Review

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The scene of "Parsifal" is laid partly in the Castle of Monsalvat, where the "Holy Grail" is being guarded, and its vicinity, "in the northern mountains of Gothic Spain," partly at the castle of the magician *Klingsor*, situate at the southern range of the same mountain chain. The following is a brief outline of the story enacted in these surroundings. *Amfortas*, the son of *Titirel*, has succeeded his father, who is still living, in the king-guardianship of the "Holy Grail"—the sacred vessel containing the blood which had flown from the crucified Saviour. It is a part of the royal prerogative to exhibit this sacred relic periodically before the assembled knights of the holy order, on which occasions the "Holy Grail" gives forth a magnificent light which exercises a divine influence over all, and none who have witnessed it can die within that week. It appears, however, that *Amfortas* being enticed into the precincts of the castle of *Klingsor*—the scheming magician, ambitious to obtain the "Holy Grail" and the power it wields—had fallen a victim to the sensuous attractions with which the latter surrounds his Court, and had been wounded with a spear wrung from his hands—the sacred weapon which had pierced the side of the Saviour, and which had hitherto formed part of the treasures connected with the "Grail." Conscious of having defiled the holy office which he held, the king returns to Monsalvat, but, although mortally wounded, he cannot die on account of the innate power of the mystery whose guardian he is, and which it is his duty weekly to display. At this juncture *Parsifal* enters upon the scene, a young adventurer whose father, *Gamuret*, a descendant of *Titirel*, had died in battle before the son was born, and who had been brought up by his mother in the solitude of forest life, kept in utter ignorance of worldly matters lest he should one day share the father's fate. The youthful hero had, however, torn himself away from these maternal leading-strings, and on his aimless wanderings had arrived at the seat of the holy mystery, "which none but the pure in heart can reach." He is conducted by one of the knight-guardians into the hall of the castle, where the holy rites are just being performed. *Parsifal*, greatly impressed by the scene, and still more by the sufferings exhibited by the king, remains throughout the ceremony, and afterwards, speechless, and his silence being construed by his guide into indifference, he is, after the assembled knights have left the hall, contemptuously told to quit the castle never to return. With characteristic *naïveté* the first act closes by the indignant knight in question violently closing the door after his youthful *protégé*, upon which the curtain drops. The following act introduces us to the luxuriant splendour of *Klingsor's* castle and its surroundings. After a somewhat lengthy dialogue between the magician and *Kundry*, a mysterious heathen woman—the only female character in the drama, and one surrounded with great interest by the dramatist—our hero again makes his appearance, resists the many temptations offered him, gains possession of the sacred spear, and as he breaks the spell around him the magician's seeming splendour disappears. With this the second act comes to a close. Between it and the third act several years must be imagined to have elapsed, years of wandering on the part of *Parsifal* in search of the "Holy Grail," during which time that inner process of purification must be supposed to have taken place which it does not lay within the power of the dramatist to depict. At last, however, the time arrives when the weary wanderer—the sacred spear, undefiled by him, in his hand; himself an altered, purified being—again reaches the doors of the long-desired Monsalvat. Again he is conducted into the grand hall, where the knights have assembled to mourn the death of their old king *Titirel*, whose coffin is being carried in and placed in the centre of the room. His son *Amfortas*, still suffering from his never-healing wound, is determined not to prolong his agony any longer, and, refusing to perform again the sacred rites which to him signify but a living death, exposes his bare breast to the warriors, imploring them to pierce it with their swords. At this moment *Parsifal* enters, and, extending the sacred spear to *Amfortas*, the old wound of the latter closes, and he is infused with new life. *Parsifal*, the sufferer, the redeemer, is hailed by all as the only one worthy to be the guardian-king of the

"Grail." And as the holy vessel once more gives forth its glorious light the ancient *Titirel*, regaining life for the moment, raises himself in his coffin to bestow his blessing upon the assembly.

Our space does not permit us to offer more than this very faint and imperfect outline of the subject of Herr Wagner's latest drama. We abstain from all further criticism for the present, being content to await its final completion with all the wonderful musical effects and detailed stage accessories of which we know its author to be a consummate master. The work will no doubt become fruitful in controversy. Some portions will be objected to on orthodox religious grounds, while others will offer full scope to the pen of the satirist. But Herr Wagner has had to encounter similar antagonism upon the first appearance of nearly all his music-dramas, and he has grown old and famous in spite of it all. We will only add that the poem is written for the greater part in rhyme, the alliterative verse, so conspicuous in "Der Ring des Nibelungen," being but rarely made use of.

Album-Sonate. Für das Pianoforte. Von Richard Wagner. [Schott and Co.]

WHEN we say that this piece was composed in 1853 it is almost unnecessary to add that it embodies not the ripened theories of one whose greatest boast is that he refuses allegiance to any code of rules save what may be evolved from his own conviction of the true mission of music in the world. By the term "Album-Sonate" (which perhaps may be a title given by the publisher) we are of course led to expect a composition not fully developed, or what we should perhaps term a "Sonatina;" and viewed in this light we are inclined to believe that the piece—which, although the time varies, is not divided into movements—will be played with much interest by musicians, and listened to with much pleasure even by a general audience. Commencing with a tranquil and expressive subject in A flat major, we are carried (somewhat abruptly) into C major, when a quiet and unpretentious melody appears. Some extremely good, but simple, writing afterwards occurs where fragments of the themes are treated, with a florid bass; and there are many effective changes of key, the calmness of the concluding portion of the piece, with the triplet accompaniment, being in excellent contrast with the energetic passages which precede it. No person hearing this unambitious trifle would believe that Herr Wagner is its composer; but everybody must feel that it is the holiday-work of an artist.

A Dictionary of Music and Musicians (A.D. 1450-1878). By eminent writers, English and Foreign. With illustrations and woodcuts. Edited by George Grove, D.C.L.

[Macmillan and Co.]

To produce a reliable Biographical Dictionary of Musicians is by no means an easy task, but when to this is added an explanation of musical terms, with articles on the history of the art, on the science and practice of composition, and the nature and use of musical instruments, the difficulties accumulate to an extent which perhaps even the earnest and indefatigable editor of the work now before us has, in this early stage of his labours, scarcely yet fully realised. In his preface he says, "Every effort will be made to compress the articles as much as possible, consistent with their being intelligible and readable;" but herein, as it appears to us, lies a very sufficient reason why a Dictionary of Musicians and a Dictionary of Music should form separate works; for whilst the first should be a collection of interesting and well-digested biographies, the second should form a musical lexicon, the principal subjects in which should be treated of at length by the ablest authors. It is of course impossible to deliver judgment upon a single part of a work, considering that twelve quarterly parts—of about the same size, we presume—are found necessary to complete it; but, so far as we can pronounce upon the specimen before us, the plan laid down by the editor appears to be most satisfactorily followed out. A good staff of contributors has been secured; and, seeing that of necessity the space allowed them is perhaps unduly limited, they have ably and carefully performed the tasks allotted to them. As all the articles are signed, it would be invidious to mention any as particularly deserving of praise; but we may say, generally, that the subjects of most