whimsical, and persistently wrong-headed and *outré* through long passages, it does not mean that Dvorak is trying to impress or startle his hearers by doing unusual things, but merely that he himself is odd and whimsical and has his periods of persistent wrong-headedness. He is Slav in every fibre—not a pseudo-Slav whose ancestors were or deserved to be whipped out of the temple in Jerusalem. He has all the Slav's impetuosity and hot blood, his love of glaring and noisy colour, his love of sheer beauty of a certain limited kind, and—alas!—his unfailing brainlessness. His impetuosity and hot blood are manifested in his frequent furious rhythms and the abrupt changes in those rhythms; his love of colour in the quality of his instrumentation, with its incessant contrasts and use of the drums, cymbals, and triangle; his sense of beauty in the terribly weird splendour of his pictures, and its limitations in his rare achievement of anything fine when once he passes out of the region of the weird and terrible; his brainlessness in his inability to appreciate the value of a strong sinewy theme, in the lack of proportion between the different movements of his works and between the sections of the movements, and, perhaps more than in any other way, in his unhappy choice of subjects for vocal works. One stands amazed before the spectacle of the man who made that prodigious success with the awful legend of "The Spectre's Bride" coming forward, smiling in childlike confidence, with "Saint



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Ludmila," which was so awful in another fashion. And then, as if not content with nearly ruining his reputation by that deadly blow, he must needs follow up "Saint Ludmila" with the dreariest, dullest, most poverty-stricken Requiem ever written by a musician with any gift of genuine invention. These mistakes might indicate mere want of tact did not the qualities of Dvorak's music show them to be the result of sheer want of intellect; and if the defects of his music are held by some to be intentional beauties, no such claim can be set up for the opinions on music which he has on various occasions confided to the ubiquitous interviewer. The Slav is an interesting creature, and his music is interesting, not because he is higher than the Western man, but because he is different, and, if anything, lower, with a considerable touch of the savage. When Dvorak is himself, and does not pass outside the boundaries within which he can breathe freely, he produces results so genuine and powerful that one might easily mistake him for a great musician; but when he competes with Beethoven or Handel or Haydn, we at once realise that he is not expressing what he really feels, but what he thinks he should feel, that he is not at his ease, and that our native men can beat him clean out of the field. To be sure, they can at times be as dull as he, but that is when they forget the lesson they should before now have learnt from him, when they leave the field in which they work with real enjoyment and produce results which may be enjoyed.

TSCHAIKOWSKY AND HIS "PATHETIC" SYMPHONY

A very little while since, Tschaikowsky was little more than a name in England. He had visited us some two or three times, and it was generally believed that he composed; but he had not written any piece without which no orchestral programme could be considered complete, and the mere suggestion that his place might possibly be far above Gounod would certainly have been received with open derision. However, when his fame became great and spread wide on the Continent, he became so important a man in the eyes of English musicians that Cambridge University thought fit to honour itself by offering him an honorary musical degree. Tschaikowsky, simple soul, good-humouredly accepted it, apparently in entire ignorance of the estimation in which such cheap decorations are held in this country; and it is to be hoped that before his death he obtained a hearing in Russia for the Cambridge professor's music. The incident, comical as it appeared to those of us who knew the value of musical degrees, the means by which they are obtained, and the reasons for which they are conferred, yet served a useful purpose by calling public attention to the fact that there was living a man who had written music that was fresh, a trifle strange perhaps, but full of vitality, and containing a new throb, a new thrill. Since 1893 his reputation has steadily grown, but in



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a curious way. One can scarcely say with truth that Tschaikowsky is popular: only his "Pathetic" symphony and one or two smaller things are popular. Had he not written the "Pathetic," one may doubt whether he would be much better known to-day than he was in 1893. It caught the public fancy as no other work of his caught it, and on the strength of its popularity many of the critics do not hesitate to call it a great symphony, and on the strength of the symphony Tschaikowsky a great composer. (For in England criticism largely means saying what the public thinks.) Passionately though that symphony is admired, hardly any other of his music can be truly said to get a hearing; for, on the rare occasions when it is played, the public thoughtfully stays away. It is true that the Casse Noisette suite is always applauded, but it is a trifling work compared with his best. Tschaikowsky shares with Gray and one or two others in ancient and modern times the distinction of being famous by a single achievement. The public is jealous for the supremacy of that achievement, and will not hear of there being another equal to it.

Whether the public is right or wrong, and whether we all are or are not just a little inclined to-day to exaggerate Tschaikowsky's gifts and the value of his music, there can be no doubt whatever that he was a singularly fine craftsman, who brought into music a number of fresh and living elements. He seems to me to have been an extraordinary combination of the barbarian and the civilised man, of the Slav and the Latin or Teuton, the Slav barbarian preponderating. He saw things as neither Slav nor Latin nor Teuton had seen them before; the touch of things aroused in him moods dissimilar from those that had been aroused in anyone before. Hence, while we English regard him as a representative Russian, or at anyrate Slav, composer, many Russians repudiate him, calling him virtually a Western. He has the Slav fire, rash impetuosity, passion and intense melancholy, and much also of that Slav naivete which in the case of Dvorak degenerates into sheer brainlessness; he has an Oriental love of a wealth of extravagant embroidery, of pomp and show and masses of gorgeous colour; but the other, what I might call the Western, civilised element in his character, showed itself in his lifelong striving to get into touch with contemporary thought, to acquire a full measure of modern culture, and to curb his riotous, lawless impulse towards mere sound and fury. It is this unique fusion of apparently mutually destructive elements and instincts that gives to Tschaikowsky's music much of its novelty and piquancy. But, apart from this uncommon fusion, it must be remembered that his was an original mind—original not only in colour but in its very structure. Had he been pure Slav, or pure Latin, his music might have been very different, but it would certainly have been original. He had true creative imagination, a fund of original, underived emotion, and a copiousness



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of invention almost as great as Wagner's or Mozart's. His power of evolving new decorative patterns of a fantastic beauty seemed quite inexhaustible; and the same may be said of his schemes and combinations and shades of colour, and the architectural plans and forms of his larger works. It is true that his forms frequently enough approach formlessness; that his colours—and especially in his earlier music—are violent and inharmonious; and that in his ceaseless invention of new patterns his Slav naivete and lack of humour led him more than a hundred times to write unintentionally comic passages. He is discursive—I might say voluble. Again, he had little or no real strength—none of the massive, healthy strength of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Wagner: his force is sheer hysteria. He is wanting in the deepest and tenderest human feeling. He is plausible to a degree that leads one to suspect his sincerity, and certainly leaves it an open question how long a great deal of his music will stand after this generation, to which it appeals so strongly, has passed away. But when all that may fairly be said against him has been said and given due weight, the truth remains that he is one of the few great composers of this century. I myself, in all humility, allowing fully that I may be altogether wrong, while convinced that I am absolutely right, deliberately set him far above Brahms, above Gounod, above Schumann—above all save Beethoven, Weber, Schubert, and Wagner. His accomplishment as a sheer musician was greater than either Gounod's or Schumann's, though far from being equal to Brahms'—for Brahms as a master of the management of notes stands with the highest, with Bach, Mozart, and Wagner; while as a voice and a new force in music neither Brahms nor Schumann nor Gounod can be compared with him other than unfavourably. All that are sensitive to music can feel, as I have said, the new throb, the new thrill; and that decides the matter.

It is now a long time since Mr. Henry Wood, one winter's afternoon, the only Englishman who may be ranked with the great continental conductors, gave a Tschaikowsky concert, with a programme that included some of the earlier as well as one or two of the later works. It served to show how hard and how long Tschaikowsky laboured to attain to lucidity of expression, and why the "Pathetic" symphony is popular while the other compositions are not. In all of them we find infinite invention and blazes of Eastern magnificence and splendour; but in the earlier things there is little of the order and clarity of the later ones. Another and a more notable point is that in not one thing played at this concert might the human note be heard. The suite (Op. 55) and the symphony (Op. 36) are full of novel and dazzling effects—for example, the scherzo of the symphony played mainly by the strings pizzicato, and the scherzo of the suite, with the short, sharp notes of the brass and the rattle of the side-drum; the melodies also are new, and in



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their way beautiful; in form both symphony and suite are nearly as clear as anything Tschaikowsky wrote: in fact, each work is a masterwork. But each is lacking in the human element, and without the human element no piece of music can be popular for long. The fame of Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, is still growing and will continue to grow, because every time we hear their music it touches us; while Weber, mighty though he is, will probably never be better loved than he is to-day, because his marvellously graphic picturesque music does not touch us—cannot, was not intended to, touch us; and the fame of Mendelssohn and the host of lesser men who did not speak with a human accent of human woe and weal wanes from day to day. The composer who writes purely decorative music, or purely picturesque music, may be remembered as long as he who expresses human feeling; but he cannot hope to be loved by so many. It is because Tschaikowsky has so successfully put his own native emotions, his own aspirations and hopes and fears and sorrows, into the “Pathetic,” that I believe it has come to stay with us, while many of his other works will fade from the common remembrance. Surely it is one of the most mournful things in music; yet surely sadness was never uttered with a finer grace, with a more winning carelessness, as one who tries to smile gaily at his own griefs. Were it touched with the finest tenderness, as Mozart might have touched it, we might—if we could once get thoroughly accustomed to a few of the unintentionally humorous passages I have referred to—have it set by the side of the G minor and “Jupiter” symphonies. As it is, it unmistakably falls short of Mozart by lacking that tenderness, just as it falls short of Beethoven by lacking profundity of emotion and thought; but it does not always fall so far short. There are passages in it that neither Beethoven nor Mozart need have been ashamed to own as theirs; and especially there is much in it that is in the very spirit of Mozart—Mozart as we find him in the Requiem, rather than the Mozart of “Don Giovanni” or the “Figaro.” The opening bars are, of course, ultramodern: they would never have been written had not Wagner written something like them first; but the combination of poignancy and lightness and poise with which the same phrase is delivered and expanded as the theme for the allegro is quite Mozartean, and the same may be said of the semiquaver passage following it. The outbursts of Slavonic fire are, of course, Tschaikowsky pure and simple; but everyone who hears the symphony may note how the curious union of barbarism with modern culture is manifest in the ease with which Tschaikowsky recovers himself after one of these outbursts—turns it aside, so to speak, instead of giving it free play after the favourite plan both of Borodine the great and purely Russian composer, and Dvorak the little Hungarian composer. The second theme does not appear to me equal to the rest of the symphony.



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It has that curious volubility and “mouthing” quality that sometimes gets into Tschaikowsky’s music; it is plausible and pretty; it suggests a writer who either cannot or dare not use the true tremendous word at the proper moment, and goes on delivering himself of journalistic stock-phrases which he knows will move those who would be left unmoved were the right word spoken. There is nothing of this in the melody of the second movement. Its ease is matched by its poignancy: the very happy-go-lucky swing of it adds to its poignancy; and the continuation—another instance of the untamed Slav under the influence of the most finished culture—has a wild beauty, and at the same time communicates the emotion more clearly than speech could. The mere fact that it is written in five-four time counts for little—nothing is easier than to write in five-four time when once you have got the trick; the remarkable thing is the skill and tact with which Tschaikowsky has used precisely the best rhythm he could have chosen—a free, often ambiguous, rhythm—to express that particular shade of feeling. The next movement is one of the most astounding ever conceived. Beginning like an airy scherzo, presently a march rhythm is introduced, and before one has realised the state of affairs we are in the midst of a positive tornado of passion. The first tunes then resume; but again they are dismissed, and it becomes apparent that the march theme is the real theme of the whole movement—that all the others are intended simply to lead up to it, or to form a frame in which it is set. It comes in again and again with ever greater and greater clamour, until it seems to overwhelm one altogether. There is no real strength in it—the effect is entirely the result of nervous energy, of sheer hysteria; but as an expression of an uncontrollable hysterical mood it stands alone in music. It should be observed that even here Tschaikowsky’s instinctive tendency to cover the intensity of his mood with a pretence of carelessness had led him to put this enormous outburst into a rhythm that, otherwise used, would be irresistibly jolly. The last movement, too, verges on the hysterical throughout. It is full of the blackest melancholy and despondency, with occasional relapses into a tranquillity even more tragic; and the trombone passage near the end, introduced by a startling stroke on the gong, inevitably reminds one of the spirit of Mozart’s Requiem.

The whole of this paper might have been devoted to a discussion of the technical side of Tschaikowsky’s music, for the score of this symphony is one of the most interesting I know. It is full of astonishing points, of ingenious dodges used not for their own sake, but to produce, as here they nearly always do, particular effects; and throughout, the part-writing, the texture of the music, is most masterly and far beyond anything Tschaikowsky achieved before. For instance, the opening of the last movement has puzzled some good critics, for it is written in a



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way which seems like a mere perverse and wasted display of skill. But let anyone imagine for a moment the solid, leaden, lifeless result of letting all the parts descend together, instead of setting them, as Tschaikowsky does, twisting round each other, and it will at once be perceived that Tschaikowsky never knew better what he was doing, or was more luckily inspired, than when he devised the arrangement that now stands. Much as I should like to have debated dozens of such points, it is perhaps better, after all, just now to have talked principally of the content of Tschaikowsky's music; for, when all is said, in Tschaikowsky's music it is the content that counts. I might describe that content as modern, were it not that the phrase means little. Tschaikowsky is modern because he is new; and in this age, when the earth has grown narrow, and tales of far-off coasts and unexplored countries seem wonderful no longer, we throw ourselves with eagerness upon the new thing, in five minutes make it our own, and hail the inventor of it as the man who has said for us what we had all felt for years. Nevertheless, it may be that Tschaikowsky's attitude towards life, and especially towards its sorrows,—the don't-care-a-hang attitude,—is modern; and anyhow, in the sense that it is so new that we seize it first amongst a hundred other things, this symphony is the most modern piece of music we have. It is imbued with a romanticism beside which the romanticism of Weber and Wagner seems a little thin-blooded and pallid; it expresses for us the emotions of the over-excited and over-sensitive man as they have not been expressed since Mozart; and at the present time we are quite ready for a new and less Teutonic romanticism than Weber's, and to enter at once into the feelings of the brain-tired man. That the "Pathetic" will for long continue to grow in popularity I also fully expect; and that after this generation has hurried away it will continue to have a large measure of popularity I also fully expect, for in it, together with much that appeals only to us unhealthy folk of to-day, there is much that will appeal to the race, no matter how healthy it may become, so long as it remains human in its desires and instincts.

LAMOUREUX AND HIS ORCHESTRA

Richter and Mottl, the only considerable conductors besides Lamoureux whom we had heard in England up to 1896, may be compared with a couple of organists who come here, expecting to find their instruments ready, in fair working order, and accurately in tune. Lamoureux, on the other hand, was like Sarasate and Ysaye, who would be reduced to utter discomfiture if their Strads were to stray on the road. He played on his own instrument—the orchestra on which he had practised day by day for so many years. Richter and Mottl took their instruments as they found them, and devoted the comparatively short time they had for rehearsal to the business of getting their



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main intentions broadly carried out, leaving a good deal of minor detail to look after itself, and not complaining if a few notes fell under the desks at the back of the orchestra. Lamoureux had laboriously rehearsed every inch of his repertory until it was note-perfect, and each of his men knew the precise bowing, phrasing, degree of piano or forte, and tempo of every minutest phrase. Now I do not mean by this that the orchestras on which Richter and Mottl performed played many wrong notes, while the Lamoureux orchestra played none; and still less do I mean that Lamoureux got finer results than Richter or Mottl. So far as the mere notes are concerned, the Englishmen who played for the German conductors acquitted themselves quite as well as the Frenchmen who played for Lamoureux. Both made mistakes at times; and a seemingly paradoxical thing is that when a Lamoureux man stumbled all the world was bound to hear it, whereas in our English orchestras a score of mistakes might be made in an evening without many of us being much the wiser. The reason for this is the reason why the playing of Lamoureux on his trained orchestra, for all its accuracy, was not better than, nor in many respects so good as, the playing of Richter and Mottl on the scratch orchestras which their agents engaged for them. Probably few uninformed laymen have any notion of the extent to which mere noise is responsible for the total effect of a Wagner piece or a Beethoven symphony—not the noise of big drum, cymbals and so on; but the continuous slight discords caused by some of the players being various degrees in front and others various degrees behind; the scratching produced by uncertain bowing, or by an unfortunate fiddler finding himself a little behind the general body (as he does sometimes) and making a savage rush to catch it up; the hissing of panting flautists; and the barnyard noises produced by exhausted oboe-players. Even with Richter, stolid and trustworthy though he is, these unauthorised sounds count for a great deal; and with a conductor like Mottl, who varies the tempo freely in obedience to his mood in the most rapid pieces, they count for very much more. They result in a continuous murmur which, so to speak, fills the interstices in the network of the music, covering wrong notes, and giving the mass of tone a richness and unity which otherwise it would lack. In such movements as the Finale of the Fifth symphony this continuous murmur does the work done for the piano by the upper strings without dampers and the lower ones when the pedal is pressed down; it gives solidity and colour to the music; and certainly half the effect in fine renderings of “The Flying Dutchman” overture, the Walkuerenritt, and the Fire-music, is due to it. But Lamoureux’s men had practised so long together under their conductor’s beat that all the instruments played like one instrument, no matter how the tempo was varied; the bowing of each passage had been considered and finally settled,



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so that there was no uncertainty there; and in the course of long rehearsal every wind-player had learned precisely where he must breathe, where he must reserve his breath, and where he could let himself go, so that the tone of flutes, oboes, clarinets, and bassoons never became in the smallest degree forced or hoarse. And the result of this was the entire absence of that murmur which one has come to regard as characteristic of the orchestra. If a wrong note was played, there was nothing to hide its nakedness. It was as though a penetrating flood of cold white light were poured upon the music and made it transparent: one perceived every remotest and least significant detail with a vivid distinctness that can only be compared with a page of print seen through a strong magnifying glass, or, perhaps better still, with a photograph seen through a stereoscope. As in a stereoscope, the outlines were defined with a degree of clearness and sharpness that almost hurt the eye; as in a stereoscope, there was neither colour nor suggestiveness. An orchestral virtuoso, like a piano or violin virtuoso, may over-practise.

Having delivered this verdict with all solemnity, I must straightway proceed to hedge. If Lamoureux had not the qualities which give Richter and Mottl their pre-eminence, he had qualities which they do not possess, and his playing had qualities which one cannot find in theirs. If he had not absolutely a genius for music, he certainly had a genius for attaining perfection in all he did, which was perhaps the next best thing. I imagine that he would have made a mouse-trap or built a cathedral exactly as he played a Beethoven symphony. The mouse would never escape from the trap; there would be nothing wanting, down to the most modern appliances and conveniences, in the cathedral. In the Fifth symphony he gave us every minute nuance in rigid obedience to the composer's directions or evident intentions, and gave them with a fastidious care strangely in contrast with Mottl's rough-and-ready brilliancy or Richter's breadth. He began every crescendo on the precise note where Beethoven marked it to begin; and he gradated it with geometrical faultlessness to the exact note where Beethoven marked it to cease. In diminuendos and accelerandos and ritenutos he was just as faithful. In the softer portions his sforzandos were not irrelevant explosions, but slight extra accents: he made microscopic distinctions between piano and pianissimo; he achieved the most difficult feat of keeping his band at a level forte through long passages without a symptom of breaking out into fortissimo. His players treated the stiffest passages in the "Dutchman" overture as if they were baby's play; and I detected hardly a wrong note either in that or in the Fifth symphony. In a word, nothing to compare with the technical perfection of his renderings, or his unswerving loyalty to the composer, has been heard in London in my time. Yet, by reason of that



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very prodigious correctness, the “Dutchman” overture seemed bare and comparatively lifeless: the roar and the hiss of the storm were absent, and the shrill discordant wail of wind in the cordage; one heard, not the wail or the hiss or the roar, but the notes which—in our crude scale with its arbitrary division into tones and half-tones—Wagner had perforce to use to suggest them. There was even something of flippancy in it after Mottl’s gigantic rendering: one longed for the dramatic hanging back of the time at the phrase, “Doch ach! den Tod, ich fand ihn nicht!” which is of such importance in the overture. On the other hand, a more splendid reading of the first movement of the Fifth symphony I have never heard; but the rest of the movements were hardly to be called readings at all. The most devoted admirers of Lamoureux—and I was his fairly devoted admirer myself—will not deny that the slow movement is full of poetry, the scherzo of a remote, mystical emotion, and the Finale of a wondrous combination of sadness, regret and high triumphant joy; and anyone who claims that Lamoureux gave us the slightest hint of those qualities must be more than his admirer—must be his infatuated slave. The last movement even wanted richness; for that excessive clearness which prevented the tones blending into masses, and forced one to distinguish the separate notes of the flutes, the oboes, the clarinets, and so forth, seemed to rob the music of all its body, its solidity. But, when all is said, Lamoureux was, in his special way, a noble master of the orchestra; and, even if I could not regard him as a great interpreter of the greatest music, I admit that the side of the great music which he revealed was well worth knowing, and should indeed be known to all who would understand the great music.

When I wrote the preceding paragraphs on Lamoureux, some of my colleagues were good enough to neglect their own proper business while they put me right about orchestral playing in general and that of Lamoureux in particular. These gentlemen told me that, when Beethoven (whom they knew personally) wrote certain notes, he intended them and no others to be played; that the more accurate a rendering, the closer it approaches to the work as it existed in Beethoven’s mind; that, ergo, Lamoureux’s playing of Beethoven, being the most accurate yet heard in England, was the best, the truest, the most Beethovenish yet heard in England. All which I flatly deny, and describe as the foolish ravings of uninformed theorists. Only unpractical dreamers fancy that a composer thinks of “notes” when he composes. He hears music with his mental ear in the first place, and he afterwards sets down such notes as experience has taught him will reproduce approximately what he has heard when they are played upon the instrument for which his composition is intended, whether the instrument is piano, violin, the human voice, or orchestra. And just as he counts on the harmonics and sympathetic



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vibrations of the upper strings of the piano for the proper effect of a piano sonata, so for the effect of an orchestral work he relies on the full rich tone and the subdued murmur, which are only produced by the members of the orchestra playing a little wrong. That they play wrong in a million different ways does not matter: provided they do not play too far wrong the result is always the same, just as the characteristic sound of an excited crowd is always the same whether there are a few more men or fewer women in one crowd than in another. This may be wrong theoretically; but all theorising breaks down hopelessly before the fact that it was such an orchestra the masters wrote for. Perhaps some day the foot-rule, the metronome, and the tuning-fork will take the place of the human ear and artistic judgment; but until that day arrives I prefer the wrongness of Mottl's orchestra to the strict correctness which Lamoureux used to give us; and I leave the aesthetic illogical logic-choppers, who demand from the orchestra the correctness they would not stand from a solo-player, to find what delight they may in such playing as Lamoureux's used to be in the "Meistersinger" overture, or the "Waldweben," or the Good Friday music. It must be remembered, however, that the excessive correctness of which I have complained was only one of the means through which Lamoureux attained excessive lucidity. He sacrificed every other quality to lucidity; and those who preferred lucidity to every other quality—that is to say, all Frenchmen—naturally preferred Lamoureux's playing to that of any other conductor. In the "Meistersinger" overture he would not allow the band to romp freely for a single moment; in the "Waldweben" he succeeded in playing every crescendo, every diminuendo, with astonishing evenness of gradation, even when a trifling irregularity to relieve the mechanical stiffness of the thing would have been as water to a thirsty traveller in the desert; in the Good Friday music he stuck rigidly to the composer's directions, and would not permit a breath of his own life to go into the music. In Berlioz's "Chasse et Orage" (from "Les Troyens") and a movement from the "Romeo and Juliet" symphony, he manifested the same qualities as when he played Beethoven and Wagner. His playing wanted colour, suggestiveness, and human warmth; and, lacking these, its chill clearness, its cleanness and sharp-cut edges, merely made one think of an iceberg glittering in a wan Arctic sunlight. Still he was a notable man; and his death robbed France of her one perfectly sincere musician.