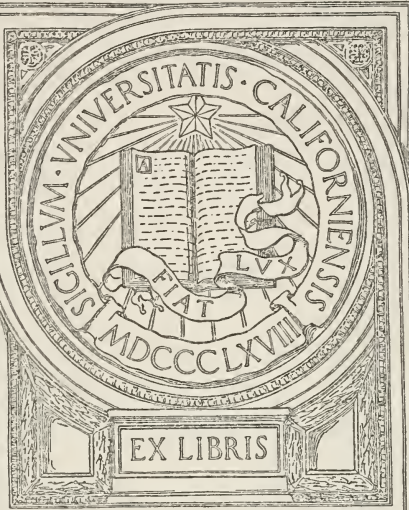


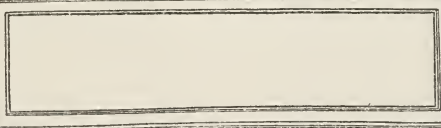
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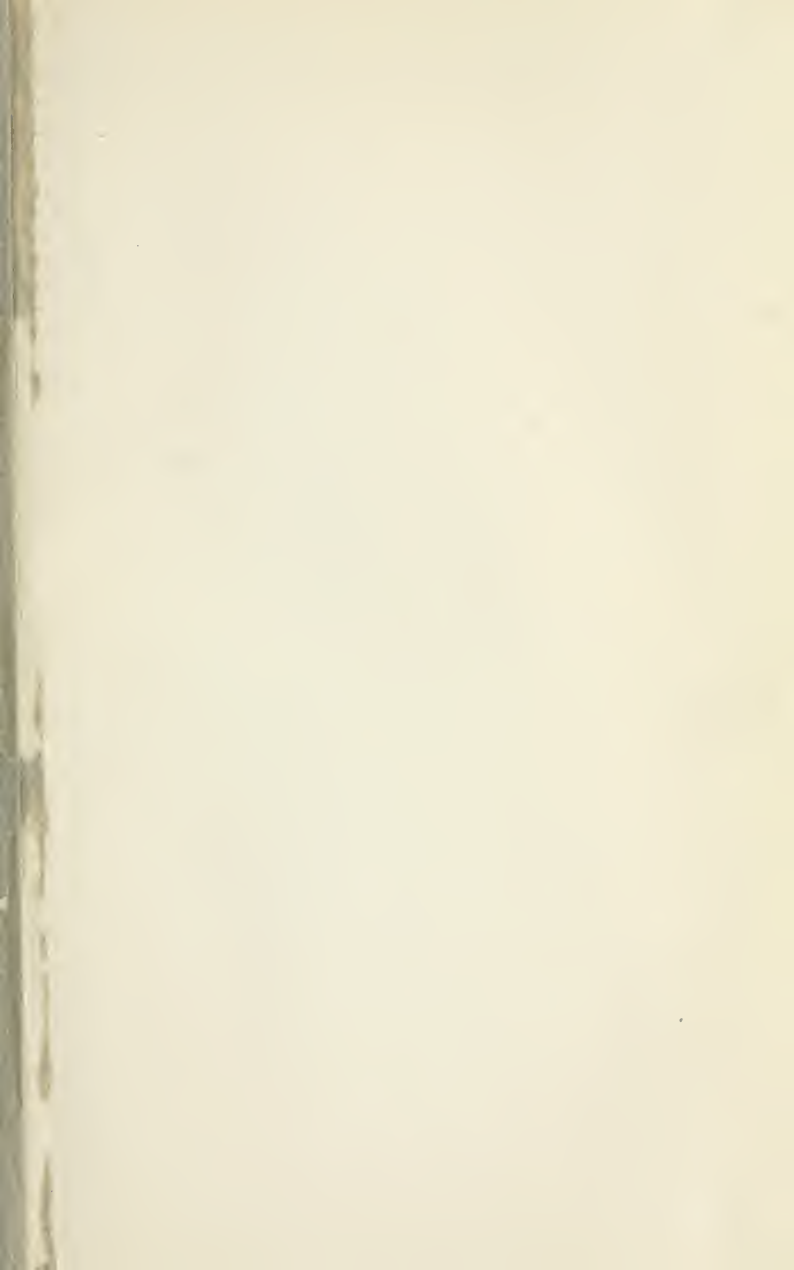


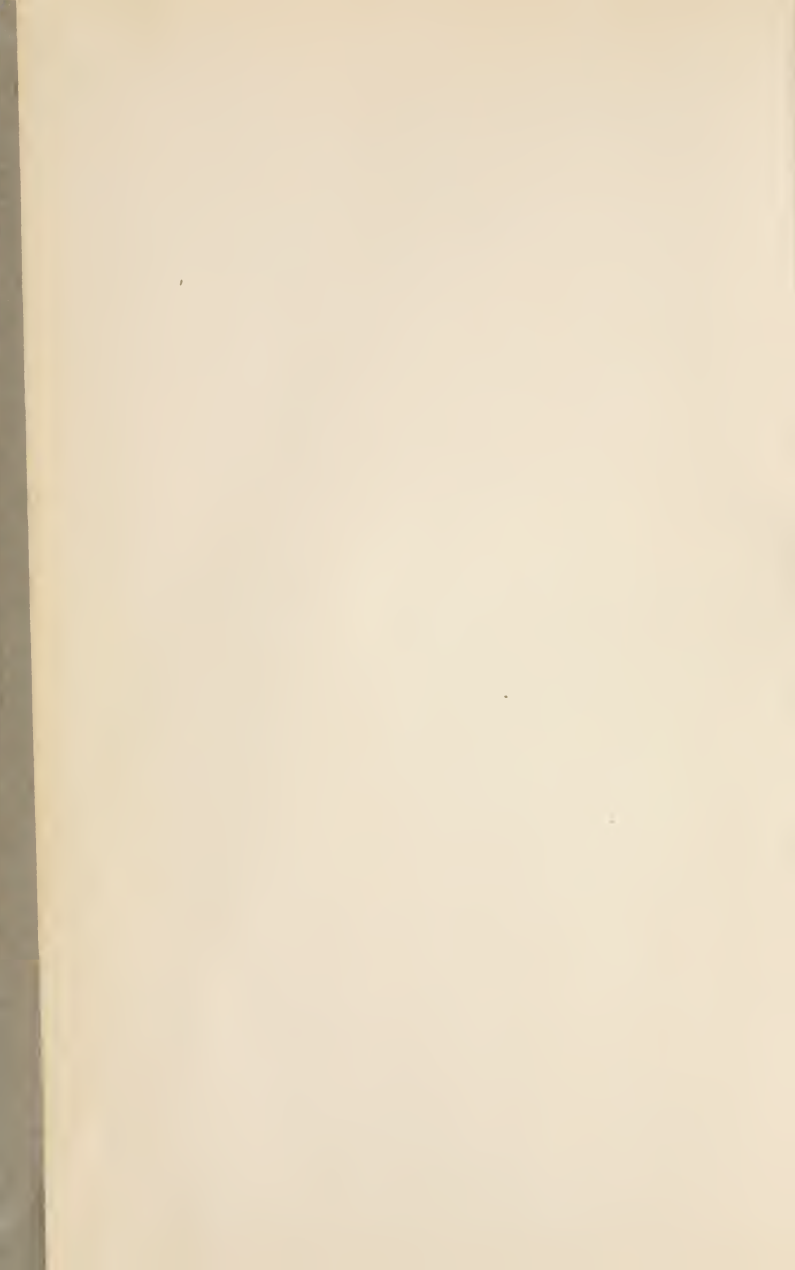
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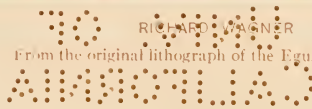
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RICHARD WAGNER

From the original lithograph of the Egusquiza portrait



Richard Wagner

THE · MAN · AND · HIS · WORK · BY

Oliver Huckel



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PREFACE

PROFESSOR WILLIAM LYON PHELPS of Yale has recently written: "The book that I have most enjoyed reading in 1913 is Richard Wagner's autobiography, — 'The Story of My Life.' I have enjoyed reading it, because it shows what tremendous difficulties Wagner encountered, what suffering he had to pass through, and yet how in the end genius overcame everything. It is also an inspiring work to read because it shows how a man can remain true to an ideal, and can actually prefer failure in the pursuit of the ideal to success accompanied with compromise."

Now this "Story of My Life" is the book of all others that I would advise those to read who would know Wagner thoroughly, the authorized translation of which is published in America by Dodd, Mead & Co., New York, 1911. This is a wonderful book in the intimacy and frankness of its revelations. It is fascinating reading. It shows a great soul with many weaknesses and failings, but it reveals also what an intellectual vigor and a steadfast purpose can accomplish in this world.

Since many readers, however, will not find these full and costly volumes available, nor the yet more extensive volumes of Carl Friedrich Glasenapp, the standard German biography, this smaller hand-book has been written for general readers, using the chief facts in these larger volumes, but also giving a fresh inter-

Preface pretation, and the viewpoints of many careful critics.

All that is claimed for this volume is clarity of view, accuracy of statement, and simplicity of treatment.

The biographer Glasenapp requires four volumes of nearly five hundred pages each to relate the events of Wagner's life, and in addition to this main biography, a vast library of related material has grown up, while the controversial pamphlets inspired by Wagner's work are as innumerable as the autumn leaves at Vallambrosa.

What we shall aim to do in this present sketch and study is to set forth a few clear outlines of Wagner's life from this enormous mass of writings. The complete and exhaustive biographies, such as the classic work on the life of Richard Wagner by Glasenapp, and the very full biographical essay and study of Richard Wagner by Houston Stewart Chamberlain, are invaluable to all students of the life and work of Wagner. This present sketch, however, purposes to be not a full biography, nor an extended study, but rather a brief and graphic picture of a great life and a great work, showing something of the inner spirit of the man, a clear outline of the outward events of his career, but above all the place and meaning of it for his day and generation, and for the whole world. We hope to trace in brief his mental and spiritual development, and to discover something of the revelation of his rare and unique genius, and of his true significance in

the world of music, literature, and dramatic art.

Much may be said by those who cannot understand the inconsistencies of great men concerning the vast contrasts in Wagner's life. Nevertheless, we shall show, I think, even in this brief sketch, the unswerving integrity of the man. However seemingly inconsistent certain phases of his life might have been, at heart he was absolutely sincere. He felt himself sincere as he knew his inmost nature. He wrote in one of his private letters: "He who accuses me of insincerity must answer for it to God." He really illustrated in his life what Carlyle has said: "Of the great man it is incredible he should have been other than true. Sincerity, a deep, great, genuine sincerity, is the first characteristic of all men in any way heroic."

We shall also discover, when we study Wagner's life in its details, that he made some grievous mistakes; that he possessed many of the idiosyncrasies of great natures; that his lofty intellect was at times hedged in by very peculiar limitations; and yet we cannot escape the fact that there is an essential greatness in the man of which he himself felt conscious and by which he was himself at times dazzled and overwhelmed. As we follow the story of his work with frank and sincere sympathy, making due allowances for manifest limitations, we may enter into something of the open secret of his wonderful life, and we shall gain acquaintance with a man and a career whose depths and heights will inevitably enrich our own lives.

I am persuaded by experience that the best

Preface way in which one can fully and certainly understand Wagner and his ideals is to witness the performance of his great festival works in their native environment at Bayreuth. However faithfully and magnificently the works may be rendered in Paris, London, New York, Boston, or Chicago, there is something of subtle atmosphere lost in transmission which can be found only in that home of the drama, consecrated to the great composer's life and memory.

I count it a rare privilege to have studied German literature with Professor Eric Schmidt in my student days at Berlin, and to have heard the whole world of Wagner's music-dramas at Berlin, Dresden, Munich, and certain of the great festival plays, especially Parsifal, at Bayreuth. It has been a singular pleasure to have visited the little court theatre at Weimar, with all its associations of Goethe and Schiller and Liszt, where some of Wagner's works were given their first hearing; to have sought out the special scenes of the legends along the Rhine, such as the Lohengrin town of Cleves, where the Swan-Castle still crowns the hill and an ancient statue of Lohengrin stands in the market-place; to have visited some of King Ludwig's splendid palaces with their mural decorations of Wagner's great themes; and, finally, to have met Frau Cosima Wagner and the famous son Siegfried at Bayreuth, and to have stood at Wahnfried at the sacred shrine,—the mighty composer's hallowed grave.

Wagner opened a new world to me. I remember as if it were yesterday how wonderful it all

seemed when I had my first revelation of it. It came to me late, at the age of thirty, and at Berlin, but it was the discovery of a new firmament, a new heaven and a new earth, a new universe. The wonder of it all has not diminished with the years. For the last ten years it has been my pleasure to devote myself to making an adequate literary translation of his great music-dramas, one each year, and this careful study has given me intimate and inspiring acquaintance with Wagner's work, and, I believe, fuller insight into the man himself.

Those who wish still fuller treatments of the life of Wagner, besides those that I have already mentioned, may consult Muncker, who has furnished excellent material for the historian; Richard Pohl, who writes for people of culture; Ludwig Nohl, who gives the portrayal of sentiment in his life; Bernhard Vogel, who writes a biography for musicians; and Pater Schmid, whose work has its own special value. These are some of the chief German biographies. There is also much to be learned from the *Personal Recollections of Wagner* by Angelo Neumann, translated by E. Livermore, published by Henry Holt & Co., 1908.

In English many turn instinctively to the volumes, — *Wagner and His Works* by Henry T. Finck; the *Art Life and Theories of Richard Wagner*, translated by Edward L. Burlingame; and the excellent study of Wagner by C. A. Lidgey, while the well-known volumes, *Studies in the Wagnerian Drama* by H. E. Krehbiel, *Richard Wagner: His Life and His Dra-*

Preface mas by W. J. Henderson, Wagner's Life and Works by Gustave Kobbe, and special studies by other musical critics must not be neglected. Dannreuthers has an excellent sketch in Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians.

In French the work of Professor Albert Lavignac, Professor of Harmony at the Conservatoire of Paris, is most admirable. The two volumes on Richard Wagner by Adolphe Jullien, translation by F. P. Hall, published by Knight & Millet, Boston, 1900, are also most interesting.

No one who desires a more intimate knowledge of Wagner and his work must neglect the writings of Franz Liszt and Friedrich Nietzsche. Liszt gave us some remarkable writings in interpretation of Wagner's drama and music. For more than forty years he was an enthusiastic interpreter of Wagner. He wrote: "My joy consists in feeling with him and following him." Nietzsche wrote a remarkable little classic on "Richard Wagner in Bayreuth." It is full of a noble enthusiasm, a fine judgment, and a finished beauty. Afterward this brilliant critic underwent a change of mind and heart concerning Wagner, probably by reason of the maladies that clouded his intellect. Nevertheless, we feel that this earlier special pamphlet represents his true genius and his clearest judgment. In reading the standard biography of Wagner by Glasenapp, we must remember that he writes as an enthusiastic disciple and admirer. This must be taken into account. As a study of his life, it reveals a wonderful industry and trustworthiness. It is the most

detailed biography yet written. It is minutely accurate, using original documents and making a critical sifting of all evidence. This monumental work, the first volume of which appeared in 1894, is the foundation of all subsequent biographies from different hands. An English translation by W. Ashton Ellis, published by Messrs. Kegan Paul & Co., of London, is the English standard.

There are also several volumes of letters which are most interesting. Two volumes of those from "Richard Wagner to Minna Wagner," translated by W. Ashton Ellis, London, 1909, give intimate glimpses (some of them very beautiful) of his early married life and of the later tragedy, his wife's ill health, her nerve-storms, and her many limitations. Another volume of letters with the same translator shows the correspondence of "Richard Wagner with Mathilde Wesendonck," which is a wonderful revelation of Wagner's own inner nature and of the poetical character of his friendship with this gifted and inspiring woman.

In this present sketch of Wagner's life, in addition to Wagner's own autobiography and Glasenapp's biography as translated by W. Ashton Ellis, we have drawn freely on Chamberlain's detailed biographic study of Wagner, following something of his general outlines and in many instances summarizing his very full statements in brief statements in his own words. In our judgment his work is one of the most careful of modern estimates in its valuation of Wagner's work.

PART I: THE OUTLINE OF THE LIFE

THE OUTLINE OF THE LIFE

AN English critic and musician, the Rev. H. R. Haweis, gives emphatically his judgment: "Wagner is the most powerful personality that has appeared in the world of music since Beethoven. Indeed, he seems to me, in his wide range as poet, dramatist, musician and philosopher, almost alone in the history of Art."

An equally eminent American musical critic, Mr. W. J. Henderson, contends with like enthusiasm: "Wagner is the most striking figure in the history of music. Whether the future will or will not accord to him the position granted by the musical world of the present — that of the greatest genius that art has produced — he will remain upon the records as the most commanding intellect that ever sought to express its thought and accomplish its purposes through the medium of music."

This unique personality, standing "almost alone in the history of Art," the "most striking figure in the history of music, . . . the greatest genius that art has produced," must be well worth our study.

The seventy years of Wagner's life was a mighty drama in itself. It was an eventful life, full of tragedy, pathos, and triumph, sounding the full gamut of human life "from the gloomiest penury to the sunniest prosperity, from heart-breaking isolation to a popularity that was almost worship."

It has often been pointed out that Wagner's term of life of seventy years divided itself into

The Outline of the Life

two significant epochs of almost equal parts. The event which marks the divisions of these two epochs is his exile from Germany in 1849, as a political revolutionist. This was in the half-way period of his life,—his thirty-sixth year. It reminds us of Dante's,—“in this the midway of our mortal life I found me in a gloomy wood astray.” Dante's exile began in his thirty-third year. But in the case of both of these great souls, the epoch preceding the exile and that following are distinctly marked periods, concerned not merely with the outward events of his life, but also with mental development and maturing powers. Largely through his exile did Wagner find himself, and especially did he learn his intense love and devotion to his Fatherland, so that he became the very quintessence of the German spirit and art, as well as the highest flowering of the art-aspirations of the world.

The career of Wagner, another has noted, resembled that of the Italian painters of the best period, with the blood hot and impetuous, and the life equally stormy. Certain it is that he pursues his ideals from town to town and from country to country, in faithful and heroic way. “To-day he is a music master in a German village; to-morrow he is an opera composer starving in the great city of Paris. To-day he is an exile in a strange land with a warrant of arrest against him; to-morrow he is the declared friend of a mighty monarch. To-day he is alone in the deepest solitude of the Alps, hidden from the world and living in passionate devotion to art; to-morrow he is the builder of the Bayreuth

Festival-House and surrounded by enthusiastic multitudes from all parts of the world. Every day and every year of his life is full of interesting events."

I. Youth, 1813-1833

IT was in the year 1813, the year of the great battle of the nations at Leipzig, that Richard Wagner was born on May 22.

That terrible battle of Leipzig, "the battle of the nations in which the empire of Napoleon received its death wound," and the foreign invader was driven back across the Rhine from the soil of the Fatherland, also led the way to the foundation of Germany's future greatness. The year 1813 was therefore a propitious time for the coming of one who was likewise destined to lead Germany away from foreign domination in poetry, music, and drama, and to achieve a new national greatness in a new battle of the nations and a world victory for the highest of all arts,—a sacred unity of poetry, music, and art in one dramatic whole.

The ancestry of Wagner, as far back as it can be traced, is Saxon. For several generations his forbears were schoolmasters and organists. His grandfather was an official in the customs department of the government. His father was also in the government service, although he had studied jurisprudence, and possessed an extensive private library in which classic literature was very well represented. The most noteworthy thing about him, however, was his enthusiastic love for the theatre. A new play by

The Outline of the Life

Schiller was celebrated as a family festival, and actors were his most intimate friends. This fact is important as a prophecy of his son's devotion to the drama in the years that were to come. He died six months after the birth of his son Richard, and soon afterward Ludwig Guyer, an actor of some celebrity, a writer of successful comedies, a portrait painter, and an old friend of the family, married the widow with her seven children, and for long years he was a real father and true friend to the boy of genius, Richard Wagner. It is an interesting fact that thus from his earliest years the boy was familiar with the stage. His foster-father frequently took him to rehearsals. He literally grew up in the theatre, and early learned that practical experience of theatrical work which was to be of so much service to him in later years. But probably more important than all, there was created in him in this way a passion for dramatic representation that was to mean everything to him in his life-work. An uncle, Adolf Wagner, is well known in the history of German literature as a man of immense learning and of remarkable talent. His numerous writings extend from essays on the Greek poets to novels and comedies. He made many translations and was an editor of the Italian classics. He also was a true friend, as well as loyal kinsman, to the growing youth, and exerted a beneficial influence on Richard's education during his school life and at the university.

Another potent influence of his childhood and youth was his mother. From all accounts she

was an excellent woman and an excellent mother, and she was certainly idolized by her son Richard, as some of his beautiful letters show. The memory of her deep affection was as a tower of strength to him in all the tragedies of his life. It was of her that he was tenderly speaking on the very evening before his death. The portrait that still exists of her seems to express humor, good health, and good sense.

Indeed, she must have been rather an unusual woman. "Her brightness and amiability," says one of the biographers, "appears to have made her especially congenial to artists, and among those who occasionally dropped in for a friendly chat with her was no less a personage than Carl Maria Von Weber, the creator of the opera *Der Freischutz*, which first aroused young Richard's musical instincts." Throughout his life Richard Wagner referred to his mother as "mein liebes Mutterchen," and at the age of forty-three he told his friend Praeger that he "could not see a lighted Christmas tree without thinking of the dear woman, nor prevent the tears starting to his eyes when he thought of the unceasing activity that she had for the comfort and welfare of her children." The exquisitely tender strains in *Siegfried*, in which the orchestra accompanies the reference to *Siegfried's* mother, some think symbolize the love of Wagner for his own mother. "I verily believe," says one of Wagner's friends, "that Richard Wagner never loved any one so deeply as his 'liebes Mutterchen.' All his references to her were of affection, amounting to idolatry. With

that instinctive power of unreasoning, yet unerring perception possessed by women, she felt the unusual brain power of the boy from his childhood, and his love for her was not unmixed with gratitude for her tacit acknowledgment of his genius."

If this was true, it was the divination of maternal love that recognized something unusual in him, for he seemed no infant prodigy. He was not regarded generally as precocious, although he would be called a fairly bright boy. His teachers at school thought him a rather indifferent pupil. He did not work methodically, nor in the customary lines. Even his music lessons did not get on well, for he would not practise regularly and liked to learn too much by ear. He was always a dreamer, loving the study of mythology.

Wagner enjoyed a thorough classical education, practically the same as Goethe and Schiller. In this respect he had the advantage of Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven, whose general education was meagre. Wagner's schooling was in Dresden at the celebrated old Kreuzschule; and in Leipzig at the Nicolai Gymnasium. Finally, he matriculated at the Leipzig University as a student of music and philosophy. All through his educational life he had a great love for classic antiquity, especially the Greek language and poetry. It was the dramatic poets, such as Aeschylus and Sophocles, who most interested him, and it is related that at thirteen years of age he learned English in order to read Shakespeare in the original. This is significant and prophetic. Sophocles and Shakespeare

were already beginning to teach him that the poets by dramatic representation could find measureless artistic possibilities.

The distinguished musician Weber not only continued as a friend, but also became an instructor in the family, and the musical performances in the Leipzig Gewandhaus gave the youth the very best of musical inspiration. His own musical gift was awakened by Weber's music and afterward by the mightier influence of Beethoven. He took musical studies during his student days, and he early composed quite a number of compositions, some of them for full orchestra. Several of these compositions were performed in Leipzig with good success about 1830. From the beginning Wagner was a poet. He had composed a prize poem when only twelve years old, which was printed. He soon began to write tragedy. At sixteen he tried his hand in a pastoral play, for which he wrote both words and music. At the age of nineteen he wrote a musical play which was performed at the Leipzig Court Theatre.

2. Storm and Stress, 1833-1849

IT was natural, therefore, that from this environment—a constant and intimate acquaintance with the theatre, an education that emphasized poetry and the drama, a musical atmosphere that was stimulating and uplifting, and especially with the inspiring influence of his learned uncle, Adolf Wagner, who was a literary genius, a dramatic poet, and an art critic with decided views on the reform of dra-

matic art — Richard Wagner should give himself to poetry, music, drama, and criticism. This he did, beginning his practical career as director of the chorus in the Würzburg Theatre, where his brother Albert was already an actor, singer, and stage manager. This was in January, 1833. Wagner's relations to his brothers and sisters and the other members of the family were kindly, but his immediate kinsfolk never seemed to show any real appreciation of his genius, except his brother Albert and his eldest sister Rosalie, who was a highly gifted actress and a most lovable woman. She always had the greatest faith in him.

During the next few years Wagner was a chorus conductor in Magdeburg, Königsberg, and Riga. In these wanderings in small provincial towns and theatres, he was doing real apprentice work in music and art, and was also learning to know intimately his German countrymen, the German Fatherland, and, most important of all, the German genius. During this time he wrote two operas, *Die Feen*, a work full of deep poetic and musical beauties, "warmed with the life-blood of youth," and a second work called *Das Liebes-verbot*. Most far-reaching of all on his character and fortunes, it happened that during this period he married an actress, Wilhelmine Planer, and the love tragedy of his life began, for his marriage seems to have been an ill-assorted union with one who, although excellent in many ways, was never able to appreciate or share the best part of his life.

At Riga, Wagner had written the words of

his first really important drama, *Rienzi* (1837–1838), and the first two acts of the music. With this drama in his soul, it became his high ambition to have it performed in an adequate way, such as was not possible in provincial theatres. He suddenly made up his mind that it must be done, and so, in the summer of 1839, with his wife, a big Newfoundland dog, a light purse, and the two acts of his opera *Rienzi* in his carpet-bag," he embarked at Pillau on a sailing-vessel to London, with Paris as the objective point, hoping that at Paris, the great centre of music and art, in some way his work would be received and performed at the Grand Opera. It was a daring hope for the unknown German poet and musician, but he believed in himself.

It is interesting to note that from the first Wagner took himself seriously. He seems to have felt within himself powers that must do large work. Even in his first days of musical awakening he wanted to play sonatas and overtures rather than simple things, and his first musical compositions were most ambitious,—an overture for grand opera at sixteen years of age! While he was yet a boy of about twelve years of age revelling in Shakespeare, he projected, he tells us, a great drama, a sort of compound of *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. He confesses that the plan was extremely grandiose, and that forty-two persons died in the course of the piece. All these things indicate a disposition to do big things or nothing, a mark that is often found with genius. Probably no one else in those days except his mother rightly estimated his powers;

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but his own conviction in regard to himself in the end has proved right,—his self-confidence has been justified. And surely, as some one has said, "It would have been a great loss to the world if Richard Wagner had been less sure of himself. It would be poor economy for Providence to give the man a big endowment of faculty, and fail to give him assurance enough to get that faculty recognized."

It was on this voyage through the Baltic and the Norwegian fiords that the legend of The Flying Dutchman made a new impression upon him, and acquired, as he says, "a definite peculiar color which only my adventures at sea could have given it." Thus began the theme of his second great opera.

He reached Paris, but the three years there were a continual tragedy. Disappointment met him on all sides. He had the greatest difficulty in earning his daily bread. He composed songs, wrote articles for the papers, and drudged at work. He tasted "the uses of adversity." The bitterness of his struggles tempted him to self-destruction. He was many times at the verge of starvation, but he found some work in reading proof for a musical publisher and in arranging popular melodies and operatic airs for the piano and other instruments. Thus he earned his bread,—he whose genius might have been given even at this time to such works as *Tannhäuser* and *Parsifal*.

He completed *Rienzi* (1840) and also wrote the sketch for *The Flying Dutchman*, but his negotiation with the Grand Opera came to

naught. These years seemed like an eternity of want and misery. Here also he fully discovered that his young wife, although having many noble and attractive qualities, had little sympathy for his art, and little appreciation of his unique personality. She also found it difficult to live with genius. So that life to both was a constant and growing stress and strain.

It was in this Paris sojourn that he began a real revolt against the modern conditions of public art. What he held to be sacred art he found was largely a matter of financial traffic, and the undisguised commercialism of it filled him with disgust and contempt. The most significant thing, however, that happened to him in Paris was the awakening of his soul amid that alien environment to a burning love for his German Fatherland. There arose within him longings for "the things that had grown up in the soil of his home," and his firm conviction that his art must strike its roots there. His previous musical sketches had been founded on stories of other lands. Now he determined to give himself to German legend and Teutonic myth. He wrote the music of *The Flying Dutchman* (1840-1841), a work which touches, as he says, "strings that can vibrate only in the German heart." And there came to him also the first vision of the possibilities of *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*.

Wagner returned to Germany in 1842, for his *Rienzi* was accepted and performed at Dresden. The success was immense. Both in Dresden and in Leipzig, enthusiasm was unbounded, and

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with this initial performance of his first great opera, Richard Wagner became famous. This was in his thirtieth year.

The Flying Dutchman was performed the following year (1843), although with a more limited success, and some criticism. These works won him recognition as a true musician, and he was made conductor of the Dresden Opera, a position which he held for six years. During this time he wrote *Tannhäuser* (1843-1845) and *Lohengrin* (1845-1847). Strangely enough, *Tannhäuser* seemed especially to excite the bitter hostility of the critics and the press; but there were many who deeply appreciated it, and among those who applauded it in words of singular clarity and beauty was Robert Schumann, the musician. It was, perhaps, the bitterness of these attacks upon *Tannhäuser* that helped to drive Wagner further into the ranks of the revolutionists, and convinced him that a complete social change was needed, for art could not breathe in a stifling atmosphere. A thunderstorm was needed to clear the air.

In 1846 Wagner undertook to prove that the Ninth Symphony of Beethoven was a human gospel, and immediately he found himself in the midst of newspaper controversies. The critics rebelled at his chaos of tones in music, at his radical essays in criticism, at his private life and character. But he answered them vigorously. He felt that he was a prophet of a new era, the high priest of a pure and holy art, and therefore, without consideration for himself or others, he kept straight on in his course, fighting for the

welfare of art and of his Fatherland. He was what Schiller had sighed for, — “a strange figure in his century, come, fearful as Agamemnon’s son, to purify it.”

3. The Exile, 1849–1861

THOSE three years in Paris were therefore not wasted. Wagner was being tested, his ideals clarified, and his highest purposes confirmed. For he now resolved to give himself to musical art, in a long and bitter warfare if needs be, for what is really true and beautiful. His fight is really “romanticism against classicism; it is liberalism against conservatism; it is the age-long struggle of life to break through the crust of convention and find new forms of fruitfulness and beauty.”

When he returned home in 1842, he had a great longing in his heart to do something for the art and the people of his native country. He writes: “For the first time I saw the Rhine; with tears in my eyes, I, the poor artist, swore eternal allegiance to the German Fatherland.”

Wagner became a part of that romantic and revolutionary movement that swept over France, Germany, and England between 1830 and 1850. Something of it was seen in the writings of Mazzini and the struggles for Italian freedom; in the genius of Victor Hugo and others in France; in Byron, Shelley, and Tennyson in England, and in Beethoven and Wagner in Germany.

Wagner was a visionary and an idealist. He had revolted against the conditions of public art

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and had uttered some very revolutionary doctrines. Into the wave of political revolution and idealism that was now passing over Germany, attempting new social ideals, Wagner entered enthusiastically. He made a famous speech in Dresden, which was extensively published under the title: "What is the attitude of republican aspiration toward the monarchy?" He held to the strange contradiction of the supremacy of the king, the abolishment of the nobility, and the exaltation of a free people. His speech pleased neither republicans, nobles, nor monarchy. In May, 1849, the insurrection broke out in Dresden. Wagner's sympathy was with the revolutionists. How far he was directly implicated is somewhat uncertain; but a warrant of arrest was issued against him and he fled from the country across the frontier into Switzerland.

His banishment lasted for twelve years. It was a catastrophe that really proved a blessing. He himself said: "If I had remained at Dresden, it would have been the grave of my art." His banishment began a new epoch in his life and work. He wrote: "Outlawed and persecuted, I was now bound by no ties to any sort of life." He felt the freedom of his convictions; he took a joy in speaking them boldly and in words of fire. Illusions and restraint were swept away. This period of his exile at the midway of his career became the central point in his life, the beginning of his largest and strongest work. The words of Beethoven seemed to come with prophetic meaning to Wagner: "For me, there is no more happiness except in myself, in my art! O God,

give me strength to conquer myself! Nothing must bind me to life."

His banishment was not to be so prolonged as was the exile of Dante. After an absence of twelve years he was permitted to return to his native country, but in those years much happened in his inward development as well as in his outward life.

The ten years from 1849 to 1859 were spent in Switzerland, mostly at Zurich. He lived in retirement and devoted himself entirely to creative work. Very few outward events broke the even tenor of the exile's life. There were occasional summer holiday jaunts to various parts of Switzerland and even to Italy; short visits were made to Paris, and one of three months to London; but the almost uninterrupted bulk of his time and strength were given to his writings on art and to his own art-creations in the musical drama. Outer things had lost importance; his life was lived in a wonderful world of its own. The words that he wrote to his friend Franz Liszt tell the story of his life at this time: "You can believe me absolutely when I tell you that the sole reason for my continuing to live lies in my irresistible longing to complete a number of works in art which still possess vitality within me. I have clearly recognized the fact that this creating and completing alone are able to satisfy me, and to fill me with the desire for life which I often find inexplicable. I cannot accept any office and shall never do so. What I do require is an honorable annuity that I may be able to continue composing my works un-

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disturbed and quite regardless of worldly success."

He needed this period of rest, retirement, and concentration to think himself out. He came to perfect clearness and comprehension in a number of treatises which he wrote in the first three years of his exile. These were on Art and Revolution, The Art Work of the Future, Art and Climate, Opera and Drama, and A Communication to My Friends. With these writings, he cleared up his own mind and came to the larger consciousness of what he wanted to do.

Wagner's suggestions on the national drama are interesting. He advises that its management be placed in the hands of competent specialists, that dramatic and musical schools be established for the training of artists; that the music of the churches be reformed at the same time, and that the whole administration of opera and theatre be placed under the authority of the minister of public worship, for he contended that the theatre and opera ought to be more than amusement and diversion, more than artistic and enjoyable. He felt that these ought to be in the highest sense educational and spiritually inspiring.

So at last by his writings he came to himself. "As artist and man," he said, "I now step forth to a new world." The wider realm into which he entered with a happy consciousness of artistic creation began with The Nibelungen Ring, three dramas, and a three act prelude, and these were the chief work and the exultant joy of his period of exile among the mountains of Swit-

zerland. This Nibelungen Ring had begun to occupy his thought as early as 1846. He printed his poem for a few friends in 1853, and it was published in 1864. Rhine-gold was composed in 1853-1854; The Valkyrie in 1854-1856; Siegfried was begun in 1856, and then interrupted; it was finally completed in 1871; and The Dusk of the Gods in 1869-1874; while the first performance of The Ring was given in 1876; making fully thirty years from the inception to the full completion and realization of this gigantic task. It reminds us of Tennyson's long-continued work on the Idylls. The interruption was from the summer of 1857 until the summer of 1859, during which he gave himself to the poem and music of Tristan and Isolde. Yet he did not feel that this was an interruption, but rather supplementary to the great world-embracing Nibelungen myth. It was also at this time that another figure arose before his mental vision which he felt was related both to the Nibelungen story and to Tristan, — the wonderful figure of Parsifal. It was not, however, until twenty years later that the drama of Parsifal was written.

During these memorable years of his exile, we may remember the unique influence on Wagner's life of certain of his friends. The chief of these was Franz Liszt. Wagner describes his friendship with Liszt as "the most important and significant event of his life." Liszt gave him material aid, and also, what was more important, artistic and moral support. Liszt brought out Wagner's music-dramas at the

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Grand Ducal Theatre at Weimar, and from that centre they radiated through all Germany. He wrote essays on Wagner's poems and music, introducing them to the German public. He presented Wagner's interests to the German princes. Above all, he gave Wagner his love, his readiness of comprehension, and his steadfast faith. He was the first person to recognize Wagner's immense importance and his superb genius. He regarded it as the object of his life, as he wrote, "to be worthy of Wagner's friendship." Liszt's letters and his visits to Zurich were for these years part of the real inspiration in which Wagner lived and created. Wagner wrote to him out of an overflowing and grateful heart: "Truly, as far as I can see around me and into my future, I find nothing which can raise me up, sustain me, comfort me, strengthen me, and arm me for renewed struggles but the sight of you once more, and the few weeks which you will devote to me."

Among other friends, the Wesendoncks must be reckoned as important. They had placed a charming chalet on their estate near Zurich at his disposal and had helped him in other ways. Frau Mathilde Wesendonck was a most inspiring friend and admirer of the great composer, and she had much to do with turning his thoughts to the great drama of Tristan and Isolde. He dedicated the poem to her, and under the inspiration of her loving friendship he wrote the wonderful music.

Much has been made of these relations, — this word only need be said. Frau Wesendonck was

a "placid sweet Madonna, and their relations were as pure and spiritual as were those of Dante and Beatrice." So concludes W. Ashton Ellis in his preface to the published letters of Richard Wagner to Mathilde Wesendonck. She herself wrote: "The tie that bound him to me, whom he called his muse, was of so high, pure, noble, and ideal a nature that it will be valued only by those who know such in their own bosoms." Wagner's personal references in his autobiography lead us to conclude that trouble was made because there was utter misconstruction of his purely friendly relations with Frau Wesendonck, who was also perfectly unconscious of having done any wrong. What had been said with perfect innocence was given by others a vulgar interpretation. High sentiment and poetic feeling were dragged in the mire by jealous tongues. It was a sad case of aggravated jealousy and unfortunate misrepresentations. The friendly relationships that were thus severed by what almost proved a tragedy had been the ethereal and sublimated affection of genius for one who gave him his finest inspiration by appreciation, sympathy, and instinctive response.

Still another friend in these Zurich years was Hans von Bülow, who largely developed his musical talent under the tuition of Wagner at Zurich and became an enthusiastic follower. Thenceforward he also worked unceasingly with word and pen and artistic deed in Wagner's service.

But perhaps the most important event in his life in these years was his acquaintance with

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the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer. Wagner wrote: "He has come to me in my solitude like a gift from heaven." The writings of Schopenhauer seemed to him almost inspired. The new views in ethics and philosophy that he found here were what he had been groping after for years; now they were given in clear and beautiful interpretations. They seemed to bring him into perfect harmony with himself, and into maturity of thought and character. They were both poetry and philosophy for him. He wrote from his own experience: "The bewildered thinker can at last stand erect and firm, upon the soil of true ethics. This we owe to the completer of Kant, the wide-hearted Arthur Schopenhauer."

After these long years of retirement and creative work, Wagner longed to hear music and to see his own work upon the stage. He felt that he needed this for his further inspiration. He made application for pardon to the King of Saxony, but it was refused. However, he left Switzerland and spent some time in Paris, Vienna, and Munich, and travelled as far as St. Petersburg, giving concerts, but these journeys brought him little except artistic and material distress. It was twelve years before his exile was over and he was allowed to come back to Germany.

4. The Return, 1862-1864

BUT every attempt to rebuild his shattered fortunes in Germany seemed to Wagner to fail. His position was desperate. He looked

forward in helpless despair. Suddenly a message from King Ludwig of Bavaria reached him in May, 1864. One stroke of the royal pen and Wagner's worldly cares were ended, and there opened up to him the prospect of a glorious day, free from all burdens, radiant with pure joy.

King Ludwig was a man of unusual parts. He became a friend of Wagner not for any sentimental fancy for music, or as a mere patron of art, but because of his real appreciation of the great artist's soul and compositions. He had read Wagner's writings and had discovered in him a truly royal ideal. He heard Wagner's Lohengrin and was seized with a deep and glowing love for the man who had created it. He recognized Wagner as "a spirit towering far above his surroundings," and above his age, and he wished to give him the opportunity to accomplish his largest creative work under the best conditions. But hardly more than a year later King Ludwig was compelled to dismiss his friend from Munich, and for a time Wagner's dreams were again shattered. This event came about through political intrigues and cabals that represented him as trying to get the government of Bavaria into his hands and accused him of wielding an undue influence over the king.

The romantic young king had desired to be his munificent patron and true friend. A magnificent new theatre had been planned in Munich, where Wagner's music-dramas were to be splendidly rendered, but the court intrigues

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and violent popular opposition interrupted these fine plans. Wagner had been proscribed and banished from German soil a dozen years before, and now a second time he was obliged to flee, for he was warned at Munich that his life was in danger.

King Ludwig still believed in Wagner, although he had to banish him from the court, and during all the succeeding years of his life he was faithful to him. It was owing to King Ludwig that Wagner was able to complete his *Nibelungen Ring*, his *Master-singers*, and his *Parsifal*, and to have them performed; and it was owing to the king's faith and patronage that at last, in 1872, the Festival Play-House in Bayreuth was erected as the embodiment of Wagner's artistic ideals. Wagner said, in that year: "What this King is to me goes far beyond my own existence; that which he has helped on in me and with me represents a future which spreads in wide circles around us, a high intellectual culture, a step toward the highest destiny of which a nation is capable, — that is expressed in the wonderful friendship of King Ludwig."

This royal patron, King Ludwig II of Bavaria, was a gifted man, handsome and intellectual, with a passionate love for art and music. He built in the mountains such magnificent castles as Hohenschwangau and Neuschwanstein. He was devoted to the *Lohengrin* legend and the other great work which Wagner was attempting. It was a distinct loss to art that the intrigues and misrepresentations of the court separated Wagner from him, and more than all

that the family infirmity of insanity at last overtook and darkened King Ludwig's closing days.

After this fortunate and yet unfortunate episode with King Ludwig, and his practical banishment from Munich, Wagner again took refuge in Switzerland in a house in the neighborhood of Lucerne, standing quite isolated on a point of land on the banks of the lake.

The chief places associated with Wagner's life are Leipzig, Dresden, Magdeburg, Königsberg, Riga, Paris, Vienna, Munich, St. Petersburg, London, Italy, and most of all Switzerland. One can never estimate how much these towering Swiss mountains may have added to his inspiration and vision.

5. The Second Exile, 1865-1871

AFTER the banishment from Munich, Wagner went again to Switzerland, and spent the following six years in the villa called Hof Tribschen on Lake Lucerne. These years became the happiest years of his life. His earlier thoughtless marriage, which had brought him so much bitterness and misery, was retrieved. His first wife, Wilhelmine Planer, had died in Dresden in January, 1866, and Wagner had now found by a second marriage a woman who was a worthy companion, and a strong inspiration and support in his art work. She was Cosima Liszt, the daughter of his best and oldest friend, Franz Liszt. She had been formerly the wife of Hans von Bülow, from whom she was divorced. Wagner's own judgment of her was: "She is a woman possessed of the

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rarest gifts in an unheard-of degree; a wonderful image of Liszt, but intellectually superior to him. She knew that she could help me, and did help me. She defied all calumny for me, and accepted every condemnation." His wife was the embodiment of his dreams,—the realization of his belief that women are the music of life.

During the quiet years at Tribschen, Wagner displayed a creative activity that was simply wonderful. He had a passion for hard work. Here he again worked over and completed the score of *The Master-singers* (1862–1867). He also worked again on *The Nibelungen Ring*, and completed *Siegfried* (1871), and nearly the whole of his mighty *Götterdämmerung* (1869–1874). He wrote many essays and commenced the publication of his collected works and poems. And here at Tribschen, where he composed the exquisite *Siegfried Idyll*, and life was a continual joy, he had the happiness of receiving the gift of a son. He writes in his joy: "A wonderfully beautiful and vigorous son, whom I can boldly call *Siegfried*. He will prosper with my work, and give me a new long life, for life at last has found a meaning."

What manner of countenance did the great composer have? We have many portraits of him. We may interpret them by this word-portrait of a French authoress, Judith Gautier: "What struck me most particularly in this mighty countenance teeming with energy, next to the inexpressible brightness of the eyes and the penetrating look, was the expression of



COSIMA WIFE OF WAGNER

From a portrait bust made before her marriage.

infinite kindliness which played around the lips, and which no portrait can render."

Wagner had a temper of volcanic type, but this was part of his artistic endowment. Such temper is common to men of genius, especially when they overwork or over-worry. But his eruptions of temper were soon gone, and his normal life was that of "infinite kindness, almost celestial kindness," as his many friends bore testimony. He had a strange personal magnetism. "When in his presence," said the artist Herkomer, "you lose your own identity. You are under an influence that sets every nerve at its highest key. I doubt whether any man since Napoleon I has been known to exercise such powers of fascination over his admirers as Richard Wagner does daily." He had an imperious eloquence and talked with vivacity upon every possible topic. He showed a marvellous memory, both musically and in other ways, and was full of the liveliest interest and the most erudite knowledge of all sorts.

Wagner's artistic soul needed a right environment for inspiration. Some of his works, it is true, were composed in poverty, exile, and discomfort, where imagination alone supplied his want. But when he had come to his own at last, and lived in his great worlds of artistic imagination, he indulged the eccentricities of genius, and was full of fads and fancies. He must live just so and dress in just a certain way. He loved silks and satins, and often his own dressing-gown was a wonderful creation. He had a singular love for "luminous stuffs that spread

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themselves like streams of flame or fall in splendid folds." These helped his imagination and besides, as he himself avowed, he was "by nature luxurious, prodigal, and extravagant, much more than Sardanapalus and all the old Emperors put together."

He had a passionate love for animals. Usually, whether he rode, walked, or rested, he was accompanied by one of his magnificent dogs, and he even insisted that sometimes they helped him to compose his music by howling most vociferously when they did not like the sound. He seriously contemplated writing a history of his dogs. It is noteworthy that wherever possible he has introduced animals into his operas, —swans, dogs, ravens, bears, horses, dragons, and other creatures, and oftentimes he associates them with beautiful and significant music.

He loved to go out for long, lonely walks and for silent communion with nature. Even here he was accompanied by his dog, and at sunset time or in the early evening, on these solitary walks, he received some of his finest inspirations both in poetry and music. Sometimes he heard and saw so distinctly that it seemed like faces or voices coming to him from the inmost soul of things.

Even his idiosyncrasies give singular insight into his character. His vegetarianism shows the simplicity of his physical life and his happy outlook on health, while his essay against vivisection reveals once again his sincere love for the lower animals and his sense of fellowship with all God's creatures.

We are told that his life in Switzerland was as regular as it was laborious. He rose at six, bathed, then reclined and read till ten; breakfasted, worked steadily from eleven till two; dined, rested, always with a book in hand; drove from four till six; worked from six till eight; supped, and spent the evening in the midst of his family. It was in these evenings that Wagner was most charming. Every cloud was cleared from his brow; his face seemed radiant with a certain light-hearted goodness, which diffused a happy atmosphere around him. He had a kind word for everyone. He entered into everything, and his conversation scintillated with brilliancy and humor.

But these peaceful years at Tribschen were brought to a close by the Franco-German War of 1870. A united Germany was what he had been longing for, and he hailed its coming with the greatest enthusiasm.

Wagner now entered upon the last and holiest duty of his life. He felt that at length Germany was ready to receive him and his art; he longed for the creation of the ideal German stage, where art could be ideally presented, and he desired to dedicate his full work to the German people and through them to the world. He therefore brought to maturity the plans which had long been in his mind and left Tribschen with his family. On May 22, 1872, on Wagner's fifty-ninth birthday, the foundation stone of the Festival Play-House at Bayreuth was laid and the final era of his own great life was begun.

It was a beautiful old city, this Bayreuth, which

had been selected as the sacred shrine for the new dramatic art. Many tribulations were endured in securing the site and in building the great structure. But it was at last completed through the generosity of King Ludwig, and Bayreuth became a Mecca to which pilgrimages from the whole world were made by devout disciples.

6. The Triumphant Years, 1872-1883

AT Bayreuth Wagner lived for eleven years, from 1872 until his death in 1883. After more than forty years of incessant struggle and proclamation of his new ideals of art, there was founded here an enduring centre and school for the exposition and interpretation of his fondest dreams. Bayreuth is almost the geographical centre of united Germany, and it was soon to become the centre of the highest musical and dramatic art, and to exert a beneficent influence throughout the whole of Germany and thence over the whole world. Here Wagner built his own home, which he called Wahnfried, meaning "where his fancies found repose." Here he was successful in having built, according to his own plans and ideas, a magnificent Festival Play-House, where his great music-dramas could be ideally performed; and here also at Bayreuth is his ivy-covered grave near the home which he loved.

In 1876 the first festival plays took place. They were the mighty dramas of The Nibelungen Ring, performed three times; undertaken, so runs the announcement of dedication, "full of



The Festival Playhouse, Bayreuth



Wagner's House, Wannfried, in Bayreuth

confidence in the spirit of the German nation and completed to the glory of his exalted benefactor, King Ludwig II of Bavaria." The financial success, however, was so disappointing that a heavy burden fell upon Wagner's shoulders and he was only saved from absolute ruin by his royal patron. It was not until 1882 that the second festival plays were given, when the great attraction was Wagner's new work, Parsifal (1877-1882), which had aroused considerable curiosity and interest.

His seclusion from the world, his life of high faith and hopes, the peace and serenity of his loving home life, and yet the bitter tragedy of inappreciation and calumny,—these were the conditions and atmosphere under which Parsifal was completed and performed. His last earthly happiness was to see this great drama adequately rendered and to hear the glorious strains of the exalted music of the Holy Grail.

This second series was a much greater success than the first festival, and also left a small fund for future work.

These great musical festivals at Bayreuth were Olympian in spirit and scope. Kings, princes, and nobles mingled there with devout music-lovers from all parts of the world, and day by day their whole thought was in the great cycle of tragedies enacted by mortals and the gods.

Some of Wagner's last work in life was now completed, especially his essays on practical philosophy in his treatise on Religion and Art published in 1880.

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Wagner did not live to see the third series of the festival plays. His life of incessant struggle and of many disappointments and the difficult problems connected with the great enterprise of his last years were beginning to tell upon him, so that he was obliged to spend his winters in Italy. He died suddenly at Venice on February 13, 1883. The end came when he was in the midst of his work. At the time of his death his wife was with him and their children, Daniel, Eva, Isolde, and Siegfried, the last now twelve years old. The next evening the gondolier who had usually taken him out was found lying on the steps of the Palazzo Vendramin, where Wagner had lived and died, weeping bitterly. He refused all comfort, saying: "He was so good a master! I shall never find so good a one again!"

To show the esteem in which Wagner was at last held, we may mention that in the course of the week after his death more than five thousand messages of condolence were sent to the Wagner family in Venice from all parts of the civilized world.

Wagner's last years have been usually regarded by the world as a fitting consummation and crowning of his life-work by happiness and success; but as a matter of fact, there was much sadness and tragedy, even despair, in those last years. He found his work still largely unappreciated, his motives misunderstood, his character maligned, and his hopes and dreams far from realized. Yet in his tragic failure there were the beginnings of a larger and a permanent suc-

cess, to be realized only after his death. We see now that his faith in himself, in his art, and in his German Fatherland was fully justified. He has shown an unflinching faithfulness to his ideals throughout all his life, — as a penniless German youth, as a lonely exile, as a worker for daily bread, as a revolutionary enthusiast, as a creator of noble vision, as a builder of a great Festival Play-House. He felt that he was a discoverer of new lands and a conqueror of new realms. He felt that he had a mission for the artistic regeneration of human society. There are some who say that Wagner became religious in his old age, when he wrote Parsifal. Those who study his life closely find a deep and most earnest spirit of religion in it from beginning to end. It was not religion of the conventional sort, but nevertheless religion, in that he believed in God and his indwelling, and therefore took life seriously and sacredly, and lived for the highest ideals in the service of humanity.

It is interesting to learn that Wagner early caught some inspiration from the life of Luther, who was one of the heroes of his youth. He visited Eisleben, the birthplace of Luther, while he was yet a boy, for his uncle lived there. Later in life he wrote: "My family had been among the staunchest Lutherans for generations. What attracted me most in the great reformer's character was his dauntless energy and fearlessness. Since then I have often ruminated on the true instinct of childhood, for I, had I not to preach a new gospel of Art? Had I not also to bear every insult in its defence, and

had I not to say, Here I stand; God help me! I cannot do otherwise." The comment of one critic on these words surely is true, when he says that in some true sense the same spirit which animated Luther burned in the heart of Wagner, — fidelity to the highest that he knew, readiness to suffer the loss of all things rather than be false to his ideals.

It is a question of small moment whether one approves of all Wagner's doctrines and all his acts. What we must needs see, I believe, is that here in Wagner's life and work is the potent voice of a mighty man to whom nothing human was alien or indifferent; that here was a real hero throwing himself courageously into the battle, for what he believed with all his heart was true and right; and that here was a prophet and reformer who proclaimed a vision of better things and worked earnestly for the coming of a larger day, — one who sang most earnestly:

"Now dawns the morning of a day divine."

Wagner felt himself the heir of all the ages, and attempted to seize and to use the full heritage of poetry, painting, drama, and music in his new creations. He was like one of the hardy navigators of old, — he had the courage and audacity to break into the new and undiscovered ocean.

His consciousness of power seemed at times, as one asserts, to have almost intoxicated him; at other times it sustained and cheered him in utter loneliness; it dominated all who came in personal contact with him, and bent the minds and wills of the rebellious like reeds before the wind.

Wagner was an egotist in the sense that he believed in himself, that he had an immense consciousness of power, and that when he was neglected, trampled upon, persecuted, and ridiculed, he stood up tremendously for himself and his ideals, and even felt an exaggerated sense of his importance and the consideration due to the part that he was playing in the world. For a half century, as Haweis says, "there was no one to believe in Richard Wagner except Richard Wagner." But by and by the crowned heads and the greatest of his world began to bow down to him. Then oftentimes their adulation irritated him as he remembered their previous neglect of him.

"The study of his personality," as Mr. W. J. Henderson contends in his *Life of Wagner*, "will always bring one back to the same point. Wagner was entirely dominated by his artistic nature and ambition. His life can be understood only by an analysis of his motives based on this premise. Wagner the man was a creature of Wagner the dreamer. There has never been a clearer instance of the mastery of genius. He was unceasingly driven by it from boyhood to the grave. It made him selfish, intolerant, dogmatic, dictatorial; but it achieved its ends. The grave at Wahnfried contains only ashes. All that was vital in Richard Wagner lives still in the dramas and the prose works. The forces which were in the man are just as active now as they were when he laughed and stormed in the villa at Bayreuth."

PART II: CHARACTERISTICS AND
ESTIMATES

CHARACTERISTICS AND ESTIMATES



HE immense productivity of Wagner is astonishing. His writings and poems fill ten large volumes. Besides the twenty-five poetical works, there are one hundred and nine separate prose writings. Of these, nineteen treat of various phases of life, among which the principal treatises are Religion and Art, Heroism and Christianity, The State and Religion, and The Jewish Element in Music. Of sixty-seven treatises concerning art, perhaps the most important are those called Opera and Drama, and the masterly essay on Beethoven. Some of the treatises relate to the drama itself; others treat of stage reform; a few give an account of his own artistic career; eleven are interpretations of his own works, and five are reminiscences of certain great artists. In many of them are given his political and social ideas, especially in his essays on The State and Religion, The Art Work of the Future, and Art and Revolution.

Of his poetical, dramatic, and musical works, many volumes have been published. Besides the eleven great musical dramas which are best known, there are also two dramas with music rarely given, one called Die Feen and the other Das Liebes-verbot, and three or four other dramatic poems which were to be the basis of operas. His varied musical works include songs, marches, cantatas, and symphonies.

Like the great Italian artists of the Renaissance, Leonardo da Vinci and Michael Angelo, Wagner was both artist and writer. He took

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himself seriously and he took life seriously. He felt that his art was to be a real part of the politics, philosophy, and religion of the world. He saw that art was not so considered, but was rather a luxury of life, a recreation and a commercialized product. He felt, therefore, that he must proclaim a new gospel of art and prepare the soil in which true art could grow. It was for this reason that he became a writer and sent forth such a goodly array of pamphlets and books on art, philosophy, and religion.

It is noteworthy that his periods of critical and political writing came only at certain intervals in his life when he felt the dire necessity of speaking out the great truths that were in him. At such times he poured forth pamphlet after pamphlet, book after book, until he had fully said what he felt the times demanded. Such periods seemed to put an absolute quietus on his powers of creation in poetry or music. But afterward there always came another period of poetic and musical inspiration.

Wagner contended, as has been said, that art was not something for entertainment or diversion, a relaxation after the labors of the day, but that it was something deeper and greater. Once he had defined art as joy in one's self, in existence; later he regarded art as the highest common expression of human life; but still later it acquired a yet deeper significance for him and meant the highest moment of human life. Thereafter he preached most earnestly the dignity and the divinity of art. He felt that it was part of the unspeakable vision of holiest revela-

tion. He recognized the dignity of art as founded on its kinship with religion. Religion alone, as he contended in his essay on Religion and Art, lends real creative power to art; while art only, by its ideal representation of the symbols of religion, can bring forth fully the divine truth concealed within them.

I. His Political Opinions

WAGNER'S political programme which led to his exile was "idyllically unworldly." It was based on his desire for a greater Germany. Kneeling on the shores of the Rhine, as he returned home after the years of misery in Paris, he had vowed eternal fidelity to the Fatherland. To this vow he remained true until his death. It led him into rash action and rash utterances in 1849, for which he was exiled from his country. He did not join in the actual fighting at the time, but in many ways he showed his physical courage and his determination to side with the weak against the strong. It is now acknowledged that Wagner possessed little capacity for politics in the narrower sense of the word. He was an artist and enthusiast, a visionary and revolutionist, but he was not fitted for the practical task of the politician who must devise ways and means to attain political ends. He believed steadfastly in the brotherhood of nations, and his dream of the glory of his German Fatherland was not that it should rule the world, but that it should ennoble and redeem the world. He contended in his great speech: "We must establish German colonies

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in all the world. We will do it better than the Spaniards, to whom the New World was a priestly slaughter-house, and different from the Englishmen, to whom it was a tradesman's till. We will do it in German fashion, and nobly."

But in his political contentions for the Fatherland, his utterances contained the contradictions of genius, and were misunderstood both by the king and people, by democrats and monarchists. He contended for liberty and progress and, at the same time, condemned constitutional advances in monarchy. He advocated the exaltation of the monarch and the abolition of all the nobility. He wanted a king supreme in the midst of a free people. It was the vision of an idealist. Another of his contradictions was his hostility to traditional ^{Proton Catholicism} Christianity and yet his constant affirmation of religion as the foundation of true human dignity and his supreme object in life as the fulfilment of the pure doctrine of Christ. This was also the vision of the idealist. He loved religion, but he had an antipathy to priests. He hated hypocrisy in poetry, in the drama, in the church, in patriotism, and in the state. In a letter he wrote: "We throw over without hesitation church, priestcraft and the entire historical phenomena of Christianity, in order to have that Christ whom we wish to preserve in His full purity." His religious views, therefore, by their vagueness were misunderstood, and yet it is certain that Wagner taught all his life long that belief in God and religion were the indispensable foundations of social life and true art and great nationality.

Wagner's political creed in its shortest form was,—“absolute king — free people.” The people are free, he asserted, only when there is one ruler and not several. The king is absolute ruler only when he has no rivals in the nobility or parliament. Every advance in constitutionalism, he contended, is a humiliation for the ruler, a want of confidence in the sovereign. A free people, in his thought, were those who had equal rights and privileges without any aristocracy or nobility among them. Of course such views would not receive any cordial reception among the German nobles.

Wagner was never a real liberal, a true democrat, or a consistent socialist. For he held fast most strenuously to monarchy without constitutional regulation. And yet he was all his life a revolutionist. He wrote in one of his letters: “My business is to make revolution wherever I come.” He believed in progress, in freedom, in a larger civilization, but he never found a consistent method of working out his ideas. He was thoroughly and persistently misunderstood. He was denounced to the democrats as a disguised aristocrat and to the princes as a revolutionist. All the time he was trying to be faithful to God, the king, and the German people.

Wagner soon learned that politics was not his sphere. Thenceforward he devoted himself to the greater revolution of mankind through a reconstruction of its social and religious ideals by means of art rather than politics.

Characteristics and Estimates 2. His Philosophy

WAGNER'S attempts at politics, as we saw, ended disastrously and resulted in his exile. He turned from politics to philosophy in order to get a practical view of the relations of life to his great work and to learn to express himself in the terms of a consistent philosophy both of outward nature and of inner life. Wagner was essentially a poet, and therefore the philosophy of Hegel and the pure reason of Kant did not so much appeal to him. The two philosophers who became most significant for him were Feuerbach and Schopenhauer.

Feuerbach was a noble character, a learned man, extremely modest but with a fearless love of truth. What attracted Wagner to his writings was the humanness of his philosophy. Wagner seemed to recognize in this philosophy his own ideals of an artistic humanity. It was a philosophy which merged into human nature, and therein was its great importance for Wagner. Feuerbach's volume, *Thoughts on Death and Immortality*, seemed to be especially inspiring to Wagner. He found agreement with his own thought that the highest being is community being, and that death is the last fulfilment of love.

But the philosopher who meant most to Wagner was Schopenhauer. It was in the very year in which Schopenhauer's first work appeared in print that Richard Wagner was born. Forty years later, his discovery of Schopenhauer, "the most genial of mankind," as Tolstoi calls him, was one of the most important events in Wag-

ner's whole life. Schopenhauer had profoundly studied Christianity, the ancient Aryan religious philosophy of India, the entire range of human art from Phidias to Beethoven, and the various departments of natural science. He was a master of philosophy from Plato to Kant. Such was the rich soil of Schopenhauer's own outlook in philosophy, and of his all-embracing view of life and the world. Wagner grew enthusiastic, and adopted this philosophy as soon as he became acquainted with it, and he always remained faithful to it. Over his work-table he hung the picture of the great seer, and in 1868 he wrote: "I have one hope for German culture, that the time will come when Schopenhauer will be the law-giver for all our thought."

Schopenhauer's philosophy, however, was not for him the discovery of a new country, but rather a return to his own first home. It was a clearing up of his own thoughts and a confirmation of his own inherent views. Schopenhauer revealed to him the meaning of many things which had heretofore been nebulous for him. Still further he confirmed for Wagner some of his most definite and fundamental views of life and harmonized his thinking. Wagner wrote to Liszt after his first acquaintance with Schopenhauer's works: "His main thought—the final negation of the will for life itself—is truly solemn, but it alone brings release. To me, of course, it was not new, nor can anyone think it, in whom it was not living before. But it was this philosopher who first awakened my mind to the clear perception."

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As Wagner says: "What fascinated me so enormously about Schopenhauer's work was not only its extraordinary 'Fate,' but the clearness and manly precision with which the most difficult metaphysical problems were treated. Here the annihilation of the will and complete abnegation are represented as the sole true and final deliverance. At first, I could not abandon the so-called 'cheerful' Greek aspect of the world. But at last I saw this nullity of the visible world as the source from which all tragedy is derived, and such perception is in every great poet and every great man."

Schopenhauer's philosophy gave a stimulus to Wagner's artistic productivity. The music of *The Valkyrie*, the ideal of *Tristan*, the figure of *Parsifal*, all date from the momentous year 1854, when he became acquainted with Schopenhauer's works. It also had a clearing effect upon his artistic views and a purifying influence on his thoughts of religion and society. The stimulus was a strengthening of the entire man and especially the deepening of the artist's faith in himself. But we must remember that the same philosophy of life in its essential aspects, and especially the tragic negation of the will to live, appeared in the great dramatic works of Wagner written before he knew Schopenhauer as fully as in his later works. These earlier works were *The Flying Dutchman*, where both heroes, one taught by suffering, the other by intuitive sympathy, solemnly renounced the will to live; *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*, which are emphatically high trage-

dies of renunciation and the negation of the will; and The Nibelungen Ring, where the entire action turns upon the conflict in Wotan's heart.

In regard to the later works, Tristan and Isolde is the highest glorification of the will to live, and the philosophy seems to be the direct opposite of the negation of the will except in the resignation at last to the will of a higher power; and when we come to Parsifal, there is little trace of the negation of the will. Resignation has yielded to action, and the central idea of the drama is the divine sympathy which longs for redemption and finally works it out in the grandest way.

We must remember that Wagner was not a philosopher in the sense of contributing any original teaching. He was essentially a poet, and whatever philosophy he absorbed merely helped in his large poetic interpretation of life. His philosophical writings are influential because he was a man of philosophic ideals, and these ideals he incorporated in great music-dramas which are among the civilizing influences of the world.

3. His Poetry

WHICH was greater in Wagner—the poet or the musician, the musical composer or the dramatist?” is the question asked by Professor Albert Lavignac of the Conservatoire at Paris. He answers it by saying that Wagner was a genius whose thought assumed with equal facility the poetic or the musical form.

He combined them in one art, and carried them to their utmost power.

There may be dissentients from this view. Nevertheless, with the growing appreciation of Wagner's music, it must be acknowledged that there is also an increasing interest in his poetic and dramatic work. He is unique among composers in writing both the words and the music of his great works. He is a splendid poet-musician, remarkable in both qualities.

He wrote his poems for music. They are not ordinary librettos; they are dramatic poems of noble conception and composition. Perhaps this has been sometimes forgotten under the spell and genius of the music. Wagner used to emphasize that people so often saw his work merely as music and not as drama, and had not really entered into his meaning. He wrote once: "The Tannhäuser which I witnessed last evening was my score here and there, but the drama of it put aside." It may be, therefore, profitable to study, at times, the drama without the music.

There are and always will be some who do not see much poetry in the often primitive rhythm and alliterative lines of Wagner's verse. They also see nothing in Walt Whitman's style of verse. But we must remember that poetry is something deeper than form. It is in the spirit, the phrase, the imagery, the sweep of vision or passion. We may often quarrel with Wagner's special forms of verse, but we cannot rightly deny that it has poetry in it, and often poetry of the highest.

Some contend that Wagner had no idea of real

poetry and was incapable of understanding or writing it. Others hold that he was essentially a poet in all that he did, and that he is not only one of the musicians, but also one of the poets of the future. To my mind Richard Wagner was essentially a poet whose dream it was to raise humanity to nobler heights through the gospel of a true art.

Wagner in his poetry makes large use of archaic words and phrases to give atmosphere and to heighten the antique effect. He often uses an unusual arrangement of words; he loves the short, broken lines of antiquity; he often discards both rhythm and rhyme; he uses the strong syllable form of verse and the ancient alliterative method. But sometimes he is in perfect conventional form, and breathes forth lyrics and lines of epic sweep and vision worthy of the greatest poets. And surely in all his dramas he makes great poetic pictures, full of dramatic force and fire.

In much of his poetry, Wagner seems to me to answer Carlyle's words: "The meaning of song goes deep,—a kind of inarticulate, unfathomable speech which leads us to the edge of the infinite, and lets us for a moment gaze into it."

Wagner as a poet has not yet been fully appreciated. In all his work, from beginning to end, he is essentially a poet, in temperament, in vision. He was a careful student of the poets from Aeschylus to Shakespeare. And while the quality of his poetic work may not be so fine as that of Goethe or Schiller, yet his dramatic genius is fully as great, if not at times greater.

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He has told the mediaeval legend with a finer human and dramatic instinct than any other poet has shown. Compare the legend of the Holy Grail as it is given in Tennyson's *Idyll* and in Wagner's *Parsifal*, and we see at once that Wagner has given the deeper and stronger version of the great story in a more thrilling way. So with *Tristan and Isolda*; Wagner's poem is vastly greater than either Tennyson's or Matthew Arnold's. It is a wonderful poem, and as one has said, "a poem like that of *Tristan* has sprung as truly from music as *Aphrodite*, the goddess of perfect beauty, has sprung from the waves of the sea." Never has the *Lohengrin* legend been so poetically told. Wagner's poem as well as the music of *Lohengrin* is one of the "undying, eternally beautiful creations of the human mind." Liszt described it as a single indivisible miracle, the highest and most perfect work of art. The poetic telling of *Tannhäuser* and *The Master-singers of Nuremberg* are wonderfully done. Certainly no one has welded together the old Teutonic myths with such consummate skill and power as Wagner has shown in *The Nibelungen Ring*. Many of his lyrics scattered through the dramas are exquisitely beautiful; his descriptive passages, of which a fine anthology might easily be culled, are often full of keen insight and wisdom eloquently expressed. His language as a rule is exquisitely lucid, but if at times it becomes uncouth and involved, it is so because he is so intensely German, so archaic in the flavor of his speech, and often so compressed in statement.

Wagner was a poet who became a musician, and he always is and forever remains a poet-musician. In his great creations he never writes music for words nor words for music. The substance of the great conception is poetical, musical, and artistic in one birth. Sometimes one part of it is written first and sometimes another, but the great whole symphonic construction lies as a poetic atmosphere in mind and heart until it is completed. This helps to explain Wagner the poet and Wagner the musician — they are one.

Wagner loved the great poets, and was of their spirit. From Aeschylus to Shakespeare, from Hafiz to Schiller, from Phidias to Raphael, from Palestrina to Beethoven, — this is the world of poetry and art of which Wagner never ceased to speak in glowing words. These are “the greatest and noblest spirits whose voices have been heard for centuries crying in the wilderness of the world and calling us to higher and nobler life.”

4. His Music

THE story of Wagner's musical awakening is interesting. Music was not his first love, although he began taking lessons as a child. He learned much of his music by ear and would not practise the regular exercises. He seems to have been deeply impressed by the music of Weber, who was a friend of the family, but his great musical awakening was when, at fifteen years of age, he first heard the music of Beethoven. The depths of his soul

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were profoundly stirred. At once he began to long to write music and to express what he felt within his soul. He found that he must know musical theory and counterpoint, so he borrowed books and studied these difficult arts. He borrowed from a circulating library a book on thorough-bass, and worked over that until he conquered it. He began to compose sonatas and quartets, and he attempted overtures for grand opera. At sixteen he had copied most of Beethoven's masterpieces, analyzed them, and understood them. He was living with sonatas, quartets, and overtures, and building most complicated musical structures. So he worked and lived in an enthusiastic fervor of musical composition until the time when he became chorus master at Würzburg, and his long career of greater musical compositions began.

Of Wagner as a musician, much has been written by musical authorities, and the world has accepted the testimony that in Wagner they find a unique genius, one of the master composers of the race. All of us appreciate certain phases of Wagner's music, for instance, the wonderful wave music and revelations of sublime passion in *Tristan*, the conflicting temptations and triumphs of the *Pilgrim's Chorus*, the tender memory and heavenly aspiration of the *Evening Star*, the wonderful fire music of *The Valkyrie*, the Good Friday music of *Parsifal*, and a hundred other miracles of harmonious inspiration in his work, but only a few of us understand or appreciate his marvellous command of the technique of harmony and counterpoint, and his

masterly power of orchestration. On these matters we may well be content to follow the discriminating judgment of Professor Lavignac, teacher of harmony at the Conservatoire at Paris. He points out that musical melody in Wagner is not what is ordinarily meant by that term, — the Italian melody based on the regular rhythmical return of musical phrases, the sentiment of the key, and the invariable close with the perfect cadence; but that Wagner's melody is free and infinite in the sense of not being finished, always linking itself to another melody, and thus admitting all possible modulations. It is a sequence of connected melodies allowing the singer every liberty in musical declamation. It is indeed declamation in music, rather than a song to music.

Another element freely used by Wagner in his music is that of the leit motif, or leading musical motive. It is a sort of musical symbol or portrait representing the chief ideas or characters of the drama. It is always short, simple, and easy to recognize and remember. Often it is descriptive and characteristic in its tones. Wagner first used it in *The Flying Dutchman* in three forms; in *Tannhäuser* he created five chief motives; in *Lohengrin* nine motives. In his subsequent works he used these musical motives even more frequently with conscious purpose and with extraordinary power. Some of these great motives, such as the Grail motive and the Faith motive in *Parsifal*, the Swan motive in *Lohengrin*, the motive of the Forge in *Siegfried*, the Gallop of the horses in *The Val-*

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kyrie, and the Valhalla motive in *The Dusk of the Gods*, have become so well known as to be instantly recognized.

Professor Lavignac has also indicated that Wagner's system of harmony resembles that of Bach and Beethoven. He pays more attention to the rules of counterpoint than to harmony properly so called. His harmonic structure in music allows certain combinations of irregular chords beyond the strict rules of harmony, and a considerably enlarged counterpoint untrammelled and enriched beyond conventional restrictions. His orchestration is richer and fuller in color than Beethoven's. He treats every instrument with the same certainty of touch as if he played it himself. In his musical style, everything is combined,—melody, harmony, and orchestration,—in accentuating and determining the dramatic action, and the result is an unparalleled boldness, richness, and power.

Very interesting was his method and manner of musical composition. Often he wrote his poem first and did not begin to set it to music until it was completely finished, and yet often the musical thought and atmosphere were growing with the growth of the poem. Sometimes, however, the music would be unwritten for years. He composed his music as Beethoven did, walking about and gesticulating. When it began to take form, he played it on the piano and then wrote it out. Sometimes he kept several works before him at the same time, composing the music of one and the poetry of an-

other, and yet bringing each out into a perfect whole, music and words flowing together as if one stream.

He once wrote, explaining his methods: "It is not my way to choose a certain subject, elaborate it into verse, and then cogitate music suitable to go with it. Such a method would indeed subject me to the disadvantage of having to be inspired twice by the same subject, which is impossible. Before I begin to make a verse, or even to project a scene, I am already intoxicated by the musical fragrance of my task. I have all the tones, all the characteristic motives, in my head, so that when the verses are completed and the scenes arranged, the opera is practically finished, so far as I am concerned; and the detailed execution of the work is little more than a quiet after-labor which has been preceded by the real moments of creation." Concerning the writing of Siegfried, he said: "The musical phrases fit themselves on to the verses and periods without any trouble on my part; everything grows as if wild from the ground."

The close unity in every one of Wagner's dramas must be noted. They are very different from the French and Italian operas, which consist of a series of separate arias, duets, sextets, or choruses, more or less loosely strung together. In Wagner's dramas, all is so intimately conjoined that any part separated from the context loses much of its beauty and meaning. Of course there are exceptions, such as Walter's prize song in *The Master-singers*,

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the Evening Star song in *Tannhäuser*, and the Wedding March in *Lohengrin*, but in general all is closely articulated without joints; words and music being twined and intertwined in a continuous unity and harmony.

Wagner's conception of melody and his musical form are largely the development of ideas first used by Weber and Beethoven. We must reiterate that melody with him is not a song or a dance tune, in which the phrases are rhythmical and symmetrical, but rather a harmony that flows on without pausing or returning upon itself. Melody, as he conceives it, should produce upon the spirit of the listener an effect, to use his own words, "like that which a beautiful forest produces, on a summer evening, upon a lonely wanderer, who has but just left the town, and who listens ever more keenly as one who hears with new senses, and becomes with every moment more distinctly conscious of endlessly varied voices that are abroad in the forest. New and various ones constantly join,—such as he never remembers to have heard before; and as they multiply in number they increase in mysterious power. They grow louder and louder, and so many are the voices, the separate tunes, he hears, that the whole strong, clear-swelling music seems to him only the great forest melody that enchained him with awe at the beginning."

5. His Art-Ideas

WITH Wagner the relation of music to the drama is most vital and necessary,

for music is the root of all art. It is not only the most human expression of every phase of human emotion in a universal language, but it can also marvellously express the transcendent, the infinite, the eternal. It therefore gives to the drama an all-embracing atmosphere, a depth and height that would otherwise be impossible. This peculiar position of music was indicated very finely and accurately by Wagner when he said that music stands in the same relation to the other arts as religion stands to the church. In Goethe's words, "it exalts and ennobles everything which it expresses." Wagner felt that music alone is desolate; only in the drama can music become form and at the same time remain solely and entirely expressive. In the new drama, Wagner contends that Shakespeare's forms and Beethoven's melodies will coalesce into one and the same being, so that the deeds of music will become visible.

Now, in this new drama the relation of music and poetry is also most interesting. The object of music is not to support the poetry, but to give its own and a fuller interpretation to the one revelation in which all the arts are in most intimate alliance and yet each is independent. It is a creative alliance for a manifold and unspeakable expression. The poet finds in such a drama means of portrayal such as he never had before. The poet concentrates feelings and thoughts into right words for the understanding; the musician, on the other hand, expands this same revelation into its widest emotional significance. Wagner calls the musician "the

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tone-poet," while referring to the other as "the word-poet," and his new drama Wagner sometimes calls "the word-tone-drama." Wagner contends that in truth the greatness of the poet is best measured by that on which he keeps silence, but in keeping silence the poet calls to the musician: "Spread your melody boldly; let it flow as a continual stream through the whole work; say in it that which I pass over in silence, because you alone can say it, and silently I will say all, leading you by the hand."

The musician it is who causes this silence to sound forth. Music expresses that which ordinary language cannot express, what we have called from our standpoint of understanding, the unspeakable. We can understand, therefore, a little better Wagner's own conception of the mission of music and of poetry and his own enthusiasm for Beethoven, of whom he speaks in that classic sentence: "Beethoven's last symphony is the release of music from its own proper element to become universal art. It is the human gospel of the art of the future. Beyond it no further progress on its own lines is possible; for nothing can follow directly upon it but the universal drama, for which Beethoven has forged the artistic key."

The art doctrines of Wagner begin with the fundamental proposition for which he fought untired, undaunted, undiscouraged, the teaching and gospel to which he gave his life,— in a word, that true art has dignity and divinity. He found in it eternal rules and an inspiration by which to fashion life to higher ends. He loved

to study the Greek art, and found instruction even in its ruin. In that ancient art, he saw how architecture, sculpture, music, and drama taught all subsequent ages how life might be shaped so as to render it more enduring and more worthy.

He contended that art is the highest experience of human life, and that it is involved in politics, philosophy, and religion. It has a deep part in religion, since it is one of the means of revelation and therefore of possible regeneration. Wagner asserted that in the future, art will be that which to-day it can only long to be and not really is; but life will become all that it can ever hope to be only by receiving art into its bosom. Human society must be thoroughly reconstructed, and this can be done only by religion, whose noblest handmaid is the highest art, which teaches man to understand nature, and also to understand himself. As Novalis says: "Only an artist can divine the meaning of life."

Another contention of Wagner's was that no single individual can produce the highest art. It must be the work of the whole people. The tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles were largely the work of Athens. So Wagner felt that his work was the work not of himself but of the whole German genius, the expression of the highest German art. His view was that only in the highest art can the collective world consciously apprehend itself; only collective art is highest art. This means that the best art must grow out of the communal life of the people,

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and also that it has unrivalled powers of unifying the people among themselves. Here Wagner stands on the same ground as Schiller, who contends that man regains unity through the ideal. The high mission of art in Wagner's thoughts, and a mission which it can fulfil only when it is the common property of all, is "to liberate the thought by endowing it with higher expressions, to redeem science by showing its inner significance, and to teach men to understand nature in an infinitely grand compass; to manifest unity in the multifold, rest in movement, the eternal in the temporal. It delivers the mind from the confusion and endless multiplicity of its perceptions, and reveals the eternally One."

Now, in the world of art, Wagner contended not only that the drama is the highest art, but that the most perfect drama is that which is purely and deeply human. By drama he meant not merely one kind of poetic construction as it is ordinarily understood, but a representation which included poetry, music, painting, and action in one great harmony,—a synthesis of the highest art in one living whole. Wagner regarded such drama as "the Original, the Fundamental, the Immeasurable, the Illimitable, the Eternally True, the source from which all inspiration flows, the root through which the nourishment for new strength is imbibed." The great Goethe had dreamed of such a union of poetry, painting, song, music, and acting when he said, as early as 1825: "If all these arts were made to work together, with the charms



RICHARD AND COSIMA WAGNER ENTERTAINING IN THEIR HOME WAHNFRIED, LISZT, AND HANS VON WOLZOGEN.
Painting by W. Beckmann.

of youth and beauty, in a single evening, and all of a high degree of excellence, there would be a feast such as no other could compare with." Lessing had also said, with deep insight: "Nature seems to have designed poetry and music, not so much to combine together, as rather to be one and the same art." Herder, the eminent critic and philosopher, was also looking for an art work "in which poetry, music, action, and scenery are one." What these poets and seers had longed for, Wagner splendidly accomplished in his superb music-dramas.

6. His Religion

WAGNER'S life was love and sympathy. He always spoke most tenderly of his mother; he had much affection for his wife Wilhelmine, even though she brought much bitterness to him; he had a glowing love for his Fatherland; he had a passionate fondness for animals, as revealed in many passages of his writings; he had a constant longing for the affection of his closest friends; again and again he cries out for love from the fearful solitude of his genius, as the hart desireth the water brook. The continual theme of his greatest work in the series of dramas from *The Flying Dutchman* to *Parsifal* is the one subject,—love and its redeeming power.

The attempt is sometimes made to disassociate a man and his work. Some have even said that Wagner the man was mean and despicable, while his musical creations were great and unsurpassed. Others find much to admire in the man, his heroic struggles, his indomitable will,

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and his superb triumphs as an artist and musical reformer, while at the same time they do not admire or understand his music. Individuals have their limitations. It is not given to every one to enjoy lofty music; nor to discern great character.

There are some who think that Wagner had no religion; others that what little religion he had, he changed every few years. They seem to imagine that he was a Christian until he wrote *Lohengrin*, but that afterwards he adopted a heathenish naturalism which showed itself in *The Nibelungen Ring*; that a few years later he fell under the influence of philosophic pessimism and wrote *Tristan and Isolda*; that this phase gradually gave way to more healthy ideas and he wrote *The Master-singers*; and at last that he had a religious transformation and composed *Parsifal*. Such notions, which are exploited by an eminent French professor of philosophy, are due to an inadequate knowledge of Wagner's personality. Careful study shows that there was a pervading religious motive throughout his life, and a consistent development of real faith in the essence of religion and in the possibilities of human regeneration.

Faith is the soul of art, in Wagner's opinion. In his younger years he spoke the inspiring words: "We wish to rise from the degrading slavery of handicraft with its pale financial soul, to free artistic humanity with its radiant world-soul." In his last work, *Parsifal*, composed after a life of bitterness and disappointment, he cried in mighty and convincing tones: "Faith

lives!" (Der Glaube lebt!) The music at the close brings a metamorphosis of the doleful strain which Parsifal's genius has recognized as the divine lament of nature, "borne on the brilliant tones of the trumpets and exalted to a triumphant reassertion of faith by the radiant world's soul."

But besides his belief in faith as the soul of art, Wagner's other basic principle was that of love as the greatest force of life. He contended that the mediator between force and freedom, without which force is brutality and freedom caprice, is love. In another place he asserted that love is the mother of society and must therefore be its only principle.

He affirmed further that nothing is more worthy of love than the community of mankind. He wrote to Liszt: "For the entire human race, the condition of lovelessness is that of suffering." Perhaps no passage better reveals his wisdom on this matter than the following: "What is it that destroys our civilization if it is not the want of love? How can the youthful mind learn to love the world as it gradually unfolds itself before him, whilst we continue to inculcate nothing but caution and suspicion in his dealings therewith? Surely there is only one right way, namely, to explain the lovelessness of the world to him and its consequence in suffering. In this way his sympathy will be awakened, and will lead him to realize the causes of his suffering, and himself to renounce the impulses of his passion, so as to diminish and divert the suffering of others." He concludes:

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“Only that love which has sprung from sympathy, and has been intensified until it has completely broken the selfish will of the individual, is the redeeming love of Christianity, the love which quite of itself includes faith and hope,—faith as the truthful, certain, divinely confirmed consciousness of the moral significance of the world, hope as the blessed knowledge of the impossibility of his consciousness being deceived.”

Richard Wagner's religion emphasized especially the doctrine of regeneration. But this is not the usual theological doctrine so described, but a practical reconstruction of human society. He wrote: “We recognize the cause of the decadence of historical man and the necessity of his regeneration. We believe in the possibility of the regeneration and devote ourselves thereto in every sense.” Again he wrote: “Only from the deep soil of a true religion can the inducement and the strength proceed which are necessary for carrying through the regeneration.” Some confusion in his writings results from his contention that religion itself has undergone decadence, the churches and the modern state as well, and by the assumption of a religion which is yet to grow out of the Christian revelation. Wagner's principal works dealing directly with regeneration are the works of his later years, especially *Religion and Art* and *The Heroic Age and Christianity*. After religion, art is in these writings considered the most important factor of regeneration. His leading thought is that art cannot really come to maturity in the present state of society; that this

is possible only in a regenerated society; but that without the coöperation of art, regeneration is impossible. Wagner had no word of approval for the chaos of modern civilization; nor did he believe in so-called natural progress, but he contended that wherever we look in the civilized world we find the need of the regeneration of mankind. He called our modern world profoundly immoral,—transforming men into monsters; a world of murder and robbery, organized and legalized by lying, deception, and hypocrisy. He found that the task which devolves upon the spirit of truthfulness is that of recognizing our culture and civilization as the misbegotten progeny of the lies of the human race.

Wagner sought for the causes of the decadence of civilized man. He seemed to find various explanations in philosophy, in history, and in natural science. At times he was pessimistic, but his poetic nature could not rest in pessimism. He had an inexhaustible force of faith and hope; he believed in the inner strength of mankind and the fullest possibilities of redemption. At times he exclaimed against the impotent religion of the churches from which he said God had been discarded, but nevertheless he believed in religion and the religion of Christ, as the measureless power for the progressive redemption of the world.

Wagner called our world the wilderness of a blighted paradise. He lamented over the shattered faith and the purity of human nature. He contended that we can look for salvation only in

the awakening of man to his simple and holy dignity. The belief in the essential purity and holiness of human nature was the philosophical foundation of Wagner's doctrine of regeneration. But in connection with this, Wagner proclaimed the strange contradiction that the negation of the will to live must always appear as the highest energy of the will itself, that out of the inner negation of the world the affirmation of redemption will be born.

The real basis of Wagner's religious belief was his conviction that the moral significance of the world is the crowning point of all knowledge. Wagner spoke of faith as a deed, the positive impulse of life.

In Wagner's thought, true art is to save the substance of religion and to recover for us that purest religion which is to spring from Christian revelation, the noblest heritage of Christian thought in its reconstructing purity and sympathy. He felt that truthful art is an emanation from truthful religion, that only upon the foundations of a truthful morality can the true blossoms of art spring forth.

In what sense Wagner was a Christian there may still be some debate, but as far back as 1851 he said: "If I, in the desire to free myself from the depravity of the modern world, have been a Christian, I was at least a more honest Christian than those who with their insolent piety reproach me with falling away from Christianity." And again later he wrote: "Henceforward our only concern will be to prepare a vigorous soil for the renewed culture of the re-

ligion of sympathy among us. Perhaps the sage which helped us to look upwards in our decadence would be not seen but heard — as a sigh of deep sympathy, such as was once heard from the Cross at Golgotha, now springing from our own soul." And finally, this passage from Religion and Art: "However peaceful the condition may be which will result from the regeneration of the human race, by reason of an appeased conscience, the fearful tragedy of the world's existence will continually make itself felt, in nature around us, in the violent conflict of the elements, in the ceaseless lower manifestations of the Will beside and about us, in sea and desert, even in the insect and worm upon which we carelessly tread; and daily we shall look to the Saviour on the Cross as our last exalted refuge."

We need not consider in this sketch of Wagner's life some of the minor phases which, however important they seemed to him, are now discerned to have no great significance in his career. I refer to such matters as his essays on vivisection, his enthusiastic advocacy of vegetarianism, and his surprising thesis on The Jewish Element in Music. The greatest minds have their eccentricities; Wagner had many.

Wagner's art and all highest art may rightly be called religious. He continually contended that "True art and true religion mutually condition each other; and from their union springs the regeneration of a race, the reborn blessed artistic humanity of the future." The perfect drama, therefore, is the living representation

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of deepest religion and human dignity, the artwork where the highest and deepest things which the human mind is capable of grasping shall be communicated in the most intelligible and the most convincing way.

Those who can appreciate both the man and his work find that the spirit and character of the man are wonderfully reflected and interpreted in the great dramas that were the fullest expression of his mind and heart. These dramas grapple with the largest themes of spiritual life. He uses for his backgrounds the mighty myths and legends of the Teutonic people, and they become the ideal fields for his purpose. The vast mythic personalities are symbols rather than historic individuals, and through them we see the vital ethical laws working themselves out. The religious ideas of sin and its consequences, of retribution for violated law, and of redemption through suffering and self-sacrifice are presented in these music-dramas with tremendous power. There may be different interpretations of the tremendous lessons involved, but no one can doubt that Wagner is seriously grappling with the greatest question of life and destiny.

Many of Wagner's religious opinions may be in dispute, but he surely held to the reality of the deepest truths of morality and religion. "It is impossible," writes a careful critic, "to study Wagner's works without being struck by the singularly deep religious feeling by which they are pervaded. The broad basis of his religion was the emancipation of the human race;

this was his conception of the fulfilment of the purer doctrine of Christ. To him the doctrine that Jesus preached was Love, and in his earnest desire to arrive at the rock of truth in religious life and art, we cannot wonder that he felt little or no sympathy with those who seemed to him to have obscured that precious truth with clouds of arbitrary and ostentatious dogma designed to further the worldly interests of priesthood." We can further agree with the judgment of another admirable critic who concludes: "If we sometimes hear Wagner speaking with contempt of Christianity, we must remember that it is the formal and official, and not the essential Christianity at which his diatribes are directed. Upon the vital elements of the doctrine of Christ his art laid firm hold; it clothed them with the beauty of glorious music, and it will share their immortality."

7. His Place in History and Art

WHAT will be the effect on Wagner's fame of his recent volumes of autobiography, which give such a full revelation of the details of his life? They reveal the weakness as well as the greatness of the man. Some contend that they make Wagner similar to Lord Bacon, who was called in his day the greatest and the meanest of men. Wagner has shown vast contrasts in character. He had his limitations and some unfortunate traits, but he also had many splendid traits of character as well as high ideals and glorious visions. I think we may leave the matter where Dr. Washington Gladden leaves

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it in his Harvard lectures on "Witnesses of the Light," where he says: "Richard Wagner was not a saint. His temper was stormy; of tact he was destitute; he was absorbed in his own creations, and often rather oblivious of the interests of others. Respecting money matters his sentiments were chivalrous, but his habits were reckless. Upon some of the episodes of his life one does not care to dwell; only the Omniscient can be judge. But over against these failings we may place his genuine democracy. To the gondolier or the cabman, he was as courteous as to the king, and his servants worshipped him. To every living creature his heart went out with compassion; to his friends he was the soul of loyalty, and there were hosts of them whose devotion to him amounted to a passion. His work, like that of most of the great workers, is of uneven value; but when the ages to come shall have sifted the chaff from the grain, it may appear that the largest and the best contribution to the world-store of great music and high inspiration at the end of the nineteenth century was the contribution of Richard Wagner."

Richard Wagner was an extraordinary man in the midst of an ordinary environment. The prosaic, practical, utilitarian Germany of the nineteenth century, full of science, railways, armies, and commerce, produced a poet and musician who felt himself the prophet of a new era for the redemption of humanity. He brought to life a new world of inspiration and beauty in his great music-dramas of Tannhäuser, Lohengrin, Tristan, and The Nibelungen Ring. In the midst

of scientific Germany, the miracle of Richard Wagner happened, and to a German Festival Play-House lovers of the beauty and power of universal truth flocked by thousands from all parts of the world. In this commercial age of ours, founded so largely on money standards, his revelation of pure idealism, set forth in a small provincial town, won at last the recognition and support of a mighty emperor, and the applause and admiration of the whole world.

It was the fine judgment of Nietzsche that Wagner was not only a great artist, but that he was "one of the great powers of civilization." There are many who will consider this estimate extravagant, but those who follow closely the leading of his great and lofty mind must acknowledge that Wagner is one of the most brilliant lights in that revelation of German art whose soul is music and poetry, and whose most perfect form is the music-drama which is being fully recognized as one of the modern powers of civilization. As Chamberlain says, "The German people have long ago acknowledged that its greatest poets are its musicians." Goethe and Schiller are superb word-poets, but Bach, Beethoven, and Wagner express something incomparable, and beyond words, for only in music does the soul of the German people attain its fullest expression and its highest perfection.

When we study carefully the antecedents of Richard Wagner in history and art, we see clearly that there were causes and reasons for his emergence at this epoch. It was not so

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much a happening as a logical outcome and historical development. German civilization had been the slow growth of centuries. It had been nourished from a hundred roots, and this final poet-musician, as Nietzsche contended, was a consummation and revelation of the whole mighty past.

The prophecies concerning the possibilities of art which Goethe, Schiller, and Herder uttered, the philosophies of Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer, and the musical revelations of Bach and Beethoven show that Wagner's greatness is not at all an accident of history or an emergence of meteoric genius, but rather the slowly matured product of the artistic development of the German nation. His life and work are the inspiration and prophecy of the greatest German poets and of the loftiest German musicians and artists, as well as the spirit and aspiration of the whole German people. He was the fulfilment of Jean Paul Richter's prophecy: "We wait for the man who shall write both the words and the music of a true opera;" and also of Herder's prophecy of the man "who will upset the whole abode of sing-song opera, and will erect an Odeum, a complete lyric building, in which poetry, music, action, and scenery are one." Wagner, the latest of Germany's truly great ones, equally gifted as musician and poet, brought forth the immortal creations which are expressions of the highest German art, — the music-dramas. As the Greek drama reached its highest point in Sophocles, the Spanish in Calderon, the English in Shakespeare, so the German

drama has reached its highest development in Wagner.

The question may be asked whether we shall ever see another Wagner. It is impossible to answer, but we may feel sure that whatever the astounding genius of the future, it will build on the same essential foundations in order to reach the highest possible art. The work of Wagner has become the priceless heritage of humanity.

We recognize, as we said, intellectual limitations in Wagner, — weaknesses, extravagances, trivialities in thought and execution, — but when all is said, and we look calmly at his work, we confess it is the handiwork of a giant, — the colossal expression of a master with titanic grasp and force. His powerful essay on Opera and Drama and his tremendous drama of The Nibelungen Ring show the breadth, the mighty grasp, the continued effort of the brain of genius. He was surely one in whom the organic and elemental fire of life burned fiercely and grandly, and from start to finish. After Saint-Saëns had heard The Ring for the first time he wrote: "The entire work seems to me, in its almost supernatural grandeur, like the chain of the Alps seen from the summit of Mont Blanc."

PART III: THE GREAT MUSIC-DRAMAS

THE GREAT MUSIC-DRAMAS

THE creations of Wagner in dramatic poetry as well as in music are a world in themselves. They are a vast and splendid company of immortal characters that his genius has portrayed, worthy to be compared with the achievements of Aeschylus, Dante, Milton, Goethe, Schiller, Shakespeare, Dickens, or Scott. The eleven great music-dramas that are the masterpieces of his genius will some day be as well known and as much a familiar part of the heritage of humanity as Hamlet or King Lear. They are already the great national legends of Germany, and stand in much the same relation to German history and literature as the unique cycle of English legends which Tennyson has so wonderfully told in his splendid *Idylls of the King*. To us in America these German national legends are as deeply significant and are as much a part of our ancestral history as the mythic stories of Britain which the poet laureate has used. Indeed, Wagner's great legends seem to us to be more instinct with life and with greater meanings for the present and the future than Tennyson's ideal. They are throbbing with the elemental passions and aspirations of the human race.

Wagner worked for the joy of working. He wrote in 1851: "My artistic products grow ever richer, more joyful and more hopeful. I feel a thrill of joy when I think that I shall soon begin my work on them."

It is interesting for us to remember that his only humorous drama, *The Master-singers*, was

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begun and partially written during his miserable years at Paris and Vienna, when disappointment and tragedy were gnawing at his heart; the terrible world-tragedy of *Götterdämmerung* was composed during the quiet, peaceful days at Tribschen; while *Parsifal* was in his mind and heart, stimulating his faith and work, for twenty years, but was completed only one year before his death. This noble and luminous work forms a wonderful background for his closing years.

Wagner's great dramas were in a deep sense born of his own experience of suffering. He was an idealist who suffered most acutely even as he lived most intensely. Warm blood flowed in his veins; no human weakness was unknown to him. But he loved greatly, and above all he learned by real experience that the greatest of all love is sympathy, and that in the depths of sympathy is the power of redemption.

A few words should be said concerning translations of these music-dramas into English. A literal translation, word for word, in the short and broken metres of the original, is not only unsatisfactory, but unacceptable to general English readers, since so much is lost by the absence of scenery, action, and interpreting music. The usual libretto translations of the operas, made under the hampering condition of fitting the English words to musical accents, are utterly inadequate from the literary standpoint. They constantly over or under emphasize, and misinterpret the spirit of the original. The only alternative is to present the dramas in adequate

literary form, faithful to Wagner's text, and faithful as well to the spirit of the music, scenery, and action, in the literary form already domesticated and most acceptable to English readers,— the natural dramatic narrative form used in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. This has been done in the translations and interpretations of Wagner's eleven great music-dramas in the volumes of this series, after years of critical study at Berlin and Oxford. The purpose is to give for the general reader, in true Wagnerian style, a cumulative impression, as far as it may be possible, — words, musical interpretation, scenery, and action, blended together in one story and picture. The translations are made after a careful study of the German text, which is faithfully although freely translated, and after repeated hearings of these great dramas at Berlin, Munich, and Bayreuth.

Brief sketches of the separate dramas are here given in order to show the development of Wagner's genius and work. Much fuller consideration of each drama, together with the full detailed story, will be found in the separate volumes of this series on the great music-dramas of Wagner.

I. *Rienzi*

RIENZI is of great historical interest as a human document of Wagner's intellectual and artistic development. It is his first grand opera. He wrote: "Rienzi may be regarded as a play in music; from it my new development as musical dramatist now unfolded."

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It is his decisive step from unconsciousness to consciousness as a great composer. His former works, such as *Die Feen* and *Das Liebesverbot*, are now recognized as preliminary and slight. Here is his first substantial work, in a grand manner and on a theme that prophesies his own unique career. *Rienzi* is to build new glories on the empires of old. It shall seem a forlorn hope, but he will be true to his ideals, whatever comes. Wagner is full of intellectual sympathy with *Rienzi* and his high purposes.

The story of the composition of the opera Wagner tells us: "Rienzi with his grand thoughts in his brain and in his heart, living in an era of rudeness and depravity, excited and attracted all my sympathy and admiration; yet my plan for the opera sprang first from the conviction of a pure lyrical element in the atmosphere of the hero. *The Messengers of Peace*, the *Call to Arms by the Clergy*, the *Battle Hymn*, induced me to the composition of the opera of *Rienzi*. The work was conceived and executed under the influence of my earliest impressions received from Spontini's heroic opera and from the glittering genre of the Parisian Grand Opera as represented by Auber, Meyerbeer, and Halévy. I completed *Rienzi* during my first sojourn in Paris. I had the splendid Grand Opera before me, and my ambition was not only to imitate, but, with reckless extravagance, to surpass all that was gone before in brilliant finales, hymns, processions, and musical clang of arms. Whilst writing the libretto I simply thought of an opera-text which would enable

me to display the principal forms of grand opera, such as introductions, choruses, arias, duets, trios, with all possible splendor."

Compare, however, Bulwer-Lytton's novel and this dramatic poem which Wagner derived from it, and notice how the poet has taken this wealth of material and chosen out of it the dramatic incidents with an inevitable instinct and a unique creative vigor, in order to give a simple and great action worthy to be portrayed both in poetry and music, and in it all to delineate a singularly sublime character. As character study *Rienzi* is probably as fine as anything Wagner has done. There are many who see in *Rienzi* a masterly history of the soul, a study of the inmost recesses of the heart, a revelation of a novel type of patriot. But in reality also we may see in Wagner's portrayal of his hero a closer delineation of the historical original. Here is the real *Rienzi*, the hope of Italy and Rome, the great hero whom his personal friend, Petrarch, characterized as "Un Signor valoroso, accorto, e saggio."

The music of the drama of *Rienzi* is also a revelation of independent thought and feeling and of real genius, with passionate massive effects of music and real musical glories. It surely prophesies that Wagner is coming to himself both as poet and musician.

What a congenial theme *Rienzi* was for Wagner's own soul, which was in growing revolt against the narrow conventions and limitations of life. As H. R. Haweis well says: "There, as on a large and classic stage, Wagner portrayed

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the eternal revolt of the human spirit against tyranny, routine, selfishness, and corruption, of which the Polish insurrection of 1831 and the Revolution of July were the modern echoes. Rienzi, a tribune of the people, dreaming of the old austere republic, in the midst of corrupt papal Rome,—a noble heart, a powerful will at war with the brutal and vulgar age, supported, cheered by the enthusiasm of a devoted and patriotic sister, raised by a wave of popularity to the highest summit of human power, then hurled down by the papal anathema, betrayed by a mean and cowering aristocracy, banished by the mob that had so lately hailed him as a deliverer, and at last falling by a treacherous hand upon the charred and crumbling ashes of the Senate House, the last great tribune in Rome!—Here was a subject with immense outlines.”

It is, of course, acknowledged that from Rienzi to *The Ring* is an immense development intellectually and musically, but the first prophesies the last. No one but Wagner, even at this date, could have written such a drama.

2. The Flying Dutchman

THE legend is an old one, much older than the story which those daring Dutch navigators of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had somehow made their own. It is a mediæval version of Ulysses, “the unresting traveller, yearning for home and domestic joys.” It is a maritime version of Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew, “accursed and hopeless of all save the

end in oblivion." The Kundry of the later Parsifal is another variation of the theme of one condemned to perpetual wandering and weary existence.

Wagner obtained the germ of the story from Heine, yet he gave it a distinct and splendid mintage of his own. This is what it meant to Wagner: "The figure of the Flying Dutchman is a mythical creation of the folk. A primal trait of human nature speaks out from it with a heart-enthraling force. This trait in its most universal meaning is the longing after rest from amid the storms of life. The sea in its turn became the soil of life; yet no longer the land-locked sea of the Grecian world, but the great ocean that engirdles the earth."

We see clearly that The Flying Dutchman was another distinct step in Wagner's development. Even more than Rienzi this opera began to assume the form of a great and real music-drama. Wagner wrote of it that here he shook off the last prejudices still clinging to him from the time when he composed merely for musical instruments, and he now attained the definiteness of the drama. Again he asserted: "With The Flying Dutchman began my new career as a poet; I was now no longer a writer of operatic libretti. Henceforward in my dramatic capacity I was in the first place a poet; not until the poem came to be fully worked out did I again become a musician. But as a poet I fully divined the power which music possessed for enforcing my words." He meant that now at last he had begun to find himself both as musician and poet.

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Rienzi was his first musical work of unique and worthy character, and *The Flying Dutchman* was his first great poetical achievement.

The music of the first act of *The Flying Dutchman* has been called most picturesque and weird. The atmosphere of the North Sea breathes through the whole drama. One can distinctly hear "the shrilling of the north wind, the roaring of the waves, the breaking of cordage, the banging of booms,—uncanny sounds on a dismal night at sea."

Wagner's conception of the story seems to be, as H. R. Haweis puts it: "Immense unhappiness drawn by magnetic attraction to immense love, tried by heartrending doubt and uncertainty, and crowned with fidelity and triumphant love, the whole embodied in a clear, simple story, summed up in a few situations of terrible strength and inexorable truth—this is *The Flying Dutchman*."

3. Tannhäuser

THIS story of Tannhäuser, "in the skilful weaving of the dramatic web out of materials scattered and apparently unrelated, gives a complete demonstration of Wagner's masterly powers as a dramatist and dramatic poet."

There are probably three distinct literary sources of this Wagnerian story of Tannhäuser. The first is the legend of Tannhäuser found in many forms in old German ballads and tales, and in which the ending is quite different from the climax that Wagner makes,—not a saving

of the soul, but a return to Venus. The second source was a collection of poems of the thirteenth century called the "Wartburgkrieg." This gives some intimate pictures of the court of Landgrave Hermann of Thuringia, a famous patron of poetry and song, and it describes a poetic contest or debate on the glories of certain princes. Wagner took what he wanted of these poems and adapted them to his purposes,—making Tannhäuser one of the minnesingers of his story. The third source was the history of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, the daughter-in-law of Landgrave Hermann of Thuringia. She furnishes the suggestion for the beautiful character, pure and lofty, of the Elizabeth of Wagner's drama, the direct contrast to the evil and voluptuous Venus. Elizabeth had not been mentioned in these previous sources. This third source thus gave what was needed for the exquisite portrait of one of the noblest of Wagner's heroines.

It seems rather incongruous at first to find the classic name of Frau Venus in this ancient Teutonic legend. But we must remember that old Germany had taken on much of classic lore from its Roman conquerors. The Venus of the Romans—essentially the Aphrodite of the Greeks, and the Astarte of the Phoenicians—the goddess of love and beauty—had pushed aside the old Teutonic goddess Freya, the wife of Odin, queen and leader of the valkyrie; Hel, the goddess of the underworld and the dead; and Holda, the goddess of the spring of budding and fructification; and gradually all

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the attributes of these had mingled in Frau Venus. The common people did not readily part with this old poetic mythology of nature, but even after they became Christian, they merely supposed these older and displaced deities to be dwelling in caves and mountains.

Wonderful music is this of Tannhäuser. The Song of the Sirens, the Dance of the Bacchantes, the Hymn to Venus, the Evening Star Song, the Pilgrim's Chorus, Elizabeth's Prayer, — each has its own charm. But the great overture is a magnificent inspiration. It paints the whole picture, and voices the whole deep struggle. It is thrilling, almost overpowering, in its agonies, beseechings, strugglings, and glorious triumph.

The inner significance of the Tannhäuser drama is manifest. The bacchanals in the Venus scenes typify "the gratification of the senses," while the pilgrims portray "the higher desires of man." Elizabeth represents the loftiest embodiment of desire, the eternal woman-soul which "leadeth us ever upward and on." Wagner makes the saving principle in his tragic story the principle of "self-effacement, a love faithful unto death."

It has been said that Tannhäuser is a man's story; that women never find in it what a man finds there; that the experience of the story lies beyond the pale of the feminine nature, and therefore cannot be fully appreciated by them. However this may be, there is an appeal and fascination in the story for every soul. It touches something vital and universal. In the

experience of Tannhäuser, as the musical and dramatic critic, W. J. Henderson, rightly asserts, "Wagner has set before us the struggle of the pure and the impure, the lusts and the aspirations of man's nature. It is essentially the tragedy of a man. Tannhäuser is typical of every man, beset on the one hand by the desire of the flesh which satiates and maddens, and courted on the other by the undying loveliness of chaste and holy love. If ever a sermon was preached as to the certainty with which the sins of the flesh will find a man out, it is preached in this tremendous tragedy, when the flame of old passions sears the flesh of new happiness and drives the errant out of paradise. Wagner, out of the old Tannhäuser myth, fashioned the tragedy of a man's soul. Every man must bow his head in reverence to the genius which thus made quick the battle of passion against purity for the possession of man's soul. Wagner wrote no mightier tragedy than this."

4. Lohengrin

LOHENGRIN is one of the most poetic as well as one of the most popular of Wagner's music-dramas. It has an exquisite spiritual quality. Doubtless it is another retelling of the old Greek myth of Cupid and Psyche, but this time the telling is a quaint and beautiful mediaeval legend.

The Lohengrin legend is said to have originated in the town of Cleves in Germany. There stands an ancient Castle of the Swan, high on

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the hilltop in the centre of the town. A splendid statue of Lohengrin, Knight of the Swan, adorns the market-place. As far as I could learn on a recent visit there, the old traditions of the place were authentic and trustworthy, although some of them are also told of the small town of Nymwegen as well as of the Duchy of Cleves. These traditions are given in numerous famous poems. Wagner has taken considerable liberties with the old legends, but has made a notable composite version which, wedded to the genius of his music, will probably remain for all time as the most widely accepted form of the legend.

The Lohengrin story was in the last one hundred lines of Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*. A slight story—but Wagner gathered other versions of this great national myth and made a composite narrative to suit his dramatic purposes. In it all he selects and rearranges with a masterly dramatic genius and a fine appreciation of the poetic possibilities of his story.

In Lohengrin, we are constantly reminded of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. *Telramund* is "infirm of purpose" like *Macbeth*, but urged on and mastered by his wife's ambition. And *Ortrud*, like *Lady Macbeth*, has the same desperate daring, the same quenchless ambition, the same unsexed womanhood.

As to character studies, we may say that in this story of Lohengrin, Wagner has portrayed with consummate art two types of women. *Elsa* is the type of woman with perfect love.

She can trust love, she can dare for love, she believes in love with all her heart. She is the complete embodiment of the idealism and heroism of love. The character of Elsa, her dreamy nature, her absolute trust in God, her unresisting attitude before her accusers, was probably suggested by the slight picture in Wolfram von Eschenbach, but Wagner has elaborated it finely. In the dark Ortrud, the wife of Frederick of Telramund, the claimant to the throne, Wagner has portrayed another type of woman, — “the woman without love.” She is, as Wagner says, that “horrible thing, a politic, scheming woman. She has but one passion — an ancestral pride; and to gratify this she would sacrifice all.”

For those who care to see the deeper and higher meanings in such a drama as Lohengrin, these suggestions may be offered. The story is the eternal myth of Psyche, a story antedating Christianity, a study of woman's heart. Absolute confidence, resting not upon outward facts, but upon inward persuasion, is presented as the necessary condition of love. The happiness of lovers depends, as it were, upon an inner psychic condition, — the perfect union of souls.

There is significance and interpretation in the music of this drama. The music of Lohengrin has a mystic and magic quality. It is full of spiritual aspiration. There is a loftiness and unworldliness about it. But it is full also of the sweetness of human love. And it is dark at times with the insinuations of evil and the sounds of warring. “The whole interest of Lo-

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hengrin," wrote Wagner, "lies in an inner process within Elsa's heart, touching the secret springs of the soul." And this he tried to express in his music. Music is feeling and revelation. "The music," as W. J. Henderson says, "is the utterance of speech; the melody, the spontaneous embodiment of feeling, — an approach to the endless melody of the later dramas. The Lohengrin music is mellifluous and wonderfully attractive, but perhaps even Wagner felt that in it his own beautiful conception of the character of Lohengrin was not fully revealed to the public."

But yet further, in Lohengrin, as in Tannhäuser and others of his dramas, there seems to be symbolized the tragic self-sacrifice of love. As Wagner himself writes: "If any characteristic poetic feature is expressed in them, it is the high tragedy of renunciation, that which alone avails." This may be the shadow of Schopenhauer's pale philosophy; yet even before his acquaintance with Schopenhauer, he had the same life convictions. Tannhäuser had meant to him the struggle of a man's heart, the conquest of the life, sacrifice of the wild pleasures of the world for the sweet delights of a pure ideal and a satisfied conscience. Wagner, however, felt that in Lohengrin he was rising high into ethereal regions, toward the radiant summits. He was irresistibly drawn to it. He writes: "Lohengrin is an entirely new manifestation. It appeared to me as an imperative duty."

Finally, there is a tremendous spiritual suggestion in this drama — as great a truth as that

in Parsifal. The spiritual purpose of the latter was to show the healing power of redemptive love, while Lohengrin shows the absolute necessity of an unquestioning faith in order to fulness of blessing. This truth has its earthly aspects. Doubt destroys the perfection of human happiness. A thousand daily experiences witness to the fact. But especially is this true in its religious aspect. The divine Helper comes to our aid. We are delivered out of great distresses. He gives Himself to us in love. He gives the fulness of His blessing. All is right so long as we perfectly love and trust Him. But begin to doubt God, begin to ask His name and question His nature, and God is soon forever lost to us. Faith is the most necessary thing in daily life, as it is the most necessary in divine life. Perfect love and perfect trust are the essence of religion, and the only source of heavenly joy. Fear hath torment, but perfect love casteth out fear.

This central truth of the drama of Lohengrin is universal, and touches all religions and all life. It shows the desolation of doubt. It is an appeal for the highest faith in the highest things. Indeed, a motto for this drama might be, "Das sich uns nur durch Glauben giebt" ("That which we attain only through faith"). May we not say, therefore, that, both in beauty and significance, this noble drama of Lohengrin belongs to the undying creations, an inspired vision, an immortal master-work, to which as yet the world has scarcely awakened?

The Great 5. The Master-singers of Nuremberg

Music-
Dramas

THE Master-singers of Nuremberg is Wagner's humorous opera. It is a refreshing contrast to the high tragedy of his sublime national epic of *The Nibelungen Ring*, and of the scarcely less tragic *Lohengrin*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Parsifal*. It is a picturesque episode, giving the spirit of the Middle Ages in admirable way.

The master-singers, it must be remembered, were not invented by Wagner. They were a real guild of old Nuremberg singers, men of flesh and blood, a product of that intensely artistic centre in mediaeval Germany. The picture of these ancient worthies is absolutely accurate and realistic. Wagner intended it as a satire on the narrowness of a mechanical art-spirit; but it became a most gentle satire and an exquisitely pleasant and artistic portrayal of the life and times of the picturesque city.

The chief characters in Wagner's drama of *The Master-singers* are very distinctive types. The foremost of course is Hans Sachs, the cobbler-poet, full of kindness, integrity, and good sense. Wagner has evidently idealized him from the data of the actual historical personage, for it seems scarcely believable that a cobbler could have been the philosopher, poet, artist, commoner, and genial romanticist that Hans Sachs is made to appear in Wagner's portraiture; yet it is true to the spirit of the man, and many incidents as given are founded on fact. For instance, it is well known in the life of the real Hans Sachs that when past middle age he was

attracted by a very young girl, whom he married, and that he lived happily with her to the end of his life.

Another principal character, Sixtus Beckmesser, is the antithesis of Hans Sachs. Wagner has combined in this one unique character the features not only of the historic Beckmesser, but of three other markers, in order to make this ill-natured buffoon. He is pompous, crabbed, and grotesque; a ridiculous and malicious pedant; a prosy old traditionalist, selfish and unattractive. Master Pogner, the goldsmith, is a fine type of the good and honest citizen, who is at the same time a noble devotee of Art, and thinks it a sublime idea to offer his daughter on the very shrine of Art itself. David is a typical apprentice; Magdalena, a wise and faithful servant; while Walter and Eva are splendid exponents of youth and beauty, poetry and enthusiasm.

The satire, as we said, is a most gentle one. The master-singers were not in the least grotesque to themselves. They took themselves most seriously, and they were taken seriously by the German people. The work of verse-making was with them not a pleasant pastime, nor an unusual inspiration, but a legitimate work, and a wholesome occupation, a fine outlet, both for their nobler sentiment and their deeper religious spirit. They felt that they could be about no more helpful and holy business than their devotion to Art in the spirit of Religion.

The humor and emotion of the drama are all thoroughly German. It is full of folk-lore and

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folk-humor,—a sort of rude, Gothic humor,—and the music is gay and light-hearted in character, in perfect harmony with the numerous jests and the tender emotions of the drama.

Some have contended that Wagner has largely portrayed himself in the character of Walter, that, in fact, it is a piece of literary and musical autobiography. But this cannot be confirmed by any words that he has ever said concerning it, by letter or otherwise. Yet we can readily agree that the composer, as one critic asserts, “really designed Walter to represent, like himself, the spirit of progress in music, while in the master-singers themselves, he embodies the spirit of pure pedantry. . . . These two powers have always been at war in the world of art and always will be. Theoreticians and critics publish rules which they deduce from the practice of the great artists. The next original genius who arrives has something new to say, and says it in a new way. Wagner in *The Master-singers* has shown us the spirit of progress in its jubilant youth, scoffing at the established rules. One of the earliest lessons of the symbolic comedy of *The Master-singers* is that a musician, or any other artist, must first master what has already been learned of his art before he can advance beyond it.” But the greater lesson of the drama is manifestly that real genius cannot be bound by pedantic rules, and seeks constantly a newer and freer utterance.

The setting of the drama of *The Master-singers* is the most charming that can be imagined. Beautiful, quaint old Nuremberg in its golden

days of prosperity and art; the fine old church of St. Catherine; the narrow, picturesque streets and artistic gabled houses; the charming costumes of the burghers of that period; and the delicate mingling of art and humor and religion give an indescribable charm. It conjures up the romantic days of long ago in these streets once trod by Albrecht Dürer and Hans Sachs.

6. The Nibelungen Ring

HERE is something primitive, colossal, majestic in Wagner's fourfold music-drama of The Nibelungen Ring. It partakes of the power and grandeur of the earlier ages of the world. It is a drama of the mighty era of the gods and of the giants and of the heroes before the coming of man upon the earth. It is the wondrous story in which was enwrapped much of the religious belief of our ancient Northern ancestors in Europe.

The deepest truths of this drama of primitive life are universal, and their meanings as potent to-day as in the prehistoric world. It is a vast allegory of the strongest passions of life. It is a dream of yesterday and a vision of to-morrow, if we have eyes to look into the heart of its mystery.

It is important to present the story of The Ring in the clear and strong way of the German original, to show the relation of the parts and the dramatic unity of the whole, to make the whole vast epic stand out in its own vivid light and thrilling power.

The Nibelungen Ring, as Wagner gives it,

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is divided into four dramas,—The Rhine-Gold, The Valkyrie, Siegfried, and The Dusk of the Gods. These are a tetralogy, a cycle of four great music-dramas, or, as it is sometimes designated, a trilogy, considering The Rhine-Gold as a prelude to the greater stories of The Valkyrie, Siegfried, and The Dusk of the Gods.

We may find it helpful toward a clear understanding to consider the four dramas as one great epic whole,—for they are such,—and to study the sources of the story, the story itself, and finally its spiritual and universal significance.

I

As to the sources, we may remember that The Ring, as we have it in Wagner's dramas, is not taken from the ancient Nibelungen Lied, to which it bears some resemblance, but it is an independent composition. It was derived by Wagner from various ancient songs and sagas composed by many old bards, and Wagner wove it into one great harmonious story. Its main features and also innumerable details are from the old Norse and German myths, but there has been new choice and rearrangement of the material. The principal source of The Ring was the Volsunga Saga, a Scandinavian epic, preserved in the Icelandic literature. Lesser parts of the story are taken from the Elder Edda and the Younger Edda, old Norse sagas. Other parts are taken from the Nibelungen Lied, the Eckenlied, and other Teutonic folk-lore.

The great drama, as Wagner finally evolved

it, is wonderfully true to the ancient spirit, and gives a splendid glimpse into the earlier mythology and legends of the Northern peoples. In the drama of *The Ring* there is portrayed a primitive existence in the world, and at first there are only four distinct races, — the gods, the giants, the dwarfs, the nymphs. Later, by a special creation, there come two other races, — the valkyrie and the heroes. As to the characterization of these races, we may note that the gods are the noblest and highest race, and dwell first in the mountain meadows, later in the palace of Valhalla on the heights. The giants are a great and strong race, but lack wisdom; they hate what is noble and are enemies of the gods; they dwell in caves on the earth's surface. The dwarfs, or nibelungs, are black, uncouth pigmies, hating the good, hating the gods; they are crafty and cunning, and dwell in the bowels of the earth. The nymphs are pure, innocent creatures of the water. The valkyrie are daughters of the gods, but mingled with a mortal strain; they gather dead heroes from the battlefields and carry them to Valhalla. The heroes are children of the gods, but also mingled with a mortal strain; they are destined to become at last the highest race of all, and to succeed the gods in the government of the world.

II

As to the argument of the story, it will also be best to get that clearly in mind as a whole, before going into the details of the various parts. It will save much confusion.

In brief, the whole story of *The Ring* is this: The Rhine-gold tells how a hoard of gold exists in the innocent depths of the Rhine, guarded by the Rhine-maidens. Alberich, a dwarf, forswears love to gain this gold. He makes it into a magic ring. It gives him all power. He gathers by it a hoard of treasures. Meanwhile Wotan, chief of the gods, has engaged the giants to build for him a noble castle, Valhalla, from which to rule the world. They build it and come for payment. He had promised to give to them Freya, goddess of youth and love. But now the gods find they cannot spare Freya, upon whom they depend for their immortal youth. Loki, the god of wiles, must provide some substitute. He tells of Alberich's magic ring, and other treasures. The giants agree to take this. Wotan goes with Loki and they steal it from Alberich, who curses them and lays the curse upon all who shall henceforth possess it. On compulsion they give the magic ring and the treasures to the giants as a substitute for Freya. The curse begins. Fafner kills his brother to get all. Fafner transforms himself into a dragon to guard the treasures and the ring. The gods enter Valhalla over the rainbow bridge.

The Valkyrie relates how Wotan still covets the ring. He cannot take it himself, for he has given his word to the giants. He stands or falls by his word. So he devises a stratagem to get the ring. He will get a hero-race to work for him and recover the ring and the treasures. Siegmund and Sieglinde are twin children of this new race. Sieglinde is carried off as a child and

is forced in marriage to Hunding. Siegmund comes, and unknowingly breaks the law of marriage, but wins Nothung, the great sword, and a bride. Brunnhilda, chief of the valkyrie, is commissioned by Wotan, at the instance of Frika, goddess of marriage, to slay him for his sin. She disobeys and tries to save him, but Hunding, helped by Wotan, slays him. Sieglinda, however, about to bear the free hero, to be called Siegfried, is saved by Brunnhilda and hidden in the forest. Brunnhilda herself is punished by being made a mortal woman. She is left sleeping on the mountains with a wall of fire around her which only a hero can penetrate.

Siegfried opens with a scene in the smithy between Mime the dwarf and Siegfried. Mime is welding a sword and Siegfried scorns him. Mime tells him something of his mother, Sieglinda, and shows him the broken pieces of his father's sword. Wotan comes and tells Mime that only one who has no fear can remake the sword. Now Siegfried knows no fear and soon remakes the sword Nothung. Wotan and Alberich come to where the dragon Fafner is guarding the ring. They both long for it, but neither can take it. Soon Mime comes bringing Siegfried with the mighty sword. Fafner comes out, but Siegfried slays him. Happening to touch his lips with the dragon's blood, he understands the language of the birds. They tell him of the ring. He goes and gets it. Siegfried has now possession of the ring, but it is to bring him nothing of happiness, only evil. It is to curse love and finally bring death. The birds also tell

him of Mime's treachery. He slays him. He longs for some one to love. The birds tell him of the slumbering Brunnhilda. A little bird leads him on the way. Wotan, who has taken last counsel of Erda, opposes him and tests him, but sees that he is the true hero at last. Siegfried finds Brunnhilda, loves her, awakens her; she in bewilderment and joy gives herself to him, and the supreme lovers of the world find love's victory and love's ecstasy.

The Dusk of the Gods portrays at the opening the three norns, or fates, weaving and measuring the thread of destiny. It is the beginning of the end. The perfect pair, Siegfried and Brunnhilda, appear in all the glory of their life, splendid ideals of manhood and womanhood. But Siegfried goes out into the world to achieve deeds of prowess. He gives her the Nibelungen ring to keep as a pledge of his love till his return. Meanwhile Alberich also has begotten a son, Hagan, to fight for him for the possession of the ring. He is partly of the Gibichung race, and works through Gunther and Gutrune, half-brother and half-sister to him. They beguile Siegfried to them, and give him a magic draught which makes him forget Brunnhilda and fall in love with Gutrune. Under this spell he offers to bring Brunnhilda for wife to Gunther. Now is Valhalla full of sorrow and despair. The gods fear the end. Wotan murmurs, "Oh, that she would give back the ring to the Rhine." Brunnhilda will not give it up,—it is now her pledge of love. Siegfried comes, takes the ring, and Brunnhilda is now brought to the Rhine cas-

tle of the Gibichungs; but Siegfried, under the spell, does not love her. She is to be wedded to Gunther. She rises in wrath and denounces Siegfried. In a hunting banquet, Siegfried is given another magic draught, remembers all, and is slain by Hagan by a blow in the back, as he calls on Brunnhilda's name in love. Then comes the end. The body of Siegfried is burned in a funeral pyre, a grand funeral march is heard, and Brunnhilda rides into the flames and sacrifices herself for love's sake; the Ring goes back to the Rhine daughters; and the old world — of the gods and Valhalla, of passion and sin — is burned up with flames, for the gods have broken moral law, and coveted power rather than love, gold rather than truth, and therefore must perish. They pass, and a new era, the reign of love and truth, has begun.

III

And now, looking at the real significance of the drama, we may take The Nibelungen Ring in one of three ways. We may consider it merely as a retelling in splendid form of some of the greatest of the ancient legends of the Norse mythology. It then becomes a national epic of the Northern peoples, as the Iliad and Odyssey were the epics of the Southern peoples. It is a great story, such as the childhood of the race loves. It is a mighty picture, or series of pictures, full of beauty, passion, pathos, tragedy, and majesty. It has no hidden meanings. It is just a world-old legend that grew up in the poetic imagination of the people, or a legend cyclus that

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developed around some ancient historic events.

Or we may take it as the ancient story rearranged by Richard Wagner to teach social and political lessons. In this view it is a great allegory of the political life of Europe in Wagner's day. It is a socialistic pamphlet, written in splendid poetic imagery. Such is Mr. Bernard Shaw's interpretation, in his book called *The Perfect Wagnerite*. We may remember in this connection that Wagner was political revolutionist and socialistic philosopher, as well as poet and musician.

Or, finally, we may take the drama as veiling great spiritual and eternal truths, not put there by Wagner, but inherent in the great story itself and forever working themselves out into revelation in all the great legends and in all the great events of the world. In this last view, there comes out the truth of the curse of the lust of power; the truth of the real supremacy of love; the truth of the inevitableness and eternity of the reign of moral law in the world.

Looking at the universal and eternal truths, therefore, the main idea of the whole Ring drama may be given in this one phrase: "To show the contrast of the two powers that rule the world,— the power of love and the power of gold."

The Rhine-Gold is a parable of the curse of gold. Innocent enough is gold itself; it becomes a power and can become a curse when its inordinate love takes possession of the soul. Its love forsworn is sufficient to gain gold, but what is it all worth?

The Valkyrie is a parable of the punishment of violated laws. There is a reign of law in the world. Whoso offends must suffer. It is inevitable. Heaven itself is subject to its divine laws.

Siegfried is a type of perfect innocence and goodness. This hero seems an embodiment of "summer and springtide, youth and strength, beauty and love." He is the highest ideal of a free hero, caring nothing for gold, possessing all things good in himself. Such a hero of light is at once attacked by envy and hate. So he falls a victim of the dark wiles, the embodiment of envy, hatred, and greed in the child of evil.

The Dusk of the Gods is a parable of the passing away of the ancient mythologies. As light came, as the ages went on, men saw that the old legends of the gods and goddesses who played fast and loose with law, who broke covenants, could not remain. Moral law must be supreme. Love in self-sacrifice is the great revelation. Unworthy gods annihilated by the principle of evil which they have introduced, — this is the meaning of the allegory of the gods devoured by the fiery flames. Myth passed to make way for truth. The gods passed away to give place to God.

There are some perplexing ethical problems involved in the drama. The infidelity of Wotan, both to love and truth, is a sad picture of the highest of the gods. The traditions, however, of Greek and Roman mythology are similar. The relations of Siegmund and Sieglinde have classic precedent among the gods, but are antagonistic to all our human instincts. The drama

shows how love is superior to all law, and yet how the violation of law is inevitably punished. The greatest teaching of the drama is that love is supreme, but that the highest love is in full harmony with the highest law. In Browning's phrase, "All's love, yet all's law."

7. Tristan and Isolda

TRISTAN and Isolda is claimed by music-lovers as Wagner's masterpiece. It is certainly his finest and most inspired music. The poem is also a masterpiece in the high and holy passion that glows within it. It is full of the elemental energy of the human race. It is typical of the deepest and strongest emotions of humanity, — a high song of love, — universal in its meaning, and almost cosmic in its wonderful breadth of outlook.

Parsifal is Wagner's most sacred and sublime drama, transfigured, as it is, with the mystic glories of redemption; and *The Master-singers of Nuremberg* is his most human production, reflecting the homely wit and quaint conceits of the common folk of Germany. But *Tristan and Isolda* is the high-water mark of his genius, — a pure untrammelled inspiration, born of a great human experience, and a divine aspiration.

It will be remembered that Dante has touched upon the tragedy of *Tristan and Isolda* in his immortal *Divina Commedia*, and that Tennyson also has treated the same story at length in one of his *Idylls of the King*, but not even Tennyson has reached the white intensity and

awful ecstasy of Wagner's throbbing lines. Wagner's tragedy was wrung from his very heart, although he began it seemingly in imagination. Recall his Diary: "As I never in my life have felt the real bliss of love, I must erect a monument to the most beautiful of all my dreams, in which, from beginning to end, that love shall be thoroughly satiated. I have in my head Tristan and Isolda, — the simplest but most full-blooded musical conception; with the black flag which floats at the end of it, I shall cover myself to die." And his Diary concluded: "Here will the Tristan be completed, — a defiance to all the raging of the world. And with that, an I may, shall I return to see thee, comfort thee, to make thee happy: there looms my fairest, my most sacred wish. So be it! Sir Tristan, Lady Isolda! help me, help my angel! Here shall your wounds cease bleeding, here shall they heal and close. For here shall the world once learn the sublime and noblest stress of highest love, the plaints of agonizing joy, and august as a god, serene and hale, shalt thou then behold me, thy lowly friend."

Between these two leaves from Wagner's Diary came the actual tragic experience, — the strange and fateful drama which forever inspired and yet forever saddened his life, — that drama in which the inspiration was Mathilde Wesendonck, his dearest friend, his own Isolda.

The music of this drama is impressive from its tragic intensity as well as its unearthly beauty. Much of it is sombre and sad; much of it is as weird and dreamlike as the witchery of night,

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or as soft and wavelike as the restless sea. Only here and there are sounded the jubilant and triumphant notes. The yearning of the life-weary soul is portrayed; the ecstasy and delirium of love; the passionate longing for death. There is the fascination and melody of slumber in it. To many it is the most wonderful of all his music,—one critic contending, “Wagner has written more complex works, but it is doubtful if ever he penned a more effective bit of musical writing than these immortal pages of *Tristan and Isolda*.”

The tale itself which Wagner used as his basis is as old as the ninth century, possibly older. It is often called “the world’s greatest love story.” There have been other pairs of famous lovers, — Paolo and Francesca, Abelard and Heloise, Launcelot and Guinevere, Romeo and Juliet; but about *Tristan and Isolda* sympathy and human interest have been great on account of the heroic quality and the desperate hopelessness of the tragedy. Wagner drew his material directly from the ancient version of *Gottfried von Strassburg*, but ennobled the tale, and made *Tristan* a finer hero than in the ancient legends. He also improves dramatic unity by eliminating a second *Isolda* who appears in some of the ancient legends. Studies of the origin and development of the *Tristan* legend may be found in *Tristan et Iseud* by Gaston Paris, and *Die Sage von Tristan und Isolda* by Dr. Wolfgang Golther. The English form of the legend first appeared in *Sir Thomas Malory’s Morte d’Arthur*, and has been treated in

various forms by Sir Walter Scott, Algernon Swinburne in *Tristram of Lyonesse*, Lord Tennyson in *The Last Tournament*, and Matthew Arnold in *Tristram and Iseult*.

The ethics of the story has provoked some discussion. It is a human document with a real love. Tristan and Isolda are in love with each other before the episode of the love-potion. That merely serves the purpose of "unleashing the bonds of reserve" which Tristan had placed upon himself, and of making them both more or less irresponsible. But the drama is that of actual love,—not a fictitious passion. It is a drama of warm flesh and blood. The interest of King Mark in his wedding had been largely political. The tragedy is in the hopelessness of the real love, hurried on by a relentless fate. The love-philtre in Wagner's drama, as Mr. W. J. Henderson has pointed out, performs the same office as Fate in the ancient Greek tragedy. In the plays of Sophocles and Aeschylus, mortals fulfil their manifest destinies, driven on by Fate. So in this drama, the helpless victims are hurled onward by a cruel and inexorable Destiny. Such a conception does complicate the ethical responsibilities. Their overpowering love is their exaltation and punishment; their ecstasy and their despair; their heaven and their hell. It brings bliss, and infinite suffering, and death.

There is manifest in this drama, and especially in the finale, Schopenhauer's influence upon Wagner, in the exaltation of renunciation and the ecstatic desire for death. In a letter to

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Franz Liszt, in which the first mention of Tristan and Isolda occurs, is also this reference: "A man has come like a gift of heaven into my solitude. This is Arthur Schopenhauer, the greatest philosopher since Kant. His chief idea, the final negation of life, is terribly serious. . . . I have found in it a quietus which in wakeful nights helps me to sleep. This is the genuine ardent longing for death, for absolute unconsciousness, total non-existence." Such a reference helps to explain the undertone of the drama, and especially Isolda's absolute and beatific resignation in death.

Wagner came to a larger vision in his later works, especially in Parsifal, which was the fullest confession of the faith of his maturest years. Some traces of Schopenhauer still remain, but the negation of life is now replaced by a divine pity and a loving service. He had grown with the years.

Something tender, beautiful, and pathetic is in this great tragedy. It grips the heart. The love-potion is fiction, but the love is reality; there is a tremendous feeling and a profound experience in it. "All the world loves a lover." The story of Tristan and Isolda will never die. There is here that love so great that "many waters cannot quench it nor the flood drown it,"—love that is ennobled by its fidelity and grandeur, love that is triumphant over life and death. There is something supreme in such deep, elemental passion.

8. Parsifal

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THE Parsifal of Richard Wagner is not only the last and loftiest work of his genius, but it is one of the really great dramas of modern times, — a drama which unfolds striking and impressive spiritual teachings. Indeed, Parsifal may be called Richard Wagner's great confession of faith. He takes the legend of the Holy Grail and uses it to portray wonderfully and thrillingly the Christian truths of the beauty, the glory, and the inspiring power of the Lord's Supper, and the infinite meaning of the redeeming love of the Cross. He reveals in this drama, by poetry and music, and with a marvellous breadth and depth of spiritual conception, this theme (in his own words): "The founder of the Christian religion was not wise: He was infinitely divine. To believe in Him is to imitate Him and to seek union with Him. In consequence of His atoning death, everything which lives and breathes may know itself redeemed. . . . Only love rooted in sympathy and expressed in action to the point of a complete destruction of self-will is Christian love."

The legend of the Grail as Wagner uses it has in it the usual accompaniments of mediaeval tradition, — something of paganism and magic. But these pagan elements are only contrasts to the purity and splendor of the simple Christian truth portrayed. The drama suggests the early miracle and mystery plays of the Christian church, but more nearly, perhaps, it reminds one of those great religious dramas, scenic and musical, which were given at night at Eleusis,

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near Athens, in the Temple of the Mysteries, before the initiated ones among the Greeks, in the days of Pericles and Plato. At Bayreuth the mystic drama is given before its thousands of devout pilgrims and music-lovers who gather to the little town as to a sacred spot from all parts of the world, — from Russia, Italy, France, England, and America, — and who enter into the spirit of this noble drama and feast of music as if it were a religious festival in a temple of divine mysteries.

The sources of Wagner's story deserve a few words. The legend of the Holy Grail took many forms during the Middle Ages. It was told in mediaeval times in slightly varying way by the French writer, Robert de Borron, and later by Chrétien de Troyes, and in the twelfth or thirteenth century by Wolfram von Eschenbach in the strong German speech of Thuringia. The substance of these legends was that the precious Cup used for the wine at the Last Supper, and also used to receive the Saviour's blood at the Cross, was forever after cherished as the Holy Grail. It was carried from the Holy Land by Joseph of Arimathea, and taken first to Rome and later to Spain, to a special sanctuary among the mountains which was named Montsalvat. Here it was to be cherished and guarded by a holy band of Knights of the Grail. The same legend appears in the chronicles of Sir Thomas Malory, but instead of Spain, early Britain is the place to which the Grail is brought. Tennyson's *The Holy Grail* in his *Idylls of the King* largely follows Sir Thomas

Malory's Chronicles. The American artist, Edwin A. Abbey, also follows Malory in his masterly paintings of the Grail legend as portrayed on the walls of the Boston Public Library. Wagner, however, uses the version of Wolfram von Eschenbach, modifying it and spiritualizing it to suit his purposes.

Galahad, as Tennyson portrays him, will always hold the first place with English readers as the ideal knight of the quest of the Holy Grail. The matchless diction of Tennyson has given the less perfect form of the legend a supreme charm and beauty. But Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parsifal, as spiritualized and humanized in Wagner's lyric drama, will be seen to be in fuller accord with the whole cycle and development of the Grail legends and at the same time it gives the nobler story. It is a consummate parable of the ineffable pity and the mystic glory, the contending passions and the heavenly aspirations, in the heart of humanity. It portrays an intensely human and heroic life imaginatively identified with that of the very Christ.

The music of Parsifal has been so often described and analyzed in critical papers that it is not necessary here to speak of it in detail. This word, however, may be in place. The marvellous music at Bayreuth, as I heard there several times, helped in every way in the interpretation of the drama. Every part and phase of the thought and movement were brought forth in the various musical motives, adding emphasis and beauty and intensity of feeling.

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Now the music would whisper of the wondrous grace of the holy sacrament, or of the sweet beauty of God's world, clothed in the radiance of Good Friday; now it would reveal the sorrows of the gentle Herzeleide, or the awful anguish of Amfortas, or the deep rumblings of Klingsor's black art, or the fascinating music of the flowermaidens. Often came the pure tones that told of the Guileless One, or the strong chords of mighty faith, or the ebb and swell of mystic bells, or the glory of the sacred Spear. Now came the regal blasts for Parsifal, and often and through it all, the splendid music of the Grail itself. The music was like a fragrant atmosphere to the drama, softening and refining what was harsh, giving a needed stress here and there, and investing the whole story with a subtle and uplifting charm.

The drama of Parsifal teaches its own great lessons of life. Yet one or two suggestions of interpretation may not be amiss, for it is confessedly one of the most mystical of modern dramas.

It may perchance be considered as representing the strife between paganism and Christianity in the early centuries of the church,—the powers of magic and the hot passions of the human heart contending against the advancing power of Christian truth and the victorious might of Purity as portrayed in the guileless Parsifal. Or it may be considered as representing in a mystic legend the spiritual history of Christ coming in later presence among the sons of men and imaged in the mystic Parsifal. Wag-

ner mentions that this Scripture was often in his mind in writing Parsifal: "Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? . . . The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men." Or this, further, it may represent in striking and inspiring way, — that the pure in heart shall win the victories in life; that the guileless are the valiant sons of God; that the life that resists evil passion and is touched by pity for the world's woe is the heart that reincarnates the passionate purity of the Christ and can reveal again the healing power, the Holy Grail of God.

"However mediaeval the language and symbolism of Parsifal may be," says a modern critic, "one cannot but acknowledge the simplicity and power of the story. Its spiritual significance is universal. Whatever more it may mean, we see clearly that the guileless knight is Purity, Kundry is the Wickedness of the world expressed in its most enticing form, and King Amfortas suffering with his open wound is Humanity. One cannot read the drama without a thrill, without a clutching at the heart at its marvellous meaning, its uplifting and ennobling lessons."

PRINCIPAL DATES IN WAGNER'S
LIFE

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1813. Richard Wagner born on May 22, in Leipzig. Father died November 22.
1814. Mother married the actor, Ludwig Guyer; the family moved to Dresden.
1823. At the Kreuzschule at Dresden.
1825. Composed a prize poem at the age of twelve, which was printed.
1826. Learned English to read Shakespeare in the original.
1827. Moved to Leipzig; entered the Nicolai Gymnasium.
1829. First instruction in music.
1831. Entered the Leipzig University; first musical compositions published.
1833. Appointed chorus director in Würzburg.
1834. Musical director at Magdeburg.
1836. Musical director at Königsberg; marriage with Wilhelmine Planer.
1837. Musical director at Riga; wrote poem *Rienzi*, and first two acts of music.
1839. Travelled to Paris via London; completed *Rienzi*; wrote *The Flying Dutchman*.
1842. Arrival at Dresden; first performance of *Rienzi*.
1843. First performance of *The Flying Dutchman*; began *Tannhäuser*.
1845. First performance of *Tannhäuser* in Dresden.
1847. Completed *Lohengrin*.
1848. Mother died; *The Nibelungen Ring* sketched; friendship with Liszt begins at Weimar, where *Tannhäuser* is given.
1849. Insurrection in Dresden; Wagner fled into exile and settled at Zurich.
1850. First performance of *Lohengrin* by Liszt at Weimar.
1853. The poem *The Ring* published.
1854. First acquaintance with Schopenhauer's works.
1855. Four months in London conducting Philharmonic concerts.
1857. *Tristan and Isolde* written as a poem.



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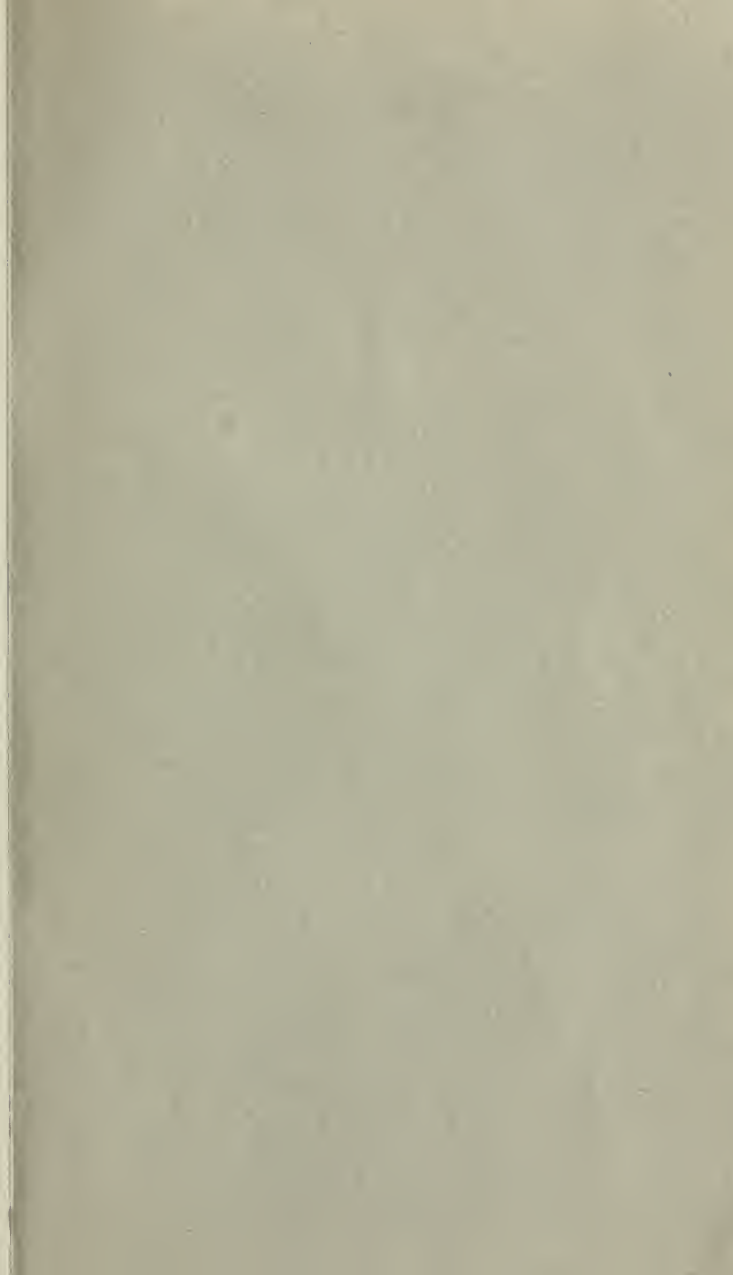
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