

"The Nibelung's Ring". An Analysis of Richard Wagner's Trilogy. The Valkyrie (Continued)

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répertoire, which have proved more attractive perhaps than any others, not, certainly, because of their novelty—for that is past—but in no small degree because the burden of effect has not been suffered to fall entirely on the chief performers, due attention having been bestowed upon the *mise-en-scène* and the singing and grouping of the chorus. During the recent season "The Flying Dutchman" has been given by this company with a propriety and completeness of *ensemble* that could leave little for the composer himself to desire; and among other works which have been rendered with remarkable efficiency should be mentioned "Tannhäuser," "Rienzi," "Mignon," Balfe's "Moro" and "The Bohemian Girl," and Sir J. Benedict's "Lily of Killarney." The performances of "Lohengrin" were not equal to those of the season before last; but in other respects the members of the company have exhibited a great advance. Mr. Ludwig, in particular, has developed into a dramatic singer of the highest order. His *Vanderdecken* is one of the most impressive and poetical of operatic impersonations, while his rendering of the declamatory music of *Telramund* in "Lohengrin" abounds in fine qualities, among which is conspicuous the rare discrimination of his dramatic action. Excepting the especially noteworthy production of "The Flying Dutchman," it is in their performance of "Mignon" that the strength of Mr. Carl Rosa's troupe is most fully displayed. The libretto of M. Thomas's opera is very little superior to that of M. Gounod's "Faust," for MM. Carré and Barbier never took greater liberties nor played merrier pranks than they have done in these instances with Goethe's works. "Faust" has, of course, suffered more severely and lost immeasurably more than "Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship"; but the libretto of "Mignon" is scarcely of a nature to inspire enthusiasm, and its English translation, with the reprehensible fustian of its spoken dialogue, is even more depressing. In spite however of these drawbacks, this charming episode of Goethe's romance is given with so admirable an *esprit de corps* by the Carl Rosa company, that much of the spirit of the original work is retained, rendering the illusion far more complete and the whole performance of far higher dramatic excellence than the interpretations of this work on the Italian stage. Miss Gaylord's impersonation of *Mignon* is neither that of the Opéra-Comique nor that of the Italian Opera, both of which have their traditions which are usually carefully and conventionally followed; it is, on the other hand, one of such originality in conception as to amount almost to a creation. An operatic representation like this is necessarily of a very different degree of excellence from those of the old days of English Opera; but even when a modern English opera, like Sir J. Benedict's "Lily of Killarney," is considered, there is no need to fear for the future of English Opera. This work, which preserves so much of the simple melodic charm of the works of Shield and the old ballad-writers, attracted good houses last season, and, indeed, there is no reason outside the narrow limits of bigotry why this should not be so. If English Opera has never known a very robust and lengthy term of existence, it is because we were, as a nation, cut off from the large and vivifying influence of continental art, and it is only through the intimate and extended artistic intercourse of the present day that the vitalising force of more liberal views of the music-drama is now asserting itself here. It is to be hoped that Mr. Carl Rosa will be able next season to give us "The Veiled Prophet" of Mr. Villiers Stanford—that this work will prove the herald of a new order of things, and that native dramatic music will

be studied and encouraged here as much as it is in France and Italy. This is the only country in Europe where opera is still regarded as something exotic, and ours is the only literature in which it is almost universally treated in a spirit of mingled flippancy and unbelief. Much of this spirit of irreverence is due to the old and favourite assumption that anything in the shape of a libretto was good enough for musical treatment. Hence the degradation of the once honoured name of opera. With the complaint that opera had become degraded arises the question, when and by whom was the downward movement towards complete degeneracy detected? Gluck, Beethoven, and Weber—all three—made successful efforts towards its elevation and regeneration. The former, particularly, not only in his remarkably dramatic compositions, but in his writings and letters, shows a clear sense of the vastness of the unexplored future for the music-drama. There need be no fear that the coming composers of dramatic music in England will necessarily be dependent upon the form and structure of the Wagnerian operas, although they will be exponents of the so-called Wagnerian theories. For the chief of these theories—those essential to the highest development of the drama in music—were articles of faith with Gluck and Beethoven, and were with them the recognition of certain great fundamental truths, the unnecessarily clamorous announcement of which by the followers of Wagner alone has prevented their universal acceptance as truisms. The pamphleteering army, in the guise of pioneers, have scaled certain well-marked heights and taken possession of them in the name of Wagner, making them the headquarters of a vigorous propaganda and the base of operations in the future, apparently oblivious of the fact that these heights had been previously occupied by Gluck and others, and that Mozart was not unacquainted with them. But whatever the degree of influence to be exercised on English Opera in the future by the teaching and example of the great master of modern music-drama, there can be little doubt that through it a great stimulus is given to composers, and that a revival of English Opera is no longer to be regarded as visionary.

"THE NIBELUNG'S RING"

AN ANALYSIS OF RICHARD WAGNER'S TRILOGY

By F. CORDER.

THE VALKYRIE (*continued from page 190*).

THE third act is more stormy and terrible than ever. Here we have the famous Valkyries' Ride, a portion of which forms the Prelude. In this original and strange piece of descriptive music the wood instruments continually execute shakes, the violins descending arpeggios of great difficulty, while the brass has the exultant bounding melody, the bass instruments accompanying in an important motive always connected with riding:—



On a wild mountain-top eight Valkyries assemble, to ride together with their chosen heroes to Valhalla. They wait for the ninth, *Wotan's* favourite, *Brynhildr*.

Presently she is seen swiftly riding towards them with only a woman on her saddle. In terror and haste she comes to seek for refuge among her sisters. On hearing her unnecessarily full explanations the Valkyries are horrified at her disobedience and refuse to help. On her inquiring for a place of safety, one of the sisters mentions a dismal forest, shunned by *Wotan*, and haunted by *Fafnir*, who has changed himself into a dragon, in which form he lies over his treasure—an odd way of enjoying it. Then *Brynhildr* is seized with a noble resolution. She will heroically surrender herself to *Wotan's* wrath that *Sieglinde* may have time to escape. She says:

Fly then swiftly
and speed to the east!
Bravely determine
all trials to bear—
hunger and thirst,
thorns and hard ways
smile through all pain
while suffering pangs,
This only heed
and hold it ever:
the highest hero of worlds
hidest thou, oh wife,
in sheltering shrine.

then, handing her the broken sword which she picked up—

anon renewed
this sword shall he swing,
and now his name I declare—
"Siegfried"—victory's son!

To this important announcement, received with rapture by the poor fugitive, we have the first appearance of the "Hero Siegfried" motive—



uttered very distinctly by the horns, with a simple accompaniment of quaver chords above.

On examination this melody will be found to bear a decided and intentional resemblance to the "Curse"-motive, No. 21, for it is *Siegfried* who should release both gods and men from the fatal ban.

As a pendant to this, *Sieglinde* utters her gratitude in a phrase of ecstasy, which never reappears till *Brynhildr's* death, at the end of the whole work:—



Uttering blessings, the hapless woman hurries away, just as the voice of *Wotan* is heard through the tempest, calling on *Brynhildr* to stay. The Valkyries—who always sing in eight distinct parts—stand round *Brynhildr* in terror and pity to screen her, but *Wotan* marches on in a towering passion and summons the culprit to stand forth. Tremblingly she advances, and her stern father loads her with violent reproaches, finally casting her off with his curse:—

Wish-maid, art thou no more;
One time a Valkyrie, wert thou—
Remain henceforth
but merely thyself.
* * *
From heavenly clans
art thou excluded,
bann'd, degraded
from thy blessed degree.
* * *
And here, where we stand,
strikes thee my curse.
In powerless sleep
shalt thou be cast—
that man shall seize on the maid,
in whose way she is seen and awaked.

On the others shrieking with horror at such a frightful sentence, the furious god drives them away and bids them shun this mountain for evermore, under pain of a like doom. With wild cries the troop hurtles away on the wings of the storm, which then subsides, and the Valkyries' ride music gradually dies away into silence.

Now a pleading phrase—



appears, in combination with *Wotan's* grief-motive, No. 31, and soon fades away as *Brynhildr*, prostrate before her father, raises her head and—quite unaccompanied—ventures to plead humbly for forgiveness:—

Was it so shameful,
what I have done,
that for my deed I so shamefully am scourged?
Was't such dishonour,
what I have wrought,
that it should rob me of honour for aye?

A long scene ensues, in which all the previous events are recapitulated, and lengthy arguments entered into by both. In vain *Brynhildr* hints at the service she has done: that she has preserved the hero of the world, *Siegfried*, who shall make anew the sword. *Wotan* still holds to his decree.

At least, *Brynhildr* pleads, let a guarding fire be placed round her, that none but a brave man may ride through it to gain her. After some demur this is conceded, and then the god's repressed emotion breaks forth. Those who have heard this admirable scene in the concert-room will remember the outburst of passion with which it commences:—

Farewell my brave
and beautiful child!
Thou, once the life
and light of my heart!
farewell! farewell! farewell!

At the end of this speech, No. 36, comes in a full burst of the orchestra. The boon is granted, and the god's anger has passed away. The figure of the magic-sleep—



is then thundered out, and quickly sinks into a tranquil accompaniment to the lovely Farewell song of *Wotan*:—



which, after another sleep-motive, consisting of a series of chromatic chords, is tenderly repeated by the orchestra as *Wotan* imprints the kiss of sleep upon *Brynhildr's* brow and lays her under a spreading tree, shrined in her armour and shield. Then he advances to the centre of the stage and with his spear (No. 9) invokes the Fire-god *Loki* (No. 12) by striking on a stone. A stream of fire pours out and encircles the stage, swelling to a sea of flame. Here all the bright treble instruments execute No. 12, the piccolo doing a variation above and the divided violins filling in with seething, hissing, *tremolando* passages, while bells and triangle seem like shooting

sparks. Then the restful figure No. 37 returns, and *Wotan* speaks the charm—

He who my spear
in spirit feareth
ne'er springs through this fiery bar!

while the hero-motive (34) uttered by all the brass, tells us that none but *Siegfried* is destined to accomplish this feat. The slumber phrase continues then monotonously to the end; *Wotan* turns sorrowfully away, often looking back, while his tender farewell strain emerges once more from the orchestral flood. As he disappears through the flames the curtain falls on this most impressive and poetical scene, ending the second part and rousing eager anticipations of the next day's drama.

SIEGFRIED.

THIS third section of the work is certainly unique from a dramatic point of view. There are only six characters in it, of which never more than two are on the stage at the same time. Yet few people will be disposed to call it tedious, though it lasts nearly six hours.

The Prelude to "*Siegfried*" begins with a pedal-point of forty-six bars on the drums. The hoard (18) and smiths' (15) motives form the subject-matter, together with an odd phrase which will be found already in "*Rhine-gold*" (Scene 3) representing *Mimi's* cogitation:—



We are introduced to a cave in a forest, where *Mimi* sits hammering in great discouragement at a sword for the wild boy whom he has brought up. He knows that *Siegfried* is destined to slay the dragon *Fafnir*, and would fain make him a weapon, but the most cunning of smiths cannot satisfy the youth's requirements. Presently *Siegfried* dashes in, driving a bear which he has caught and bridled with a rope, to the great terror of *Mimi*. The following is a new motive typifying his exuberant wildness—a melody which he is accustomed to blow on his horn:—



He tries the new sword by hacking it on the anvil, and is furious at finding it fly to pieces. Here is the phrase of his anger, which pervades this scene:—



Mimi vainly tries to soothe his ill-temper—various forms of the smiths' figure always occur in *Mimi's* music—but *Siegfried* sulkily strikes from his hand the food he proffers, and will not believe in the genuineness of his protestations of love and coaxings. The youth demands to know who are his parents, for even his savage ignorance will not allow him to be longer imposed upon in this matter. His song, telling how he saw all birds and beasts enjoy love in some form, has a fine rugged poetry in it. It has a very sweet theme:—

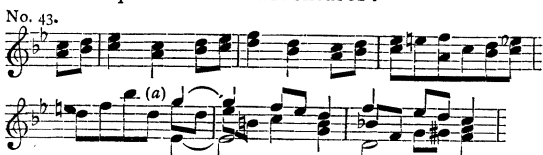


By dint of threats and shakings *Mimi* is forced into telling how he found the hapless *Sieglinde* in the

wood and gave her shelter; how she bore a son and died, and how all the pay her protector got was a broken sword, which he produces in corroboration of his tale. *Siegfried*, overjoyed at finding himself not bound to the hateful dwarf, commands him at once to forge this sword anew, that he may go forth to the world himself. He rushes off to the woods, away from his perplexed guardian, singing as he goes:—

As the fish fain
through the flood shoots,
as the finch flies
to a free shore,
far hence I'll flee,
flow like a stream:
with the wind o'er the woods
wafting away,
then, *Mimi*, ne'er will I return!

One phrase in this Song of Freedom (*a*) recurs in the "*Götterdämmerung*," when he leaves his love to wander in quest of fresh adventures:—



Now to the disconsolate dwarf, who knows himself unequal to his task, there comes a strange visitor. *Wotan* has taken to roam the world in the form of a Wanderer, looking out for help from his menacing doom. To a solemn theme for tubas, trombones, and horns—



he enters and greets *Mimi*. A rather long but undeniably interesting scene follows, simply to explain the events of the two previous dramas and refresh our memories with their thematic contents. *Wotan* stakes his head against *Mimi's*, each having to answer three questions propounded by the other. *Wotan's* last question is, "Who shall forge the sword with which *Siegfried* is to slay *Fafnir*?" and on the dwarf failing to guess, he supplies the answer himself as he departs:—

Hear, *Fafnir's* would-be undoer!
heed, thou fated dwarf:
none but who fear
hath never felt
maketh "*Needful*" new.
Thy head so wise
henceforth guard well!
I leave it forfeit to him
who has learnt not yet to fear.

Mimi sinks back behind his anvil in an ecstasy of terror, nervously dreading in the rustling of the trees and flitting of their shadows the approach of some ghostly enemy. The orchestra here seems to be trying its best to frighten him, rather causing than illustrating his terrors, combining various phrases of mischievous "*Loki*" music, while the dragon-motive booms out in the bass. The returning *Siegfried* breaks from the thicket, causing *Mimi* almost to faint with fright. Unable at first to give an account of himself, *Mimi* at last collects his wits and explains that he is anxious to teach *Siegfried* what fearing is. *Siegfried* cannot even be brought to understand the word, so *Mimi* promises that *Fafnir* shall teach him. This brings back the question of the sword, and the smith declaring himself unable to do anything with it, *Siegfried* determines to tackle the job himself. The figure of the first triplet in No. 40 is his "work"-motive, as he takes the broken sword-blade and,

setting it in the vice, files it to powder. He sings wild songs over his work, always with this refrain—



and having melted the steel-dust to an ingot, proceeds to forge a new blade, to the astonishment and awe of *Mimi*, who is racking his brain how to escape from this dilemma: if *Siegfried* is made to fear by *Fafnir* the dragon will not be killed nor the hoard and Ring gained; whereas, if he quails not *Mimi* himself will fall by his hand, according to the Wanderer's fiat. Suddenly a happy thought strikes him: he will make a poison-draught and give it to *Siegfried* under pretence of refreshing him directly after he has slain the dragon. His delight at this scheme finds vent in the following phrases—



which are ingeniously interwoven with the songs *Siegfried* continues to sing with increasing exuberance as his work approaches completion, until a most exciting climax is reached. *Siegfried* waves the completed sword in the air, and crying—

See, Mimi, thou smith!
So serveth Siegfried's sword!

dashes it upon the anvil, which it slices clean in half. As *Mimi* falls to the ground in terror, *Siegfried* brandishes his sword with shouts of joy, and the curtain falls.

The music of this and the following act, though very fine, and more flowing than that of the "Rhine-gold" and "Valkyrie," is still not the perfectly homogeneous musical stream that we get in the later works of the master. He is contented as yet with bringing in his motives unadorned and unaltered wherever they are wanted, and does not work them symphonically to any extent. We may make an exception in the case of the Nibelung smith-motive, which occurs in various combinations no less than 240 times during the course of this one act.

The second act shows us another and more gloomy part of the forest. A weird prelude, founded on various Nibelung-motives with *tremolo* accompaniments, prepares us for the presence of the evil genius *Alberic*. A very wicked theme, too, here plays an important part—the *Fafnir*-motive—



which will be seen to be founded on the giant's theme (No. 11). *Alberic*, waiting for him who shall slay *Fafnir*, is visited by the Wanderer, and a long colloquy ensues, without any other apparent object than to remind us of past events. The Wanderer,

half in jest, rouses up *Fafnir* and warns him of a coming foe, but he only yawns and says:—

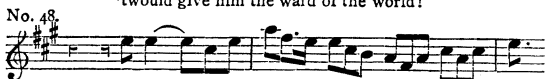
I lie in possession—
let me slumber!

The Wanderer wanders away, whither, a reminiscence of his farewell to *Brynhildr* tells us. *Alberic* resumes his secret watch, the day dawns and *Siegfried* enters, guided by *Mimi*, who leaves him in this place to learn the art of fearing.

Now ensues a most enchanting scene. Tired with his long night-march, *Siegfried* reclines under a linden-tree in the bright morning light, turning his thoughts on his unknown mother, while the orchestra, imitating the rustling of the woods, gives us a tender, melodious form of the *Sieglinde*'s sorrow-motive (28). Presently the voices of the birds attract the boy—pretty, warbling phrases for flute and clarinet. He cuts a reed pipe and vainly endeavours to imitate the notes, with the hope of learning the language. Failing in this, he blows a merry tune on his horn, comprising not only his own motive (No. 40), but—what would be impossible on a natural horn—the hero-motive (No. 34) as well. This wakens the dragon *Fafnir*, who crawls out to find who is the disturber of his peace. *Siegfried*, like the audience, is more inclined to laugh than be frightened at this object, and after some parley a rather comic combat ensues, ending, of course, in the death of *Fafnir*. The dragon's blood has spurted on *Siegfried*'s hand; it burns like fire. He carries his hand unconsciously to his mouth, when, at the first taste of the blood, he finds himself able to understand the songs of the birds above him. One sings:—

Hey! Siegfried doth hold
now the Nibelung's hoard!
O! he'll find the hoard
in the hole anon!

Were he the Tarnhelm to win
it would tide him through wonderful tasks;
but were he the Ring too to ravish
'twould give him the ward of the world!



The phrase to which this is sung is in 4-4 time, while the accompaniment is in 3-4. *Siegfried* obeys the voice of the bird, and investigates the dragon's lair. Meanwhile *Mimi* timidly returns, and is pounced upon by the still watching *Alberic*, the two quarrelling fiercely over the ownership of the treasure which *Siegfried* now holds. The return of that unconscious youth with the two coveted articles stops their wrangle, and *Mimi* pursues his intended plot. But again the friendly bird sings—

Hey! Siegfried doth hold
now the Helm and the Ring!
O trust not in Mimi,
the treacherous elf!
Heareth Siegfried but sharply
the shifty hypocrite's words:
what at heart he means
shall by Mimi be shown;
so booteth the taste of the blood—

and so all falls out. *Mimi* tries to wheedle *Siegfried*, but instead of the soft flatteries he thinks he is speaking, he informs him of all his villainous intentions. He offers the poisoned cup, and *Siegfried* lays him dead with one blow of his sword, whereupon a grim "Ha, ha, ha!" to the Nibelung phrase (No. 15) issues from the rocks where *Alberic* is hiding. Now *Siegfried*, after disposing of his two corpses, feels more keenly than ever his lonely condition. He appeals again to the friendly bird for a companion, and is answered:—

Hey! Siegfried has slain
now the sinister dwarf!
I wot for him now
a glorious wife,
In guarded fastness she sleeps,
fire doth emborder the spot:
o'erstepped he the blaze,
waked he the bride,
Brynhildr then would be his!

Whereupon fervid emotion seizes the youth:—



He is further told that none may waken the bride save he who knows not fear. Overjoyed, he follows the bird, which then flies before him to guide him on his way. This is the rather tame end of the second act.

In the music of the third act, written several years later on, a great change in style is perceptible. A general air of savage wildness pervades the music, sometimes, but not always, in admirable keeping with the subject. A strange scene opens this act, preceded by a prelude, in which all the themes connected with *Wotan* are employed, accompanied by the "riding" figure (the bass of No. 33). In a wild, mountainous region the Wanderer comes to conjure up, by his spells, the form of the mysterious *Erda*. He seeks for advice in his sore perplexity, but she can give him none. But one new phrase, that of the "world's heirdom"—



occurs in this scene, and the orchestra almost seems to go mad over its complex web of old themes in new forms. On *Siegfried* appearing in the distance, the Wanderer dismisses *Erda*, and goes to meet him. *Siegfried* is, as usual, fearless and impudent, and when, after a long parley, the Wanderer attempts to bar his way (why, is hardly clear), *Siegfried* strikes the spear from his grasp and hews it in pieces. Then *Wotan* knows that his power has indeed departed, and, quietly picking up his broken sceptre, he vanishes away to Valhalla, there to wait the Dusk of the Gods, when *Loki*, the treacherous, shall fling fire into the hall and consume all the Æsir.

Meanwhile *Siegfried* is opposed by *Loki*'s barrier of flame, and boldly dashes into it, winding his horn. The melody is ingeniously worked up with the fire (12) and hero (34) motives into a glowing fire-symphony, while the scene is being changed behind the smoke and flame which fill the stage. Gradually all subsides, with delicate sweeps of the harp and faint allusions to the motives connected with *Brynhildr*. A remarkable wandering passage of twenty-four bars for first violins alone here attracts notice as the smoke clears, and we see the same scene as at the end of "The Valkyrie"—a rocky mountain, with *Brynhildr* lying asleep in her armour. Sweet and alluring strains accompany *Siegfried*'s exploration of this place—*Wotan*'s farewell (38) and a seductive melody belonging to *Fricka* in the "Rhinegold" appearing, amongst others, *Siegfried*'s astonishment and emotion at beholding a woman for the first time are very finely portrayed: he releases the sleeper from her encumbering armour, and finally, after a lengthy hesitation, presses a kiss on her lips.

Now comes the opportunity for Wagner to write a love-scene surpassing all his previous attempts. The only question is whether he has not rather overdone the thing—if one may dare to criticise this overwhelming scene. *Brynhildr* wakes and sits erect, greeting the sun and world in almost the words of the Edda:—

Hail, ye gods all!
Hail, thou world!
Hail ye glories of nature!
Unknt is now my sleep;
I stand awake:
Siegfried 'tis
who unwinds the spell!

Then the two burst into a rapturous duet on this phrase—



followed by this, which has for a bass the first bar of the *Siegfried*-motive (34)—



and these themes are worked out at great length, combined with many old ones. *Siegfried*, ardent and impetuous, seeks to embrace *Brynhildr*, but the Valkyrie, as strange to love as he, is terrified to death at his approach. She tenderly pleads—to those two lovely phrases on which the "*Siegfried Idyll*" is founded—to be left an immortal, unsullied being:—

O *Siegfried*! *Siegfried*!
light of my soul!
Love—thyself
and leave me in peace:
destroy not thy faithful slave.



But *Siegfried* gradually coaxes away her fears until, in a wild, hysterical rapture, she gives herself to him. (A very different scene, this, to the dignified chapter in the Saga which corresponds to it!) One last theme then enters on a long dominant pedal:—



The voices join again in a duet as the climax approaches. We then find that No. 55 is merely a new double counterpoint to No. 51. No. 50 and 52 also combine, and with a piling-up of the excitement which no words can describe, all these themes unite in one grand climax, and the drama is ended.

THE DUSK OF THE GODS.

It is needless to say that in this final portion of the work both music and drama soar higher than ever towards the sublime. As regards the drama, Wagner has here, at any rate, grasped the utmost dramatic possibilities of the old legend and given us a really noble tragedy.

The Prologue to "The Dusk of the Gods" opens, after a very few bars, with the same scene as that we have just left, the Valkyrie's rock. It is night, all is shrouded in gloom, and the three *Nornir* (Fates) sit weaving a golden rope and telling of the previously shown events. The motive (No. 2 in the minor) of their mother *Erda* is of course prominent, and also a slightly different form of the same theme, representing the "world's ash-tree" (*Yggdrasil*) from which, as they tell, *Wotan*'s spear was cut. Weird, wandering arpeggio passages on the muted strings also typify the three *Nornir* themselves. At the end of the scene their rope breaks, the curse (21) sounds menacingly out, and they sink into the earth, their duties for ever over.

Now the day dawns, and as the sun rises *Brynhildr* and *Siegfried* emerge from a rocky cave, which is her chamber. Some time has passed, for he is in full armour, and on the point of leaving her to seek fresh exploits. Each has a fresh motive, hers tender and womanly—

No. 56.



and his a dignified and heroic version of his former theme (No. 40):—

No. 57.



There is also a love-phrase of great and melancholy beauty:—

No. 58.



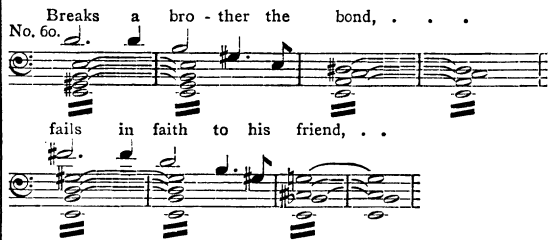
The parting scene of the lovers is, in our opinion, finer than the love-scene at the end of "*Siegfried*," being less wild and tempestuous. Towards the end the phrase 43a appears, typifying *Siegfried's* love of wandering. The hero leaves his noble mistress, having given her his famous Ring as a love-gift and received in return her horse Grani. As he becomes lost to sight in the distance, the orchestra takes up the melody of his horn and works it up into a most vigorous movement, with a mischievous phrase of *Loki's*, showing us that evil is at hand. The Rhine-music and complaint of the Rhine-nymphs follow, and the movement fades away at its conclusion with menacing Nibelung-motives. By this time the scene has been changed, and we are introduced to the Hall of the Gibichungs on the Rhine, where a great chieftain, *Gunther*, lives with *Hagen*, his half-brother, and *Gudrun*, his sister. The following rhythmical accent will be found everywhere in the music of these Gibichungs:—

No. 59.



From the dialogue of this scene it appears that *Gunther* is desirous of augmenting his fame by illustrious marriages for himself and sister. *Hagen* (who, it should here be explained, is the son of *Alberic*, his mother having been won by gold, not love) gives cunning advice on this point. He tells of *Brynhildr*, the fairest woman on earth, waiting in her fire-girt home for a wooer brave enough to ride the flame; and then he tells *Gudrun* of *Siegfried*, the dragon-killer, the mightiest of heroes. It is decided that should *Siegfried* ever wander this way, *Gudrun* shall give him a magic draught of forgetfulness to drown all other interests from his mind and chain him to her side. Scarcely has this resolution been made when *Siegfried's* horn is heard in the distance, and he comes down the Rhine in a boat, horse and all. He lands, makes friends with the Gibichungs, is given a cup of wine, which he drains to the memory of *Brynhildr*, and straightway forgets her very existence.

He hears of *Gunther's* ambition with scarce a momentary recollection of her to whom it refers, and, finally, even offers to win the bride in place of *Gunther*, who, in spite of his courage, feels doubtful about the fire. The two heroes go through the ceremony of taking the oath of blood-brotherhood, enunciating their vow in the form of a duet. Dropping blood from their arms into a cup of wine, they sing:—



Breaks a bro - ther the bond, . . .
fails in faith to his friend, . . .
What in drops we here
haste to drink of,
in streams be strained from his heart,
forfeit stern to his friend.

After this, *Siegfried*, taking affectionate leave of *Gudrun*, whose hand is to be the reward of his success, sails back to the Valkyrie's rock with *Gunther*. *Hagen*, left alone to guard the hall, has a gloomy soliloquy. He is plotting to gain the fatal Ring. His music merges into a long and sinister interlude, while the scene changes once more back to the Valkyrie's rock. Here we find *Brynhildr* sitting, contemplating and kissing her Ring, while echoes of former love-themes (54) follow the current of her thoughts. A sudden gust of thunderstorm arises and brings her an unexpected visitor, *Valtrauta*, one of her sister Valkyries. *Brynhildr's* delighted greetings and caresses are scarcely returned, for the visitor is in sore trouble. She tells a long story of the sad state of things in Valhalla. *Wotan* came home recently with his broken spear, silently directed his heroes to cut down the world's ash-tree and stack it in faggots round Valhalla:—

No. 61.



Then, assembling all the gods and heroes in the great hall, he has sat ever since, patiently awaiting his doom. *Valtrauta* continues:—

Unto his breast
weeping I press'd me;
his brooding then broke—
and his thoughts turned, *Brynhildr*, to thee!

Here we have a touching reminiscence of the Farewell song (38).

Deep sighs he uttered,
closed his eyelids,
as were he dreaming,
receded these words:
"The day the Rhine's three daughters
gain by surrender the Ring,
from the curse's load
released are gods and men."
I thought upon 't,
and then I threaded,
'mid throngs dumb-stricken,
thence from his side;
in haste on my horse
I threw me astride,
and straightway thrust towards thee.
Then, my sister,
I supplicate—
do what thou may'st,
if but thou hast mind—
ward off the woe of the gods!

Now observe the dramatic retribution! *Brynhildr*, having been cast off by *Wotan* and degraded to a mere mortal, is unmoved by this tale of woe, and would sooner die a thousand deaths than part with

her Ring. After vain entreaties *Valtrauta* is obliged to fly home unsuccessful and distressed. *Brynhildr*, again alone, is surprised to find her protecting fire rising from its normal distant glow to an approaching wall of flame. Some one is trying to cross it! She hears *Siegfried's* horn, and rapturously starts up to greet her hero. Horror! It is a stranger who confronts her! *Siegfried*, wearing the Tarnhelm, which gives him *Gunther's* form, advances and claims her for his bride. Filled with horror, she resists, the Ring giving her supernatural strength; a terrific struggle takes place, but on *Brynhildr* imprudently revealing in her triumph the secret of her strength, *Siegfried* contrives to tear the Ring from her finger. Her power gone, she helplessly yields, and goes to her rocky chamber as he bids her. Then, drawing his sword, *Siegfried* says:—

Now, Needful, witness thou
that chaste my wooing is.
To seal my oath to my brother,
separate me from his bride.

and as he follows *Brynhildr* the curtain falls.

The second act brings us to exciting events, and the music is wild and strange beyond all description. It opens with a demoniac prelude on Nibelung-motives, with a characteristic accompaniment of syncopated chords. We are then shown the exterior of the Gibichungs' hall, with *Hagen* sitting asleep, and *Alberic* visiting him in a dream, to stir up his hatred against all who stand between him and the Ring. *Hagen* assures his elfin parent of his faithfulness, and as *Alberic's* figure melts away the day dawns over the Rhine—a beautiful scenic effect. *Siegfried*, transported hither by the Tarnhelm, appears before *Hagen*, wakes him, and tells him of his success. The bridal pair are now descending the river in the boat, and he has heralded them to see that all is prepared for the double wedding. He goes into the hall with *Guðrun*, leaving *Hagen* to summon all the vassals and people of the tribe from the country round. This gathering of the clans is very weird. *Hagen* blows a huge cow-horn (in C), and is answered by others in the distance (in D and D flat), making together a very nice cacophony. Against a perpetual tremolo C of the violas and cellos the following call of the Gibichungs is heard:—



It incessantly pervades the remainder of this act, the F sharp bass against the chord of C being a characteristic, but we dare not say a pleasing, feature. The men rush wildly on by twos and threes, thinking it an alarm, but as *Hagen* gradually explains his summons, their wild cries change to mirth, and they sing a sort of joyous chorus, but it is a very savage kind of merriment. *Hagen* is still giving directions when the expected couple arrive, and they land amid the wild acclamations of the people. Now comes the situation in the drama. The two bridal pairs meet, and *Brynhildr* comes face to face with *Siegfried*, with *Guðrun* on his arm. A crash from the orchestra and a long-sustained chord is followed here by a sinister motive, which now clings to the wronged and tortured *Brynhildr*:—

No. 63.



A violent and terribly dramatic scene ensues; *Brynhildr* is bewildered by seeing on *Siegfried's* finger the

Ring which *Gunther*, as she thinks, took from her. *Hagen*, for his own reasons, throws the attempted explanations into hopeless confusion, and it only appears to the people that *Brynhildr* is accusing *Siegfried* of having abused his situation of proxy-bridegroom. *Siegfried*, on being urged, takes an oath on *Hagen's* spear that he has been true to his brother. The maddened *Brynhildr* pushes him aside, and swears on the same spear that he has broken his oath, but no one believes her save *Gunther*.

The marriage revellers retire to feast within the hall, leaving three gloomy figures brooding apart: *Brynhildr*, anguished and longing for vengeance; *Gunther*, overcome by shame and sorrow; and the evil *Hagen*, who now stirs up these two to wipe out their injuries by *Siegfried's* death. *Brynhildr*, ere she became his, gave all her spells and runes to the work of making him invulnerable, but she now remembers that she set no spell on his back, knowing that he would never turn it to a foe. The hint is not lost on *Hagen*, and he proposes that *Siegfried* shall go a-hunting to-morrow, and be brought home struck by a boar. A form of No. 63, with the menacing Nibelung-motive above, is never absent throughout this scene, ending the act, after a strange trio of the three conspirators, as the wedding revellers again come out and force *Gunther* and *Brynhildr* to join their procession.

The third act affords a charming relief from these sounds of woe and bitterness. A short prelude tells us that *Siegfried* (34) and the Gibichungs (62) are hunting by the Rhine (2). We are then shown a lovely river valley. The Rhine-nymphs are swimming about on the stream and singing a most exquisite trio, in somewhat the same character as their former music. A portion of the melody runs thus:—

No. 64.



Siegfried, who has strayed from his party in pursuit of a bear, accosts these nymphs in search of information. A lively, if rather coarse, scene ensues. The nymphs try to coax the Ring from him, but failing, they warn him that it will prove his death. Still less does this move him, and they leave him at last with jeers and laughter. The hunting party now appear, blowing their discordant horn-call (62). They greet the truant, and then make a mid-day bivouac. To cheer up his brother *Gunther*, who is sad and downcast (remorseful for the evil deed he is countenancing), *Siegfried* offers to tell the story of his youthful days. *Hagen* maliciously squeezes the juice of an herb into a horn of wine and offers it to *Siegfried* to clear his memory. Then the hero sits down and gives us a delightful *resumé* of the preceding drama, telling all about *Mimi*, the bird and the dragon. But now for the first time *Gunther* hears how *Brynhildr* was really *Siegfried's* bride, and he discovers *Hagen's* deceit. As he starts up in surprise, *Hagen* quickly cries to *Siegfried*—

Canst read the speech
of those ravens aright?—

as *Wotan's* two messengers rise croaking from a bush to fly to their master and warn him that all is over. *Siegfried* turns to look at the birds, and *Hagen* stabs him in the back. Terrible and sublime is the death of the hero. Exquisite reminiscences of *Brynhildr's* awaking fill his dying thoughts—he is once more himself and her true love. The awed ejaculations of the men, "*Hagen, what hast thou done?*" and a solemn phrase which forms the characteristic of the succeeding dirge—



combine to make up an unsurpassable picture of solemn dread. *Hagen* has gloomily stalked away over the hills, and the men now follow him with the dead hero's body; the moon shines down upon the retreating funeral procession as the orchestra breaks into the sublime Funeral March, as it is called. This is merely a string of phrases connected with *Siegfried*, welded into one whole by the aid of our last quotation (65) in Wagner's own inimitable manner. During this piece the scene changes to the Hall of the Gibichungs, as in Act I. *Gudrun* is waiting by night for the return of the hunting party. Presently *Hagen* comes in, rousing up all the house with wild hysterical glee to welcome home the hunters. The people come in with torches and lanterns, to meet only the funeral procession of *Siegfried*. Woe and terror prevail. *Hagen* boldly defends his deed, and asserts his "booty-right" on the dead man by endeavouring to seize the fatal ring. *Gunther* struggles with him for it and is killed. The confusion is only quelled by the solemn entry of *Brynhildr*, who has been down to the river and taken counsel of the Rhine-nymphs. She says:—

Children I heard
crying to their mother
to say that milk has been spilled;
but nought I marked
a fitting lament
for the highest hero's fate.

She bids the men to build a funeral pyre by the river's brink (No. 61), and meanwhile sings a noble funeral song, in the course of which all the principal motives of the four dramas appear, No. 35 forming the exalted climax. It may here be noticed that some thirty lines of the libretto have been judiciously cut out by the composer in setting to the music, on account of too great length. Yet these are some of the best lines in the whole poem. *Brynhildr* mounts her horse Grani, and leaps him (at least the stage direction says so) into the fire, where she is consumed with her lover. The Rhine swells up, and washes over the fire embers; the nymphs, floating on it, regain their Ring at last; and *Hagen*, wildly attempting its rescue, is pulled down into the flood and drowned. During this the brass instruments intone the Valhalla theme (8) against the undulating Rhine arpeggios of the strings, while the Rhine-nymphs' motive (3) and *Brynhildr*'s blessing (35) soar above. Louder swells the Valhalla march as a red glow appears on the distant horizon, and in the sky is seen a vision of the gods sitting round their hall, and being burnt up by *Loki*'s fire. The connection between the destruction of *Siegfried* and *Brynhildr* and that of Valhalla is by no means clear, but it rounds off the tragedy by leaving no one of the characters alive, except perhaps *Gudrun*.

The exigences of space have prevented us from doing more than give an account of the incidents, and a list of the principal motives of this remarkable work. We can only advise those interested in it to read through the vocal scores, and disentangle for themselves, by the light of our remarks, the mazes of the music, of which no verbal description, however full, can give much idea. The "Nibelung's Ring" differs from "Tristan" and the "Mastersingers" in the fact that while nearly all the motives or component musical phrases are diatonic, their treatment is chromatic. On the first production of the work many critics, both German and English, while admitting its great beauties, found so much to repro-

bate in both music and libretto, that their summing-up was: "This work is a magnificent mistake." But what avails the voice of the critic when it contradicts the public judgment? The "Nibelung's Ring" is now being played at every German opera-house which can afford to mount it, and the success is invariable and overwhelming. In the face of this the critic has only to hold his peace.

HEINRICH HOFMANN

By JOSEPH BENNETT.

(Concluded from page 185.)

As a composer of instrumental music Hofmann is most widely known through his works for the pianoforte, which have attained great popularity on account of reasons not less legitimate than obvious. Hofmann is no pretender to a position in advance of his time, nor does he aim to satisfy his ambition by figuring as the god of a small sect. He writes for the masses, without descending to the level of common taste. The character of his pieces, their scope and form of expression, even the very designations they bear, bespeak a desire for "the greatest happiness of the greatest number." Yet there is no attempt to win the suffrages of the "many-headed" by appeals to vulgar fancies. However broadly laid out to catch votes, Hofmann's pianoforte pieces are invariably those of a refined as well as an accomplished musician. The composer is, therefore, doing a specially good work in art. It is all very well for gifted men to labour in the upper spheres. There can be no higher aim than the creation of music which exemplifies the sublimest powers of the human mind, and no higher reward than its acceptance by those who comprehend all the greatness of such an achievement. But if nothing more were done than this what would become of the art? We need men that, like Hofmann and others, are willing to take upon themselves a less lofty though not less useful mission, and, by appealing to the people in language understood of them, to cultivate their tastes to a perception of higher and higher good.

From the first, Hofmann has shown himself awake to the favour enjoyed by national and characteristic music, with which the catalogue of his pieces for the pianoforte abounds. It is interesting to observe how almost exclusively he has confined himself, in the gratification of this taste, to nationalities—as Russia and Hungary—the music of which is chiefly remarkable for strangeness of rhythm, or—as Scandinavia—for strongly marked and erratic forms of melody. This preference may be either the result of inclination or policy, but in any case it illustrates one of the tendencies of the present musical age, which, in its restless search after novelty, leaves no hole unexplored, no corner unswept. The great masters of eighty years ago were satisfied to introduce a national melody once or twice in a lifetime, by way of compliment—as Beethoven—or for the indulgence of a whim—as Haydn. But now we have symphonies and concertos named after a half-dozen countries, while in the lower walks of Art classic themes and rhythms are being elbowed out by strong and uncouth barbarians. There is nothing in all this to excite alarm, but rather hope. The ancient hero who, struck to the earth, sprang up with renewed strength gained from the Great Mother, is a type of many things, and every form of Art would become effete were it not invigorated at intervals by inoculation with the sap of nature in its untutored naturalness. Thus it is emphatically with music, and when, in course of time, culture has taken off the roughness of