The Nibelungen Trilogy at Bayreuth

Author(s): Joseph Bennett

Source: *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, Vol. 17, No. 403 (Sep. 1, 1876), pp. 583-587

Published by: [Musical Times Publications Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3352372>

Accessed: 23-12-2015 03:53 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Musical Times Publications Ltd. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

THE MUSICAL TIMES

AND SINGING-CLASS CIRCULAR.

SEPTEMBER 1, 1876.

THE NIBELUNGEN TRILOGY AT BAYREUTH

BY JOSEPH BENNETT.

WHEN Richard Wagner first announced the carrying out of his darling enterprise at Bayreuth, men wondered why his choice fell upon such a place; they have wondered ever since, and they are wondering now. The master has thick-and-thin admirers, who credit him with the gift of infallibility, and believe that the fiction of the English Constitution, "The King can do no wrong," may be applied in his case as an absolute fact. Yet even these people can discover for Bayreuth nothing better than negative recommendations of a more or less whimsical kind. My own experience convinces me that scarcely could a worse selection have been made. As a dignified and respectable little town, with certain literary and historic associations, Bayreuth is, no doubt, a fit retreat for a man who desires to labour "far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife;" but to make it the scene of a great gathering, to put upon its feeble resources an unbearable strain, and consequently to inflict upon visitors a host of discomforts, was a step only explainable by reference to the wilfulness in which great men sometimes permit themselves to indulge. Among Wagner's qualities is a grim humour quite familiar to readers of his literary works, and it may be that a resolution to entice the musical world off the highway, so to speak, and along uncomfortable bye-paths was a practical manifestation of it. Anyhow, the feat gave proof of his influence, and every one of us who wasted hours for a morsel of food, after fighting for a place in which to eat it; who domiciled in strange quarters, and—not through poverty—became acquainted with "strange bed-fellows;" who panted along dusty roads in a broiling sun, because the score or so of vehicles in the place were engaged twenty deep—every one of us, I say, had the consolation of knowing that here was practical homage paid to intellectual and artistic might. It was all of consolation we could get, and I am afraid it did not prevent a good deal of bad language. The natives, poor souls, did their very best under the pressure put upon them. They were willing enough, but fancy the chances they had in an encounter with 2,000 hungry and earnest strangers. As for the hotels—well, I will only observe that, if the statistics of the big lunatic asylum close to Wagner's theatre do not show a remarkable accession of patients from the class of landlords and waiters, my belief in the relationship of cause and effect will receive a blow.

Wagner chose a pretty spot for his theatre. There is a hill some 1,500 yards from the town, crowned with a wood, and having fields on its lower slope. Some distance up the slope stands the building, with a terrace on its town front, whence the eye ranges over the valley of the Red Main to the lofty hills beyond. Flanking the theatre, but slightly lower, are two wooden refreshment houses; and, lower still, the ex-meadow is planted with young trees, which border winding walks, the beginning of a pleasance "of the future." For the theatre itself little can be said—at any rate as regards the exterior. It is decidedly not beautiful; it comes very near being ugly, and signs that it has been erected "on the cheap" are more evident than

pleasing to an æsthetic eye. But, here again, what matters? "The play's the thing," and Wagner cares more for one small accessory to his stage business than for the whole concern in front of the curtain. Look into the theatre and be satisfied of this. There may be a recognition of personal comfort, even of luxurious taste, in the Fürsten Galerie, but elsewhere behold a Spartan simplicity. It is assumed that he who goes to the Wagner Theatre does so as a lover of art. In that capacity alone is he recognized. "I will give you," says Wagner, "a good view of the stage; I will put my orchestra out of sight, and you shall not be annoyed by a gesticulating conductor; but if you expect a box in which to lounge, if you think to have light for the examination of your neighbours, or for the poring over libretti, if you expect facilities for disturbing the house by going in or out as you choose, then don't come to my place, for none of these things will you get. As you are not a prince, I cannot ask you to the Fürsten Galerie; but here is a cane seat in a vast parterre rising tier above tier, so that everybody sees well all that he ought to see. Take it or leave it." In such practical fashion is the whole business managed, and there has not been any grumbling. Some of the French and Belgian critics, it is true, wrote early letters home in a state of wonderment, but they grew reconciled when it appeared that a musical drama is not necessarily connected with a fashionable lounge. As for the Germans, they out-Wagnered Wagner, and I believe that they would have sat out the performances on spikes had the master so ordained.

What a crowd was that which filled Bayreuth on the eve of the Festival! Emperors and princes came, and were received with acclamation, Wagner himself going down (in a dress coat and white tie) to greet the German Kaiser, and to hear from the imperial lips that the imperial mind was a blank in the matter of the artistic questions at issue, but that a national enterprise should be supported. Bayreuth, for some days before in process of waking, opened its eyes wide to see the old soldier. But there were many others present quite as remarkable as he, though the more eminent among German musicians stayed away. Brahms, Hiller, Volckmann, Joachim, Rubinstein, Raff—none of these put in an appearance, for reasons about which it would be impertinent to speculate. But all countries were well represented, and the visitors' list published from day to day was a roll-call of eminence not only in music but in kindred arts. Franz Liszt made a prominent figure on more accounts than his own personal distinction, and, indeed, the Festival would not have been complete without him. In the days when Wagner had not a friend, and was picking up a bare living in Paris—when, moreover, the two were unknown to each other, it was Liszt who recognized the future author of "Der Ring des Nibelungen," and, in the nick of time, gave him precious encouragement. Hardly less important and gratifying to Liszt, therefore, than to Wagner himself, was an occasion which justified his previsions and realized his hopes. Among others present who engaged more or less attention were such musical *littérateurs* as Herr Hanslick, of Vienna; Signor Filippo de Filippi, of Milan; M. Albert Wolff, of Paris; Mr. Wheeler, of New York; and Mr. Davison, of London; while professors from all countries could be reckoned by the hundred. In short, the gathering was unique—the grandest tribute ever paid to the genius and will of a single man.

Life in Bayreuth during the Festival was busy enough, if in many respects uncomfortable. A large portion of the time not spent at the theatre was necessarily occupied in fighting for food, and for the balance there were plenty of claimants—old friends seen after long parting, new friends anxious to be useful, and chance acquaintances whose share in a matter of common interest gave them a right to attention. Nobody waited for an introduction to anybody at Bayreuth. People ignorant even of each other's names became confidential over the invariable glass of beer whenever opportunity offered, and till far into the night a buzz of conversation rose to the unaccustomed heavens. Of course opinions often clashed. There were some present who could not recognize the amazing perfection of Wagner's work, and who, in the face of terrible odds, had the boldness to say so. Such courage should have commanded the respect of their opponents; but, as far as my observation goes, the out-and-out Wagnerian is an intolerant person, not disinclined to use muscle as a means of conversion to the faith. At all events the meeting was disgraced by sundry quarrels and at least one assault, with which, it is to be feared, the majority sympathized, looking upon it as the pardonable result of laudable enthusiasm. Life in and about the theatre scarcely varied from day to day. As the performances—save that of "Das Rheingold"—began at 4 o'clock, there was, first of all, a hot walk to the building along an unwatered road, then a lounge in the shade, or a "restorer" in the refreshment booth, or an amusing inspection of the very remarkable-looking people who by means of long unkempt hair, *à la* Liszt, proclaim themselves devotees of modern German art. These mustered in strong force, and vied with each other in eccentricity, the palm of strangeness being unanimously accorded to a brother and sister (both, it is said, pupils of Liszt), who wandered about "looking mysteriously nowhere," the gentleman in an odd be-feathered hat, from under which streamed black straight locks, the lady in no hat at all, and with her tresses waving wildly. While these and such as these passed in review, a little procession of royal carriages ascended the hill; and, if Emperor William were there, as on the first two days, the Germans gathered round the state entrance to greet him with the dismal, long-drawn "Hoch!" which does duty for our more vigorous and exciting "Hurrah!" Then a blast of trumpets summoned all to enter, the "call" being invariably one or other of the *Nibelungen motivi*. It never took the audience long to settle down, and when the trumpets once more sounded and the lights were lowered till darkness became visible, a peremptory hiss stopped all motion and noise. During the performance silence and stillness were maintained; but on the curtain falling after each act, it was a sight to see with what relief the entire fifteen hundred poured themselves out of the theatre, blinking in the sunlight, and hurrying to find wherewith the exhausted body might be refreshed. So the days went on till the entire drama had unfolded itself, and the crowd, their curiosity satisfied, melted away, leaving Bayreuth to prepare for the next batch of visitors. The first series of representations, I should add, did not pass off without some disappointment. Owing to the temporary illness of Herr Betz, who filled an important part, the performance of "Siegfried" was put off from Tuesday to Wednesday, and, as a result, not a few had to leave without witnessing "Götterdämmerung," while many more were unable to attend a public supper given on Friday for the

purpose of bringing Wagner and his patrons together. But matters might easily have been worse, as it would appear from the case of Herr Betz that the leading *rôles* were not "under studied."

The arrangements of the theatre for art purposes were singularly complete, and no question can arise as to the future influence of such of them as departed from established custom. Complete success attended the hidden orchestra, not only because a distracting spectacle was removed from the ken of the audience, but because, without loss of purely musical effect, a distinct and appropriate mental impression was created by the flood of sound streaming from a concealed source. Wagner's idea of a veil of music rising between the spectator and the stage, colouring all beyond with its rich hues, thus found justification, the result being precisely as he described it. But some one may ask, "How could a hundred and fourteen instruments find room without a huge ungainly chasm between audience and stage?" The answer is that the orchestral seats were arranged on an inclined plane descending far beneath the "boards." At the bottom of the plane were stationed the brass and percussion instruments, the "strings" occupying the higher rows. By this plan the visible width of the orchestral pit was not great enough to be an eyesore, while the position of the loud instruments secured depth and majesty of tone without blatant noise. That the orchestral players were satisfied with their novel station I cannot say. They objected on principle to be put out of sight, and they complained, with good reason, of most exhausting heat. True, because they were invisible, they could—and did—play in their shirt-sleeves; but this freedom hardly compensated for a situation which many of them declare they will never again occupy. Thanks to the good offices of Mr. Dannreuther, I was able to inspect the arrangements on and behind, above and beneath, the stage for the working out of scenic effects unequalled in magnitude, elaboration, and splendour. That I was much the wiser for gazing upon a mass of intricate machinery cannot be said with any regard for truth, but I came away with profound respect for the inventive skill of Herr Brandt, of Darmstadt, in whom Wagner discovered a man able to satisfy his most extravagant desires. Later on I shall have occasion to speak of the more prominent features in a series of stage spectacles, which may be regarded as the *ne plus ultra* of their kind. Fortunate in scenic resources, Wagner was not less so in all other departments of the complicated apparatus required by his music-drama. In Herr Doepler, of Berlin, he had an artist able to dress the characters after a fashion at once truthful—as far as truth can be ascertained—and picturesque. The stage groupings were admirably superintended by Herr Fricke, of Dessau; while Herr Richter, of Vienna, filled the all-important post of conductor in a manner absolutely beyond reproach. I may say this the more emphatically, because I have never seen Herr Richter. He is known to me only "by his fruits," and assuredly never did music so exacting receive such ample justice. It may be urged that the completeness of the performance arose from a multitude of rehearsals. Of course it did—otherwise Herr Richter and his men would have wrought a miracle. The secret of their success, apart from individual skill, was simply hard work. Let me give particulars on this head. The orchestral rehearsals alone of the four dramas were thirty-six in number—nine for each drama, to say nothing of subsequent rehearsals more or less "full." Many of these lasted four hours, the

"wind" occupying two hours, and the strings the other two. In point of fact, active preparations began on the third day of June, and continued without intermission till within three days of the performance. "No wonder," it may be said, "that the result was perfect." The wonder is that, in our days of hurry, so much patient labour was thought needful and cheerfully bestowed. As a matter of course, the instrumentalists were the pick of Germany. Herr Wilhelmj led the 32 violins, having under him eight concertmeisters, to say nothing of artists well known as performers of chamber music; while the 12 violas, 12 violoncelli, and 8 double-basses, added to this splendid army of fiddles, made up a string band such as could only before have been dreamt of by the connoisseurs whose hopes it more than realized. Among the "wind" were 4 flutes, 4 oboes, 1 cor Anglais, 3 clarinets, 1 bass clarinet, 4 bassoons, 1 contra fagotto, 7 horns, 4 tenor and bass tubas (expressly made for the occasion), 3 trumpets, 1 bass trumpet, 4 trombones, 1 double-bass trombone, 1 bass oboe (also constructed specially), 1 double-bass tuba, drums, and 8 harps. The preponderance of bass in this scheme, especially of "sixteen-foot tone," must at once strike every reader. But in practice it was none too much. On the contrary, it gave surprising majesty to the *ensemble*, while the numerous phrases for the bass alone were rolled out with a force that sometimes approached the awful. As to the uniform excellency of the orchestra I cannot be particular, because, even if space were available, words would fail. Enough if I invite the reader to imagine all he can in the way of merit, and then believe that he has not done justice to Herr Richter's wonderful band. Turning to the vocal artists, let me first put on record their names and characters: F. Betz (*Wotan*), A. Niemann (*Sigmund*), G. Unger (*Siegfried* and *Froh*), E. Gura (*Gunther* and *Donner*), H. Vogl (*Loge*), C. Hill (*Alberich*), C. Schlosser (*Mime*), A. Eilers (*Fasolt*), F. von Reichenberg (*Fafner*), J. Niering (*Hunding*), G. Siehr (*Hagen*), A. Materna (*Brünnhilde*), F. Grün (*Fricka*), J. Haupt (*Freia*), L. Jaide (*Erda* and *Waltraute*), J. Schefzky (*Sieglinde*), M. Weckerlin (*Gutrune*), L. Lehmann, M. Lehmann, and M. Lammert (*Rhine Daughters*)—in all twenty artists, not counting the representatives of three Norns, eight Walkyries, and a chorus of nine women and fifteen men. That all had been carefully chosen the result proved. The acting in most cases was irreproachable; in some super-excellent. In stature and bearing Wagner's chosen ones realized his ideal; nor were they destitute of the physical qualities necessary to sustained declamation at the top of the voice against a powerful orchestra. That no more than two or three had any right to call themselves vocalists is true, but as Wagner gave them no vocal music, in the ordinary sense of the term, the fact mattered little. They enunciated his lines with vigour, and left the musical effect to the safe care of the band. Among the artists specially worthy of honour were Frau Materna, whose *Brünnhilde*, a fine dramatic and declamatory character, is fitly described as splendid. Herr Betz, as the gloomy *Wotan*, showed great power, while the *Loge* of Herr Vogl and the *Mime* of Herr Schlosser were creations of the highest order. The stage effects gained their impressiveness chiefly through certain novel means, for, though the scenery was good, it is often, as scenery, equalled on the English stage. Drifting clouds were admirably simulated by a clever contrivance; the lightning and thunder, instead of burlesquing, exactly reproduced, nature, and the use of steam made possible such a display of

apparently real smoke and flame as had never before been attempted on any stage. *Per contra*, the magic lantern did its work as badly as usual in the representation of the Walkyries flying through the air, the beasts were more grotesque than appalling, and in the performance of "Das Rheingold" accidents happened which, considering the months spent in preparation, were without excuse.

The preliminary and subordinate part of my task here ends, and I come to the gist of the whole matter—What is this new thing which Herr Wagner has bestowed upon the world?

It must be obvious that, in answering a question so comprehensive—when the thing comprehended is four long dramas—I cannot enter into minute particulars. To do so would be to fill this number of the *Musical Times*, and still leave much unsaid. All that I may attempt is the imparting of what autumn manoeuvring commanders style a "general idea," by means of as many details as space allows.

First, let me touch the poem. "Der Ring des Nibelungen" consists of four sections: an Introduction, "Das Rheingold," and a trilogy—"Die Walküre," "Siegfried," and "Götterdämmerung." So constituted it is a complete work, bound together in all its parts by the closest ties, having a distinct beginning, an equally distinct ending, and comprising within itself all that is necessary to perfect elucidation. Looking at the technical completeness of "Der Ring des Nibelungen," it is easy to assume that the plan was carefully defined from the outset. Not so, however. It grew under the author's hands till that which was once but a single drama became four. Curiously enough, it stretched backwards in point of time. Dealing at first with results arising from hidden causes, Wagner felt the necessity of revealing those causes, and so was led to the source whence all the effects arose. We have his own authority for believing this; moreover, he has told us exactly where and under what circumstances he began the work. Having drawn a succession of heroes—the Dutchman, Tannhäuser and Lohengrin—from the region of myth, he looked about, more than twenty-five years ago, for a successor to those famous personages, and, after glancing at Frederic Barbarossa only to find that historical characters were unmanageable, according to his theory, he alighted upon Siegfried, one of the most prominent actors in Teutonic and Scandinavian mythology. Siegfried was a tempting subject. Himself a splendid being, he formed the central figure of a group of events unsurpassed in romantic interest and poetic beauty. But as the limits of a single drama would not admit even the chief events of Siegfried's life, Wagner chose those immediately preceding his death, and based upon them the poem now known as "Götterdämmerung"—fourth and last section of "Der Ring des Nibelungen"—but then entitled "Siegfried's Tod." The story of this drama is highly exciting, and its outlines show that the author had in view an impressive stage spectacle analogous to that of "Tannhäuser" and "Lohengrin." We find the same rapid series of exciting events, the same highly-wrought climaxes, the same employment of crowds upon the stage, and, in short, all the elements of spectacular lyric drama as accepted by Wagner at an earlier period of his career. How much "Götterdämmerung" differs from "Siegfried's Tod" the author has not revealed. It is probable that some additions were made, but internal evidence goes to show that the poem, as we have it, belongs mainly, in point of dramatic construction, to the "Lohengrin" period. Like all its successors, however, it differs as to the character of verse. For

reasons he has fully set forth, but which need not be discussed here, Wagner adopted in "Siegfried's Tod" the unrhymed alliterative verse of the old Teutonic and Scandinavian poets, believing that its marked accents and positive rhythm best harmonized with the idea he had formed that the *melos* should be suggested by, and grow from, the "word." I take an example of this form from Mr. Alfred Forman's excellent translation of "Der Ring des Nibelungen"—a translation as yet only circulated in private, but which, it is hoped, will soon be made public—choosing part of a song that throws a halo of beauty even around an incestuous love-making of brother and sister :—

"Winter storms make way
to the wakening May,
in placid splendour
prosper the Spring;
on bending breezes
buoys his journey,
weaving wonder
on his way;
over field and forest
floats his freshness,
wide and wakening,
laughs his look.
He sounds in boundless singing
of buoyant birds,
breath is sweet
with scent he sighs:
his liquid blood blooms out
in life of blossoms,
seed and leaf
are the leap of his heart.
With grace of gentle weapons
he forces the world;
winter and storm give way
to his stately war."

In this poem Wagner saw the ideal of musico-dramatic poetry, and throughout "Der Ring des Nibelungen" it is exclusively employed. Adopted as a matter of convenience by the composer, he alone perhaps can fully estimate its value; but impartial listeners must have felt that, brought to the test of performance, greater variety is required. Under certain circumstances, the rugged and strongly-accented lines are all that could be wished; under others, more particularly when soft and tender sentiments prevail, both ear and mind—perhaps from force of habit—demand a gentler rhythm, and long for the suave effect of rhyme.

From this necessary digression I return to the story of the drama. Having completed the poem of "Siegfried's Tod" ("Götterdämmerung"), Wagner, enamoured of his subject, and necessitated to show much that else had to be intellectually perceived, took up the earlier life of the hero. From this sprang a second drama, called at first "Junger Siegfried," and now, as "Siegfried," forming the third section of the great work. There is reason to assume that here the whole scheme of "Der Ring des Nibelungen" dawned upon the author's mind. The force of circumstances carried him, almost despite his will, further and further back to the origin of that which had previously occupied his thoughts, and from the working of this necessity arose "Die Walküre" and "Das Rheingold," connecting ultimate effect with remotest cause. It is not difficult to see in these later dramas—I avoid the word *libretti* throughout, especially here, where it would have no business at all—how Wagner had passed completely under the dominion of a theory that the poem ought to make no concession for the sake of musical effect. He had laid out "Götterdämmerung" with a view to the usual mingling of solo and concerted piece (though in setting it to music at a later time he refused the opportunities his own hand had prepared, and crowded the stage with dummies), but its successors became, more and more rigidly, dramas. In

"Siegfried" there is not a single chorus, and only a few bars of concerted vocal music. In "Die Walküre" there is one chorus for female voices, and in "Das Rheingold" we have what, elsewhere, would be called a trio. In effect, therefore, the three works just named are "plays," throughout which but a single voice is heard at any given time. Unhappily for those who do not accept Wagner's theories, they are "plays," moreover, in the fulness—should I not say prolixity?—of their dialogue. The poet is wholly regardless of the musician. He will utter everything necessary to the completeness of his poem—and very often a good deal is thought needful—the result being a series of conversations, some of them wearisome repetitions, others abounding in allusions, and based upon ideas which are all very well for a reader who can pause to think, but which, on the stage, and associated with music, are embarrassing. Take, as an example, the interview between Wotan and Erda in the third act of "Siegfried," where 183 lines are devoted chiefly to telling us what we already know, or to references the significance of which by no means lies on the surface. I do not urge this as against the beauty and completeness of the poem, but simply to point it out for consideration as connected with a "drama for music." The question, of course, arises—and a most important one it is—whether a drama for music should so rigidly consult its own separate necessities, and yield nothing to the conditions of its alliance. My own answer given deliberately after the experience of Bayreuth, is in the negative. It is true that Wagner has so far recognized the demands of music as to identify each scene with some distinct emotion, powerfully expressed; but even this is not enough to save his theory from rejection. In every drama so constructed there must be passages with which music has nothing to do, and the effect of which music, especially when written on the principles hereafter mentioned, simply mars. But the question underlying all is whether Wagner has not hit upon a fallacy in supposing that he can, from a practical point of view, subordinate music to drama. In theory, his system appears perfect; in reality, I doubt whether it will ever work. The way to test this is for the audience at Bayreuth to ask themselves what part of the compound thing there presented engaged most of their attention. Wagner, as the official mouthpiece of his system, would urge that the mind should have been sensible of nothing but a whole; but that was impossible. The three grand elements—music, poetry, and stage representation—stood separately before every eye, and there can be no doubt as to which was most earnestly regarded; which was most discussed, which contributed before the others to the judgment pronounced. The predominance of music in all these respects might have been foreseen, and was, in fact, inevitable. Associate music and poetry on equal terms you cannot. The more universal, emotional, and powerful art will prevail; and not all the force of twenty Wagners can alter the fact. Wherefore, I contend, that to write a drama with a view to dramatic exigencies alone, and then to ally it with music, must not only result in failure, but is contrary to the very nature of things.

Leaving these general considerations, I approach the particular illustration of his theory with which, in "Der Ring des Nibelungen," Wagner has furnished us. Does it prove that the domain of myth is that wherein the writer of music-drama should look for his

subject? The answer is neither an unqualified "Yes" nor an unqualified "No." On the one side, the poet is free, in myth-land, from a number of embarrassments and restrictions which surround him elsewhere. He can, as Wagner has shown, well define and condense the emotion of each particular scene, and he is not bound by historic truth or regard for conventionalities. These are such immense advantages, that I am far from sure whether they do not outweigh anything on the opposite side. But, *per contra*, it may be urged that the more mythical a subject the further does it stand away from the sphere of human interest and emotion. In all ages the greatest dramatists have recognized this cardinal fact. Take Shakespeare and his "Midsummer Night's Dream" as a conspicuous example. Essentially a fairy drama—the embodiment of a myth—the "Dream" is full of every-day humanity. The Athenian lovers, Bottom and his crew, the Duke and his court, are all so mixed up with Oberon, Titania, and Puck, that we are never sensible of a want of personal sympathy with character and event. But in "Der Ring des Nibelungen" the humanity is, speaking broadly, too faint for a sustained and absorbing interest. Note the subjoined outline of the story running through all four dramas, and say whether it comes very near the heart: The Rhine Daughters guard a golden treasure in the depths of the river. The treasure gives control of the world to its possessor, but can only fall into the hands of one who forswears love. Alberich, a Nibelung, representative of the subterranean powers of evil, fulfils the condition, seizes the gold, and fashions out of it a ring, the embodiment of his acquired might. At this time Wotan (Odin), chief of the upper gods, is in difficulties. He has engaged giants to build him a castle, Walhall; and, not liking to give them the reward agreed upon, descends to the Nibelungs on a raid after the Rheingold and ring. By trickery he wins these, and with them pays the giants, not before Alberich has attached a curse to the ring, the first fruit of which is seen when one giant kills the other in a dispute over the spoil. The survivor carries off the ring, and, in the guise of a dragon, sleeps upon it, too brutish to avail himself of its power. Wotan, desiring to defend Walhall, allies himself with Erda, the Earth Goddess, by whom he has nine daughters, Walkyries, whose business it is to people the gods' abode with the bravest knights slain in battle. Wishing also to obtain the ring, he, by another alliance, raises up a hero, Siegmund, for whose use he destines a sword so buried in the stem of an ash that none other can pull it out. Siegmund meets with his twin-sister, Sieglinde, married to Hunding, and though the relationship is discovered, carries her off as his wife. On the interposition of Wotan's wife, Fricka, a subsequent combat between Hunding and Siegmund is made fatal to the seducer, though Brünnhilde, the Walkyrie charged by Wotan to effect this result, disobeys and protects, unavailingly, him whom she should have caused to be destroyed. Wotan himself intervenes, and the god-given sword, Nothung, which Siegmund has drawn from the ash, shivers against the god-held spear which symbolizes Wotan's power. Sieglinde, after the fight, seeks refuge in a forest, and Brünnhilde is condemned to sleep, surrounded by fire, upon a rock, till a man shall wake her and claim her as his wife. The incestuous union of Siegmund and Sieglinde produces a son, Siegfried, who, on the death of his mother, is reared by Mime, brother of Alberich, in hope of, through his means, winning the ring for himself. Siegfried, by-and-bye, discovers his parentage;

welds together the pieces of the broken sword, Nothung; kills the dragon-giant; kills also Mime, who attempts treachery; carries off the ring, and by miraculous means, understanding the language of birds, hears from them of the sleeping Brünnhilde. Longing for human sympathy, and not knowing fear, he reaches Brünnhilde's rock, plunges through the fire and wins the maid. But he cannot stay with her always, and sets forth in due time to see the world and seek adventure. Lighting on the Court of King Gunther, he drinks a magic draught brewed by Hagen, son of Alberich, forgets even the existence of Brünnhilde, becomes enamoured of Guttrune, Gunther's sister, and to obtain her agrees to win Brünnhilde for the King, who has heard of the sleeping heroine, yet cannot face the fire. Siegfried fulfils his promise in the guise of Gunther, and Brünnhilde is carried off as Gunther's wife. But the treachery is revealed through the ring, which Siegfried, acting for his friend, had wrested from Brünnhilde (who wore it as a love token) and forgotten to hand over to Gunther when they changed places. Full of revenge, the outraged woman reveals to Hagen where Siegfried is vulnerable, and, in the course of a hunting excursion, the Nibelung's son kills the hero. The body is carried to the palace, where Brünnhilde, putting the ring on her finger, leaps into the flames of the funeral pyre. The Rhine overflows the spot, and the Rhine Daughters recover the accursed ornament at the moment that Walhall in flames proclaims the downfall of the reign of force and the advent of that of love. Looking at this wonder-story, with its array of gods, demons, giants, dragons, miraculous gauds, potent drinks, and what not that ever entered into the fabulist's head, it may naturally be doubted whether the drama at any time approaches the spectator near enough to touch the spring of his emotions. That it does so, here and there, is true, but it is also a fact that, generally speaking, we care little what becomes of anybody concerned. The supernatural beings, when not repugnant, are indifferent, the mortals as a rule are more or less contemptible, while upon all rests the dark shadow of an incestuous crime so rare even in the days of myth that Fricka exclaims, urging Wotan to punish Siegmund:—

"Bridal embrace
of brother and sister!
When, where was it known
to mate with the child of your mother!"

Is this story, wherein poetic beauty and ingenious circumstances are allied to childish imaginings, made black by association with a sin, which horrifies even a goddess, and degraded by connection with love that rises in but a single instance above animalism—is this a model for the national music-drama of Germany? Heaven forefend.

Here I have done with the poem of "Der Ring des Nibelungen." A consideration of the music is obviously impossible within the limits of the present article. Let it be postponed, then, till space enough is available for the treatment of a subject at once so novel and so important in its relations to the "Art-work of the future."

(To be continued.)

EVERY English musician must feel gratified at the success of the "Balfé Memorial Festival," given during the past month at the Alexandra Palace, more particularly as it was organized to perpetuate his name by founding a "Balfé Scholarship" in our Royal Academy of Music. Whatever may be thought of his latest work, "Il Talismano," there