
To Richard Wagner

By Sidney Lanier



The Wagner Library

Edition 1.0

Contents

About this Title	4
To Richard Wagner. - A Dream Of The Age.	5

About this Title

Source

To Richard Wagner
By Sidney Lanier

The Galaxy
Volume 24 Issue 5
Pages 652-653
Published in 1877

Original [Page Images](http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/moa/moa-cgi?notisid=ACB8727-0024-83) at Cornell University Library
(<http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/moa/moa-cgi?notisid=ACB8727-0024-83>)

Reading Information

This title contains 3376 words.
Estimated reading time between 10 and 17 minutes.

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

[652]

To Richard Wagner.

A Dream Of The Age.

I SAW a sky of stars that rolled in grime.
 All glory twinkled through some sweat of fight.
 From each tall chimney of the roaring Time
 That shot his fire far up the sooty night
 Mixt fuels—Labor's Right and Labor's Crime—
 Sent upward throb on throb of scarlet light,
 Till huge hot blushes in the heavens blent
 With golden hues of Trade's big firmament.
 The workmen drove by night and snored by day:
 Young Force was fain to mould all nature new;
 Art, raging to reverse each fair old way,
 Poor Epileptic! her sad circle drew
 All zigzag—puled and laughed when she should pray.
 Men's tongues accented life's large Word untrue—
 Shouted the trifling prefix, Time, full high,
 But slurred th'Eternal Syllable, in a sigh.

[653]

Fierce burned that flame of Trade: yet all was well.
 Hope dreamed rich music in the rattling mills.
 "Ye Foundries, ye shall cast my Church a bell!"
 Loud cried the Future from the furthest hills:
 "Ye groaning Forces, crack me every shell
 Of customs, old constraints and narrow ills:
 Thou, lithe Invention, wake and pry and guess,
 Till thy deft hand can make us happiness!"
 And I beheld high scaffoldings of creeds
 Crumbling from round Religion's perfect Fane;
 And a vast noise of rights, wrongs, powers, needs—
 Cries of new Faiths that called, "The Way is plain"—
 Grindings of upper against lower greeds—
 Fond sighs for old things, shouts for new—had reign
 Below that stream of golden fire that broke,
 Mottled with red, above the seas of smoke.
 Hark! Gay fanfares from horns of old Romance
 Open the clouds of clamor: who be these
 That, paired in rich processional, advance
 From darkness, o'er the murk-mad factories,
 Into yon flaming road, and sink, strange Ministrants!
 Sheer down to earth with many minstrelsies
 And motions fine, and mix about the scene,
 And fill the Time with forms of foreign mien?
 Bright ladies and brave knights of Fatherland;
 Sad mariners, no harbor e'er may hold;

A Swan soft floating tow'rds a tragic strand;
Dim ghosts of earth, air, water, fire, steel, gold,
Wind, care, love, lust; a lewd and lurking band
Of Powers—dark Conspiracy, Cunning cold,
Gray Sorcery; magic cloaks and rings and rods;
Valkyries, heroes, Rhinemaids, giants, gods!
Now marvels fall: each shape of yon wild Past
Dissolves, as cloud will melt away with cloud,
In later kindred type; the modern Last
Explains the antique First; a mighty crowd
Of gods and powers and ancient secrets vast
New-live in steam and crank and lever loud:
The large Norse forces smile to man, as mild
As tender giants to a little child.
Then, in my dream, those accidents of sight
Passed into hearing: life was turned to sound:
I heard the voice of ancient day and night
With later voices swell, so linked and bound
That never any ear could part aright
Those threads of tune that each through other wound:
And yet, O mystery of mysteries!
All seemed to sing one Fugue in many keys.
Grim songs of sinews, metals and blown fires
Roared as from hot clay furnace-throats expressed;
Deep hymns, of knights' and ladies' dear desires,
Dull hearts of smiths and clerks made manifest;
The lissome strings of Greek and Hebrew lyres
Twang'd out the modern Theme; East uttered West;
Pale girls by spinning spools in factories
Sang Elsa's woes and Brünhild's passionate pleas.



O Wagner, westward bring thy heavenly art!
No trifler thou: Siegfried and Wotan be
Names for big ballads of the modern heart.
Thine ears hear deeper than thine eyes can see.
Voice of the monstrous mill, the shouting mart,
Not less of airy cloud and ware and tree,
Thou, thou, if even to thyself unknown,
Hast power to say the Time in terms of tone!

Sidney Lanier.