
The Wagner Festival at Bayreuth

By Gustave J. Stoeckel



The Wagner Library

Edition 1.0

Contents

About this Title	4
The Wagner Festival at Bayreuth	5
The Rhinegold.	10
The Walküre.	14
Siegfried.	18
Götterdämmerung. (Dusk of the Gods.)	21

About this Title

Source

The Wagner Festival at Bayreuth
By Gustave J. Stoeckel

The New Englander
Volume 36 Issue 139
Pages 258-293
Published in 1877

Original [Page Images](http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/moa/moa-cgi?notisid=ABQ0722-0036-34) at Cornell University Library
(<http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/moa/moa-cgi?notisid=ABQ0722-0036-34>)

Reading Information

This title contains 14106 words.
Estimated reading time between 40 and 71 minutes.

Page numbers of the original source are indicated
using square-bracketed parentheses, like [62].

[258]

The Wagner Festival at Bayreuth

By Gustave J. Stoeckel, Mus. D., Yale College.

SINCE my return from Europe, whither I went for the purpose of attending the Bayreuth Festival, many of my friends have questioned me about the musical enterprise, in which Wagner intended to prove the correctness of his conceptions of dramatic music. Questions are easily asked, but when we consider that it took Wagner twenty years to compose the Tetralogy, which comprises the Ring of the Nibelungen; when we furthermore consider that the audience was composed chiefly of musicians and art-critics whose opinions about the merit or demerit of Wagner's music by no means agree; I say, when we take all this into consideration, you will easily understand the embarrassment I felt, when such questions were asked of me with the expectation of an answer in one sentence. It is for the purpose of giving a reply, which will be satisfactory to myself, and also I hope to my readers, that this Article has been prepared.

So much *pro* and *con* has been written about Wagner and his music, that I propose first to say a few words about the principles according to which all arts, and especially the fine arts, ought to be judged. I shall then compare Wagner's ideas with them, and in the description of the Tetralogy point out the peculiarities of his system with its excellences and defects.

Art, defined as a system of rules, by the observance of which the performance of actions is facilitated, includes the useful as well as the fine arts, but in connection with our subject we have only to deal with the latter. These rules form the technical part of art, and are an essential acquisition for the art student. Although one cannot be an artist without them, they are by no means sufficient to make one. Useful arts and the artizans may and ought to be satisfied with fulfilling the demands of an exact technique. Not so the fine arts and the artists. By them the technique is treated as a servant, by the labor of which an ideal conception is represented. The spiritual idea dictates to the artist the use of the forms, by means of which a true representation of that thought, which stands mother to the [259] artistic creation, can be obtained. The artist will subject his learning, his progress in conception and treatment—all the requirements which the most exacting technique could demand—to the *spiritual* idea. He will exclude everything which does not serve as an expression to that commanding thought, and every such expression, once adopted, he will treat as subordinate to that idea. He will never allow it to be more than a servant, nor to assume offending self-importance.

It is, however, not enough, in the fine arts, that an idea or sentiment be the source whence springs the artistic creation, but it must be in its expression (*viz.*, the material form which it assumes) a beauty, the natural result of a gifted artist's contemplating the workings of mind and soul. *Art is the expression of beauty, beautifully expressed.* What is beauty? Let me relate an incident out of my own experience to illustrate the answer—before I give it. When as a young man I studied music, my teacher, Mr. Joseph Krebs, a Catholic priest, requested me one day, to attend the rehearsal of a mass which was to be performed at his church. He instructed me to report to him my opinion of the composition. I did so, wrote out a lengthy criticism, and expected to hand it in at my next lesson. When I entered the recitation room, Mr. Krebs at once asked my opinion of the mass, before I had a chance to offer the argumentative document in my pocket. I replied, that it was a very pretty composition. "Pretty" said he, "*pretty*, you say?" "I did think it pretty," was my response. "Then," said he, "it shall not be performed in my church, for only the beautiful shall enter the house of God." And then followed a lengthy discussion about the beautiful and the pretty, which may be stated shortly as defining pretty, all that touches our physical senses in an agreeable manner, and

beautiful, that which touches our souls. I objected to his condemning the mass on my judgment, being so young and inexperienced, but his reply was, that he did not want nor need the opinion of an expert, or he should not have sent me. All he wanted to know was the impression the composition would leave upon a young mind. And as it was only pretty, it could not enter the sanctuary. "Take a seat," he concluded, "the mass will never be performed."

[260]

I have heard the testimony of many young people, who after the performance of comic opera, of negro minstrelsy, or even the more serious spectacular works, felt as if the evening was not properly concluded without some further indulgences. But after an opera by Gluck, Mozart, or Beethoven, after an oratorio by Handel, Haydn, or Mendelssohn, the wildest of them will go home silently and meditate on the impressions received.

In the one case only the senses were reached, and not a very desirable appetite created; in the other, the fibres of the heart were touched, and the vibrations of a responsive soul were listened to with elevating pleasure, opening the mind, as it were, to perceive a still greater work than that just witnessed. For every work of art will excite in us that curiosity, which, after fancying it has exhausted all, feels at the very moment we turn away that has it seen or heard the smallest part only, and that a still greater work hovers invisibly above it. This attribute of a great work is an infallible touch-stone of its genuineness. In every one of the fine arts, in architecture, sculpture, painting, poetry, and music, we find works which fill the soul with a longing for something still greater than that which we behold,—a longing for beauty, of which the represented one in art is but the angelic guide to a more heavenly one.

In the fine arts the faculties of mind and soul are called into requisition for the creation of works as well as for the contemplation of them. The center of the creating as well as contemplating power, however, lies in the heart. It is not enough to know what is good, true, moral, and holy, we must be made to feel it. And the province of all true art is to make us feel the beauty of what is good, true, moral, and holy. For that which subdues men most, is not conscious obedience, not forcibly repressed inclinations to evil, not the violent, self-guiding persistency in one rigid line of even exemplary conduct, but the unconscious reception of a kindly example; the gentle compliance with what the good and beautiful alluringly offer, and the habitual turning to the divine—like a butterfly to the sunlight. These are the powers which lead men mysteriously, but surely on. The forces of the mind must be aided by the allies of the soul. The most severe dictates from the brain will be readily obeyed, when approved by the heart. Work [261] is easy when liked, but almost impossible when hated. Earthly wisdom flows from the head, but in the inmost chambers of the heart lie the treasures bestowed by heaven. There dwell the beauties of divine origin, and whatever be the degrees of thought and reflection, they must not be against the tribunal of feeling, which holds its court in the soul. For there is no good, no truth, no moral, no holy, without beauty; and *art, the fine arts* teach it and represent it.

Thus it will be seen that art performs an important task in the elevation of human nature. The fine sense of the Greeks, who in the fine arts are ever our masters and instructors, represented the first poet-musician, "Apollo," singing to immortal poetry immortal music. "Rocks and cliffs awakened, and the stony hearts dissolved; beasts of the forest were spell-bound, and the fierce instincts of man were tamed; birds listened in their song, brooks ceased their lullaby, and the coarse laugh of revelry shuddered at those sounds which proclaimed to humanity the sweet power of art, the brightness of her glory and her enlightening harmony."—*Liszt*.

So does the music of Beethoven subdue the instincts of ferocity, brutality, and sensuality. He, by the power of his art, softens the heart and ennobles it; he pours his harmonies over the contradictory elements in the soul of man, and awakens, encourages, and strengthens all that

is noble in human nature; his melodies, like bright shining lights, lead upward and on to higher spheres, where low appetites and vulgar desires cannot be admitted.

There is a scene in the "Mutual friend," describing the end of a long journey to which Betty Higden came. The old woman, with her true and unfaltering adherence to her ideas of right and propriety, lies in the open field. Deadly sickness has spread its pale veil over the wrinkled features of a withered body, which still holds a noble soul. Hexham holds her in her arms and administers all the consolations in her power. The dying Betty Higden relates her life, every page of which records a suffering but always contented martyr. To the repeated anxious inquiry of Hexham, whether she should not lift her head hither, she replies, "Not yet." But when her tale is finished she says to Hexham "Bless ye, now lift me, my love." [262] The hand of the artist is shown in the following sentence, with which Mr. Dickens finishes the scene. "Lizzie Hexham very softly raised the weather-stained gray head, and lifted her as high—as heaven." When we look at Raphael's Sistine Madonna, we do not feel as if the artist wished to awaken in us the feeling of a real form coming down through the frame, out of the real clouds. Nothing of the kind touches our heart. Perfectly certain that we have painted canvass before us, a dream nevertheless steals over the soul and we feel carried upward and transformed. It opens the heavens to which the whole group, mother, child, St. Sixtus, Santa Barbara, and the figures of the angels belong, and carries the beholder there. So does the Dome of the Sistine Chapel by the creations of Michael Angelo open into a heavenly mansion; so does Handel's Hallelujah lift the Dome, which is spread over our spirit's vision, and we see the angels in never-resting groups join in the eternal Hallelujah to the Lord Omnipotent.

Thus it will be seen, that art performs an important task in the elevation of human nature. Look at the imperishable monuments of architecture, and its frozen harmony carries every thought and feeling within you upward; examine the beauties of sculpture, and while in the act of doing so, you feel elevated and transformed: stand before a masterpiece of painting and a dream steals over you, that carries you to the heavens; listen to the poetry of a Milton, Shakspeare, Goethe, or Schiller, and you are changed for the moment almost into their equals; yield yourself up to the music of our glorious masters, and all profanity, all sensuality, all low appetites and vulgar desires are chased out of you. Every true work of art has invariably this tendency, and music, employed (perhaps unconsciously) for the very purpose in the home, the social circle, the church and the state; music, greeting the infant with the sweet accents of maternal love and bidding in solemn strains the last farewell to life departed; music, joining innocent childhood in its mirth, cheering on ripened manhood in its activity; an encouraging friend in time of adversity, a relieving language to an over-burdened soul; music, more than any of its sister arts, has the power to lead us from the material to the ideal, to lift us from low desires to high aspirations, from the flesh to the spirit, from [263] earth to heaven. This is the spirit in which the great masters of art conceive their missions. Just so they thought and felt once, think and feel now, and will think and feel hereafter.

With this preface of general remarks on art, I will now proceed to Wagner and his mission. Wagner wants to unite all the branches of the fine arts in the production of the "Drama of the Future." Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, Poetry, and Music, which were all united once, in the representations of the ancients, are now each going its own way to perfection. According to his view, such perfection cannot be reached, except by the coöperation of all of them in the Drama. Music without such coöperation, or absolute music as he calls it, is an error. It needs poetry, to explain it. It is only by the combined action of the singers, of paintings, decorations, and the architecture of the theater, that its greatest effect can be attained. With him, music is but an ornament, to embellish poetry, its object and subject. Examining the opera as existing, he found that it was an absurdity, when considered as a musical drama. It conveyed no ideas, simply because in its composition the composer had none. Poetry furnished not the leading

thoughts, but the foundation for syllableizing highly elaborate vocalization. The Opera was treated as a vehicle in which the singer could show himself to his best advantage. It was like a statue, exhibited upon the stage for the purpose of allowing the different singers to paint it with the colors that suited them best. What the result would be, must be, he had no difficulty in showing by the productions of the most successful of operatic composers. All of them were under the command of the singer. The latter was the dictator; he had to be consulted and satisfied, or the Opera could never be brought out. Dramatic action, dramatic truth—the logical result of a play, well cast,—were minor considerations. The singer was the reigning power, and to him all art had to render obeisance. Wagner, who is of strong revolutionary tendencies, made short work of the singer. He deposed him, and as a consequence broke all the forms in which he was wont to express himself. Thus, Aria, Duo, Trio, the concerted ensemble, and the Chorus, had to share the singer's fate. Instead of singers, he employs actors who declaim musically. Instead of well phrased airs, he claims the [264] invention of an endless melodic flow, which adapts itself to every word and action of the play, thus giving to the poetry its highest expression. For every prominent situation and character he invents a leading musical motive, which accompanies it whenever it appears or reappears. As auxiliaries are used: 1. The music of the orchestra, which under his treatment is now the principal factor in the opera. 2. The grouping of actors into living tableaux. 3. The reproduction of the phenomena of nature. 4. The architecture of the theater, in building not only temples and palaces, but also subterranean caves, the habitations of the dwarfs, of the giants, and of the gods. 5. Paintings, representing beautiful landscapes, illuminated by ever-changing light. Thus in accordance with his views, he draws all the fine arts into his service. The musical drama of the future is therefore not simply a musical work. On the contrary, all the arts claim an equal share. It is the product of their union under the guidance of his hand.

As to the forms of poetry, Wagner has adopted alliteration. Iambics and trochees and all the measures in ancient and modern use were found unfit for the Nibelungen, except alliteration which is used in the old Edda and the Volsungen and Nibelungen-Saga's, from which the theme for the ring of the Nibelungen is taken. He handled this material with the utmost freedom, for the purpose of employing all the fine arts as interpreters of his system. There is one reigning idea throughout the four dramas which comprise the Tetralogy, viz: the curse of the gold, which destroys all who are hunting for it, gods, giants, dwarfs, and men. The preliminary drama of the first night contains the genesis of the work and brings but gods, giants, and dwarfs upon the stage. These three are antagonistic forces. The gods, who dwell in Walhalla; the giants, who live upon high precipices and inaccessible mountains; and the dwarfs, who are busy in the bowels of the earth, strive for supremacy, obtainable through the gold, hidden in the waters of the river Rhine. This Rhinegold comes first into the possession of the dwarfs. The gods deprive them of it, but have to deliver it to the giants as ransom, from whom it is won by man. The curse of the gold, however, brings destruction to every one of its possessors and the drama ends by restoring [265] it to the River Rhine, whence it was originally taken. Thus a ring becomes the symbol of the whole Tetralogy; the end runs back to the beginning.

As none of Germany's opera houses would have the facilities or *personalia* for the representation of the Ring of the Nibelungen, Wagner formed a joint stock company, the members of which, under the name of Patrons, were furnished with a *Patronat's-schein* (a ticket at the price of 900 marks = \$250 in gold), which admitted them to a cycle of three performances, each consisting of the whole drama of four nights. With funds thus raised, Wagner laid the corner-stone to the theater in Bayreuth in 1872. Its plan was conceived and carried out according to the principle of concentrating all the attention of the audience upon the stage. The auditorium is built in the form of an amphitheater. At its highest point is the

King's gallery, extending just behind the last row of seats over the whole width of the auditorium. It accommodates 100 persons. Above it a gallery for free admissions gives room for 205. From the King's gallery down to the stage the rows of seats hold 1345 persons. There are no aisles, no *Proscenium* boxes, nothing to attract the attention from the stage. The auditorium is conceived in the spirit of a free arena, in the antique style, framed in on both sides with Corinthian columns, between which are the entrances, and on the sides of which are the chandeliers for lighting the house. The side walls reach without a break to the ceiling, which in form of a tent seems to stretch into the ether.

The length of the whole stage is 108 feet, width 113 feet, height 87 feet. The depth under the stage is 30 feet. It is here that the orchestra is seated, in a diminutive amphitheater-form, like the auditorium. At its highest point sits the conductor, facing all his performers. The lowest half is roofed over in the shape of a prompter's box, its open face looking toward the conductor; its upper half is roofed over in a similar but reversed way, so that its open space shows toward the stage. The sound from the lower portion is by the reflecting roof thrown upon the higher portion of the orchestral amphitheater, and from there upon the stage by the reversed roof. The string and wooden instruments are placed under the upper [266] roof; the brass and bass instruments under the lower. The so-called *Proscenium*, thus divided by the upper roof (which projects a little over the floor of the stage), leads by two passages into the auditorium, from which it is divided by a curtain, brown and gray in stripes, and hemmed in by a golden border. It is drawn aside and upwards so as to leave the impression that some unseen hands have moved it very gracefully out of sight; The whole house is held in the same colors as the curtain, and fills the beholder with a sober, expectant spirit, from which it is impossible to escape. The building in its outside appearance betrays its temporary character. Its framework is of wood, bricked in; and back of the stage is an additional building for the engine, for motors, and for machinery.

The following forces were employed for the performance of the Tetralogy in August last:

1. *The Orchestra*—It consisted of 32 violins, 12 violas, 12 cellos, 8 bassos, 4 flutes, 4 oboes, 1 English horn, 3 clarionets, 1 bass clarinet, 4 bassoons, 1 contra-bassoon, 7 French horns, 4 tubas, 1 contra-bass tuba, 3 trumpets, 1 bass trumpet, 4 trombones, 1 bass trombone, 3 pair of kettle-drums, 8 harps, a 32-foot organ-bass, and six supernumeraries, in all 120 men, under the direction of Hans Richter, the Vienna Capellmeister. Most of this force was composed of concert masters, professors, virtuosi, court-and-chamber musicians, who volunteered their services. Hence the performance in midsummer, when all those engaged at the principal opera houses have their vacation, during which they could respond to Wagner's call.
2. *The Singers*, numbering 23 solo and 37 chorus singers, 60 in all.
3. *The Mechanical Artists*, represented by 1 machinist, 2 decoration-painters, 1 stage-builder, 2 architects, 1 professor for costumes and requisites, 1 for chorography, and 1 engineer for illumination. Each of these had workmen at his disposal.

The active artistic force in the representation of the Ring was, therefore 190 men. The rehearsals began June 3d, and ended August 9th. On the 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th of the latter month the first performance took place; a week later the second, and the following week the third and last. I attended the second performance.

[267]

The Rhinegold.

The prologue to the Trilogy makes us acquainted with the forces which are to be employed in the following performances. It contains the germs out of which the dramatic characters are developed. The performance begins at 6 o'clock. From the middle of the afternoon until the drawing of the curtain, the visitors walk or drive to the hill upon which the theater stands, about a mile and a half outside of Bayreuth. They gather in groups upon the walks in open air, or in the restaurants erected on both sides of the slope, upon which the opera-house stands above them in the middle. These groups are formed largely according to nationality, crafts, social grades in society, and occasional acquaintanceships. Scientific men, poets, musicians, painters, sculptors, and architects; journalists' and bankers. counts and princes, were all represented, coming from almost every civilized country. It seemed as if the pictures of celebrated men, which we see in art stores, had suddenly stepped out of their frames, and stood right before you. One could not walk three steps without giving elbow-room to some celebrity. Suddenly the conversational hum in this babel of tongues is interrupted by the call of eight trumpeters, the signal to take seats. Everybody responds by going to that entrance, which leads him to his moveable cane seat, where he waits, standing and talking until the signal is repeated within the house. From that moment until the curtain drops not a sound is heard from the audience. The lights are turned down, the seats lowered and taken, and all eyes fixed upon the curtain. The prelude begins. In the deepest bass an organ-point is intoned upon E flat, which lasts through the whole introduction. Horns follow each other successively in the intervals of the Major Triad in E flat, and a motive is created, which denotes the primitive condition of the world; innocent and happy, because undisturbed by passions and emotions, arid the train of feelings created by them. The effect of this composition is a peculiar one. The mind of the listener cannot but accept the fact that it is on the eve of an event, in which primitive elements unfold themselves to its eye. No other composer has ever attempted a composition of such length (136 measures) with the harmony of but one chord. Yet no monotony is felt. The gradation [268] from the lowest depths to the highest pitch, from the softest pp. to the loudest ff., from the lull and murmur of a few instruments to the talk and uproar of them all, is so well distributed, that by the time the curtain opens, you are well prepared for the picture which unfolds itself, only dimly visible out of mists and vapors. Under a dark green twilight the first scene presents itself. It is laid upon that portion of the bottom of the Rhine where rocks and cliffs abound. In its quietly flowing waters, which fill the whole space of the stage, swim the Rhine-daughters in graceful movements. They watch over the pure Rhinegold resting upon one of the rocks. In monosyllables they chant their lovely *Wagalaweia*. Alberich, the dwarf king of the Nibelungen, deformed, homely, and full of mischief, comes from a subterranean passage and watches the nymphs. He tries to make love and to catch first one and then another, and becomes comically excited by his failures. Whilst he shakes his fist at the Rhine-daughters, a sunbeam penetrates the waters, and reveals the gold. It shines with radiant splendor. The whole river seems to be warmed up by the glittering sunbeam, which is reflected a thousandfold by the gold, now in dazzling light. The scenic effect is beautiful. One sits before the picture enchanted. Like as in a dream one looks at the fairy scene before him, which the nymphs, singing and swimming, enliven by their graceful movements and lively song. Alberich, astonished, bewildered, and still under the excitement of his unsuccessful attempts, asks for the meaning of the luster which sheds its magic through the waters. The nymphs laugh at him, and in their soliloquy reveal the fact that the power sleeping in the gold would make its possessor the master of the world. No one however could get the charm without abjuring love forever. They tease the dwarf, telling him

that no danger could be anticipated from one who had chased them through the ordeal just passed. To their dismay, Alberich, overmastered by a demoniac determination, curses love, steals the gold, and disappears in the passage through which he entered. The nymphs dive after him, and amid cries of despair are swallowed up by the waters of the Rhine, which are disturbed, and move in heavy convulsions down into an endless abyss. By degrees the scene changes from a disturbed [269] river into a misty region, behind which a twilight illumination converts the fogs into light clouds. The gray dawn of approaching morn dissolves these into invisible æther, and reveals a beautiful landscape, with Wotan and Fricka sleeping upon flowery beds. In the background stands a castle, illuminated with growing splendor by the rising sun. To this, the second scene, the orchestral interlude leads through descriptive music into the incomparably beautiful Walhallmotiv, the appropriate interpreter of the scene.

The design of the first scene seems to be, to represent the primary conditions of innocence by the pure gold, the primitive element of the water, and the nymphs. Alberich disturbs the era of innocence by cursing love and stealing the gold; eternal night breaks over the guilty depth. The music to the entire scene is entrusted to the orchestra, with the exception of that portion which is sung by the Rhine-daughters. The description of the sinking of the waters into the endless abyss, by the orchestral music, is a master piece of its kind. The musical declamations of Alberich scarcely go beyond the bounds of ordinary speech.

Before proceeding with the second scene, I will explain the nature and office of the deities appearing in the drama.

Wotan and Fricka stand, according to the northern mythology, at the head of the Asen or columns, upon which the foundation of the world rests, as Jupiter and Juno stood at the head of the Olympian gods.

Wotan is the spirit of nature, the sum of all creating forces, the father of all.

Fricka, the wife of Wotan, is the protectress of matrimony, and gives blessing to the family relations.

Donner (Thunder) is the mightiest of the Asen after Wotan. His attribute is the hammer, with which he gathers the clouds into the storm and defends Walhalla against the giants (just as Jupiter hurled the thunderbolts against the Cyclops, when they tried to storm Olympus).

Frya is the goddess of Spring, Love and Immortality.

Erda is the personification of mother earth.

Froh is the god of peace and commerce.

[270]

Loge, Loki, is the personification of fire in its destructive capacity. He is the bad principle, the Mephistopheles among the gods, distinguished by tricks, deceit, cunning (and the abilities of a modern prime minister).

Fafner and Fasolt are giants. The words imply watchmen of a treasure.

Walhalla is a compound of *wal* = the body of a fallen hero, and *halla*, the equivalent for our word hall. It signifies the heavenly place where the bodies of fallen heroes are received by Wotan.

The second scene, with Wotan and Fricka sleeping upon flowery beds in a most enchanting landscape, with the palace of the gods towering up in the background, is a perfect wonder of stage effects. It captivates the eye of the beholder by its never dreamt-of splendor. Between the castle and the resting place of Wotan and Fricka flows the Rhine. Upon its borders out of subterranean regions grows the elm tree of the world. Its branches stretch into the heavens; the clouds are its leaves and the stars are its golden fruit. The castle was built by the giants for Wotan, who had promised them the goddess Frya as a recompense. He did so by the advice of Loge. Fricka also wanted the building. She is like Juno, jealous of her mighty spouse, and thinks he will like home better, when it is a splendid mansion.

As Wotan awakes he sees the castle, of which he was dreaming, in reality before him.

While he expresses his satisfaction and delight, Fricka utters her sorrow over the expected loss of Frya. During their dialogue, Frya comes in great haste, praying for protection against the giants, who follow and claim her. Fricka, Froh and Donner, coming from the opposite side, intend to shelter her against the Cyclops, but Wotan is unwilling to break the contract, which is carved upon his spear. Finally, Loge appears, and is appealed to by Wotan, to find a way out of the dilemma, into which they got by his advice. Loge, instead of applying himself to the case in question, relates the story of Alberich's theft of the Rhinegold, and tells them that a ring and tarn-helmet have already been made out of the gold; the first ensuring the reign over all the world, the second enabling its possessor to make himself invisible or to change into whatever [271] form he should wish. He embellishes his tale with ingenious descriptions of the immense treasures stored up by the Nibelungen. By this device he creates in gods and giants the strongest desire for the possession of ring and helmet and treasures. The giants offer to release Frya in exchange for the Nibelungenhort. Wotan also is determined to have it, but on no condition will he part with it. (The whole controversy reminds one of the story of the huntsmen who divided the bear's hide before they had him.) The giants, getting impatient, finally take Frya by force, promising Wotan to give him time until next day's eve, when he will have to produce the Nibelungenhort for them, or part with the goddess forever. The helpless gods stand by and suffer her to be dragged away by the giants. Wotan, assisted by his adviser Loge, descends now through a crevice in the rocks to Nibelheim, the home of the dwarfs. Sulphurous vapors rise immediately upon their disappearance, spreading over the whole stage and changing into dark clouds rising upwards. By degrees the clouds are transformed into rocks and cliffs forming subterranean caves. The whole scene seems to sink deeper and deeper into the bowels of the earth. A dark-red twilight dawns upon the ever changing aspect of the scene; from the farthest distance the tinkling sound of anvils reaches the ear, which first seems to come nearer and louder and then again is lost in the distance in the softest echos and reverberations. At this point the scene presents a seemingly endless cave, with numberless shafts and levels. The music wanders from the mysteriously busy motive, illustrating the character of Loge, through chromatic runs in Arpeggio harmonies, into the characteristic forging motive, accompanied by the Fanfare of the Rhinegold. Into this sea of sound, the tuned anvils behind the scene add their rhythmical beauties. The symbolic meaning of this mixture of motives is to tell the story, that the ring has already been made by the Nibelungen.

Again it is the wonderful splendor of the scene, created gradually before the beholder's eye, that keeps the audience spell-bound. In the cave is seen Alberich, who drags the reluctant Mime (his brother, the smith, by whose skill ring and helmet were made) from one of the side chambers. He pays [272] the workman by kicks and cuffs. He pinches, slaps, and whips him, and when he departs for the forge, leaves him half dead upon the ground. In this condition Mime is found by Wotan and Loge, who descend through an opening in the top of the cavern. From him they learn all about ring and helmet. Alberich, however, returns very soon, driving with his whip the whole crowd of Nibelungen before him. They carry his accumulated treasures upon their backs and put them upon a heap. They perform their task silently, forming the most grotesque groups in peculiar and laughable movements, largely dictated by Alberich's whip. At the moment of noticing Wotan and Loge the Nibelungen are commanded by their king to depart with their treasure. Under cries of despair the strange crowd disappears. Alberich now wants to know the reason of the visit from such mighty guests. Loge assures him of their friendly design, tells him of the fabulous tales which they had heard of his wealth, and succeeds in exciting in the dwarf the desire to show his mighty rivals what he could do with the helmet. He changes first into a dragon and then into a toad, in which form they capture and bind him and return to the surface of the earth. The scene changes in the reverse order into a free landscape upon mountain heights overhung by mists and clouds.

Wotan and Loge bring Alberich from a shaft and induce him to part with his treasures, for his freedom. He gives the curse to the gold into the bargain and returns to his home. The fogs clear away, from one side comes Donner, Froh, and Fricka, from the other the giants and Frya, the captive goddess, whose presence restores the youthful appearance of the gods which they had lost since her captivity. By the advice of Erda, who appears as a vision, Wotan finally yields to the demands of the giants, and Frya is liberated in exchange for the Nibelungen treasure. Fafner and Fasolt pack the ransom in sacks and get into a dispute about the division of the spoils. In the encounter which follows, Fasolt is killed, and Erda's prophecy that a curse clings to the gold, is fulfilled. Wotan commands Donner to clear the mists and fogs away. He, in obedience, ascends to the highest peak of the mountains in the background and commands the vapors to form themselves into thunder clouds. Lightning and thunder follow, [273] with all the uproar of enraged elements. When the calm is restored a rainbow appears over the river, forming a bridge to a castle standing in the clouds in splendor and light. Over this rainbow-bridge the gods walk into their new mansion, built by the giants and paid for by the dwarfs. For the first time the name of Walhalla is applied to the castle. This closing scene, although poetically conceived, was not executed as well as the former ones. Clouds, mists and vapors could no longer be employed to heighten the illusion. The sinking evening sun illuminated it rather too distinctly. The rainbow looked like a painted drawbridge, over which gods with very human faces strode with the customary abominable stage strides. But the music accompanying the scene was beautiful. The Walhalla motive developed itself into a splendid orchestral composition, which took the listener into higher regions. Whether or no, he was transformed, carried away with the gods to heavenly mansions.

As will be observed, Wagner has in this first of the dramas adhered very severely to his system. With the exception of the Rhine-daughters' charming song, all the dramatic characters had only musical declamation. Embellished, however, as it was, by the all-absorbing descriptive music of the orchestra, it could not be understood, and remained a sealed book to those who had not made themselves acquainted with the text beforehand. The same may be said of the music. Its leading motives, their applications and combinations, as a matter of necessity, had to address themselves more to the head than the heart, more to the understanding than the feeling. Wagner in deposing the singer has installed other despots in his place. The orchestra and the scenery are more domineering than the singer in his wildest excesses.

The vapors and clouds are not always a dramatic necessity. A god, upon his disappearance, should leave no sulphurous vapors behind, which are more in harmony with his Satanic majesty. In the Rhinegold they are made to appear for the purpose of changing the scene. Wagner himself has very severely and justly condemned such practices. He calls them effects, a word used in the German language for a result without a cause. He has been severely criticized by his opponents for [274] mishaps in the machinery and the consequent failure in the scenic representation. I think it unjust to Wagner the poet and composer, however well applied to Wagner the performer. On the whole, it must be admitted that Rhinegold is a drama well constructed for the display of scenery, and the peculiar musical talent of the composer. In descriptive music of the wonderful and exceptional he succeeds best, and Rhinegold presents a succession of such scenes.

The Walküre.

The word, a compound of *Wal*, already explained, and *küren*, to prepare, signifies the female attendants of the gods. The *Walküren*, clad in armor and mounted on spirited horses, decide the fate of heroes in battles, and prepare and bring the fallen ones to the heavenly mansions. These heroes are harvested, so to speak, in compliance with the wish and will of the *Wotan*, in order to gather a host of the noblest and strongest of the human race for the defence of *Walhalla* against the Giants. Symbolically the *Walküren* are the personification of the will and wish of *Wotan*.

Ring, helmet, and *Nibelungen* treasure are now in the possession of the Giant *Fafner*, who hides them in a large cavern in the midst of a wild forest. He changes himself into a dragon by means of the *Tarn* helmet and keeps watch over them. *Wotan*, in order not to lose the reign over the world, must regain the ring. Neither he, being bound by his contract, nor any other god, can do anything directly. *Wotan* must raise among men a hero, who will conquer the dragon so that he can repossess himself of the treasure.

With these explanations we will again go into the theater. The performance begins at four. Two hours are allowed for each of the three acts, of which each of the last three dramas consist. Between every act sufficient time (from a half to three-quarters of an hour) is allowed for a visit to the restaurants. After the audience is seated, called by the signal as on the first day, the orchestra represents in a wild and stormy prelude the last phases of a subsiding thunder storm. It has a few reminiscences of the last scene in *Rhinegold*, and of *Donner* with the hammer and the motive, by which he then and there gathered [275] the clouds into the storm. When the last echoes of the thunder reverberate through the house and the marked staccatos of the thunder-motive fall upon our ear like heavy straggling raindrops, left behind the raging storm, then the curtain opens and the view presents a room in an ancient German mansion. A giant elm tree spreads its branches over the roof. Its trunk is in the middle of the room. Upon the walls hang household utensils and braided mats. To the right is a colossal fireplace, to the left and toward the back are doors, the latter leading into the open air. Through this door, enters *Siegmond* hastily, and nervously agitated. He sinks exhausted upon the floor and falls asleep. Thus finds him *Sieglinde*, the wife of *Hunding*, whose abode the room represents. *Siegmond*, aroused, asks for water. *Sieglinde* offers him refreshments, and makes him acquainted with the name of her husband. During their interview they become passionately attached to each other, so much so, that *Sieglinde* resolves to fly with *Siegmond* from the yoke of oppression, to which she was forced by *Hunding*. *Hunding* had conquered and killed her whole family of brothers and sisters (except a twin brother and her father) and then wedded her. The music, in extreme beauty, describes the agitation of both and the gradual growth of their attachment. The love motive, expressing the sentiment of just such lovers, is charming and enchanting beyond description, not—as giving expression to the radiant joy of innocent love in its first spotless dawn, but as the utterance of the rejoicing of a heart, held in chains by a mortal enemy, and anticipating the approaching morn of its release by the guidance of love. It is musically a justly celebrated scene, although the discovery of *Siegmond* as the twin brother of *Sieglinde*, dampens the otherwise magnificent treatment of the mightiest of human passions. Meanwhile *Hunding* returns from the forest and finds *Siegmond*, his mortal enemy, at his own hearth and home. The laws of ancient German hospitality forbid him to take advantage of *Siegmond*'s helplessness, He is unmolested while under his roof. With an invitation to mortal combat on the next morning, he retires, asking *Sieglinde* to prepare him his night cup. In complying with his command, she mixes him a potion, which keeps him in the bonds of helpless sleep through the entire [276] night. She returns to *Siegmond*, who is in great distress because of his fate to be in the grasp of his enemy without a weapon of defense. But *Sieglinde* shows him the handle of a sword, sticking

out of the trunk of the elm tree. She tells him that an old man (Wotan) once thrust it in there and said that the man who could draw it out, should not be conquered. Siegmund with strong effort frees the steel. In their excitement over the anticipated success of the next day's encounter, they are suddenly interrupted by the violent opening of the back door. Spring has burst it open, to come and woo Love, its sister. A lovely night, illuminated by the full moon, shines into the room; entreating Zephyrs fan coolingly the burning faces of the loving pair, who transfigured by the pale moonlight, hold themselves in each other's arms. In the introduction to Siegmund's love-song the flutes and violins sound like voices of sweetly-cooing nightingales and the thrilling chirp of the cricket. In the treatment of this song and in the whole scene to its end, art, as represented by Wagner, reaches its highest point of culmination. All the scene seems to tremble under the wild glow of sensual love. As the air of the spring night is penetrated through and through by the pale moonlight, so are the listeners' senses captivated by this scene. It is impossible to criticize, while hearing it. All æsthetics, theory, and morals, are chased out of one; one's breath is bated and the beating of the heart seems to stand still, the whole soul bewitched by an irresistible power. It is true, that after the intoxicating enjoyment is over, you perceive the ethical anarchy of the whole scene, which upsets all the holy emotions of a pure soul, defies the teachings of all morality and is in direct antagonism to established rules and customs. But during the performance, all that is sensual in human nature is wrought up to its wildest activity by the alluringly tempting music. The curtain closes upon a scene which offends Morality and Religion, wakes up those sleeping passions in human nature which a refined and cultivated taste must abhor and detest. The masterly treatment is all the more offensive, because of its influence upon a sensitive nature.

The second act, introduced by a prelude with the sword motive as a basis, upon which the love motive and the rhythm of the [277] ride of the Walküren play in ingeniously intermingled figures, shows upon the opening of the curtain a wild and rocky narrow mountain chain. A gorge leads from the background to the front, over which the rocks at their highest point form a natural bridge. Brunhilde (the Walküre) in full armor, and Wotan appear; the god instructs the former to give victory to Siegmund in his battle with Hunding. Amid joyful exclamations in one of the most difficult strains which ever the obstinacy of a musician could invent, but which is of striking characteristic originality, Brunhilde departs and climbing from cliff to cliff shouts her *Ho-jo-to-ho!* Her final disappearance beyond the highest peak of the mountain chain is followed by the arrival of Fricka in her chariot. The goddess comes to ask vengeance for the double violations of adultery and incest by Siegmund and Sieglinde. After a long dialogue Wotan yields to the persuasions of Fricka and instructs the returning Brunhilde to bring Siegmund to Walhalla; she, the offspring of Wotan and Erda and the favorite of the god, tries in vain to prevail upon him to keep to his first resolution, and finally departs to fulfill the parental command. The music to this scene is only palatable to the musician, who can trace the leading motives, skilfully introduced to support the most conflicting arguments. Even he must be satisfied with what reflection and thought can offer. The heart is not reached, the feelings not enlisted. Wotan in this scene is simply an absurdity. As a god he ought to reign, but lacks the talents of a ruler; he wants to shelter the world with his spear, but breaks laws whenever he finds it in his interest so to do; he wants to bring up a race of heroes, and is himself a slave. Of all the characters in the drama this god is the poorest, drawn with a total disregard of the qualities inherent in a deity. Brunhilde on the contrary is the best; her sympathy with the lovers, which brings her in conflict with her duties, is given in very touching language, supported by music which reaches the heart.

The third scene is opened by the appearance of Siegmund and Sieglinde, coming over the bridge in their flight. She urges him to farther flight; he entreats her to rest. Brunhilde joins them and informs Siegmund of his approaching death. He is willing to follow the Walküre if in company with Sieglinde. [278] This is denied, and in the deepest distress he draws his

sword with the intention of putting an end to his and Sieglinde's existence. The music to this episode is very beautiful. The preparatory sounds from the orchestra steal into our hearts like the pangs of a death-struggle. The muffled kettle-drums present a rhythmical phrase of four measures as a symbol of the mysterious workings of Providence. The majestic Walhalla-motive, with the song of fate and the dialogue of Siegmund and Brunhilde, form the ground-harmony to this part of the scene. When Siegmund is so strongly determined not to part from Sieglinde, Brunhilde takes compassion on the hero, and against the command of Wotan promises to shelter him. Hunding's approach is announced by the distant call of horns. Brunhilde mounts her horse and gallops away. Dark clouds rush over the scene; thunder and lightning issue forth; the mountains and rocks are obscured by the stormy elements. Nearer draws the enemy; louder call the horns and more impetuously. Siegmund prepares himself for battle. With a kiss he parts from the beloved one, who has fainted. The love-song of the first act sounds sweetly once more from the orchestra, like the last greeting of a dying one. Siegmund disappears in the darkness. Occasionally the battle-ground is illuminated by lightning. The combatants stand upon the rocky bridge confronted. Sieglinde, awakening from her swoon, comprehends the situation at once and makes an effort to throw herself between husband and lover, but is blinded by a glaring light above Siegmund. In a fiery cloud in the air appears Brunhilde, protecting Siegmund with her shield. At the moment when Siegmund tries to thrust his sword through Hunding, a red fire breaks from the opposite side through the clouds and reveals Wotan above Hunding, whom he shelters with his shield. Siegmund's sword breaks in pieces and he is killed by his antagonist. Brunhilde falls back frightened, gathers the broken pieces of the sword and lifts Sieglinde upon her horse, flying before the enraged Wotan, who is in uncontrollable anger at her disobedience. Wotan disappears amid thunder and lightning, with which the scene closes. This whole scene does not fail to make its impression. Mountains, cliffs and rocks, thunder and lightning, do not seem simply an illusion. There they [279] are in reality, and the wild and strange music carries the audience right into the very scenes. One lives there, acts with the actors, fights with the antagonists, is enlisted for or against them, and hopes for the successful escape of Brunhilde with her ward. The different motives, interwoven to illustrate the action musically, finally yield to the preponderating overbearance of the motive of the ride of the Walküren, which at this point is worked into the well known concert piece. It opens the third act. The galloping theme is intoned by brass instruments, the violins, subdivided, storm around it, in crying and wildly-mixed tone figures. One thinks himself in the midst of the wild hunt of the flying Dutchman. Before, behind, around you, neighing of horses galloping through the air, snapping of whips, and the wild *Tally-ho!* of the huntsmen. The curtain rises, and the view presents the highest peak of a rocky mountain, under which is the entrance to a cave. Four of the Walküren are encamped upon the peak. They are clad in armor, and sing their wild *ho-jo-to-ho!* Through the clouds come the other Walküren on horseback, with the bodies of slain heroes thrown over their saddles. Their conversation; their unearthly laugh in sixth-accords; their *ho-jo-to-ho*, shouted through speaking tubes from the clouds toward the peak; their ejaculations, clothed in strange harmonies, make the scene one of the wildest imaginable. Untamed forces of nature seem to have gotten loose. The effect is magnificent, although it lacked the reality of a former performance in Munich, where young grooms performed the ride in the clouds upon trained horses. In Bayreuth flying machines were used. Brunhilde with Sieglinde appear last. The other Walküren shun her, when they learn of her disobedience. Brunhilde now entreats Sieglinde to continue her flight alone, toward the forest where Fafner dwells in his cave. Wotan would not dare to pursue her there. She gives the broken pieces of Siegmund's sword to her as her inheritance. Scarce has she left, when Wotan comes in a thunder-shower, and commands Brunhilde to give up Sieglinde. She, unable to do so, prays for mild punishment. The god banishes her from Walhalla, and condemns her to

remain upon a rock in a deep sleep. She is to become the prize of the first passer-by, who will awaken her. All the other Walküren leave the scene [280] in the greatest distress on hearing Wotan's hard judgment. Brunhilde, upon her knees and in the deepest anguish, prays for a milder sentence. Wotan makes the punishment lighter by encircling her with a burning fire, through which none but a hero would dare to penetrate. The heavens suddenly become clear, the sun in purple colors sinks below the horizon, and a beautiful twilight illuminates the farewell scene between Wotan and his favorite daughter. He kisses the godhead from her eyes. She sinks upon a hill of moss, under the branches of a fir tree. He closes her helmet and covers her with her shield. Then he marks with his spear a circle, upon which the flames burst forth, burning brighter and brighter until the whole is enclosed in fire, when the curtain drops upon the last scene of the Walküre.

It will be readily believed, that Wagner has improved the scenes in this drama by his undoubted ability as a composer and performer. I think of him as a performer, when I recall the picture, which represented Brunhilde in the last scene carried out according to his dictates. It seemed a statue of exquisite beauty, in the midst of a beautiful landscape, illuminated by the ever-changing colors of the sunset. Every fold of the white satin dress, every bend of the arm and hand; the position of the whole body, the closed helmet and glittering shield; were so masterly arranged, that an artist might well take a lesson from such a picture. In my mind it lives with the best of statues which it has been my fortune to see. The rôle of Brunhilde is of extreme difficulty and was entrusted to Frau Materna, of Vienna, an artist of very superior gifts and attainments.

Wagner has been very severely criticised for the creations of Siegmund and Sieglinde as brother and sister. His friends point at the old Edda, where they are represented in that relation. This is true, but their union in the old drama was a dramatic necessity, logically developed, and such it is not in the Walküre. Why then has he nevertheless risked the shock, which this treatment must necessarily give to our conceptions of matrimonial relations? Undoubtedly—in my opinion—because of his thorough knowledge of himself. It is impossible for him to sing the song of innocence, the pure devotion of maternal love, the suffering of a martyr, who never perhaps [281] quitted his threshold; or the praise of virtues which cling like a bright shining lustre around a Christian home. He knows that his peculiar gifts as a composer enable him particularly to give expression to feelings, emotions, and passions, aroused by events of exceptional occurrence, by the wonderful and the phenomenal in nature. Hence the introduction of Siegmund and Sieglinde as blood relations. The logical development of their feelings under such peculiar circumstances incite his musical creative faculties to their highest pitch. It is so with the ride of the Walküren and the enchantment of fire; he accompanies the fabulous horsemanship and the wonderful stage effects with musical masterpieces. His so-called mission of reform in dramatic music is largely the result of his exceptional talent for orchestral display. Upon the orchestra he is a virtuoso, and to his mastery of the many-tongued instrument must be ascribed most of the changes which he introduced. If the secret birth of most of the scenes could be revealed, it would probably show, that his orchestral ability is the mother of the so-called drama of the future.

Siegfried.

Between Walküre and Siegfried, the drama of the third night, a space of twenty years is supposed to have elapsed. Siegfried, the offspring of Siegmund and Sieglinde, has been brought up by Alberich's brother Mime, who found his mother dying in the woods, and who entrusted him with the infant and the pieces of his father's broken sword. The forging motive interwoven with the motive of reflection is used as the material for a short prelude, preceding the drawing of the curtain.

The first scene represents a forge in the middle of a rocky cave. Mime sits before the anvil in deep thought, holding a sword in his hand; he complains bitterly of Siegfried's giant strength, who, a mere boy yet, always has broken the sword, which he (Mime) had repeatedly mended out of the pieces received from Sieglinde. Leading a very large bear, Siegfried comes suddenly into the cave, clothed in a wild looking forest dress with a silver horn hanging from a chain around his neck. He encourages the bear to attack Mime, who, in fear and alarm of the wild sport, crawls around and about, in order to escape [282] the beast. Siegfried is in joyful exhilaration at the capers, which the dwarf cuts, and finally yields to his entreaties and sends the bear back to the forest. He asks for his sword and breaks it into pieces as usual. Their dialogue fills the first scene. Siegfried is made acquainted for the first time by the reluctant but babbling Mime, with his parentage and the magic virtue of the sword made of the pieces bequeathed by his mother. With it a man becomes invincible. The news, that Mime the hateful dwarf is not his father, overjoys Siegfried so much, that he storms out into the forest and gives vent to his feelings in a song, which is one of the gems of the work.

The second scene introduces Wotan as a wanderer, stepping into the forge and taking a seat by the fire. Mime dislikes the stranger, who proposes that the dwarf should give him three riddles to solve. He is ready to pledge his head against Mime's hearth. Mime agrees, and to his astonishment, the wanderer answers every question. Now the wanderer proposes three questions to Mime for solution. Mime pledges his head and loses it by his inability to answer the third riddle, which is, the wanderer tells him, that "only he, who knows no fear, shall forge the sword, so that it could not be broken." He also assures him, that the yet unknown, who would come, forge the sword, conquer the dragon, and gain the Nibelungen treasure, would kill him, saving him the trouble of taking his head, to which he was entitled. With this prophecy Mime is left alone, joined speedily by the returning Siegfried. He notices the anxiety and absent-mindedness of Mime, who, half crazy with fear, constantly repeats the sentence: "Only he, who knows no fear, shall finish *Nothung*" (the sword). He soon sees the drift of Mime's behavior, who tries to teach him fear by the description of the dragon. Siegfried now decides to forge the sword and gets to work with hammer and anvil. When he has finished the sword, he tries its strength upon the anvil, and splits it with one stroke,—upon which the curtain drops. The music to this scene is very appropriate. Entirely materialistic, it offered to Wagner's talent the very best material. He, in his orchestral accompaniment, created a symphonic poem, which for adaptation to scene and action can hardly be surpassed. What he does here with the orchestra, can scarcely be depicted [283] by a mere description. Whether he wants the orchestral expression for the breaking of the sun through the clouds, for the bustle and noise of the blacksmith's shop, or the fear of Mime and the joy of Siegfried, he always commands it in characteristic and peculiar combinations, which present to the listener harmonies and rhythms entirely new and original. More so than in other parts of the Ring of the Nibelungen is in this scene the drama entrusted to the orchestra. It draws the bellows of the forge, blows and hammers, and makes the sparks fly in every direction. The orchestra shapes, files, and polishes the sword, splits the anvil and gives, in the slumber motive of Brunhilde, warning to Siegfried of the time when he shall be taught fear. The performance of Mime, represented by Carl Schlosser of Munich, was a masterpiece

of histrionic art. His musical declamation was exceptionally good, for almost every word could be understood. His playing and singing furnished the best, perhaps the only argument in favor of Wagner's system. In his elocution, character, and action he was a dwarf, all the more diminutive because of the handsome and gigantic proportions of Siegfried, performed by Mr. Unger. If representative art has to bestow laurels, they were certainly earned by Schlosser, of Munich.

The opening of the curtain brings us into the first scene of the second act. We are in the forest. It is night and only in indistinct outlines the aperture to a cave, before which Alberich sits, appears. The moon breaks suddenly through the dark clouds and reveals the wanderer, who informs Alberich of Siegfried's approach. Their dialogue lasts through the night. The cavern is Fafner's abode, and to him Wotan imparts Siegfried's design. The dragon however prefers to sleep undisturbed. It is one of those scenes of frequent occurrence in the Ring, in which Wagner gives a musical treatment to philosophy. It is monotonous in the highest degree. With the appearance of Siegfried in the morning's dawn, guided by Mime, the audience wakes up. Mime informs him that this place is the end of their journey. Here he will be taught fear and his teacher be Fafner. Left by Mime, Siegfried rests under a tree and tries to get more exact information of his poor parents from the language of the bird in the branches. In vain is his effort to play upon a reed [284] and establish a communication with the songster. In a final attempt he sounds his horn, which however awakens Fafner, who comes in the shape of a monstrous dragon toward the intruder. This dragon was represented by a large machine, covered appropriately, which allowed a singer to utter through a speaking tube, whatever he had to say. It consisted chiefly of brawling, and declaring his determination to eat up Siegfried for breakfast. The hero however declines to be served up in that way, draws his sword "*Nothung*" and kills him. As a recompense the dying monster gives him an excellent sermon and seems rather grateful for the finishing stroke from such an intrepid boy. In drawing his sword out of the dragon's body, Siegfried's finger is bedaubed with blood, which he sucks quickly and finds himself suddenly able to understand the bird in the branches. Its song instructs him of the ring, helmet, and treasure in the cave. He steps into it and disappears for the purpose of getting them. This ends the second scene. The singing of the bird, the atmosphere of the forest, the rising of the sun, and the fight with the dragon, were again truthfully illustrated by the orchestra, but the dragon was a miserable failure. It needed no Siegfried to brave such a monster; any baby of ordinary courage would have thought it fun to attack and kill him.

The third scene brings Alberich and Mime upon the ground. They dispute about Fafner's spoils, to which they both assert their claims. In their controversy they are interrupted by Siegfried's reappearance from the cave with ring and helmet in his possession. The bird begins immediately his song of information, warning Siegfried of Mime's intention to poison him. Siegfried kills Mime, throws his corpse into the cave, and closes its entrance with the carcass of the dragon. The bird in his song makes him acquainted with Brunhilde's enchantment, and the possibility of release by one who knows no fear. Upon learning this, he tells the bird that he himself is the dull boy who could not yet master the lesson of fear. The feathery messenger then guides him to the place. The curtain drops upon the second act.

Two leading motives, viz: that of the ride of the Walküren and the sword motive, open the introduction to the third act. [285] It is a scene at the foot of a rocky mountain. The dark night is illuminated by lightning. Heavy thunder peals die gradually away, while the lightning crosses the clouds for some time after. Wotan in his character as wanderer invokes Erda, who appears as a vision. He wants information about the fate of the gods; she replies that her knowledge has left her and refers him to Brunhilde, the child of their union. The scene is intended to foreshadow the fall of the gods. The evening dusk of their final approaching fate pervades the whole dialogue, which only ends by the disappearance of Erda. The second

scene begins with Siegfried's appearance, guided by the bird. Wotan tries to impede his search of Brunhilde. In their fight his spear is broken by Siegfried's sword. A lightning stroke issues from the broken spear, which takes its direction toward the rocky height, where flames begin to rise in the brightest of colors. Wotan vanishes, and Siegfried, playing upon his horn his forest melody, breaks through the fire and disappears. By degrees the flames and smoke change into light clouds which appear illuminated by morning twilight, representing the same scene as the farewell of Wotan and Brunhilde in the *Walküre*. Over the rocky precipice climbs Siegfried. He discovers Brunhilde, lifts shield and helmet, awakens her, and learns the lesson of fear and trembling for the first time. The drama is finished amid the most exalted exclamations of the lovers; the end of the gods is foreshadowed; ring and helmet are in the possession of Siegfried. A mortal holds the offspring of Wotan and Erda in his embrace. The music to most of the scenes is very trying to the nerves. One cannot but yield to the power which the composer wields. The encounter of Siegfried with the dragon in its action is undoubtedly ridiculous, but not so the music. As already pointed out, the composer needs such uncommon occurrences to excite his musical ability. A sober reflection and a criticising recapitulation may and must point out such defects, but at the moment of hearing, the composer holds his audience by his orchestra with an iron grasp. Whether they will or not, follow they must.

[286]

Götterdämmerung. (Dusk of the Gods.)

Unlike the other dramas, this last one in its prelude employs not only the orchestra, but also three Nornes and Siegfried and Brunhilde. The Nornes are the sisters of fate, representing past, present, and future. They swing a golden rope fastened upon the Walküren rock. This suddenly breaks, their mission is ended and they are swallowed up by mother earth. Their talking and acting is tiresome almost beyond endurance. Of their philosophy, which they politely expound to each other for the benefit of the poor mortals in the auditorium, not one syllable could be understood; the language of the orchestra was much plainer. It related to the initiated the approaching fall of the celestials; it told of the dusk of the evening, to be followed soon by a dark endless night. After the disappearance of the Nornes, Siegfried and Brunhilde descend from the rocks, the first to depart for new adventures, the latter to bid him farewell. Siegfried gives to Brunhilde the enchanted ring as a token of his unfaltering love, she presents him with her war-horse, for whom she has no further use, because as the wife of a mortal she has lost her god-like attributes. The descriptions of Siegfried's departure and travel to the dwelling of the *Gibichungen* and Brunhilde's return to her own home are entrusted to the orchestra and fill up the time until the curtain is drawn for the drama of the *Götterdämmerung*. Its opening scene represents the hall in the castle of the *Gibichungen*. The background is open, leading to the borders of the Rhine. Günther, the head of the clan, Guthrune his sister, and Alberich's son Hagen, the half-brother of Günther, sit before a table. Hagen represents to Günther as well as to Guthrune the necessity of getting married, in order to increase the wealth and greatness of their tribe, he recommends Brunhilde as the spouse for Günther and Siegfried for Guthrune. While they are discoursing this theme, Siegfried comes down the Rhine in a boat and lands upon the open space in the background. By Hagen's advice Guthrune pledges her welcome to the hero in a cup mixed with a potion by which he becomes unconscious of the past. He weds Guthrune and promises to conquer Brunhilde for Günther. Accordingly he returns to his own home, assumes the shape of [287] Günther by means of the Tarnhelmet, overcomes by his strength the once powerful Walküre, robs her of the ring and brings her as a captive to his new brother-in-law. With this the first act closes.

The scene remains unchanged for the second act. Hagen sits before the entrance of the hall of the *Gibichungen* sleeping. Alberich's approach is seen by the light of the rising moon. He awakens his son and gives him advice, how to get ring and helmet. Hagen promises to obey the parental instructions, but declares his intention of keeping the treasures for himself. Their demoniac intercourse lasts through the night. Upon the rise of the sun, the dwarf-king departs and Siegfried suddenly appears from behind a bush. He relates his success with Brunhilde and announces her arrival in company with Günther, with whom he had exchanged places, whereupon Hagen blows his cow-horn as a signal for assembling the *Gibichungen* tribe, to attend the anticipated marriage festivals. For the first time a chorus appears. Neither polyphonic treatment nor any special excellence will ever be claimed for this composition, yet it had a marvellous effect of relief upon the audience, tired out with the seemingly endless monologues and dialogues. While Günther and Brunhilde arrive from the borders of the Rhine and are welcomed by the clan, Siegfried and Guthrune come from the mansion. Brunhilde, observing the ring on Siegfried's finger, charges him in presence of the whole tribe with treachery, which he however under the spell of the *elixir d'amour*, stoutly denies. The controversy is ended, by Siegfried's leaving the scene, accompanied by Guthrune, Brunhilde and Günther, largely influenced by Hagen's advice, determine now the death of Siegfried. Hagen promises to kill him and Brunhilde tells him that the hero is only assailable in the back. As they separate they meet the bridal festival of Siegfried and Guthrune. Amid its music the

curtain falls.

The third act begins with Siegfried's call upon horns on one side of the stage responded to by cow-horns from the other. The scene is in a wild picturesque valley in a thick forest near the Rhine. The river is in sight. In its waters swim the Rhine daughters. Siegfried appears, having lost his way by following game. The nymphs ask him for the ring; he refuses [288] it; they disappear with a warning of his approaching fate. To calls from horns in the distance, Siegfried responds upon his silver horn. This brings Günther, Hagen, and the hunters upon the ground. They all sit down and eat their lunch, after which Siegfried tells them the story of his life. When narrating of the enchanted tire and his success in reviving and winning Brunhilde, two ravens fly up from a bush near by. Hagen asks him of the meaning of this, and directs Siegfried's attention to the birds. Looking toward the flight of the birds, he presents his back toward Hagen, who kills him with his spear. While in his last moments, Siegfried recovers recollection and pledges himself again to Brunhilde, after which he expires. The members of the clan carry his body back to Günther's mansion; the orchestra accompanies the funeral procession in a march, which even the opponents of Wagner admit to be the greatest since Beethoven's in the 3d symphony. The scene is changed by the aid of mists and fogs into the place before the hall of the Gibichungen. Guthrune steps from the entrance expecting Siegfried's return. Hagen arrives and announces the arrival of welcome game for Brunhilde. The torchlights of the approaching funeral train illuminate the scene more and more. The corpse of Siegfried is placed in the middle of the open space. Guthrune falls into a swoon at the sight, and when restored to consciousness, cries for help while charging Hagen and her brother with the murder of her husband. Hagen boldly admits the deed and endeavors to get possession of the ring. Günther, who tries to prevent him, falls in the encounter. But even now Hagen is thwarted in his design by the threatening attitude of arm and finger of the corpse. Brunhilde appears in the background and surmises the treachery practised by the *elixir d'amour*. She takes Siegfried's ring, promising to restore it to the river Rhine. With a burning torch she lights the funeral pile, upon which Siegfried's body has been placed by the members of the tribe, mounts her horse and spurs him into the fire. The Rhine becomes agitated and rolls its waters in heavy seas over the ruins of the fire. In its waters appear the nymphs, holding the ring triumphantly over their heads. As soon as Hagen sees them, he throws away shield and spear, thinking of wresting the treasure [289] from the Rhine daughters, who however entrap him and carry him into the deep. A fire breaks through the clouds, becoming clearer and clearer, until by its brightest glow Walhalla and its deities are revealed. The flames seem finally to reach the habitation of the gods, and as it in turn disappears in the fire and the smoke, the curtain drops upon the last scene of the Tetralogy.

In conclusion let me call your attention to Wagner, the theorist, who laid down new rules for the composition of dramatic music; and to Wagner, the composer, who tried to exemplify them in the Ring of the Nibelungen.

When Wagner attacked the old forms of the opera, he directed his polemic principally against the singer as the center of all opposition to the healthful development of the musical drama. It must be clear to every thoughtful mind, that as long as music and its forms dictated the poetry, and the prima donnas and favorite tenors with their individual demands commanded music and its forms, just so long the opera was a servant instead of a master. A musical drama, depending for its value upon such caprices could never become a work of art. There is no doubt whatsoever of the correctness of Wagner's views, thus far. His mistake consists in deposing the singer instead of correcting him, in chasing him out of the dominion of the drama instead of confining him within legitimate bounds. The best agency for dramatic utterance is after all, melody, which finds its intelligent and intelligible interpreter in the human voice. All others, such as musical declamation and elocution, acting, facial expression, mimicry, and gesticulations, scenic representation, and orchestral display must of necessity be

subordinate in dramatic music even according to the dictum of Wagner. But he simply changed the tyranny of the vocalist to that of the instrumentalist. He has raised the orchestra to be a first class power; all other elements of dramatic music are secondary and some even third-rate. It, the orchestra, does everything, describes, imitates, paints, and reflects, in stronger colors than the originals upon the boards. It is no longer a servant in the household of the musical drama, but the domineering master which employs musical declamation but as the interpreting guide. As a matter [290] of necessity the cultivation of the art of singing received its highest point of culture under the old system, while under the Wagner *régime* the orchestral resources have been developed to a degree of perfection such as our old masters never could have attained with their ideas of dramatic music. The question would arise, whether the drama has gained anything by the changes introduced. If we compare characteristic portraiture in Mozart's operas with that in Wagner's, we shall very readily find, that the older master endowed the meager and often very insignificant outlines of his librettos with such pregnant and plastic attributes (even without the help of leading motives or an endless melodic flow) that we can readily believe in their immortality, while the modern master fails in the most essential of dramatic labors, viz: of creating dramatic persons and characters. All the melody, sung by Wotan or any other god in the Tetralogy, will not define the character of any of the ancient German deities, while the orchestral talk is very plain and not seldom of striking characteristics. The banishment of the chorus, or of any more than one performer at a time, is another of the grave mistakes, which Wagner's system tries to enforce. It is true, that no man can be more sincere in his convictions than Wagner is. He is fanatically convinced of their correctness. Every line in the Tetralogy seems to ask: "How can a dramatic character or scene or event be developed without the explaining word, and how can the value of the word come to its highest development except in musical declamation?" Against this may be held the fact that Wagner's declamation could not be understood, while the melody of the old masters aided greatly the enunciation of the text. The forms, which Wagner disregards and in which the classic masters have cast their creations, may and undoubtedly do not suit his talent, but they are the inheritance of all the lent and genius of our musical past, and are as imperishable as the human form, in which the best statues even of our modern times are still cast. We may call his musical leading motives very beautiful. So they are, as a hand, an eye, a head, may be beautiful. But they are only beautiful fragments, and it is only through that form which unites them as a complete whole, that they can become a work of art. Form and matter are supplementing [291] each other now as much as ever. Colors may be the most beautiful, but they will never make a painting, until employed in a form; melody, musical declamation, acting, scenic representation, and orchestral coloring, each and every one may be excellent when considered alone, but only when brought into their proper relation as parts of a whole (the form of which dictates their use) can they become agents of beauty.

Wagner's failures in musical characteristic portraiture may be ascribed to his disregard of form; his innovations have their source in his idiosyncrasy, not in any particular wants of art.

The achievements which his system has brought into art may be stated under the following heads:

- *1st.* The orchestra has been raised from a large guitar to an intelligent interpreter of the sentiments, feelings, and passions of the dramatic persons.
- *2d.* The text, which formerly furnished simply the basis for brilliant vocalization, has been entrusted with giving the commanding influence, which it undoubtedly ought to give.
- *3d.* The introduction of leading motives has bared the mysteries of the orchestral language.
- *4th.* The endless melodic flow has rent in twain the fetters, by which the dramatic composer was formerly bound.

These improvements will in all probability be adopted for all times to come and will prove a lasting benefit to the art of music. But whatever the fanaticism of its author has cut away from or engrafted upon the inheritance of our old glorious masters, may and probably will live as long as the experimental gardener lives to attend to it, but will wither and die without his fostering hand, because foreign to true art and its healthy development.

Wagner, the composer, has been likened to Peter Paul Rubens, the painter, with whom he has a great deal in common. The same mastery in handling the material; the same gigantic proportions for even the smallest things; the almost entire absence of Idealism. Right, downright materialism, in both and not seldom in the grossest forms. Wagner has in other respects a great similarity with Victor Hugo. The French poet delights in characters, which we seek in vain among mankind, paints them with virtues and vices of such gross exaggeration, that [292] they appear as phantoms—frightful to behold—with emotions, passions, and feelings, which in mortal man can find no echo. It is so with Wagner. The tendency of his music is to excite the nerves of his hearers to an unhealthy degree, and then he presents his characters—overdrawn and unreal—to the intoxicated mind. Both Victor Hugo and Richard Wagner go back to the dead bones of antiquity, and pick them of their very substance, flesh and marrow being gone long ago. Both present in masterly portraiture that which is past, the ghost invoked from the grave, the bewitching but unhealthy sentiments of times that never existed but in the imagination of diseased minds. In both the same egotism. Victor Hugo, in his own opinion is the greatest poet, and he has left no stone unturned, to prove it to the French. Wagner is possessed of the same insanity, and woe to him who dares to deny it.

Now it cannot be denied that Rubens was a great painter, nor that Victor Hugo is a great poet, or Wagner a great musician. But in Rubens' and Victor Hugo's case, the sober judgment of afterthought has failed to put them upon the pedestal of the greatest men. What will posterity do with Wagner? Will it give him a place beside Bach, Händel, Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven? It would be presumptuous to forestall it. It certainly will do him justice. Of one thing however we are sure, viz: that he is a genius. Casting aside the fanatical prescriptions, with which he doctored the school of arts, one cannot but acknowledge, that art in general and music in particular will be benefited by his influence. As a materialist, he has developed in the orchestra a power of description of the sensual perception of every-day life, of mythical and historical events and of the phenomena of nature, such as no older master before him ever has attempted. He may be said in a certain sense to complete Beethoven. This greatest of masters has endowed the orchestra with the power to speak the language of the soul; Wagner has developed its capacity as language of the senses; Beethoven's music is spiritual, Wagner's material; Beethoven always bespeaks in us the better man, Wagner the bad: Beethoven the heavenly, divine, and godlike in human nature, Wagner the earthly, worldly, and demoniac. The orchestra has derived a benefit from both these masters, for both capacities [293] are indispensable qualities of a dramatist. Wagner has also contradicted the doctrines, preached from the art centers by the old Grandpapas of musical criticism, who never allowed any other food, than that with which they had been nursed (a common fact with people in their second childhood). Wagner has destroyed the pernicious influence of those domineering, self-constituted judges, who, no matter how old they grow, never learn anything new. He has done an immense service to every young aspiring artist, by showing him, that there are yet new ways open, where new discoveries may be made and new laurels won.

I have been asked both in Germany and on my return, whether I was satisfied with my visit to Bayreuth. My answer was and is decidedly in the affirmative, for it was a great mind that spoke its inmost thoughts at the performances in the little Bavarian town. No, I was not disappointed, for I found my opinion of Wagner's music fully confirmed at the unexampled representation of the Ring of the Nibelungen. As I have expressed them in this Article, you will, even if you do not agree with me, give me credit for impartiality. I hail with the brightest

of pleasures any rational development in our the most beautiful of arts, while I cannot but with sorrow look upon even the most sincere efforts that have a tendency to degrade it.