
Art and Revolution

By Richard Wagner

Translated by William Ashton Ellis



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Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| About this Title | 4 |
| Translator's Note | 5 |
| Introduction to Art and Revolution. | 7 |
| Art and Revolution. | 11 |
| Notes | 29 |

About this Title

Source

Art and Revolution

By Richard Wagner

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[22]

Translator's Note

The INTRODUCTION translated on the opposite and following pages was written by Richard Wagner as the Preface to Volumes III. and IV. of his "*Gesammelte Schriften*," or Collected Writings, for the Edition of 1872; and applies not only to "*Art and Revolution*," but also to "*The Art-Work of the Future*" and "*Opera and Drama*," &c.

[23]

Introduction to Art and Revolution.

THOMAS CARLYLE, in his *History of Frederick the Great*, (01) characterises the outbreak of the French Revolution as the First Act of the "Spontaneous Combustion" of a nation "sunk into torpor, abeyance, and dry-rot," and admonishes his readers in the following words:—

"There is the next mile-stone for you, in the History of Mankind! That universal Burning-up, as in hell-fire, of Human Shams. The oath of Twenty-five Million men, which has since become that of all men whatsoever, 'Rather than live longer under lies, we will die!'—that is the New Act in World-History. New Act,—or, we may call it New *Part*; Drama of World-History, Part Third. If Part *Second* was 1800 years ago, this I reckon will be Part *Third*. This is the truly celestial-infernal Event: the strangest we have seen for a thousand years. Celestial in the one part; in the other, infernal. For it is withal the breaking-out of universal mankind into Anarchy, into the faith and practice of *No-Government*,—that is to say (if you will be candid), into unappeasable revolt against Sham-Governors and Sham-Teachers,—which I do charitably define to be a Search, most unconscious, yet in deadly earnest, for true Governors and Teachers. . . . When the Spontaneous Combustion breaks out; and, many-coloured, with loud noises, envelopes the whole world in anarchic flame for long hundreds of years: then has the Event come; there is the thing for all [24] men to mark, and to study and scrutinise as the strangest thing they ever saw. Centuries of it yet lying ahead of us; several sad Centuries, sordidly tumultuous, and good for little! Say Two Centuries yet,—say even Ten of such a process: before the Old is completely burnt out, and the New in any state of sightliness? Millennium of Anarchies;—*abridge it, spend your heart's-blood upon abridging it, ye Heroic Wise that are to come!*"

When, in the feverish excitement of the year 1849, I gave vent to an appeal such as that contained in the immediately succeeding essay: "*Art and Revolution*," I believe that I was in complete accord with the last words of this summons of the grey-headed historian. I believed in the Revolution, and in its unrestrainable necessity, with certainly no greater immoderation than Carlyle: only, I also felt that I was called to point out to it the way of rescue. Far though it was from my intent to define the New, which should grow from the ruins of a sham-filled world, as a fresh *political* ordering: (02) I felt the rather animated to draw the outlines of the *Art-work* which should rise from the ruins of a sham-bred *Art*. To hold this *Art-work* up to Life itself; as the prophetic mirror of its Future, appeared to me a weightiest contribution toward the work of damming the flood of Revolution within the channel of the peaceful-flowing stream of Manhood. I was bold enough to prefix the following motto to the little pamphlet: "When Art erst held her peace, State-wisdom and Philosophy began: when now both Statesman and Philosopher have breathed their last, let the Artist's voice again be heard."

It is needless to recall the scorn which my presumption brought upon me; since in the course of my succeeding literary labours, whose connected products I here append, [25] I had occasion enough to defend myself against the grossest of these attacks. I have also exhaustively treated this whole matter, both with regard to the inception of these works and the characteristic incitement thereto, not only in the "Communication to my Friends," (03) which brings this whole period to a close, but also in a later treatise, entitled: "The Music of the Future" ("*Zukunftsmusik*"). I will only say here that the principal cause which brought down the ridicule of our art-critics upon my seemingly paradoxical ideas, is to be found in the fervid enthusiasm which pervaded my style and gave to my remarks more of a poetic than a scientific character. Moreover, the effect of an indiscriminate intercalation of philosophical maxims was prejudicial to my clearness of expression, especially in the eyes of those who could not or would not follow my line of thought and general principles. Actively aroused by the perusal of some of *Ludwig Feuerbach's* essays, I had borrowed various terms of abstract

nomenclature and applied them to artistic ideas with which they could not always closely harmonise. In thus doing, I gave myself up without critical deliberation to the guidance of a brilliant writer, who approached most nearly to my reigning frame of mind, in that he bade farewell to Philosophy (in which he fancied he detected naught but masked Theology) and took refuge in a conception of man's nature in which I thought I clearly recognised my own ideal of artistic manhood. From this arose a kind of impassioned tangle of ideas, which manifested itself as precipitance and indistinctness in my attempts at philosophical system.

While on this subject, I deem it needful to make special mention of two chief 'terms,' my misunderstanding of which has since been strikingly borne in upon me.

I refer in the first place to the concept *Willkür* and *Unwillkür*, (04) in the use of which a great confusion had [26] long preceded my own offending; for an adjectival term, *unwillkürlich*, had been promoted to the rank of a substantive. Only those who have learnt from *Schopenhauer* the true meaning and significance of the *Will*, can thoroughly appreciate the abuse that had resulted from this mixing up of words; he who has enjoyed this unspeakable benefit, however, knows well that that misused "*Unwillkür*" should really be named "*Der Wille*" (the Will); whilst the term *Willkür* (Choice or Caprice) is here employed to signify the so-called Intellectual or Brain Will, influenced by the guidance of reflection. Since the latter is more concerned with the properties of Knowledge,—which may easily be led astray by the purely individual aim,—it is attainted with the evil qualities with which it is charged in the following pages, under the name of *Willkür* whereas the pure *Will*, as the "*Thing-in-itself*" that comes to consciousness in man, is credited with those true productive qualities which are here—apparently the result of a confusion sprung from the popular misuse of the term—assigned to the negative expression, "*Unwillkür*." Therefore, since a thorough revision in this sense would lead too far and prove a most fatiguing task, the reader is begged, when doubtful of the meaning of any of such passages, to bear graciously in mind the present explanation.

Further, I have to fear that my continual employment of the term "*Sinnlichkeit*," (05) in a sense prompted by the same authority, may give origin, if not to positively harmful misunderstanding, at least to much perplexity. Since the idea conveyed by this term can only have the meaning, [27] in my argument, of the direct antithesis to "*Gedanken*" (Thought), or—which will make my purport clearer—to "*Gedanklichkeit*" (Ideation): its absolute misunderstanding would certainly be difficult, seeing that the two opposite factors, Art and Learning, must readily be recognised herein. But since, in ordinary parlance, this word is employed in the evil sense of "Sensualism," or even of abandonment to Sensual Lust, it would be better to replace it by a term of less ambiguous meaning, in theoretical expositions of so warm a declamatory tone as these of mine, however wide a currency it has obtained in philosophical speech. Obviously, the question here is of the contrast between intuitive and abstract knowledge, both in themselves and their results; but above all, of the subjective predisposition to these diverse modes. The term "*Anschauungsvermögen*" (Perceptive Faculty) would sufficiently denote the former; were it not that for the specific *artistic* perception, a distinctive emphasis seems necessary, for which it might well appear indispensable to retain the expression "*Sinnliches Anschauungsvermögen*" (Physical perceptive faculty), and briefly "*Sinnlichkeit*" (Physicality), alike for the faculty, for the object of its exercise, and for the force which sets the two in rapport with each other.

But the greatest peril of all, is that which the author would incur by his frequent use of the word *Communism*, should he venture into the Paris of to-day with these art-essays in his hand; for he openly proclaims his adherence to this severely scouted category, in contradistinction to *Egoism*. (06) I certainly believe that the friendly German reader, to whom the meaning of this antithesis will be obvious, will have no special trouble in overcoming the doubt as to whether he must rank me among the partisans of the newest Parisian "*Commune*." Still, I

cannot deny that I should not have embarked with the same energy upon the use of this word "Communism" (employing it in [28] a sense borrowed from the said writings of Feuerbach) as the opposite of Egoism: had I not also seen in this idea a socio-political ideal which I conceived as embodied in a "*Volk*" (People) that should represent the incomparable productivity of antique brotherhood, while I looked forward to the perfect evolution of this principle as the very essence of the associate Manhood of the Future.—It is significant of my experiences on the practical side, that in the first of these writings, *Art and Revolution*, which I had originally intended for a certain political journal (07) then appearing in Paris (where I stayed for a few weeks in the summer of 1849), I avoided this word "Communism,"—as it now seems to me, from fear of gross misunderstanding on the part of our French brethren, materialistic ("*sinnlich*") as they are in their interpretation of so many an abstract idea,—whereas I forthwith used it without scruple in my next art-writings, designed expressly for Germany; a fact I now regard as a token of my implicit trust in the attributes of the German mind. In pursuance of this observation, I attach considerable importance also to the experience, that my essay met with absolutely no whit of understanding in Paris, and that no one at the time could understand why I should single out a political journal for my mouthpiece; in consequence whereof; my article did not after all attain to publication there.

But it was not only from the effects of these and similar experiences, that the quick of my ideas drew gradually back from contact with the political excitement of the day, and soon developed more and more exclusively as an *artistic* ideal. Hereof the sequence of the writings collected in these two volumes (08) gives sufficient indication; and this the reader will best recognise from the insertion, in their midst, of a dramatic sketch: *Wieland der Schmied*, executed by me in the same chronological order as that in [29] which it now stands. If that artistic ideal, which I have ever since held fast to as my inmost acquisition, under whatsoever form of its manifestment,—if that ideal remained the only actual outcome of a labour which taxed the whole energy of my nature; and finally, if only as a creative artist could I live up to this ideal without disquietude: then my belief in the German spirit, and the trust in its predestined place amid the Council of the Nations that took an ever mightier hold upon me as time rolled on, could alone inspire me with the hopeful equanimity so indispensable to the artist—even from the outer aspect of the human lot, however much the care for the latter had forced its passionate disturbance upon my views of life. Already I have been enabled to preface the second edition of *Opera and Drama* by a dedication to a friend (09) I had won in the interval,—and to whose instructive suggestions I have had to thank the most comforting solutions of the last named problem,—in order to reach to him the hand of the artist as well as of the man, in token of the hopes that cheer us both.

I have now only to conclude these comments by pointing back once more to their opening sentences, wherein I cited the dictum of Carlyle upon the import of the great world epoch that dawned upon us with the French Revolution. According to the high opinion which this great thinker has proclaimed, of the destiny of the German nation and its spirit of veracity, it must be deemed no vain presumption that we recognise in this German people—whose own completed *Reformation* would seem to have spared it from the need of any share in Revolution—the pre-ordained "Heroic Wise" on whom he calls to abridge the period of horrible World-Anarchy. For myself; I feel assured that just the same relation which my ideal of Art bears to the reality of our general conditions of existence, that relation is allotted to the German race in its destiny amid a whole political world in the throes of "Spontaneous Combustion."

[30]

Art and Revolution.

ALMOST universal is the outcry raised by artists nowadays against the damage that the Revolution has occasioned them. It is not the battles of the "barricades," not the sudden mighty shattering of the pillars of the State, not the hasty change of Governments,—that is bewailed; for the impression left behind by such capital events as these, is for the most part disproportionately fleeting, and short-lived in its violence. But it is the protracted character of the latest convulsions, that is so mortally affecting the artistic efforts of the day. The hitherto-recognised foundations of industry, of commerce, and of wealth, are now threatened; and though tranquillity has been outwardly restored, and the general physiognomy of social life completely re-established, yet there gnaws at the entrails of this life a carking care, an agonising distress. Reluctance to embark in fresh undertakings, is maiming credit; he who wishes to preserve what he has, declines the prospect of uncertain gain; industry is at a standstill, and—Art has no longer the wherewithal to live.

It were cruel to refuse human sympathy to the thousands who are smarting from this blow. Where, a little while ago, a popular artist was accustomed to receive, at the hands of the care-free portion of our well-to-do society, the reward of his appreciated services in sterling payment, and a like prospect of comfort and contentment in his life,—it is hard for him now to see himself rejected by tight-closed hands, and abandoned to lack of occupation. In this he shares the fate of the mechanic, who must lay the cunning fingers with which he was wont to create a thousand dainty trifles for the rich, in idleness upon his breast above a [31] hungry stomach. He has the right then to bewail his lot; for to him who feels the smart of pain, has Nature given the gift of tears. But whether he has a right to confound his own personality with that of Art, to decry his ills as the ills of Art, to scold the Revolution as the arch-enemy of Art, because it interferes with the easy ministry to his own wants: this were grave matter for question. Before a decision could be arrived at on this point, at least those artists might be interrogated who have shown by word and deed that they loved and laboured for Art for its own pure sake; and from these we should soon learn, that they suffered also in the former times when others were rejoicing.

The question must be therefore put to Art itself and its true essence; nor must we in this matter concern ourselves with mere abstract definitions; for our object will naturally be, to discover the meaning of Art as a factor in the life of the State, and to make ourselves acquainted with it as a social product. A hasty review of the salient points of the history of European art will be of welcome service to us in this, and assist us to a solution of the above-named problem—a problem which is surely not of slight importance.



[32]

IN any serious investigation of the essence of our art of to-day, we cannot make one step forward without being brought face to face with its intimate connection with the *Art of ancient Greece*. For, in point of fact, our modern art is but one link in the artistic development of the whole of Europe; and this development found its starting-point with the Greeks.

After it had overcome the raw religion of its Asiatic birth-place, built upon the nature-forces of the earth, and had set the fair, *strong manhood of freedom* upon the pinnacle of its religious convictions,—the Grecian spirit, at the flowering-time of its art and polity, found its fullest expression in the god Apollo, the head and national deity of the Hellenic race.

It was Apollo,—he who had slain the Python, the dragon of Chaos; who had smitten down

the vain sons of boastful Niobe by his death-dealing darts; who, through his priestess at Delphi, had proclaimed to questioning man the fundamental laws of the Grecian race and nation, thus holding up to those involved in passionate action, the peaceful, undisturbed mirror of their inmost, unchangeable Grecian nature,—it was this Apollo who was the fulfiller of the will of Zeus upon the Grecian earth; who was, in fact, the Grecian people.

Not as the soft companion of the Muses,—as the later and more luxurious art of sculpture has alone preserved his likeness,—must we conceive the Apollo of the spring-time of the Greeks; but it was with all the traits of energetic earnestness, beautiful but strong, that the great tragedian *Æschylus* knew him. Thus, too, the Spartan youths learnt the nature of the god, when by dance and joust they had developed their supple bodies to grace and strength; when the boy was taken from those he loved, and sent on horse to farthest lands in search of perilous adventure; when the young man was led into the circle of fellowship, [33] his only password that of his beauty and his native worth, in which alone lay all his might and all his riches. With such eyes also the Athenian saw the god, when all the impulses of his fair body, and of his restless soul, urged him to the new birth of his own being through the ideal expression of art; when the voices, ringing full, sounded forth the choral song, singing the deeds of the god, the while they gave to the dancers the mastering measure that meted out the rhythm of the dance,—which dance itself; in graceful movements, told the story of those deeds; and when above the harmony of well-ordered columns he wove the noble roof; heaped one upon the other the broad crescents of the amphitheatre, and planned the scenic trappings of the stage. Thus, too, inspired by Dionysus, the tragic poet saw this glorious god: when, to all the rich elements of spontaneous art, the harvest of the fairest and most human life, he joined the bond of speech, and concentrating them all into one focus, brought forth the highest conceivable form of art—the DRAMA.

The deeds of gods and men, their sufferings, their delights, as they,—in all solemnity and glee, as eternal rhythm, as everlasting harmony of every motion and of all creation,—lay disclosed in the nature of Apollo himself; here they became actual and true. For all that in them moved and lived, as it moved and lived in the beholders, here found its perfected expression; where ear and eye, as soul and heart, lifelike and actual, seized and perceived all, and saw all in spirit and in body revealed; so that the imagination need no longer vex itself with the attempt to conjure up the image. Such a tragedy-day was a Feast of the God; for here the god spoke clearly and intelligibly forth, and the poet, as his high-priest, stood real and embodied in his art-work, led the measures of the dance, raised the voices to a choir, and in ringing words proclaimed the utterances of godlike wisdom.

Such was the Grecian work of art; such their god Apollo, incarnated in actual, living art; such was the Grecian people in its highest truth and beauty.

This race, in every branch, in every unit, was rich in individuality, [34] restless in its energy, in the goal of one undertaking seeing but the starting-point of a fresh one; in constant mutual intercourse, in daily-changing alliances, in daily-varying strifes; to-day in luck, to-morrow in mischance; to-day in peril of the utmost danger, to-morrow absolutely exterminating its foes; in all its relations, both internal and external, breathing the life of the freest and most unceasing development. This people, streaming in its thousands from the State-assembly, from the Agora, from land, from sea, from camps, from distant parts,—filled with its thirty thousand heads the amphitheatre. To see the most pregnant of all tragedies, the "Prometheus," came they; in this Titanic masterpiece to see the image of themselves, to read the riddle of their own actions, to fuse their own being and their own communion with that of their god; and thus in noblest, stillest peace to live again the life which a brief space of time before, they had lived in restless activity and accentuated individuality.

Ever jealous of his personal independence, and hunting down the "Tyrannos" who, howsoever wise and lofty, might imperil from any quarter the freedom of his own strong will:

the Greek despised the soft complacency which, under the convenient shelter of another's care, can lay itself down to passive egoistic rest. Constantly on his guard, untiring in warding off all outside influence: he gave not even to the hoariest tradition the right over his own free mundane life, his actions, or his thoughts. Yet, at the summons of the choir his voice was hushed, he yielded himself a willing slave to the deep significance of the scenic show, and hearkened to the great story of Necessity told by the tragic poet through the mouths of his gods and heroes on the stage. For in the tragedy he found himself again,—nay, found the noblest part of his own nature united with the noblest characteristics of the whole nation; and from his inmost soul, as it there unfolded itself to him, proclaimed the Pythian oracle. At once both God and Priest, glorious godlike man, one with the Universal, the Universal summed up in him: like one of those [35] thousand fibres which form the plant's united life, his slender form sprang from the soil into the upper air; there to bring forth the one lovely flower which shed its fragrant breath upon eternity. This flower was the highest work of Art, its scent the spirit of Greece; and still it intoxicates our senses and forces from us the avowal, that it were better to be for half a day a Greek in presence of this tragic Art-work, than to all eternity an—un-Greek *God!*



Hand-in-hand with the dissolution of the Athenian State, marched the downfall of Tragedy. As the spirit of *Community* split itself along a thousand lines of egoistic cleavage, so was the great united work of Tragedy disintegrated into its individual factors. Above the ruins of tragic art was heard the cry of the mad laughter of Aristophanes, the maker of comedies; and, at the bitter end, every impulse of Art stood still before Philosophy, who read with gloomy mien her homilies upon the fleeting stay of human strength and beauty.

To *Philosophy* and not to Art, belong the two thousand years which, since the decadence of Grecian Tragedy, have passed till our own day. In vain did Art send hither and thither her dazzling beams into the night of discontented thought, of mankind grovelling in its madness; they were but the cries, of pain or joy, of the units who had escaped from the desert of the multitude, and, like fortunate wanderers from distant lands, had reached the hidden, bubbling spring of pure Castalian waters, at which they slaked their thirsty lips but dared not reach the quickening draught unto the world. Or else it was, that Art entered on the service of one or other of those abstract ideas or even conventions which, now lighter and now more heavily, weighed down a suffering humanity and cast in fetters the freedom both of individuals and communities. But never more was she the free expression of a free community. Yet true Art is highest freedom, and only the highest freedom can bring her forth from out itself; no [36] commandment, no ordinance, in short, no aim apart from Art, can call her to arise.

The Romans,—whose national art had early vanished before the influence of an indoctrinated Grecian art,—procured the services of Greek architects, sculptors and painters; and their own *savants* trained themselves to Grecian rhetoric and versification. Their giant theatres, however, they opened not to the gods and heroes of the ancient myths, nor to the free dancers and singers of the sacred choirs! No! Wild beasts, lions, panthers and elephants, must tear themselves to pieces in their amphitheatres, to glut the Roman eye; and gladiators, slaves trained up to the due pitch of strength and agility, must satiate the Roman ear with the hoarse gulp of death.

These brutal conquerors of the world were pleased to wallow in the most absolute realism; their imagination could find its only solace in the most material of presentments. Their philosophers they gladly left to flee shuddering from public life to abstract speculations; but, for themselves, they loved to revel in concrete and open bloodthirstiness, beholding human suffering set before them in absolute physical reality.

These gladiators and fighters with wild beasts, were sprung from every European nation;

and the kings, nobles, and serfs of these nations were all slaves alike of the Roman Emperor, who showed them, in this most practical of ways, that all men were equals; just as, on the other hand, he himself was often shown most palpably by his own Pretorian Guard, that he also was no more than a mere slave.

This mutual and general slavery—so clear, that no one could gainsay it—yearned, as every universal feeling of the world must yearn, for an adequate expression of itself. But the manifest degradation and dishonour of all men; the consciousness of the complete corruption of all manly worth; the inevitably ensuing loathing of the material pleasures that now alone were left; the deep contempt for their own acts and deeds, from which all spirit of Genius [37] and impulse of Art had long since joined with Freedom in her flight; this sorrowful existence, without actual aimful life,—could find but one expression; which, though certainly universal as the condition that called it forth, must yet be the direct antithesis of Art. For Art is pleasure in itself; in existence, in community; but the condition of that period, at the close of the Roman mastery of the world, was self-contempt, disgust with existence, horror of community. Thus *Art* could never be the true expression of this condition: its only possible expression was *Christianity*.

Christianity adjusts the ills of an honourless, useless, and sorrowful existence of mankind on earth, by the miraculous love of God; who had not — as the noble Greek supposed—created man for a happy and self-conscious life upon this earth, but had here imprisoned him in a loathsome dungeon: so as, in reward for the self-contempt that poisoned him therein, to prepare him for a posthumous state of endless comfort and inactive ecstasy. Man was therefore bound to remain in this deepest and unmanliest degradation, and no activity of this present life should he exercise; for this accursed life was, in truth, the world of the devil, *i.e.*, of the senses; and by every action in it, he played into the devil's hands. Therefore the poor wretch who, in the enjoyment of his natural powers, made this life his own possession, must suffer after death the eternal torments of hell! Naught was required of mankind but *Faith*—that is to say, the confession of its miserable plight, and the giving up of all spontaneous attempt to escape from out this misery; for the *undeserved Grace* of God was alone to set it free.

The historian knows not surely that this was the view of the humble son of the Galilean carpenter; who, looking on the misery of his fellow-men, proclaimed that he had not come to bring peace, but a sword into the world; whom we must love for the anger with which he thundered forth against the hypocritical Pharisees who fawned upon the power of Rome, so as the better to bind and heartlessly [38] enslave the people; and finally, who preached the reign of universal human love—a love he could never have enjoined on men whose duty it should be to despise their fellows and themselves. The inquirer more clearly discerns the hand of the miraculously converted Pharisee, Paul, and the zeal with which, in his conversion of the heathen, he followed so successfully the monition: "Be ye wise as serpents . . .;" he may also estimate the deep and universal degradation of civilised mankind, and see in this the historical soil from which the full-grown tree of finally developed Christian dogma drew forth the sap that fed its fruit. But thus much the candid *artist* perceives at the first glance: that neither was Christianity Art, nor could it ever bring forth from itself the true and living Art.

The free Greek, who set himself upon the pinnacle of Nature, could procreate Art from very joy in manhood: the Christian, who impartially cast aside both Nature and himself; could only sacrifice to his God on the altar of renunciation; he durst not bring his actions or his work as offering, but believed that he must seek His favour by abstinence from all self-prompted venture. Art is the highest expression of activity of a race that has developed its physical beauty in unison with itself and Nature; and man must reap the highest joy from the world of sense, before he can mould therefrom the implements of his art; for from the world of sense alone, can he derive so much as the impulse to artistic creation. The Christian, on the

contrary, if he fain would create an art-work that should correspond to his belief; must derive his impulse from the essence of abstract spirit (*Geist*), from the grace of God, and therein find his tools.—What, then, could he take for aim? Surely not physical beauty,—mirrored in his eyes as an incarnation of the devil? And how could pure spirit, at any time, give birth to a something that could be cognised by the senses?

All pondering of this problem is fruitless; the course of history shows too unmistakeably the results of these two opposite methods. Where the Greeks, for their edification, [39] gathered in the amphitheatre for the space of a few short hours full of the deepest meaning: the Christian shut himself away in the life-long imprisonment of a cloister. In the one case, the Popular Assembly was the judge: in the other, the Inquisition; here the State developed to an honourable Democracy: there, to a hypocritical Despotism.

Hypocrisy is the salient feature, the peculiar characteristic, of every century of our Christian era, right down to our own day; and indeed this vice has always stalked abroad with more crying shamelessness, in direct proportion as mankind, in spite of Christendom, has refreshed its vigour from its own unquenchable and inner well-spring, and ripened toward the fulfilment of its true purpose. Nature is so strong, so inexhaustible in its regenerative resources, that no conceivable violence could weaken its creative force. Into the ebbing veins of the Roman world, there poured the healthy blood of the fresh Germanic nations. Despite the adoption of Christianity, a ceaseless thirst of doing, delight in bold adventure, and unbounded self-reliance, remained the native element of the new masters of the world. But, as in the whole history of the Middle Ages we always light upon one prominent factor, the warfare between worldly might and the despotism of the Roman Church: so, when this new world sought for a form of utterance, it could only find it in opposition to, and strife against, the spirit of Christendom. The Art of Christian Europe could never proclaim itself; like that of ancient Greece, as the expression of a world attuned to harmony; for reason that its inmost being was incurably and irreconcilably split up between the force of conscience and the instinct of life, between the ideal and the reality. Like the order of Chivalry itself; the chivalric poetry of the Middle Ages, in attempting to heal this severance, could, even amid its loftiest imagery, but bring to light the falsehood of the reconciliation; the higher and the more proudly it soared on high, so the more visibly gaped the abyss between the actual life and the idealised existence, [40] between the raw, passionate bearing of these knights in physical life and their too delicate, etherealised behaviour in romance. For the same reason did actual life, leaving the pristine, noble, and certainly not ungraceful customs of the People, become corrupt and vicious; for it durst not draw the nourishment for its art-impulse from out of its own being, its joy in itself; and its own physical demeanour; but was sent for all its spiritual sustenance to Christianity, which warned it off from the first taste of life's delight, as from a thing accursed.—The poetry of Chivalry was thus the honourable hypocrisy of fanaticism, the parody of heroism: in place of Nature, it offered a convention.

Only when the enthusiasm of belief had smouldered down, when the Church openly proclaimed herself as naught but a worldly despotism appreciable by the senses, in alliance with the no less material worldly absolutism of the temporal rule which she had sanctified: only then, commenced the so-called Renaissance of Art. That wherewith man had racked his brains so long, he would fain now see before him clad in body, like the Church itself in all its worldly pomp. But this was only possible on condition that he opened his eyes once more, and restored his senses to their rights. Yet when man took the objects of belief and the revelations of phantasy and set them before his eyes in physical beauty, and with the artist's delight in that physical beauty,—this was a complete denial of the very essence of the Christian religion; and it was the deepest humiliation to Christendom that the guidance to these art-creations must be sought from the pagan art of Greece. Nevertheless, the Church appropriated to herself this newly-roused art-impulse, and did not blush to deck herself with

the borrowed plumes of paganism; thus trumpeting her own hypocrisy.

Worldly dominion, however, had its share also in the revival of art. After centuries of combat, their power armed against all danger from below, the security of riches awoke in the ruling classes the desire for more refined enjoyment of this wealth: they took into their pay the [41] arts whose lessons Greece had taught. "Free" Art now served as handmaid to these exalted masters, and, looking into the matter more closely, it is difficult to decide who was the greater hypocrite:—Louis XIV., when he sat and heard the Grecian hate of Tyrants, declaimed in polished verses from the boards of his Court-theatre; or Corneille and Racine, when, to win the favour of their lord, they set in the mouths of their stage-heroes the warm words of freedom and political virtue, of ancient Greece and Rome.

Could Art be present there in very deed, where it blossomed not forth as the living utterance of a free, self-conscious community, but was taken into the service of the very powers which hindered the self-development of that community, and was thus capriciously transplanted from foreign climes? No, surely! Yet we shall see that Art, instead of enfranchising herself from eminently respectable masters, such as were the Holy Church and witty Princes, preferred to sell her soul and body to a far worse mistress—*Commerce*.



The Grecian Zeus, the father of all life, sent a messenger from Olympus to the gods upon their wanderings through the world—the fair young *Hermes*. The busy thought of Zeus was he; winged he clove from the heights above to the depths below, to proclaim the omnipresence of the sovereign god. He presided, too, at the death of men, and led their shades into the still realm of Night; for wherever the stern necessity of Nature's ordering showed clearly forth, the god Hermes was visible in action, as the embodied thought of Zeus.

The Romans had a god, *Mercury*, whom they likened to the Grecian Hermes. But with them his winged mission gained a more practical intent. For them it was the restless diligence of their chaffering and usurious merchants, who streamed from all the ends of the earth into the heart of the Roman world; to bring its luxurious masters, in [42] barter for solid gain, all those delights of sense which their own immediately surrounding Nature could not afford them. To the Roman, surveying its essence and its methods, Commerce seemed no more nor less than trickery; and though, by reason of his ever-growing luxury, this world of trade appeared a necessary evil, he cherished a deep contempt for all its doings. Thus Mercury, the god of merchants, became for him the god withal of cheats and sharpers.

This slighted god, however, revenged himself upon the arrogant Romans, and usurped their mastery of the world. For, crown his head with the halo of Christian hypocrisy, decorate his breast with the soulless tokens of dead feudal orders: and ye have in him the god of the modern world, the holy-noble god of 'five per cent,' the ruler and the master of the ceremonies of our modern—'art.' Ye may see him embodied in a strait-laced English banker, whose daughter perchance has been given in marriage to a ruined peer. Ye may see him in this gentleman, when he engages the chief singers of the Italian Opera to sing before him in his own drawing-room rather than in the theatre, because he will have the glory of paying higher for them here than there; but on no account, even here, on the sacred Sunday. Behold *Mercury* and his docile handmaid, *Modern Art*!

This is Art, as it now fills the entire civilised world! Its true essence is Industry; its ethical aim, the gaining of gold; its aesthetic purpose, the entertainment of those whose time hangs heavily on their hands. From the heart of our modern society, from the golden calf of wholesale Speculation, stalled at the meeting of its cross-roads, our art sucks forth its

life-juice, borrows a hollow grace from the lifeless relics of the chivalric conventions of mediaeval times, and—blushing not to fleece the poor, for all its professions of Christianity—descends to the depths of the proletariat, enervating, demoralising, and dehumanising everything on which it sheds its venom.

Its pleasance it has set up in the Theatre, as did the art [43] of Greece in its maturity; and, indeed, it has a claim upon the theatre: for is it not the expression of our current views of present life? Our modern stage materialises the ruling spirit of our social life, and publishes its daily record in a way that no other branch of art can hope to rival; for it prepares its feasts, night in night out, in almost every town of Europe. Thus, as the broad-strewn art of drama, it denotes, to all appearance, the flower of our culture; just as the Grecian tragedy denoted the culminating point of the Grecian spirit; but ours is the efflorescence of corruption, of a hollow, soulless and unnatural condition of human affairs and human relations.

This condition of things we need not further characterise here; we need but honestly search the contents and the workings of our public art, especially that of the stage, in order to see the spirit of the times reflected therein as in a faithful mirror; for such a mirror public Art has ever been. (10)

Thus we can by no means recognise in our theatrical art the genuine Drama; that one, indivisible, supreme creation of the mind of man. Our theatre merely offers the convenient *locale* for the tempting exhibition of the heterogeneous wares of art-manufacture. How incapable is our stage to gather up each branch of Art in its highest and most perfect expression—the Drama—it shows at once in its division into the two opposing classes, Play and Opera; whereby the idealising influence of music is forbidden to the Play, and the Opera is forestalled of the living heart and lofty purpose of actual drama. Thus on the one hand, the spoken Play can never, with but few [44] exceptions, lift itself up to the ideal flight of poetry; but, for very reason of the poverty of its means of utterance,—to say nothing of the demoralising influence of our public life,—must fall from height to depth, from the warm atmosphere of passion into the cold element of intrigue. On the other hand, the Opera becomes a chaos of sensuous impressions jostling one another without rhyme or reason, from which each one may choose at will what pleases best his fancy; here the alluring movements of a dancer, there the *bravura* passage of a singer; here the dazzling effect of a triumph of the scene-painter, there the astounding efforts of a Vulcan of the orchestra. Do we not read from day to day, that this or that new opera is a masterpiece because it contains a goodly number of fine *arias* and duets, the instrumentation is extremely brilliant, &c., &c.? The aim which alone can justify the employment of such complex means,—the great dramatic aim,—folk never give so much as a thought.

Such verdicts as these are shallow, but honest; they show exactly what is the position of the audience. There are even many of our most popular artists who do not in the least conceal the fact, that they have no other ambition than to satisfy this shallow audience. They are wise in their generation; for when the prince leaves a heavy dinner, the banker a fatiguing financial operation, the working man a weary day of toil, and go to the theatre: they ask for rest, distraction, and amusement, and are in no mood for renewed effort and fresh expenditure of force. This argument is so convincing, that we can only reply by saying: it would be more decorous to employ for this purpose any other thing in the wide world, but not the body and soul of Art. We shall then be told, however, that if we do not employ Art in this manner, it must perish from our public life: *i.e.*,—that the artist will lose the means of living.

On this side everything is lamentable, indeed, but candid, genuine, and honest; civilised corruption, and modern Christian dulness!

[45]

But, affairs having undeniably come to such a pass, what shall we say to the hypocritical pretence of many an art-hero of our times, whose fame is now the order of the day? —when

he dons the melancholy counterfeit of true artistic inspiration; when he racks his brains for thoughts of deep intent, and ever seeks fresh food for awe, setting heaven and hell in motion: in short, when he behaves just like those honest journeymen of art who avowed that one must *not* be too particular if one wish to get rid of one's goods. What shall we say, when these heroes not only seek to entertain, but expose themselves to all the peril of fatiguing, in order to be thought profound; when, too, they renounce all hope of substantial profit, and even—though only a rich man, born and bred, can afford that!—spend their own money upon their productions, thus offering up the highest modern sacrifice? To what purpose, this enormous waste? Alas! there yet remains one other thing than gold, a thing that nowadays a man may buy for gold like any other pleasure: that thing is *Fame!*—Yet what sort of fame is there to reach in our public art? Only the fame of the same publicity for which this art is planned, and which the fame-lusting man can never obtain but by submission to its most trivial claims. Thus he deludes both himself and the public, in giving it his piebald art-work; while the public deludes both itself and him, in bestowing on him its applause. But this mutual lie is worthy of the lying nature of modern Fame itself; for we are adepts in the art of decking out our own self-seeking passions with the monstrous lies of such sweet-sounding names as "Patriotism," "Honour," "Law and Order," &c., &c.

Yet, why do we deem it necessary so publicly to cheat each one the other?—Because, mid all the ruling evils, these notions and these virtues are present still within our conscience; though truly in our *guilty* conscience. For it is sure, that where honour and truth are really present, there also is true Art at hand. The greatest and most noble minds—whom Æschylus and Sophocles would have [46] greeted with the kiss of brotherhood—for centuries have raised their voices in the wilderness. We have heard their cry, and it lingers still within our ears; but from our base and frivolous hearts we have washed away its living echo. We tremble at their fame, but mock their art. We admit their rank as artists of lofty aim, but rob them of the realisation of their art-work; for the one great, genuine work of Art they cannot bring to life unaided: we, too, must help them in its birth. The tragedies of Æschylus and Sophocles were the work of Athens!

What boots, then, the fame of these Masters? What serves it us, that *Shakespeare*, like a second Creator, has opened for us the endless realm of human nature? What serves it, that *Beethoven* has lent to Music the manly, independent strength of Poetry? Ask the threadbare caricatures of your theatres, ask the street-minstrel commonplaces of your operas: and ye have your answer! But do ye need to ask? Alas, no! Ye know it right well; indeed, ye would not have it otherwise; ye only give yourselves the air as though ye knew it not!

What then is your Art, and what your Drama?

The Revolution of February deprived the Paris theatres of public support; many of them were on the brink of bankruptcy. After the events of June, Cavaignac, busied with the maintenance of the existing order of society, came to their aid and demanded a subvention for their continuance. Why?—Because the Breadless Classes, the *Prolétariat*, would be augmented by the closing of the theatres.—So; this interest alone has the State in the Stage! It sees in it an industrial workshop, and, to boot, an influence that may calm the passions, absorb the excitement, and divert the threatening agitation of the heated public mind; which broods in deepest discontent, seeking for the way by which dishonoured human nature may return to its true self; even though it be at cost of the continuance of our—so appropriate theatrical institutions!

Well! the avowal is candid; and on all fours with the frankness of this admission, stands the complaint [47] of our modern artists and their hatred for the Revolution. Yet what has *Art* in common with these cares and these complaints?



Let us now compare the chief features of the public art of modern Europe with those of the public art of Greece, in order to set clearly before our eyes their characteristic points of difference.

The public art of the Greeks, which reached its zenith in their Tragedy, was the expression of the deepest and the noblest principles of the people's consciousness: with *us* the deepest and noblest of man's consciousness is the direct opposite of this, namely the denunciation of our public art. To the Greeks the production of a tragedy was a religious festival, where the gods bestirred themselves upon the stage and bestowed on men their wisdom: *our* evil conscience has so lowered the theatre in public estimation, that it is the duty of the police to prevent the stage from meddling in the slightest with religion; (11) a circumstance as characteristic of our religion as of our art. Within the ample boundaries of the Grecian amphitheatre, the whole populace was wont to witness the performances: in our superior theatres, lo! only the affluent classes. The Greeks sought the instruments of their art in the products of the highest associate culture: we seek ours in the deepest social barbarism. The education of the Greek, from his earliest youth, made himself the subject of his own artistic treatment and artistic enjoyment, in body as in spirit: our foolish education, fashioned for the most part to fit us merely for future industrial gain, gives us a ridiculous, and withal arrogant satisfaction with our own unfitness for art, and forces us to seek the subjects of any kind of artistic [48] amusement outside ourselves,—like the rake who goes for the fleeting joys of love to the arms of a prostitute. Thus the Greek was his own actor, singer, and dancer; his share in the performance of a tragedy was to him the highest pleasure in the work of Art itself, and he rightly held it an honour to be entitled by his beauty and his culture to be called to this beloved task: we, on the other hand, permit a certain portion of our proletariat, which is to be found in every social stratum, to be instructed for our entertainment; thus prurient vanity, claptrap, and at times unseemly haste for fortune-making, fill up the ranks of our dramatic companies. Where the Grecian artist found his only reward in his own delight in the masterpiece, in its success, and the public approbation: we have the modern artist boarded, lodged, and—*paid*. And thus we reach the essential distinction between the two: with the Greeks their public art was very *Art*, with us it is artistic—*Handicraft*.

The *true artist* finds delight not only in the aim of his creation, but also in the very process of creation, in the handling and moulding of his material. The very act of production is to him a gladsome, satisfying activity: no toil. The *journeyman* reckons only the goal of his labour, the profit which his toil shall bring him; the energy which he expends, gives him no pleasure; it is but a fatigue, an inevitable task, a burden which he would gladly give over to a machine; his toil is but a fettering chain. For this reason he is never present with his work in spirit, but always looking beyond it to its goal, which he fain would reach as quickly as he may. Yet, if the immediate aim of the journeyman is the satisfaction of an impulse of his own, such as the preparing of his own dwelling, his chattels, his raiment, &c.: then, together with his prospective pleasure in the hasting value of these objects, there also enters by degrees a bent to such a fashioning of the material as shall agree with his individual tastes. After he has fulfilled the demands of bare necessity, the creation of that which answers to less pressing needs will elevate itself to the rank [49] of artistic production. But if he bargains away the product of his toil, all that remains to him is its mere money-worth; and thus his energy can never rise above the character of the busy strokes of a machine; in his eyes it is but weariness, and bitter, sorrowful toil. The latter is the lot of the Slave of Industry; and our modern factories afford us the sad picture of the deepest degradation of man,—constant labour, killing both body and soul, without joy or love, often almost without aim.

It is impossible to mistake the lamentable effects of Christian dogma, in this also. As this dogma set man's goal entirely outside his earthly being, and that goal was centred in an absolute and superhuman God: so only from the aspect of its most inevitable needs, could life

remain an object of man's care; for, having once received the gift of life, it was his bounden duty to maintain it until that day when God alone should please relieve him of its burden. But in no wise should his needs awake a lust to treat with loving hand the matter given him for their satisfaction; only the abstract aim of life's bare maintenance could justify the operation of his senses. And thus we see with horror the spirit of modern Christianity embodied in a cotton-mill: to speed the rich, God has become our Industry, which only holds the wretched Christian labourer to life until the heavenly courses of the stars of commerce bring round the gracious dispensation that sends him to a better world.

The Greek knew no handicraft, rightly so described. The so-called necessities of life,—which, strictly speaking, make up the whole concernment of our private and our public life,—he deemed unworthy to rank as objects of special and engrossing attention. His soul lived only in publicity, in the great fellowship of his nation; the needs of this public life made up the total of his care; whereas these needs were satisfied by the patriot, the statesman, and the artist, but not the craftsman. The Greek went forth to the delights of this publicity from a simple, unassuming home. It would have seemed to him disgraceful [50] and degrading to revel, within the costly walls of a private palace, in the refinements of luxury and extravagance which to-day fill out the life of a hero of the Bourse; for this was the distinction that he drew between himself and the egoistic "Barbarians" of the East. He sought the culture of his body in the general public baths and gymnasia; his simple, noble clothing was for the most part the artistic care of the women; and whenever he fell upon the necessity of manual toil, it was of his very nature that he should find out its artistic side, and straightway raise it to an art. But the drudgery of household labour he thrust away—to *Slaves*.

This Slave thus became the fateful hinge of the whole destiny of the world. The Slave, by sheer reason of the assumed necessity of his slavery, has exposed the null and fleeting nature of all the strength and beauty of exclusive Grecian manhood, and has shown to all time that *Beauty and Strength, as attributes of public life, can then alone prove lasting blessings, when they are the common gifts of all mankind.*

Unhappily, things have not as yet advanced beyond the mere demonstration. In fact, the Revolution of the human race, that has lasted now two thousand years, has been almost exclusively in the spirit of Reaction. It has dragged down the fair, free man to itself, to slavery; the slave has not become a freeman, but the freeman a slave.

To the Greek the fair, strong man alone was free, and this man was none other than *himself*; whatever lay outside the circle of Grecian manhood and Apollonian priesthood, was to him *barbarian*, and if he employed it,—*slave*. True that the man who was not Greek, was actually barbarian and slave; but he was still a *man*, and his barbarianism and his slavery were not his nature but his fate: the sin of history against his nature, just as to-day it is the sin of our social system, that the healthiest nations in the healthiest climates have brought forth cripples and outcasts. This historical sin, however, was destined soon to be avenged upon the free Greek himself. Where there lived among the nations no feeling of *absolute human-love*, [51] the Barbarian needed only to subjugate the Greek: and all was over with Grecian freedom, strength, and beauty. Thus, in deep humiliation, two hundred million men, huddled in helpless confusion in the Roman empire, too soon found out that—when *all men cannot be free alike and happy*—all men must *suffer alike as slaves*.

Thus we are slaves until this very day, with but the sorry consolation of knowing that we are all slaves together. Slaves, to whom once the Christian Apostles and the Emperor Constantine gave counsel, to patiently submit to a suffering life below, for sake of a better world above; slaves, whom bankers and manufacturers teach nowadays to seek the goal of Being in manual toil for daily bread. Free from this slavery, in his time, felt the Emperor Constantine alone; when he enthroned himself a pleasure-seeking heathen despot, above this life which he had taught his believing subjects to deem so useless. And free alone,

to-day,—at least in the sense of freedom from open slavery,—feels he who has money; for he is thus able to employ his life to some other end than that of winning the bare means of subsistence. Thus, as the struggle for freedom from the general slavery proclaimed itself in Roman and Medieval times as the reaching after absolute dominion: so it comes to light to-day as the greed for gold. And we must not be astonished, if even Art grasps after gold; for everything strives to its freedom, towards its goda—and our god is Gold, our religion the Pursuit of Wealth.

Yet Art remains in its essence what it ever was; we have only to say, that it is not present in our modern public system. It lives, however, and has ever lived in the individual conscience, as the one fair, indivisible Art. Thus the only difference is this: with the Greeks it lived in the public conscience, whereas to-day it lives alone in the conscience of private persons, the public *un*-conscience recking nothing of it. Therefore in its flowering time the Grecian Art was *conservative*, because it was a worthy and adequate expression of the public conscience: with us, [52] true Art is *revolutionary*, because its very existence is opposed to the ruling spirit of the community.

With the Greeks the perfect work of art, the Drama, was the abstract and epitome of all that was expressible in the Grecian nature. It was the nation itself—in intimate connection with its own history—that stood mirrored in its art-work, that communed with itself and, within the span of a few hours, feasted its eyes with its own noblest essence. All division of this enjoyment, all scattering of the forces centred on *one* point, all diversion of the elements into separate channels, must needs have been as hurtful to this *unique* and noble Art-work as to the like-formed State itself; and thus it could only mature, but never change its nature. Thus Art was conservative, just as the noblest sons of this epoch of the Grecian State were themselves conservative. *Æschylus* is the very type of this conservatism, and his loftiest work of conservative art is the "*Oresteia*," with which he stands alike opposed as poet to the youthful *Sophocles*, as statesman to the revolutionary *Pericles*. The victory of Sophocles, like that of Pericles, was fully in the spirit of the advancing development of mankind; but the deposition of *Æschylus* was the first downward step from the height of Grecian Tragedy, the first beginning of the dissolution of Athenian Polity.

With the subsequent downfall of Tragedy, Art became less and less the expression of the public conscience. The Drama separated into its component parts; rhetoric, sculpture, painting, music, &c., forsook the ranks in which they had moved in unison before; each one to take its own way, and in lonely self-sufficiency to pursue its own development. And thus it was that at the Renaissance of Art we lit first upon these isolated Grecian arts, which had sprung from the wreck of Tragedy. The great unitarian Art-work of Greece could not at once reveal itself to our bewildered, wandering, piecemeal minds in all its fulness; for how could we have understood it? But we knew how to appropriate those dissevered handiworks of Art; for as [53] goodly handiwork, to which category they had already sunk in the Romo-Greek world, they lay not so far from our own nature and our minds. The guild and handicraft spirit of the new citizenship rose quick and lively in the towns; princes and notabilities were well pleased that their castles should be more becomingly built and decorated, their walls bedecked with more attractive paintings, than had been possible to the raw art of the Middle Ages; the priests laid hands on rhetoric for their pulpits and music for their choirs; and the new world of handicraft worked valiantly among the separate arts of Greece, so far at least as it understood them or thought them fitted to its purpose.

Each one of these dissevered arts, nursed and luxuriously tended for the entertainment of the rich, has filled the world to overflowing with its products; in each, great minds have brought forth marvels; but the one true Art has not been born again, either in or since the Renaissance. The perfect Art-work, the great united utterance of a free and lovely public life, the *Drama*, *Tragedy*,—howsoever great the poets who have here and there indited

tragedies,—is not yet born again: for reason that it cannot be *re-born*, but must be *born anew*.

Only the great *Revolution of Mankind*, whose beginnings erstwhile shattered Grecian Tragedy, can win for us this Art-work. For only this Revolution can bring forth from its hidden depths, in the new beauty of a nobler Universalism, *that* which it once tore from the conservative spirit of a time of beautiful but narrow-meted culture—and tearing it, engulfed.



But only *Revolution*, not slavish *Restoration*, can give us back that highest Art-work. The task we have before us is immeasurably greater than that already accomplished in 'days of old. If the Grecian Art-work embraced the spirit of a fair and noble nation, the Art-work of the Future must embrace the spirit of a free mankind, delivered from every [54] shackle of hampering nationality; its racial imprint must be no more than an embellishment, the individual charm of manifold diversity, and not a cramping barrier. We have thus quite other work to do, than to tinker at the resuscitation of old Greece. Indeed, the foolish restoration of a sham Greek mode of art has been attempted already,—for what will our artists not attempt, to order? But nothing better than an inane patchwork could ever come of it—the offspring of the same juggling endeavour which we find evinced by the whole history of our official civilisation, seized as it is with a constant wish to avoid the only lawful endeavour, the striving after Nature.

No, we do not wish to revert to Greekdom; for what the Greeks knew not, and, knowing not, came by their downfall: that know *we*. It is their very fall, whose cause we now perceive after years of misery and deepest universal suffering, that shows us clearly what we should become; it shows us that we must love all men before we can rightly love ourselves, before we can regain true joy in our own personality. From the dishonouring slave-yoke of universal journeymanhood, with its sickly Money-soul, we wish to soar to the free manhood of Art, with the star-rays of its World-soul; from the weary, overburdened day-labourers of Commerce, we desire to grow to fair strong men, to whom the world belongs as an eternal, inexhaustible source of the highest delights of Art.

To this end we need the mightiest force of Revolution; for only *that* revolutionary force can boot us, which presses forward to the goal—to that goal whose attainment alone can justify its earliest exercise upon the disintegration of Greek Tragedy and the dissolution of the Athenian State.

But whence shall we derive this force, in our present state of utmost weakness? Whence the manly strength against the crushing pressure of a civilisation which disowns all manhood, against the arrogance of a culture which employs the human mind as naught but steam-power for its machinery? Whence the light with which to illumine the gruesome ruling heresy, that this civilisation [55] and this culture are of more value in themselves than the true living Man?—that Man has worth and value only as a tool of these despotic abstract powers, and not by virtue of his manhood?

When the learned physician is at the end of his resources, in despair we turn at last to—*Nature*. Nature, then, and only Nature, can unravel the skein of this great world-fate. If Culture, starting from the Christian dogma of the worthlessness of human nature, disown humanity: she has created for herself a foe who one day must inevitably destroy her, in so far as she no longer has place for manhood; for this foe is the eternal, and only living Nature. Nature, Human Nature, will proclaim this law to the twin sisters Culture and Civilisation: "So far as I am contained in you, shall ye live and flourish; so far as I am not in you, shall ye rot and die!"

In the man-destroying march of Culture, however, there looms before us this happy result: the heavy load with which she presses Nature down, will one day grow so ponderous that it lends at last to down-trod, never-dying Nature the necessary impetus to hurl the whole

cramping burden from her, with one sole thrust; and this heaping up of Culture will thus have *taught* to Nature her own gigantic force. The releasing of this force is—*Revolution*.

In what way, then, does this revolutionary force exhibit itself in the present social crisis? Is it not in the mechanic's pride in the moral consciousness of his labour, as opposed to the criminal passivity or immoral activity of the rich? Does he not wish, as in revenge, to elevate the principle of labour to the rank of the one and orthodox religion of society? To force the rich like him to work,—like him, by the sweat of their brow to gain their daily bread? Must we not fear that the exercise of this compulsion, the recognition of this principle, would raise at last the man-degrading journeymanhood to an absolute and universal might, and—to keep to our chief theme—would straightway make of Art an impossibility for all time?

[56]

In truth, this is the fear of many an honest friend of Art and many an upright friend of men, whose only wish is to preserve the nobler core of our present civilisation. But they mistake the true nature of the great social agitation. They are led astray by the windy theories of our socialistic doctrinaires, who would fain patch up an impossible compact with the present conditions of society. They are deceived by the immediate utterance of the indignation of the most suffering portion of our social system, behind which lies a deeper, nobler, natural instinct : the instinct which demands a worthy taste of the joys of life, whose material sustenance shall no longer absorb man's whole life-forces in weary service, but in which he shall rejoice as Man. Viewed closer, it is thus the straining from journeymanhood to artistic manhood, to the free dignity of Man.

It is for Art therefore, and Art above all else, to teach this social impulse its noblest meaning, and guide it toward its true direction. Only on the shoulders of this great social movement can true Art lift itself from its present state of civilised barbarianism, and take its post of honour. Each has a common goal, and the twain can only reach it when they recognise it jointly. This goal is *the strong fair Man*, to whom *Revolution* shall give his *Strength*, and *Art* his *Beauty*!

Neither is it our present purpose to indicate more closely the march of this social development and the records it will stamp on history, nor could dogmatic calculation foretell the historical demeanour of man's social nature, so little dependent upon preconceived ideas. In the history of man nothing is *made*, but everything evolves by its own inner necessity. Yet it is impossible that the final state which this movement shall attain one day, should be other than the direct opposite of the present; else were the whole history of the world a restless zig-zag of cross purposes, and not the ordered movement of a mighty stream; which with all its bends, its deviations, and its floods, yet flows for ever in one steadfast course.

[57]

Let us glance, then, for a moment at this future state of Man, when he shall have freed himself from his last heresy, the denial of Nature,—that heresy which has taught him hitherto to look upon himself as a mere instrument to an end which lay outside himself. When Mankind knows, at last, that itself is the one and only object of its existence, and that only in the community of all men can this purpose be fulfilled: then will its mutual creed be couched in an actual fulfilment of Christ's injunction, "Take no *care* for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on, for your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." This Heavenly Father will then be no other than the social wisdom of mankind, taking Nature and her fulness for the common weal of all. The crime and the curse of our social intercourse have lain in this: that the mere physical maintenance of life has been till now the one object of our *care*,—a real *care* that has devoured our souls and bodies and well nigh lamed each spiritual impulse. This *Care* has made man weak and slavish, dull and wretched; a creature that can neither love nor hate; a

thrall of commerce, ever ready to give up the last vestige of the freedom of his Will, so only that this *Care* might be a little lightened.

When the Brotherhood of Man has cast this care for ever from it, and, as the Greeks upon their slaves, has lain it on machines,—the artificial slaves of free creative man, whom he has served till now as the Fetish-votary serves the idol his own hands have made,—then will man's whole enfranchised energy proclaim itself as naught but pure *artistic* impulse. Thus shall we regain, in vastly higher measure, the Grecian element of life; what with the Greek was the result of natural development, will be with us the product of ages of endeavour; what was to him a half-unconscious gift a will remain with us a conquered knowledge; for what mankind in its wide communion doth truly *know*, can never more be lost to it.

Only the *Strong* know *Love*; only Love can fathom *Beauty*; only Beauty can fashion *Art*. The love of [58] weaklings for each other can only manifest as the goad of lust; the love of the weak for the strong is abasement and fear; the love of the strong for the weak is pity and forbearance; but the love of the strong for the strong is *Love*, for it is the free surrender to one who cannot compel us. Under every fold of heaven's canopy, in every race, shall men by real freedom grow up to equal strength; by strength to truest love; and by true love to beauty. But Art is Beauty energised.

Whatsoever we deem the goal of life, to that we train our selves and children. The Goth was bred to battle and to chase, the genuine Christian to abstinence and humility: while the liegeman of the modern State is bred to seek industrial gain, be it even in the exercise of art and science. But when life's maintenance is no longer the exclusive aim of life, and the Freemen of the Future—inspired by a new and deed-begetting faith, or better, Knowledge—find the means of life assured by payment of a natural and reasonable energy; in short, when Industry no longer is our mistress but our handmaid: then shall we set the goal of life in joy of life, and strive to rear our children to be fit and worthy partners in this joy. This training, starting from the exercise of strength and nurture of corporeal beauty, will soon take on a pure artistic shape, by reason of our undisturbed affection for our children and our gladness at the ripening of their beauty; and each man will, in one domain or other, become in truth an artist. The diversity of natural inclination will build up arts in manifold variety and countless forms of each variety, in fulness hitherto undreamed. And as the Knowledge of all men will find at last its religious utterance in the one effective Knowledge of free united manhood: so will all these rich developments of Art find their profoundest focus in the Drama, in the glorious Tragedy of Man. The Tragedy will be the feast of all mankind; in it,—set free from each conventional etiquette,—free, strong, and beauteous man will celebrate the dolour and delight of all his love, and consecrate in lofty worth the great Love-offering of his Death.

[59]

This Art will be *conservative* afresh. Yet truly of its own immortal force, will it maintain itself and blossom forth: not merely cry for maintenance, on pretext of some outward-lying aim. For mark ye well, *this* Art seeks not for *Gain*!



"Utopia! Utopia!" I hear the mealy-mouthed wise-acres of our modern State-and-Art-barbarianism cry; the so-called practical men, who in the manipulation of their daily practice can help themselves alone with lies and violence, or—if they be sincere and honest—with ignorance at best.

"Beautiful ideal! but, alas! like all ideals, one that can only float before us, beyond the reach of man condemned to imperfection." Thus sighs the smug adorer of the heavenly kingdom in which—at least as far as himself is concerned—God will make good the

inexplicable shortcomings of this earth and its human brood.

They live and lie, they sin and suffer, in the loathliest of actual conditions, in the filthy dregs of an artificial, and therefore never realised Utopia; they toil and over-bid each other in every hypocritical art, to maintain the cheat of this Utopia; from which they daily tumble headlong down to the dull, prosaic level of nakedest reality,—the mutilated cripples of the meanest and most frivolous of passions. Yet they cry down the only natural release from their bewitchment, as "Chimeras" or "Utopias;" just as the poor sufferers in a madhouse take their insane imaginings for truth, and truth itself for madness.

If history knows an actual Utopia, a truly unattainable ideal, it is that of Christendom; for it has clearly and plainly shown, and shows it still from day to day, that its dogmas are *not* realisable. How could those dogmas become really living, and pass over into actual life: when they were directed against life itself, and denied and cursed the principle of living? Christianity is of purely spiritual, and super-spiritual contents; it preaches humility, [60] renunciation, contempt of every earthly thing; and amid this contempt—Brotherly Love! How does the fulfilment work out in the modern world, which calls itself, forsooth, a Christian world, and clutches to the Christian religion as its inexpugnable basis? As the arrogance of hypocrisy, as usury, as robbery of Nature's goods, and egoistic scorn of suffering fellow-men. Whence comes this shocking contradiction between the ideal and the fulfilment? Even hence: that the ideal was morbid, engendered of the momentary relaxing and enfeeblement of human nature, and sinned against its inbred robust qualities. Yet how strong this nature is, how unquenchable its ever fresh, productive fulness—it has shown all the more plainly under the universal incubus of that ideal; which, if its logical consequences had been fulfilled, would have completely swept the human race from off the earth; since even abstinence from sexual love was included in it as the height of virtue. But still ye see that, in spite of that all-powerful Church, the human race is so abundant that your Christian-economic State-wisdom knows not what to do with this abundance, and ye are looking round for means of social murder, for its uprootal; yea, and would be right glad, were mankind slain by Christianity, so only that the solitary abstract god of your own beloved *Me* might gain sufficient elbow-room upon this earth!

These are the men who cry "Utopia," when the healthy human understanding (*Menschenverstanda*) appeals from their insane experiments to the actuality of visible and tangible Nature; when it demands no more from man's godlike reason (*Vernunft*) than that it should make good to us the instinct of dumb animals, and give us the means of finding for ourselves the sustenance of our life, set free from care though not from labour! And, truly, we ask from it no higher result for the community of mankind, in order that we may build upon this one foundation the noblest, fairest temple of the true Art of the Future!

The true artist who has already grasped the proper standpoint, may labour even now—for this standpoint is ever [61] present with us—upon the Art-work of the Future! Each of the sister Arts, in truth, has ever, and therefore also now, proclaimed in manifold creations the conscience of her own high purpose. Whereby, then, have the inspired creators of these noble works from all time suffered, and above all in our present pass? Was it not by their contact with the outer world, with the very world for whom their works were destined? What has revolted the architect, when he must shatter his creative force on bespoke plans for barracks and lodging-houses? What has aggrieved the painter, when he must immortalise the repugnant visage of a millionaire? What the musician, when he must compose his music for the banquet-table? And what the poet, when he must write romances for the lending-library? What then has been the sting of suffering to each? That he must squander his creative powers for gain, and make his art a handicraft!—And finally, what suffering has the dramatist to bear, who would fain assemble every art within Art's master-work, the Drama? The sufferings of all other artists combined in one!

What *he* creates, becomes an Art-work only when it enters into open life; and a work of dramatic art can only enter life upon the stage. But what are our theatrical institutions of to-day, with their disposal of the ample aid of every branch of art?—Industrial undertakings: yes, even when supported by a special subsidy from Prince or State. Their direction is mostly handed over to the same men who have yesterday conducted a speculation in grain, and to-morrow devote their well-learned knowledge to a 'corner' in sugar; or mayhap, have educated their taste for stage proprieties in the mysteries of back-stairs intrigue, or such like functions. (12) So long as—in accordance with the prevailing character of public life, and the necessity it lays upon the theatrical director to deal with the public in the manner of a clever commercial speculator—so long as we look upon a [62] theatrical institution as a mere means for the circulation of money and the production of interest upon capital, it is only logical that we should hand over its direction, *i.e.*, its exploitation, to those who are well-skilled in such transactions; for a really artistic management, and thus such an one as should fulfil the original purpose of the Theatre, would certainly be but poorly fitted to carry out the modern aim. For this reason it must be clear to all who have the slightest insight, that if the Theatre is at all to answer to its natural lofty mission, it must be completely freed from the necessity of industrial speculation.

How were this possible? Shall this solitary institution be released from a service to which all men, and every associate enterprise of man, are yoked to-day? Yes: it is precisely the Theatre, that should take precedence of every other institution in this emancipation; for the Theatre is the widest-reaching of Art's institutes, and the richest in its influence; and till man can exercise in freedom his noblest, his artistic powers, how shall he hope to become free and self-dependent in lower walks of life? Since already the service of the State, the military service, is at least no longer an industrial pursuit, let us begin with the enfranchisement of public art; for, as I have pointed out above, it is to *it* that we must assign an unspeakably lofty mission, an immeasurably weighty influence on our present social upheaval. More and better than a decrepit religion to which the spirit of public intercourse gives the lie direct more effectually and impressively than an incapable statesmanship which has long since host its compass: shall the ever-youthful Art, renewing its freshness from its own well-springs and the noblest spirit of the times, give to the passionate stream of social tumult—now dashing against rugged precipices, now lost in shallow swamps—a fair and lofty goal, the goal of noble Manhood.

If ye friends of Art are truly concerned to know it saved from the threatening storms: then hear me, when I tell you that it is no mere question of preserving Art, but of first allowing it to reach its own true fill of life!

[63]

Is it your real object, ye *honourable* Statesmen, confronted with a dreaded social overthrow,—against which, mayhap, ye strive because your shattered faith in human nature's purity prevents your understanding how this overthrow can help but make a bad condition infinitely worse,—is it, I say, your object to graft upon this mighty change a strong and living pledge of future nobler customs? Then lend us all your strength, to give back Art unto itself and to its lofty mission!

Ye suffering brethren, in every social grade, who brood in hot displeasure how to flee this slavery to money and become free men: fathom ye our purpose, and help us to lift up Art to its due dignity; that so we may show you how ye raise mechanical toil therewith to Art; and the serf of industry to the fair, self-knowing man who cries, with smiles begotten of intelligence, to sun and stars, to death and to eternity: "Ye, too, are mine, and I your lord!"

Ye to whom I call, were ye at one with us in heart and mind, how easy were it to your Will to set the simple rules to work, whose following must infallibly ensure the flourishing of that mightiest of all art-establishments,—the Theatre! In the first place it would be the business of

the State and the Community to adjust their means to this end: that the Theatre be placed in a position to obey alone its higher and true calling. This end will be attained when the Theatre is so far supported that its management need only be a purely artistic one; and no one will be better situated to carry this out than the general body of the artists themselves, who unite their forces in the art-work and assure the success of their mutual efforts by a fit conception of their task. Only the fullest freedom can bind them to the endeavour to fulfil the object for sake of which they are freed from the fetters of commercial speculation; and this object is Art, which the free man alone can grasp, and not the slave of wages.

The judge of their performance, will be the free public. Yet, to make this public fully free and independent when face to face with Art, one further step must be taken [64] along this road: the public must have *unbought* admission to the theatrical representations. So long as money is indispensable for all the needs of life, so long as without pay there remains naught to man but air, and scarcely water: the measures to be taken can only provide that the actual stage-performances, to witness which the populace assembles, shall not take on the semblance of *work paid by the piece*,—a mode of regarding them which confessedly leads to the most humiliating misconception of the character of art-productions,—but it must be the duty of the State, or rather of the particular Community, to form a common purse from which to recompense the artists for their performance as a whole, and not in parts.

Where means should not suffice for this, it were better, both now and always, to allow a theatre which could only be maintained as a commercial undertaking, to close its doors for ever; or at least, for so long as the community's demand had not proved strong enough to bring about the necessary sacrifice for its supply.

When human fellowship has once developed its manly beauty and nobility,—in such a way as we shall not attain, however, by the influence of our Art alone, but as we must hope and strive for by union with the great and inevitably approaching social revolution,—then will theatrical performances be the first associate undertaking from which the idea of wage or gain shall disappear entirely. For when, under the above conditions, our education more and more becomes an artistic one, then shall we be ourselves all thus far artists: that we can join together in free and common service for the one great cause of Art, in its special manifestment, abandoning each sidelong glance at gain.

Art and its institutes, whose desired organisation could here be only briefly touched on, would thus become the herald and the standard of all future communal institutions. The spirit that urges a body of artists to the attainment of its own true goal, would be found again in every other social union which set before itself a definite and honourable [65] aim; for if we reach the right, then all our future social bearing cannot but be of pure artistic nature, such as alone befits the noble faculties of man.

Thus would *Jesus* have shown us that we all alike are men and brothers; while *Apollo* would have stamped this mighty bond of brotherhood with the seal of strength and beauty, and led mankind from doubt of its own worth to consciousness of its highest godlike might. Let us therefore erect the altar of the future, in Life as in the living Art, to the two sublimest teachers of mankind:—*Jesus, who suffered for all men; and Apollo, who raised them to their joyous dignity!*

Notes

Note 01 on page 7

Book XXI. chap i.—TR.

Note 02 on page 7

Even Carlyle can only betoken this as the "Death of the Anarchies: or a world once more built wholly on Fact better or worse; and the lying jargonizing professor of Sham-Fact. . . become a species extinct, and well *known* to be gone down to Tophet!"—R. WAGNER.

Note 03 on page 7

"*Eine Mittheilung an meine Freunde*;"—see [end of the present volume](#).—TR.

Note 04 on page 8

We have no English equivalents of these words, except in the adjectival form: *voluntary* and *involuntary*, in which there lies the same confusion of ideas as that for which Wagner here upbraids himself; and even now, when Schopenhauer's definition of the "Will" is pretty generally accepted, it would seem better, for clearness' sake, to delimit the term by some such prefix as the "*Inner*," or "*Instinctive*" Will, in order to distinguish it from the "Outer" or "Intellectual" Choice. In this series of translations I shall endeavour to render such expressions in the sense the author here indicates.—W. A. E.

Note 05 on page 8

Sinnlichkeit= Qualities appealing to the senses; or again, the bent to an objective method of viewing things. Hence it may at times be best rendered by *Physicalism* or *Materialism*; at others, by *Physical perception*, *Physical contemplation*, or even—borrowing from Carlyle—*Five-sense-philosophy*.—TR.

Note 06 on page 8

To use the now more customary antithesis: *Socialism* v. *Individualism*.—TR.

Note 07 on page 9

"In the *National* you will shortly see an important article of mine: *Art and Revolution*, which I believe will also appear in German at Wigand's in Leipzig."—From Wagner's letter to Uhlig, of 9th August 1849.—TR.

Note 08 on page 9

Volumes III. and IV. of the *Gesammelte Schriften*, or "Collected Writings."—TR.

Note 09 on page 9

1868; Constantin Frantz.—TR.

Note 10 on page 17

In the original text of both the present treatise and *The Art-work of the Future*, the expression "*öffentlich*" is frequently made use of. In English the only available equivalent is that which I have here employed, viz.: "public"; but our word "public" must be stretched a little in its significance, to answer to Richard Wagner's purpose. When he speaks of "public art" or "public life," it must be borne in mind that the idea of officialdom or State-endowment is not necessarily included; but rather the word is employed in the sense in which we use it when talking of a "public appearance"; thus "public art" will mean such an art as is not merely designed for private or home consumption. —TR.

[Note 11 on page 19](#)

R. Wagner to F. Heine, March 18, '41:—"This showed me still more decidedly that the religious-catholic part of my *Rienzi* libretto was a chief stumbling-block. . . . If in my *Rienzi* the word 'Church' is not allowed to stand," &c.—To W. Fischer, Dec. 8, '41:—"Sixteen singers must remain for the Priests, or on account of the censorship, aged Citizens."—TR.

[Note 12 on page 26](#)

It is impossible to realise the full sting of this allusion, without having read in "*Wagner's Letters to Uhlig*" (H. Grevel & Co.) the account of the author's own experience at Dresden of the conduct of these gentry.—TR.