
*Some Explanations Concerning "Judaism in
Music."*

By Richard Wagner

Translated by William Ashton Ellis



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[77]

Some Explanations Concerning "Judaism in Music."

(To Madame Marie Muchanoff, née Countess Nesselrode).

Most Honoured Lady!

In the course of a recent conversation you put me an astonished question, as to the cause of the hostility—incomprehensible to yourself, and so manifestly aiming at depreciation—which encounters all my artistic doings, more particularly in the daily Press not only of Germany, but of France as well, and even England. Here and there I have stumbled on a like astonishment in the Press itself in the report of some non-initiated novice: one believed one must ascribe to my art-theories a singularly irritant property, since otherwise one could not understand how I, and always I, was degraded so persistently, on every occasion and without the least remorse, to the category of the frivolous, the simply bungling, and treated in accordance with that my appointed station.

The following communication, which I allow myself in answer to your question, not only will throw a light hereon, but more especially may you gather from it why I myself must engage in such elucidation. Since you do not stand alone in your astonishment, I feel called to give the needful answer to many others besides yourself, and therefore publicly: to no one of my friends, however, could I delegate the office, as I know none in so sheltered and independent a position that I durst draw on him a hostility like that which has fallen to my daily lot, and [78] against which I can so little defend myself, that there is nothing left for me but just to shew my friends its reason.

Even I myself cannot engage in the task without misgivings: they spring, however, not from terror of my enemies (since, as I have here no residue of hope, so also have I naught to fear!) but rather from anxiety for certain self-sacrificing, veritably sympathetic friends, whom Destiny has brought to me from out the kindred of that national-religious element of the newer European society whose implacable hatred I have drawn upon me through discussion of peculiarities so hard to eradicate from *it*, and so detrimental to our culture. Yet on the other hand, I could take courage from the knowledge that these cherished friends stand on precisely the same footing as myself, nay, that they have to suffer still more grievously, and even more disgracefully, under the yoke that has fallen on all the likes of me: for I cannot hope to make my exposition quite intelligible, if I do not also throw the needful light on this yoke of the ruling Jew-society in its crushing-out of all free movement, of all true human evolution, among its kith and kin.

*

[101]

IN the year 1850 I published in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* an essay upon "Judaism in Music," (1) wherein I sought to fathom the significance of this phenomenon in our art-life.

Even to-day it is almost incomprehensible to me, how my recently departed friend FRANZ BRENDEL, the editor of that journal, made up his mind to dare the publication of this article: in any case the so earnest-minded, so thoroughly staunch and honest man, taking nothing but

the cause in eye, had no idea that he thus was doing aught beyond just giving needful space to the discussion of a very notable question connected with the history of Music. However, its result soon taught him the kind of people he had to do with.—In consequence of the many years of rightly and deservedly honoured work which Mendelssohn had spent in *Leipzig*—at whose Musical Conservatorium Brendel filled the post of a Professor—that city had received a virtual Jewish baptism of music: as a reviewer once complained, the blond variety of musician had there become an ever greater rarity, and the place, erewhile an actively distinguished factor in our German life through its university and important book-trade, was learning even to forget the most natural sympathies of local patriotism so willingly evinced by every other German city; it was exclusively becoming the [102] metropolis of Jewish music. The storm, which now rose over Brendel, reached the pitch of menacing his civic life itself: with difficulty did his firmness, and the quiet strength of his convictions, succeed in forcing folk to leave him in his post at the Conservatoire.

What helped him soon to outward peace, was a very characteristic turn the matter took, after the first imprudent foam of wrath on the part of the offended.

Should occasion arise, I had by no means intended to deny my authorship of the article: I merely wished to prevent the question, broached most earnestly and objectively by myself, from being promptly shifted to the purely personal realm—a thing, in my opinion, to be immediately expected if my name, as that of a "composer indubitably envious of the fame of others," were dragged into play from the outset. For this reason I had signed the article with a pseudonym, deliberately cognisable as such: K. Freigedank [i.e. "K. Freethought"]. To Brendel I had imparted my intention in this regard: he was courageous enough to steadfastly allow the storm to rage around himself, in place of conducting it across to me—a course of action which would have freed him at once from all the pother. Soon I detected symptoms, nay plain indications, that people had recognised me as the author: no charges of the kind did I ever oppose with a denial. Hereby folk learnt enough, to make them entirely change their prior tactics. Hitherto, at any rate, only the clumsier artillery of Judaism had been brought into the field against my article: no attempt had been made to bring about a rejoinder in any intelligent, nay even any decent fashion. Coarse sallies, and abusive girdings at a medieval Judaeophobia—ascribed to the author, and so shameful for our own enlightened times—were the only thing that had come to show, beyond absurd distortions and falsifications of the article itself. But now a change of front was made. Undoubtedly the higher Jewry was taking up the matter. To these gentry the chief annoyance was the notice roused: so soon as ever my name was known, one had to fear that [103] its introduction would merely increase that notice. A simple means of avoiding this result had been put into their hands, through my having substituted for my own name a pseudonym. Now it seemed advisable henceforward to ignore me as the essay's author, and at like time to smother all discussion of the thing itself. On the contrary, I was very well attackable on altogether other sides: I had published essays on Art and had written operas, which latter I presumably should like to get performed. On this domain a systematic defamation and persecution of me, with total suppression of the disagreeable Judaism-question, at any rate held out a promise of my wished-for chastisement.

It would surely be presumptuous of me—seeing that, at that time, I was living at Zurich in complete retirement—to attempt a more exact account of the inner machinery set in motion for the inverse Jewish persecution, then commenced against myself, and later carried into ever wider circles. I will merely recite experiences that are already public property. After the production of *Lohengrin* at Weimar, in the summer of 1850, certain men of considerable literary and artistic standing, such as ADOLF STAHR and ROBERT FRANZ, auspiciously came forward in the Press, to direct the attention of the German public to my self and work; even in musical papers of dubious tendency there peeped momentous declarations in my favour. But, on the part of each several author this happened exactly and only *once*. They

promptly relapsed into silence, and in further course behaved, comparatively speaking, even hostilely towards me. On the other hand, a friend and admirer of Herr Ferdinand Hiller, a certain Professor BISCHOFF, shot up in the *Kölnische Zeitung* as founder of the system of defamation henceforward carried-out against me: this gentleman laid hold on my art-writings, and twisted my idea of an "Artwork of the Future" into the absurd pretension of a "Music of the Future" ("*Zukunftsmusik*"), a music, forsooth, which would haply sound quite well in course of time, however ill it might sound just now. [104] Not a word said he of Judaism; on the contrary, he plumed himself on being a Christian and offspring of a Superintendent. I, on the other hand, had dubbed Mozart, and even Beethoven, a bungler; wanted to do away with Melody; and would let naught but psalms be sung in future.

Even to-day, respected lady, you will hear nothing but these saws, whenever people talk of "Music of the Future." Think, then, with what gigantic pertinacity this ridiculous calumny must have been kept erect and circulated, seeing that in almost the entire European Press, despite the actual spread and popularity of my operas, it crops up at once with renovated strength—as undisputed as irrefutable—so soon as ever my name is mentioned.

Since such nonsensical theories could be attributed to me, naturally the musical works which thence had sprung must be also of the most offensive character: let their success be what it might, the Press still held its ground that my music must be as abominable as my Theory. This was the point, then, to lay the stress on. The world of cultured Intellect must be won over to this view. It was effected through a Viennese jurist, a great friend of Music's and a connoisseur of Hegel's Dialectics, who moreover was found peculiarly accessible through his—albeit charmingly concealed—Judaic origin. (2) He, too, was one of those who at first had declared themselves for me with a wellnigh enthusiastic penchant (*Neigung*): his conversion took place so suddenly and violently, that I was utterly aghast at it. This gentleman now wrote a booklet on the "Musically-Beautiful," in the which he played into the hands of Music-Judaism with extraordinary skill. In the first place by a highly-finished dialectic form, that had all the [105] look of the finest philosophic spirit, he deceived the whole Intellect of Vienna into supposing that for once in a way a prophet had arisen in its midst: and this was the desired chief-effect. For what he coated with this elegant dialectic paint were the trivialest of commonplaces, such as can gain a seeming weight on no other field than one, like that of Music, where men have always merely drivelled so soon as they began to æsthetise about it. It surely was no mighty feat, to set up the "Beautiful" as Music's chief postulate: but, if the author did it in such a manner as to astonish all men at his brilliant wisdom, then he might succeed in doing a thing by all means harder, namely in establishing modern Jewish music as the sterling "beautiful" music; and at a tacit avowal of that dogma he arrived quite imperceptibly, inasmuch as to the chain of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven he linked on Mendelssohn in the most natural way in the world—nay, if one rightly understands his theory of "the Beautiful," he implicitly allotted to the last-named the comforting significance of having happily restored the due arrangement of the Beauty-web, to some extent entangled by his immediate predecessor, Beethoven. So soon as Mendelssohn had been lifted to the throne—which was to be achieved with special grace through placing by his side a few Christian notabilities, such as Robert Schumann—it became possible to get a good deal more believed, in the realm of Modern Music. Above all, however, the already-pointed-out main object of the whole æsthetic undertaking was now attained: through his ingenious booklet the author had rooted himself in general respect, and had thereby gained a position which gave importance to him when, as a bewildered æsthete, he now appeared as a reviewer, too, in the best-read political paper, and straightway pronounced myself and my artistic doings completely null and nugatory. That he was not at all misled by the great applause my works obtained among the public, must give him but a larger nimbus; item, he thus succeeded (or others succeeded through him, if you will) in getting just [106] this tone about me adopted as

the fashion, at least so far as newspapers are read throughout the world—this tone which it has so astonished you, most honoured lady, to meet where'er you go. Nothing but my contempt for all the great masters of Tone, my warfare against Melody, my horrible mode of composition, in short "The Music of the Future," was thenceforth the topic of everybody's talk: about that article on "Judaism in Music," however, there never again appeared a word. On the other hand, as one may observe with all such rare and sudden works of conversion, this [*Dieser*—? "he"] produced its effect all the more successfully in secret: it [?"he"] became the Medusa's head which was promptly held before everyone who evinced a heedless leaning toward me.

Truly not quite uninformative for the Culture-history of our day would it be, to trace this curious propaganda a little closer; since there hence arose in the realm of Music—so gloriously occupied by the Germans heretofore—a strangely branched and most dissimilarly constructed party, which positively seems to have insured itself a joint unproductivity and impotence.

You next will surely ask, respected lady, how it came that the indisputable successes which have fallen to my lot, and the friends my works have manifestly won me, could in no way be used for combating those hostile machinations?

This is not quite easy to reply-to in a word or two. In the first place, however, you shall learn how matters went with my greatest friend and warmest advocate, FRANZ LISZT. Precisely through the splendid self-reliance which he shewed in all his doings, he furnished the ambushed enemy, ever alert for the puniest coign of vantage, with just the weapons they required. What the enemy so urgently wanted, the secreting of the to them so irksome Judaism-question, was quite agreeable to Liszt as well; but naturally for the converse reason, namely to keep an embittering personal reference aloof from an honest art-dispute— whereas it was the other side's affair to keep concealed the motive of a dishonest fight, the key to all the calumnies [107] launched-out on us. Thus the ferment of the whole commotion remained unmentioned by our side, too. On the contrary, it was a jovial inspiration of Liszt's, to accept the nickname fastened on us, of "*Zukunftsmusiker*" ("Musicians of the Future"), and adopt it in the sense once taken by the "*Gueux*" of the Netherlands. Clever strokes, like this of my friend's, were highly welcome to the enemy: on this point, then, they hardly needed any more to slander, and the title "*Zukunftsmusiker*" cut out a most convenient path for getting at the ardent, never-resting artist. With the falling-away of an erewhile cordially-devoted friend, a great violin-virtuoso on whom the Medusa-head would seem to have also worked at last, there began that seething agitation against Franz Liszt, who magnanimously heeded no attack, whence'er it came—that agitation which prepared for him the undeception and embitterment wherein at last he put an end for ever to his splendid efforts to found in Weimar a furthering home for Music.

Are you, honoured lady, less astonished at the persecutions to which our great friend was subjected, in his time, than at those which have taken myself for mark?—Perhaps what might mislead you, then, is that Liszt had certainly drawn down on himself the envy, above all, of his German colleagues left behind him, through the brilliance of his outward artistic career; moreover, through giving up the racecourse of the Virtuoso, and through his hitherto having made mere preparations for an appearance as creative musician, that he had given fairly intelligible rise to a doubt, so easy to be nursed by envy, as to his real vocation for that status. I believe, however, that what I shall refer-to later will prove that at the real bottom of the matter this doubt, no less than was the case with my own imputed theories, gave but the merest pretext to the war of persecution: in the one case as in the other, it would have sufficed that they should be looked into more closely, and compared with a correct impression of our doings, for the question to have been at once removed to quite another [108] standpoint; then, one could have criticised, discussed, and spoken for and against—in the long run *something*

would have been the upshot. But that 's just what all the talk was *not* about; and just this closer viewing of the new appearances one did not want to let occur. No, with a vulgarity of expression and insinuation the like whereof has never shewn itself in a kindred case, the whole army of the Press indulged in such a howling and a shrieking, that any human decency of argument was quite past thinking of. And thus it is that I assure you:—what Liszt has encountered, also, is a proceed of the workings of that article on "Judaism in Music."

However, even we ourselves did not discover this at once. At all times there are so many interests opposed to new departures, nay making for an out-and-out crusade against each thing implied therein, that we, too, believed we here had but to do with *vis inertiae* and an art-traffic jogged from out its wonted ease. Since the attacks proceeded for the most part from the Press, and indeed from the great and influential political Daily-press, those of our friends who had been made anxious by the public's being given a bias against Liszt's ensuing first appearance as instrumental composer, thought it their bounden duty to take corrective steps: but, leaving out of count a few blunders which were thus committed, it soon grew evident that not even the most sober notice of a Lisztian composition could find an entry to the greater journals, all places here being taken in advance and in a hostile sense. Now, who will tell me seriously that this attitude of the great papers evinced an apprehension of possible harm to be wrought the good German art-taste through a new departure? I have lived to find that in one of these respected sheets it was impossible for me to even mention Offenbach in the way befitting him: in this instance, who can dream of a care for the artistic taste of Germany? So far had the matter got: we were completely barred-out from the greater German Press. But to whom belongs this Press? Our Liberals and Men of Progress have terribly [109] to smart for being cast by the Old-Conservative party into one pot with Judaism and its specific interests: when the Ultramontanes ask what right has a Press conducted by the Jews to interfere in matters of the Christian Church, there lies a fatal meaning in the question, which at any rate is founded on an accurate knowledge of the wires that pull those leading journals.

The remarkable thing about it is, that this knowledge is patent to everyone else; for who has not made the experience for himself? I am not in a position to say how far this state of things applies to larger matters of Politics, though the Bourse affords a tolerably open index to the situation: but on this realm of Music given over to the most disgraceful cackle no man of insight has the smallest doubt that everyone is subject to a very curious discipline, whose following in the remotest circles, and with uniform punctiliousness, lets one argue to a most energetic management and organisation. In Paris, in particular, I was amazed to find this watchful management a positively open secret: there everyone has some astounding tale to tell you of it, especially as touching the extremely minute precautions against the secret being openly denounced at least, now that it is exposed to indiscretion through too many sharing in its knowledge; so that every tiniest cranny, through which it might leak into some journal, has now been stopped, were it only by a visiting-card in the keyhole of a garret. Here too, then, everyone obeyed his orders precisely as in the best-drilled army while a fight is on: you have already made acquaintance with this platoon-fire of the Paris press, aimed against me under command of Care for Good Taste in Art.—In London, some years ago, I met more frankness on this point. As immediately on my arrival the musical critic of the *Times* (I beg you to remember what a colossal world-sheet I here have named!) rained down on me a hail of insults, so in the further course of his effusions Herr Davison did not hesitate to hold me up to public odium as blasphemous of the [110] greatest composers for reason of their Judaism. (3) By this disclosure he at any rate had more to win than lose, for his own standing with the English public: on the one side, because of the great esteem which Mendelssohn enjoys in England, above all places; on the other, perhaps, because of the peculiar character of the English nation, which to experts seems more grounded on the old testament, than on the new.—Only in St. Petersburg and Moscow did I find the terrain of the musical press still

overlooked by Jewry: there I lived to see a miracle—for the first time in my life, was I taken up by the newspapers quite as much as by the public, whose good reception, I may add in general, the Jews had nowhere been able to spoil for me save in my father-city, Leipzig, where the public simply stayed away.

Through its ridiculous aspects this portion of my story has almost betrayed me into a jesting tone, which I must give up, however, if I am to permit myself, respected lady, to finally draw your attention to its very earnest side; and this, in your eyes, will probably commence exactly where we look away from my persecuted person, and take in eye the effects of that singular persecution upon the spirit of our Art itself

To strike that path, I first must touch once more expressly on my personal interest. Just now I mentioned incidentally, that the persecution put upon me by the Jews had not as yet been able to estrange the public from me, and that everywhere the public welcomed me with warmth. This is correct. I here must add, however, that that persecution at all events is calculated, if not to bar my way to [111] the public, yet to make it so difficult that on this side too, at last, the success of the enemy's efforts may very well promise to become complete. You already see that although my earlier operas have broken an entrance to almost every German theatre, and are given there with steady success, each of my newer works encounters an impassive, nay, a defiant attitude on the part of those self-same theatres: my earlier works, forsooth, had forced themselves upon the stage *before* that Jewish agitation, and their success was no longer to be got the better of. But, so the story ran, my new works were composed on the lines of my later-published "senseless" theories; I thus had fallen from my earlier state of innocence; and no one more could listen to my music. Just as Judaism in general could only root itself among us through profiting of the defects and weaknesses in our social system, so also here the agitation lightly found a soil—ingloriously enough for us!—already laid-out for its ultimate success. In whose hands is the conduct of our theatres, and what tence do these theatres pursue? On this point I have spoken my mind both often and enough, and only the other day again, in a larger treatise on "German Art and German Politics," I set forth at some length the multifarious reasons for the downfall of our theatric art. Do you imagine that I therewith made myself a favourite in the spheres concerned? Only with the greatest reluctance, as they themselves have verified, do theatrical administrations nowadays embark on the production of a new work of mine. (4) They *might*, [112] however, have their hands forced through the universally favourable attitude of the public toward my operas; how welcome then must be the excuse so lightly to be drawn from the fact that my later works, you see, are so universally contested by the Press, and especially by its most influential section! Don't you already hear the cry sent-up from Paris, why on earth one should think necessary to attempt the in itself so difficult task of importing my operas into France, seeing my artistic rank is not so much as recognised in my native land?—This state of matters, however, is still further aggravated by my actually not offering my later works to any theatre; on the contrary, to my haply sought consent to the production of a new work I am compelled to attach conditions never held needful before—namely the fulfilment of certain demands, intended to insure me a really correct performance. (5) And here I touch on the most serious aspect of the commingling of the Jewish essence in our art-affairs.

In that essay upon Judaism I concluded by shewing that it was the feebleness and incapacity of the post-Beethovenian period of our German music-producing, that admitted of the commingling of the Jews therein: all those musicians of ours who found in the washings of the great plastic style of Beethoven the ingredients for preparing that newer, shapeless, sickly mannerism, ground down and plastered with the semblance of solidity, wherein they plodded on in mawkish comfort, without a life, without a strife—all these I set down as thoroughly included in my sketch of Music-Jewdom, let them belong to any nationality they pleased. This singular community it is, that nowadays embraces nearly everyone who

composes music, and—alas! too—who conducts it. I fancy many of them were honestly confused and frightened by my writings: it was on their sincere bewilderment and perplexity that the Jews, enraged by my aforesaid article, laid hold for sake of [113] promptly cutting short all decorous discussion of my remaining theoretic essays, seeing there had already been shewn some notable beginnings of such a thing on the part of honest German musicians. With that pair of catchwords was stifled every fruitful, every explanatory and formative debate and mutual clearing of the ground.—In consequence, however, of the devastations wrought by the Hegelian Philosophy in German heads, so prone to abstract meditation, the same feeble spirit had taken lodgment on this domain [i.e. of Philosophy] as well as on its annexe, of Æsthetics, after Kant's great thought—so intelligently used by Schiller as basis for æsthetic views upon the Beautiful—had been pushed aside by a dreary jumble of dialectic nothings. Even on this side, however, I met at first an inclination to enter honestly upon the views laid down in my art-writings. But that above-named pamphlet of Dr Hanslick in Vienna, upon the "Musically-Beautiful," just as it had been composed for a definite purpose, had also been brought with hottest haste into such celebrity that one can scarcely blame a blond and pure-bred German Æsthetician, Herr Vischer—who had plagued his brain to find a writer for the rubric "Music" in a grand 'system' he was working out—if he associated himself, for convenience and safety's sake, with the so very much belauded Vienna Music-æsthete: for his grand work he handed over to him the execution of that article on a subject which he confessed to knowing nothing about. (6) So the musical Jew-Beauty took its seat in the heart of a full-blooded German system of Æsthetics, a fact which helped the more to increase the renown of its creator, as it now was lauded by the journals at the top of their voice, but, owing to its great un-entertainingness, was read by no one. Under enhanced protection through this new and altogether Christian-German fame, the musical Jew-Beauty was now uplifted to a thorough dogma; the most intricate and hardest [114] questions of Musical Æsthetics, whereon the greatest philosophers had always expressed themselves with doubt and hesitancy whene'er occasion called for serious judgment—these questions were henceforward taken up by Jews, and by bamboozled Christians, with such confidence that to anyone who really wanted to think about the thing, and particularly to account for the overpowering effect of Beethoven's music on his feelings, it must almost seem as though he were listening to the wrangle for the Saviour's garments at the foot of the Cross—a subject the famous bible-student, David Strauss, might presumably expound with just as great discernment as Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

Now this all must have at last the broader issue, that any attempt of ours to fortify the ever-slackening nerves of Art—as against this fussy, unproductive twaddle—was met not only with the natural obstacles which uprear themselves in every age, but also with a fully-organised Opposition, weinigh the only function wherein the elements involved had power to shew activity. If *we* seemed silenced and resigned, in the other camp there went on nothing that could properly be regarded as a Willing, an Endeavouring or Producing: rather did the very party which pinned its faith to pure Jew-music-beauty let anything take place that pleased, and every new calamity *à la Offenbach* rain down upon our German art-life, without so much as turning on its side—a thing which they, at any rate, will find quite "selbstverständlich" ["self-intelligible"]. On the contrary if anyone, like myself for instance, was prompted by some emboldening chance to lay hand on given artistic forces arid lead them into energetic action, you must have heard, respected lady, the hubbub raised on every side. Then came real fire and flame within the tents of modern Israel! Above all, once more, was it astonishing to hear the contemptuous, the quite dishonouring tone—inspired, as I believe, not simply by blind passion, but by a shrewdest reckoning of its inevitable effect upon the patrons of my undertakings; for who does not feel hurt at [115] last by the disdainful tone employed in general toward a man one honours with the highest trust 'fore all the world?

(7) Everywhere and in every combination necessary to employ for complex undertakings, the quite natural elements of ill-will on the part of persons unconcerned (or perhaps, of those too vitally concerned) are present: how easy is it made then, by that contemptuous attitude of the Press, for these people to set my undertaking in a dubious light even in the eyes of its protectors! Can anything like this occur in France, to a Frenchman honoured by the public; in Italy, to an acclaimed Italian composer? This thing, which could happen only to a German in Germany, was so new that certainly the reasons for it are for the first time now to be sought out. You, respected lady, were filled with wonder at it; but those who, for the matter of that, are unconcerned with this seeming strife of bare art-interests, and yet have other grounds for hindering undertakings such as those I set on foot—these people wonder not, but find the whole thing natural enough. (8)

So the result is this: an ever more persistent hindrance of each enterprise that might lend my works and labours an influence on our present state of musical and theatric art.

Is that anything of consequence?—In my opinion, *much*; and I believe I am saying this without pretension. That I [116] may venture to set a certain store by my own efforts, I perceive from this one fact:—how earnestly all comment is avoided, on those publications to which I have been impelled from time to time in this regard.

I told you how, at first—before the commencement of this so expertly mantled agitation of the Jews against myself—there had been shewn beginnings of an honourably German treatment and discussion of the views I had laid down in my writings upon Art. Let us suppose that this agitation had not supervened, or—to give everyone fair play—that it openly and honourably had kept to its immediate cause: then we reasonably might ask ourselves what shape the thing would have taken, on the analogy of kindred episodes in the life of unmixed German Culture? I am not so optimistic as to imagine that very much would have been the issue; but surely something was to have been awaited, and at any rate something other than the actual result. If we rightly understand the signs, the period of concentration had set in, both for poetic Literature and for Music, when the legacies of matchless masters, who in serried ranks make out the great re-birth of German Art itself, were to be realised for the common good of all the nation, of all the world. In what preciser sense this conversion would be operated—that was the only question. And it was for Music that it shaped itself the most imperatively: for here, above all through the later periods of Beethoven's creation, a whole new phase of evolution had entered for the art, a phase that overtopped all views and suppositions nursed by her before. Under the lead of Italian vocalism, Music had become *an art of sheer agreeableness*: one thus entirely denied to her the power of giving herself a like significance with the arts of Dante and Michael Angelo, and had hence dismissed her, without more ado, to a manifestly lower rank of arts. *Wherefore from out great Beethoven there was now to be won a quite new knowledge of her essence; the roots, whence Music had thriven to lust this height and this significance, were to be followed thoughtfully through Bach to Palestrina; and thus there was to be founded a quite other system for judging her aesthetically, than that which took its reckonings from a musical evolution lying far outside these masters' path.*

A correct feeling on this matter was instinctively alive in the German musicians of this period; and here I name you ROBERT SCHUMANN as the most thoughtful and most gifted of them all. By the course of his development as composer one may visibly demonstrate the influence which the alloy of Jewish essence, above referred-to, has exerted on our art. Compare the Robert Schumann of the first, with the Robert Schumann of the second half of his career: there plastic bent to shaping, here turgid blurring of the surface, with end in sickness dressed-out as mystery. And quite in keeping is it, that Schumann in this second period looked peevishly, morosely and askance on those to whom in his first period, as Editor of the "*Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*," he so warmly and so amiably held out his German hand.

By the bearing of this journal, in which Schumann also (with a like sagacious instinct) set his pen in motion for the great object that behoves us, you may see at once with what a mind I should have had to commune, if with him alone had I had to come to terms about the problems - that aroused me: here do we meet, in truth, another tongue than that dialectic Jewish jargon which has been at last transplanted to our new Æsthetics; and—this I maintain!—in that tongue one might have come to a helpful understanding. What was it, then, that gave the Jewish influence this might? Alas! a cardinal virtue of the German is alike the fount of his defects. The quiet, stolid self-reliance that is ingrained in him to the point of warding off all sentimental qualms, and prompts so many a loyal deed from out the even tenour of his unspoilt heart—this very quality, if linked with but a small deficiency of needful fire, may easily degenerate into that astounding passiveness (*Trägheit*) in which, amid the continued neglect of every loftier region of the German spirit on the part of high political powers, we nowadays see plunged the most, nay almost all the minds that still stay faithful to the [118] German nature. Into this passivity sank Robert Schumann's genius too, when it became a burden to him to make stand against the restless, busy spirit of the Jews; it fatigued him to have to keep watch on all the thousand single features which were the first to come under his notice, and thus to find out what was really going on. So he lost unconsciously his noble freedom, and his old friends—even disowned by him in the long run—have lived to see him borne in triumph by the music-Jews, as one of their own people!—Now, honoured friend of mine, was *this* not a result worth speaking of? At any rate its mentioning will spare our throwing light on pettier subjugations, which, in consequence of this most weighty one, were everyday the easier to achieve.

But these personal successes find their supplement in the realm of Associations and Societies. Here, too, the German spirit shewed itself aroused to act according to its natural bent. The idea, which I have designated as the task of our post-Beethovenian period, for the first time actually united an ever-growing number of German musicians and music-lovers for objects which gained their natural significance through taking up that task. To the excellent Franz Brendel—who with faithful perseverance gave the impetus, and was rewarded by the fashionable scoffs of Jewish papers—to him is to be ascribed the positive fame of having recognised the needful thing on this side too. But the defect inherent in our German system of Association was bound to shew itself the sooner here, as a Union of German Musicians not only set itself in competition with the powerful sphere of organisations conducted by the Government and State—in common with other free associations, condemned to like effectlessness—but further, with the mightiest organisation of our times, with Judaism itself. Manifestly any larger *Union* of musicians could only expect to help forward the formation of a German style, in music, by the practical expedient of altogether 'model' performances of weighty works. For this, one needed *means*; but the German musician is poor: who's [119] going to help him? Certainly not a disputation and debate about art-interests, which can have no sense amid a crowd, and easily may lead to ridicule. The leverage we lacked, however, belonged to Judaism. The theatre to the dandies and young Israel of the coulisses, to the music-Jews the concert-institutions: what was there left for us? Just one small music-sheet, which printed a report of our biennial meetings.

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As you see, respected lady, I herewith certify the total victory of Judaism on every side; and if now once more I raise my voice against it, it certainly is from no idea that I can reduce by one iota the fulness of that victory. As on the other hand, however, my exposition of the course of this peculiar episode in German Culture seems to affirm that the whole thing is the result of that agitation provoked among the Jews by my earlier article, you may not be very distant from a new astonished question: namely, Why on earth did I stir up this agitation

through that my challenge?

I might excuse myself by saying that I was prompted to that attack, not by any pondering of the "*causa finalis*," but solely through the incentive of the "*causa efficiens*" (as the philosophers express it). Certainly, even at the time of inditing and publishing that essay, nothing was farther from my mind than the notion that I could combat the Jews' influence upon our music with any prospect of success: the grounds of their latter-day successes were already then so clear to me, that now, after a lapse of over eighteen years, it affords me some measure of satisfaction to prove my words by its re-publication. What I may have proposed to effect thereby, I should be unable to clearly state; wherefore I fall back on the plea that an insight into the inevitable downfall of our musical affairs imposed on me the inner compulsion (*Nöthigung*) to trace the causes of that fall. Perhaps, however, it lay near my heart to join therewith a hopeful divination: this you may [120] gather from the essay's closing apostrophe, with which I turn towards the Jews themselves.

Just as humane friends of the Church have deemed possible its salutary reform through an appeal to the downtrod nether clergy, so also did I take in eye the great gifts of heart, as well as mind, which, to my genuine refreshment, had greeted me from out the sphere of Jew society itself. Most certainly am I of opinion that all which burdens native German life from that direction, weighs far more terribly on intelligent and high-souled Jews themselves. Methinks I saw tokens, at that time, of my summons having called forth understanding and profounder stir. If dependence, however, is a great ill and hindrance to free evolution in every walk of life, the dependence of the Jews among themselves appears to be a thralldom of the very utmost rigour. Much may be permitted and overlooked in the broad-viewed Jew by his more enlightened congeners, since they have made up their minds to live not only *with* us, but *in* us: the best Jew-anecdotes, so very entertaining, are told us by themselves; on other sides, too, we are acquainted with the frankest, and therefore at all events *permissible*, remarks of theirs about themselves as well as us. But to take under one's wing a man proscribed by one's own stock—that, in any case, must be accounted by the Jews a rightdown mortal crime. On this side I have had some harrowing experiences. To give you an idea of the tyranny itself, however, let one instance serve for many. An undoubtedly very gifted, truly talented and intellectual writer of Jewish origin, who seems to have almost grown into the most distinctive traits of German folk-life, and with whom I had long and often debated Judaism in all its bearings—this writer made the later acquaintance of my poems "*Der Ring des Nibelungen*" and "*Tristan und Isolde*"; he expressed himself about them with such warm appreciation and clear understanding, that he certainly laid to heart the invitation of my friends, to whom he had spoken, to publish openly his views about [121] these poems that had been so astonishingly ignored by our own literary circles. *This was impossible to him!*—

Please gather from these hints, respected lady, that, albeit I this time have merely answered your question as to the enigmatic reasons for the persecutions I have undergone, particularly on the part of the Press, I nevertheless should not perhaps have given my answer this almost wearisome extension, were it not that even to-day a hope which lies within my deepest heart, though wellnigh inexpressible, had added its incentive. If I wished to give this hope expression, before all I ought not to let it bear the semblance of reposing on a perpetual concealment of my relations with Judaism: this concealment has contributed to the bewilderment wherein not only you, but almost every sympathising friend of mine is placed to-day. Have I myself given rise to this, by that earlier pseudonym; nay, have I made over to the enemy's hands the strategic means for my own defeat: then I now must open to my friends what had long been too well known to my opponents. If I suppose that this openness alone is able, not so much to bring me friends from out the hostile camp, as to strengthen them to battle for their own true emancipation: then perchance I may be pardoned, if a comprehensive view of our Culture's history (*ein umfassender kulturhistorischer Gedanke*) screens from my

mind the nature of an illusion that instinctively has found a corner in my heart. For on one thing am I clear: just as the influence which the Jews have gained upon our mental life—as displayed in the deflection and falsification of our highest culture-tendencies—just as this influence is no mere physiologic accident, so also must it be owned-to as definitive and past dispute. Whether the downfall of our Culture can be arrested by a violent ejection of the destructive foreign element, I am unable to decide, since that would require forces with whose existence I am unacquainted. If, on the contrary, this element is to be assimilated with us in such a way that, in common with us, it shall ripen toward a higher evolution of our nobler human qualities: then is it obvious that no screening-off [122] the difficulties of such assimilation, but only their openest exposure, can be here of any help. If from the so harmlessly-agreeable realm of Music—as our newest Æsthetics have it—an earnest impetus has been haply given this by me, that fact itself, perhaps, might be reckoned not unfavourable to *my* view of Music's weighty office; and you, in any case, best-honoured lady, might find herein an apology for my having detained you so long with a theme so seemingly abstruse.

Tribschen, near Lucerne, New-Year 1869.

Richard Wagner.

Notes

Note 1 on page 5

Note to the 1873 edition (*Ges. Schr.*, vol. viii)—"See volume v of my Collected Essays and Poems."—In the 1869 edition this paragraph ran as follows: "The essay which appears above—unchanged in its essentials—I published somewhat over eighteen years ago in the '*Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*,' as mentioned in my opening statement."—TR.

Note 2 on page 7

In the *Deutsche Rundschau* for January of this year (1894) Dr. Hanslick says (p. 56): "It would simply be flattering to me, to be burnt by Pater Arbuez Wagner on the same pile with MENDELSSOHN and MEYERBEER; unfortunately I must decline this distinction, since my father and all his ancestors, so far as one can trace them, were arch-Catholic peasant-sons, moreover from a countryside where Judaism has only been known in the shape of a wandering peddler."—TR.

Note 3 on page 9

Without in any way attempting to defend the late Mr. J. W. Davison for his sometimes savage, sometimes jocular attacks on Richard Wagner in 1855, it should not be forgotten that our author confessedly knew very little English, and therefore must have largely depended on his London friends (of that time) to read Davison's articles into German for him—a proceeding open to all the usual dangers attendant on translation—while, on the other hand, a most clumsy and injudicious personal attack had been opened on Davison in an American paper, even before Wagner's arrival in this country and certainly without his knowledge, by one of those London friends (the late Fred Praeger).—TR.

Note 4 on page 10

It would be not uninteresting, and at any rate would afford a glimpse into our art-affairs, if I gave you particulars of the behaviour which, to my genuine astonishment, I had lately to experience on the part of the two largest theatres, those of *Berlin* and *Vienna*, with regard to my "*Meistersinger*." In my negotiations with the manager of these Court-theatres it needed some little time before I saw through the dodgery employed there, and found that not Only were they trying to *get out of* giving my work, but also to prevent its being given elsewhere. You thence would plainly see that it is a question of a fixed determination, and that a veritable terror was manifestly felt at the bare idea of a new work of mine appearing. Some-day, perhaps, it may entertain you to hear a few more details from my region of experiences.—R. WAGNER.

Note 5 on page 10

Only through my momentarily letting fall these demands out of imperative regard for my publisher, could I lately move the *Dresden Court-theatre* to undertake the production of my *Meistersinger*.—R. WAGNER.

Note 6 on page 11

This was told me long ago, at Zurich, by Professor VISCHER himself; in what degree of

personal directness the co-operation of Herr Hanslick was drawn upon, I was not informed.—R. WAGNER.

[Note 7 on page 11](#)

The reference is evidently to King Ludwig II of Bavaria.—TR.

[Note 8 on page 12](#)

Of this you may form a very adequate notion, and of the way in which these last-named gentry employ the fashionable tone in my regard to obstruct all 'furtherance of each my enterprise, if you will only take the trouble to peruse the feuilleton of the recent New-Year's number of the "*Süddeutsche Presse*," just sent to me from Munich. Herr JULIUS FRÖBEL there calmly denounces me to the Bavarian Government as founder of a sect that proposes to do away with State and Religion, and replace it all by an Opera-theatre whence to reign; a sect, moreover, that makes for satisfaction of "Tartuffian lust" (*Befriedigung "muckerhafter Gelüste"*).—The deceased HEBBEL once described to me the peculiar lowness of the Viennese comedian Nestroy, by saying that a rose must necessarily stink if this person had but smelt at it. How the idea of Love, as keystone of Society, may figure in the brain of a Julius Fröbel, we here may see with like effect.—But don't you understand, again, how cleverly a thing like this is reckoned to rouse that disgust which makes the slandered man himself disdain to smite the slanderer?—R. WAGNER.