

## GERMAN OPERA SINCE RICHARD WAGNER

By EDGAR ISTELE

*If some one lays the score of a newly composed opera before me for criticism, that means nothing to me. We are now far enough advanced in the arts of harmonisation, augmented triads, instrumentation and the general pattern of modern composition to know beforehand that one is not likely to stumble over special crudities or stupid blunders. But I ask for the text-book. That tells me whether or no the man has the sense of drama in poetry and it fairly indicates to me his talent for dramatic music if he succeeded in finding the proper musical expression for his text, which happens very rarely indeed.*

—Wagner to Hans v. Wolzogen.

IT was in June of last year, shortly after the opening of the International Congress of Music at the Sorbonne in Paris, that the editor of this magazine informed some of his European friends of his plans. Sitting in the Luxembourg Gardens, then so ideally peaceful, we spoke of subjects possibly to be dealt with. While he was chatting with Mr. Calvocoressi about Moussorgsky, I was pondering the question which he had asked me: "Has German opera a future?" At that moment I should have given an answer essentially different from the one I am now inclined to give. The absolute change in our circumstances and cultural conditions which the war brought with it over night, will also make itself keenly felt in the regions of Art. Only he can possibly give an unbiased answer to such a question who is as free from chauvinism as the writer of this article believes himself to be, with his leaning—for reasons of descent, birth and manner of living—toward Latin culture in the manner of Mozart and Gluck, who manifested a fondness for it without ceasing to be Germans.

I was until lately a supporter of Nietzsche's doctrine: "Il faut méditerraniser la musique"; and even now I hope for deliverance from the "spirit of heaviness" which burdens the "perspiring" modern German music, by means of the genius of the Latin race. The reader will understand what I mean if I again refer to Mozart and Gluck, with a glance at the last works of Verdi who, though coming from another direction, from across the Alps, strove toward the same goal. Until recently, I was inclined to look upon Wagner from Nietzsche's standpoint and I thought

with him that, if there was anything more to be expected of music, there must come a musician, "daring, fine, mischievous, southern and super-healthy enough to take revenge in an immortal way on such music." Today, after the gigantic manifestation of German spirit, which to our astonishment has shown itself not only in the tremendous, impulsive military force, but even more so in the wonderful social organization of this nation—today I believe in an entirely different artistic future for Germany. My "belief in the German Spirit," as Wagner calls it in the dedication of his *Trilogy*, has grown enormously; let us hope that this spirit will not become so presumptuous as to underestimate all good foreign things, whereas it formerly overestimated inferior foreign products. However, no forecast of the future of German opera is possible unless we be prepared by a survey of its immediate past, from the death of Richard Wagner to the present day.

At the time of Richard Wagner's death in Venice (Feb. 13, 1883) the German stage was in a curious condition. Though his works had not prevailed everywhere, there could be no doubt as to their ultimate triumph, and the last opponents of the living master bowed willingly before the dead genius, whose gigantic spirit even after death defeated all resistance, entered the enemy's land, and finally stormed the fortress of his antagonist Meyerbeer. On the other hand, certain negative forces soon asserted themselves. Wagner's works had swept everything that was not in conformity with them from the German stage, and many popular old operas, the delight of our fathers and grandfathers, disappeared, never to rise again, in the bottomless depths of the theatre archives. For a long time it seemed as though the Wagner-flood would entirely destroy the old operatic "Kultur", but when the first storm was past it became evident that all good and genuine works, above all the masterpieces of Mozart, Beethoven, Weber, and Marschner had held their ground. Gluck also, whose opera reform was in many telling points a forerunner of the Wagnerian revolution, continued to hold his own with his best operas, and the works of the theatre expert Lortzing, harmless, simple "musical comedies"<sup>1</sup> even enjoyed a growing popularity for the very reason that they in no way competed with the mighty dramas of the Master of Bayreuth. In fact, if one did not wish to entirely abandon a useful, everyday activity in favor of Wagner festivals, it became necessary to make provision for an increase of "reper-

<sup>1</sup>I have used for the untranslatable German terms "Singspiel," "Spieloper," "musikalisches Lustspiel" and "Komische Oper," the English words "musical comedy" and "comic opera" in their *original* sense, i. e. comic musical works of *higher* quality.

toire-opera." Owing to the eliminating powers of Wagner's dramas, the repertoire threatened to lapse into monotony. For that very reason the best foreign operas, such as the light operas of Auber and Boieldieu, reasserted themselves. Nor was it possible for even a Wagner to completely dislodge his greatest rival, Meyerbeer. Lortzing, that shrewd old stage-hand, had once said in a talk with Lobe: "How long do you think a theatre could exist, were it only to perform creations of the highest genius? You could not construct a perfectly flawless half-year's repertoire."

Perceiving this state of affairs, many composers tried at the time of and after Wagner to produce useful repertoire-operas, without attempting to invade the sphere of genius. They merely endeavored to combine the "good new" which Wagner had brought with what was fit to live of the "good old," thus bringing about what we may call "compromise-operas." It lies in the nature of every compromise that it should cause a certain amount of dissatisfaction to both parties concerned. So it was in this case. These operas were too "old-fashioned" for the Wagnerians and altogether too "Wagnerian" for the partisans of the older operas. What this impossible style-mixture would lead to was clear: in due time these works sank into oblivion.

Let us select from the host of compromise-composers the two most talented, Edmund Kretzschmer (1830-1908) and Karl Goldmark (1830-1915), who both owe their great success to their clever librettist Salomon Mosenthal (1821-77). It was he who had helped Otto Nicolai to his only lasting opera-success, and Mosenthal must certainly be considered the only talented German imitator of Meyerbeer's librettist Scribe. His text-book for Kretzschmer's most successful opera "Die Folkunger" (1874,<sup>1</sup> therefore during Wagner's lifetime) was originally intended for Meyerbeer and many scenes therein remind one of his "Prophet." The reason that the opera is no longer given, after having been for a few years a drawing card for most German theatres, does not lie with the uncommonly effective libretto (dealing with an old Swedish legend), but with Kretzschmer's lack of a sufficient musical personality. Though he had once accidentally scored a success, his art was not capable of further development. Much superior to him is Goldmark, of Hungarian-Jewish descent, who won a triumph in 1875 with his "Königin von Saba" (libretto also by Mosenthal). This seemed in every way well deserved, since the subject suited Goldmark's personality, and gave him such opportunity to depict the Orient in glowing

<sup>1</sup> The dates of works refer to the first performance.

colors that this work can be looked upon without doubt as the best typically Jewish production. Even today, if elaborately mounted, it is a brilliant "number" in most large opera-houses. Nevertheless the tones of this music fade before the much older, but fresher "Huguenots." Which simply goes to show that a sympathetic talent such as Goldmark's should not compete with the genius of a Meyerbeer. The subsequent works of Goldmark, with the exception of "Das Heimchen am Herd" (1896) taken from Dickens (libretto by Willner), which appeared when the fairy-opera craze was at its height, and achieved a great one-season success, proved that though Goldmark was a clever musician, he was by no means a born dramatist.

Kretzschmer and Goldmark stood and fell with the theatre-technic of their librettist Mosenthal. He also helped Anton Rubinstein (1829-1894), the renowned pianist, to win laurels for a short time with his operas "Maccabäer" (1875) and "Moses" (1887), which handled Jewish subjects, like the "Königin von Saba." The passing vogue of these German operas and others, which were at first produced in Russian, was largely due to the reputation of Rubinstein as a piano-virtuoso. His best work is and remains "Der Dämon" (Petersburg, 1875, libretto by Wiskotoff). Ignaz Brüll (1846-1907), like Goldmark and Rubinstein, a Jewish composer, also owes his only great operatic success to Mosenthal. "Das Goldene Kreuz" (1875), a very charming two-act musical comedy, in text and music slightly influenced by French models, belongs to a type of art of harmless gaiety which has unfortunately found no successor. This work, which is a useful repertoire-opera, will continue to be produced, as it offers thankful rôles, and many of its pretty, singable melodies are very popular. Other operas of his did not fare well. The "Goldene Kreuz" is not a compromise-opera, inasmuch as it entirely ignores Wagner's existence, and leans decidedly toward Auber and Boieldieu. However, Brüll's other works were of a typically compromise character. This character—largely due to obvious Wagnerian influence—made itself unpleasantly felt in the operas of Heinrich Zöllner (born 1854), who pleased the public greatly with his somewhat shortened, but otherwise literal setting to music of Hauptmann's drama "Die Versunkene Glocke" (1899). His patriotic operas "Der Ueberfall" (taken from Wildenbruch), and "Bei Sedan" (taken from Zola, 1895) have gained actuality through the war, but will probably soon be forgotten.

In the domain of the sentimental "popular opera" (Volksoper)—whose best type is represented by Lortzing's "Undine"—Victor

Nessler (1841-90) a compromise-composer of the first water, attained a great success which, however, spoke very badly for the taste of the average German public. He did this by exploiting Scheffel's epic "Der Trompeter von Säkkingen" (1884, a year after Wagner's death!). He owed this huge success partly to the clever libretto by Rudolf Bunge, who understood how to flatter the public's lower instincts, and partly to the indestructible cornet solo "Behüt dich Gott," which continues to be played in every beer-hall. Nessler's music is about the most worthless which the German stage had been obliged to endure for years, and is even today not entirely rooted out in the provincial towns. Wagner once said jokingly: "It is incredible what the German public will swallow as beautiful, if it has subscribed for it." Further attempts of Nessler to produce German "popular opera" revealed his absolute inability to do so, especially as compared with Lortzing.

While all these composers remained conscious of their insignificance in comparison with the gigantic genius of Wagner, August Bungert (born 1846), who reminds one of the inflated frog in the fable, tried to surpass Wagner's festival idea with a six-day cycle "Homerische Welt" (1898-1903). This work, though magnificently mounted and produced at the Dresden court opera, turned out to be nothing but a Wagner parody, with a very noticeable admixture of Meyerbeer. Despite tremendous press agitation the projected Bungert festival-house on the Rhine was not built, and he is today almost entirely forgotten.

Whereas cautious natures with the help of compromise and eclecticism tried to avoid Wagner, and by composing effective libretti secured at least a fleeting success, the greater part of the rising German generation surrendered unconditionally to Wagner. This attitude was certainly more sympathetic than the other, but artistically it led the composer at first into a blind-alley, where he was obliged to retrace his steps. However, the best and most talented without exception took this route. They lost many valuable years in this way, but at any rate extended their view by boldly climbing the mountain instead of walking around it. At first one saw in Wagner only the dramatist of "pathos," of the "Ring," "Tristan" and "Parsifal." The works up to and including "Lohengrin" were left as "used up" for the "eclectics" to imitate, and one can rest assured that Kretzschmer and Goldmark had diligently studied their Wagner up to "Lohengrin." Also the older Weimar circle which had surrounded Liszt till the failure of the "Barbier von Bagdad" (1858) and were not so infected with the "Tristan" chromatics as the later Wagnerians, stayed in a

moderate zone. Cornelius himself, the most important dramatist of this circle, equally talented both as poet and musician, did not go beyond "Lohengrin" and was at least as strongly influenced by Berlioz as he was by Wagner. I shall later speak of his best work, the "Barbier von Bagdad," the only original opera produced by one of the Wagner-Liszt circle, and the ancestor of the modern German musical comedy.

Here let it be remarked that Cornelius' serious operas, "Der Cid" (1865) and "Gunlöd" (a fragment, arranged and completed several times by others since 1891), poetically and musically but slightly influenced by "Tristan," indicate his efforts to develop an original style along the lines of "Lohengrin." He realized fully the unfavorable workings of Wagner's influence, when he said in 1861, after a deep study of "Tristan":

It was a question of *entirely* or *not at all* . . . I am happily through with my study of it; it finally became a kind of sickness; it seemed a nightmare. But as I cannot help being an optimist, I do not regret having passed through it. I believe that our time lends itself least of all to one-sided absorption in our own creations without looking to the left or right. Wagner's "Tristan" is without doubt the most important dramatic work since Gluck; I maintain one must know it thoroughly in order to gauge the height of the age. To take a sip is dangerous and leads to eclecticism. I made the work my own. I now understand fully my attitude in regard to it, and return with rejuvenated powers to my own work after this mental ducking.

His work, however, did not lead into the "Tristan" sphere, where terrible dangers lay concealed for the imitator; dangers which Cornelius plainly saw, but into which the next generation rushed blindly. Thus Cornelius could follow in the footsteps of Wagner without losing his own individuality. He rightly called his "Cid" the

only opera since Lohengrin which, though influenced by it, presents itself both in verse and music as a capable, healthy piece of work and yet remains within the limits of the possible (as Wagner put it, still disclosing the old opera pattern)—in short it is the estimable work of a talent on a soil prepared for cultivation by a genius.

However, none of the other Liszt pupils possessed this noble knowledge of self, which plainly felt the distance between genius and talent. Had any one of them dared to enter the lists against Wagner, it would have been Cornelius, but this modest composer well knew his limitations. As a poet he was more distinguished than Wagner, but unfortunately he did not appreciate the much superior dramatic genius of the master, and thus he failed to realize that his "Cid", though poetically and musically very beautiful,

was not very effective theatrically. He disdained to follow the well-meant advice of Wagner, who pointed out the weak parts of the work in a most able manner. Cornelius, despite his friendship with the master, often expressed the opinion that Wagner would prove very dangerous for his followers, and he saw as in a vision the future German ideal beyond Wagner. He wrote shortly after the first performance of "Tristan":

Wagner's hot, stifing spirit was to me only in the nature of a delusive light. *My art shall be cheerful and simple; it shall make people happy; it shall be rooted in the soil of the Folk and of standard morals; it shall not set up the vanity of sickly, erotic love and of self in God's place.*

And a little later:

The ideal ripens in me to turn from storming the heavens to the discovery of a suitable art-work for our era within the judiciously selected and fortified border-lines of territory conquered by Wagner in his best period.

But this was not to be. Cornelius died, and with him died the hope of further development of an individual German musical comedy and of refined popular opera ("Volksoper").

In the first place Wagner's delusive spirit continued to lure the coming generation onward to ruin. He himself was not in the least to blame for this disastrous development. He often warned but was not heeded. His art was like the legendary magnetic mountain which destroyed the stability of everything that approached it. Seeing his earnest warning disregarded, Wagner treated the matter with good-natured satire in his paper, "About Opera writing and composing":

It would almost seem that the study of opera-composing is progressing secretly outside of the conservatories; whoever then happens to drift into my "course" should be on his guard! Yet, less the study of my works than their success appears to have piloted into my "course" many who remained uninformed at the conservatories. Nobody has hazier ideas of the nature of this course than I, perhaps because for a while partiality was shown to medieval subjects for text-books; the Edda, too, and the bleak North in general were utilized as mines for good texts. However, not merely the choice and character of the opera libretto seemed to be of importance for the, after all, "new" course, but also sundry other things, particularly the composition of the entire text ("durchcomponiren") and still more the uninterrupted meddling of the orchestra in the affairs of the singers. Therein one proceeded with all the more liberality, since in recent times very much "course" had made its appearance in instrumentation, harmonization and modulation of orchestral compositions. . . Pretty melodies are done for

and without "new ideas," probably very little of originality will be accomplished in that direction. Therefore I advise the followers of the New-Course<sup>1</sup> to look sharply for good ideas in subject, plot and characters of the text-books."

But Wagner's words were thrown to the winds, and he himself, in closing his article, says with resignation that his advice will "be of no use." Instead of acquiring stage knowledge, and looking upon a human, soul moving libretto shaped for the stage as a principal necessity, composers pursued the phantom of un-heard of instrumental effects, hid deficient ability under a national veneer, raved in "leitmotives," and thus at last drove the German public into the arms of the Italian "verismo," where, despite dagger and poison, it found more enjoyment than in the dreary society of German "Kapellmeister" operas.

Others belonging to Liszt's circle tried to compose operas; good musicians, but poor dramatists, like Bronsart, Lassen, Dräseke, Raff and Alexander Ritter, none of whom prospered. Their works were produced by friendly conductors, and were generally buried with honors by a well-disposed public without having been able to gain a footing on the stage. The most interesting man of this coterie was Alexander Ritter (1833-96), who represented to a certain degree the type of Wagnerian poet-composer without original inspiration and whose historical position is important only for the reason that it was he who turned Richard Strauss from Mendelssohnian conservatism to Wagner-Liszt "progressiveness." Ritter, an amiable character, rose above the average neither as a poet nor as a musician, and his two one-act works "Der faule Hans" (1895) and "Wem die Krone" are interesting solely as forerunners of Humperdinck. Ritter was the first Wagnerian who tried to set "fairy-tale poetry" in Wagner's style to music.

While those forming the older circle around Liszt, men like Cornelius and Ritter, possessed beyond their knowledge of music a good measure of general culture, which enabled them to grasp the entire greatness of Wagner, the musical generation following became more and more shallow. Wagner's peculiarities were slavishly copied and his scores were studied with an eye for technical niceties only. Out of these scraps of Wagnerian musical language a musical broth was concocted with the help of alliterating poets which became more and more distasteful to the public.

<sup>1</sup> Wagner's expression "die Neu-gerichteten" is a play on words and means at the same time "the just-executed."



Gradually Wagnerianism, which was linked with Pangermanism, Antisemitism and Vegetarianism by the only true and faithful of the "Bayreuther Blätter", fell into disrepute. They copied Wagner's manners and habits, and believed to have discovered at last the ardently desired secret of his creative genius. These good people did not realize that in Wagner merits and demerits grew organically and inseparably out of his whole powerful personality, and that every great genius conceals in himself the greatest contradictions. Here are a few examples: Wagner was in theory a vegetarian, in practice a meat-eater; he was anti-semitic, but despite this fact let none other than Hermann Levi, the son of a rabbi, conduct the first performance of "Parsifal"; he was a Pangermanist, yet drew the most effective part of his technic from Latin models; he was a democrat, yet the friend of a king; he pretended to be a new herald of Christianity, but was, until shortly before he began work on "Parsifal," what Goethe called a "decided non-Christian"; he was in his art a radical innovator, a revolutionist, but nevertheless preached fervently the gospel of Bach, Beethoven and Mozart; indeed, as Hans v. Wolzogen certifies, he pointed out none other than Mendelssohn as a model of a discreet, fine and artistic spirit, in contrast to the modern strivers after effect. Wagner was thus a man of great contradictions, but comprehensible enough if one considered his entire personality. His musical disciples did not grasp this fact; they saw but the trees, not the forest, and in busying themselves with Nibelungen-tuba and alliteration they overlooked the real great aim of the master.

So it happened that none of these composing conductors, conservatory professors and critics arrived at more than an exceedingly external copy of Wagner's peculiarities. Those also among the young Wagnerians, who later pursued an independent course, began in this way. It suffices to cast a glance at d'Albert's opera "Gernot" (libretto by Kastrop, 1897), Weingartner's "Sakuntala" (1884) and "Malawika" (1886), both after poems by himself, Kienzl's "Urvasi" (1886, poem by himself) and Richard Strauss's first opera, "Guntram" (1894), in order to appreciate the degree of delusion arrived at even by composers who later showed originality—in the first years of their development by way of Wagnerian "redemption-opera," with northern or Indian subjects. Typical of this sort of inferior talent that never deviates from the wrong track of Wagnerian imitation is Max Schillings (born 1868). Very much overestimated by a limited circle, his stage-works "Ingwelde" (1894) and "Der Pfeifertag" (1899) were still-born,

owing to their impossible libretti by Sporck. Schilling's last opera, "Der Moloch" (1906), libretto by Gerh user, proves his total inability as a dramatic composer.

By far the most talented Wagnerian musician is Hans Pfitzner (born 1869), who was proclaimed (by a loud rather than a convincing propaganda) the only true successor of Wagner. Indeed, he has been hailed as the only genius among present-day composers. Such awe-inspiring proclamations have never yet been confirmed by future generations. Moreover, there lurk in them two great dangers for those whom they most concern. It generally happens that auto-suggestion creates in the *musicus laureatus* who sees himself through the incense of his friends, a mystical notion of his divine rights. On the other hand his contemporaries, who are expected to fall on their knees and worship, will challenge above all else his right to the title of "high priest." It then often comes to light that the new prophet claims much more than he is entitled to. So also as regards Pfitzner. This dramatist, whose works are spoken of more often than they are performed, has up to his forty-sixth year completed only two operas, "Der arme Heinrich" (1896) and "Die Rose vom Liebesgarten" (1901), both libretti by James Grun. (Wagner had in the same space of time finished nine works, including "Tristan"!)

Of these two works the first (a redemption-opera like "Parsifal" and "Tristan"), is a most minute Wagner imitation. To be sure, from the purely musical point of view it shows an interesting development of Wagner's tone-language. The second work, musically more original, and often of a captivating charm, is however not much more than a brilliant promise of what the future will bring forth. This promise has not yet been fulfilled; for his opera "Palestrina," though announced some years ago, has not yet put in an appearance. Both the afore-mentioned works are unable to hold the stage on account of their libretti. The story of the "Arme Heinrich" is one of the most distressing and sombre which the German stage has produced, and this impression is deepened by Pfitzner's gloomy composition. "Die Rose vom Liebesgarten," on the other hand, suffers from bloodless symbolism and downright helpless dramatic construction. It is too bad that such an eminent musician as Pfitzner should waste his powers in the vain effort to gain a lasting success on the stage. Perhaps his love for the stage is altogether unfortunate: his songs and chamber-music stamp him a refined neo-romantic, and they indicate that his success lies in the same sphere as that of Schumann. Indeed, many of Pfitzner's peculiarities remind one of Schumann, whose only stage-work, too, was a woe-begotten child.

The great, lasting opera success which all the above mentioned composers so warmly desired but never attained, was achieved suddenly in 1893 (ten years after Wagner's death), by a sympathetic Wagnerian master of almost forty summers, Engelbert Humperdinck (born 1854), who had up to that time lived in retirement and whom poor health unfortunately has ever since prevented from revealing his full powers.

He became world-famous with his fairy-opera "Hänsel und Gretel" (libretto by his sister Adelheid Wette), after having with great difficulty at last succeeded in getting his work produced. The cause of this great success lay in the combination of a series of fortunate circumstances, but that does not in the least lessen the merits of the work. The opera was unlike most of the tone-dramas in Wagner's style in this, that it was not the result of puzzled-out theories, but a mere product of chance. Humperdinck's sister had dramatized the well-known fairy-tale for her children, and requested him to write music for it. The work, for which he wrote popular airs, pleased the obliging brother to such an extent that he turned it into a full-fledged opera. Thus this charming score, which has delighted young and old for many years, especially at Christmas time, grew out of half-improvised children's music. The success of the unassuming work would no doubt have been confined within narrower limits had it not appeared at a moment when it could create a sensation. The one-act, blood-curdling Italian dagger-opera of the "Verismo" was done for, also the helpless scores of the Wagnerians, who bored the public with warmed-over "Tristan" and "Parsifal" phrases. Germany awaited a new German master; one who would, somewhat in the manner of Cornelius, further cultivate, with originality, the best that Wagner had accomplished. The law of contrast demanded that something very simple should follow the overladen scores of the Wagnerians and the brutalities of the modern Italians and their German imitators. Humperdinck brought this about, and the thankful nation hailed him as a messenger from heaven.

If we of the present day, with our entirely different esthetic aims, survey this opera, we perceive without belittling its great merits, such as freshness, and sympathetic warmth of feeling, that Humperdinck, a child of his time, did not make use of an appropriate technic for such a work. The polyphony of his score—it reminds one of Wagner's "Siegfried," the first German fairy-opera—is much too complicated for the simple subject, which could have been more suitably handled after the fashion of

Lortzing. This undeveloped sense of style, in "Hänsel und Gretel" somewhat concealed by the many merits of the work, was thrown sharply and unpleasantly into relief in the following operas, none of which in any degree repeated the success of the first. The two fairy-operas "Die sieben Geislein" (1897) and "Dornröschen" (1902), in unpretentious form adopted the same principle as "Hänsel und Gretel," but disappointed entirely. The music to Ernst Rosmer's sham fairy-tale "Die Königskinder" (1898), with its unbearable melodramatic recitation—the pitch of the spoken dialogue is fixed in musical notes—appeared to be at its best a rather curious experiment. Still, the music on the whole, as for example in the really delightful entre-acts, is a great improvement on that of "Hänsel und Gretel."

Humperdinck himself came to see the impossibility of this mongrel product, and rewrote the "Königskinder" as an opera (1910), thereby rescuing it for the stage. Nevertheless the success did not come up to expectations, probably because the pseudo-poetry of Frau Bernstein-Porges (pseudonym: Ernst Rosmer) even when arousing the musical sympathy of the composer, could not be raised to the height of genuine poetry. (I shall speak later of his only comic opera, "Die Heirat wider Willen"). His most recent work, the musical comedy "Die Marketenderin" (1914, libretto by Robert Misch) was written for a special occasion. Of little importance in itself, this patriotic piece has suddenly acquired a certain actuality on account of the European war.

Humperdinck has always devoted himself to an extensive pedagogic activity, and though he has not really founded a "school" in the dramatic field he counts many distinguished young composers among his pupils. The most important of these, Leo Blech (born 1871), developed under Humperdinck's direction from an amateur, as his first "verismo" operas show him to have been, into a technically finished master. His fairy-operas "Alpenkönig und Menschenfeind" (1904) and "Aschenbrüdel" (1905, libretti by Batka), conceived very much after the fashion of Humperdinck, were less successful than his one-act operas, of which I shall speak later.

Humperdinck was also the teacher of Richard Wagner's son Siegfried (born 1869), whom his father had wished to become an architect, but who suddenly turned to composing, and has ever since devoted himself entirely to "popular" fairy-opera. Siegfried Wagner, like his father, writes his own libretti; but, needless to say, has not his father's musical or poetical gifts. He began with an opera "Der Bärenhäuter" (1899), which was carefully worked out, and showed some talent. Largely on account of its clever

second act, this work was very successful. It was frequently performed, not only because the composer bore a renowned name, but because it really was the promising effort of a dramatic talent. The combination of two Grimm fairy-tales (which originated with Richard Wagner) made a good subject. The clever handling of the absorbing plot, together with the fresh, though often banal and unoriginal music, awakened hopes for the future. These his later works failed to fulfill. His next opera "Herzog Wildfang" (1901) was a decided failure, as were the many other works which followed one another at regular intervals of two years. They were not able to convince one of Siegfried's possession of higher creative powers. Musically they held themselves on an estimable level. The libretti, in awful German, generally were a compound of legend, sprinkled with the diabolical. With the help of far-fetched humor they tried to be popular, yet bored the public, and their unclear symbolical plots are only now and then enlivened by a good scenic idea. Their titles are: "Der Kobold" (1904), "Bruder Lustig" (1905), "Sternengebot" (1908), "Banadietrich" (1910), "Schwarzschwanenreich" (1911) and "Sonnenflammen" (1913). Not one of these works could hold the stage.

Siegfried Wagner's ambition is to create a species of merry, "popular opera" of light character, which would fill the breach in the repertoire caused by the appearance of Richard Wagner. This goal is most decidedly worth the labor of the noblest. That Siegfried sights, but is not able to reach the "promised land" is undoubtedly the tragedy of his life. Others, more gifted, preceded or followed him with better results. The Austrian, Wilhelm Kienzl (born 1857), after unsuccessful attempts in the domain of the music drama, hit the mark with his musical play "Der Evangelimann" (1895, libretto by himself). A happily chosen Viennese subject, taken from an emotional criminal novel, thrillingly and effectively put on the stage, determined its success. The music, especially in the admirable "bowling" scene, showed decided talent for comic opera. This, however, Kienzl unfortunately did not further develop. In its sentimental parts the "Evangelimann" threatened to follow Nessler's example. In his "Don Quixote" (1898, libretto by himself) he aimed higher, but did not make good. His following work "Der Kuhreigen" (1911, libretto by Batka) met with public favor on account of its very effective subject taken from the French Revolution; but, probably because the subject had not been well handled dramatically, the success of the opera could in no way be compared with that of his "Evangelimann." This work will long continue to be loved as

a real "popular" opera, and points plainly to the fact that the effectiveness of the libretto does more than the quality of the music to keep an opera alive.

Very similar to those of Kienzl are the operas of the poet-composer Julius Bittner (born 1874), also an Austrian. Though his works show greater originality he has not yet attained the success of his more fortunate countryman. Bittner, by profession an Imperial judge, is an amateur in the best sense of the word. Not that he is not a musical expert or a complete master of technic, but that his self-criticism is not pronounced enough for him to separate his good from his inferior ideas and thus keep his work on a uniform level. Bittner now and then has eminently good ideas; a scene like his peasant revolt in the "Bergsee" (1901) belongs to the best that has been seen on the German stage since Wagner, but this is offset by so many weak scenes that the good vanishes without telling effect. This is true also of his best work, "Der Musikant" (1910), with a splendid subject and with charming "popular" scenes. This would have been one of our finest comic operas had the plot been allowed to remain in that sphere. Bittner, however, forcibly twisted it into a serious opera, thus immediately falling into the trap of unfruitful Wagnerianism. That he who could have been for Austria in music what Schönherr is in drama, is now unfortunately following the wrong course is shown by his last work, the singularly disjointed "Abenteurer" (1913).

The better type of popular opera comes almost exclusively from Austria. Such works as Heuberger's (1850-1914) "Barfüssele" (1905, libretto by Leon, taken from Auerbach) and Karl Weis's (born 1862) "Der polnische Jude" (libretto by Batka, taken from Erckmann-Chatrion) owed their great but temporary success mainly to the effectiveness of their subjects. In Heuberger's work it was the leaning toward sentimental operetta, in Weis's the gruesome element, that held the public. No earlier or later operas written by these composers were successful. Of the German writers of well-known popular operas there remain to be mentioned Karl v. Kaskel (born 1866) and Alfred Kaiser (born 1872). Kaskel's melodic inspiration was not effective enough to win great popularity; hence his operas "Die Bettlerin vom Pont des Arts" (1899, taken from Hauff) and "Der Gefangene der Zarin" (1911, libretto by Rudoif Lothar) soon disappeared from the repertoire. Rougher and more banal is Alfred Kaiser, a German-Belgian, who began with French operas and attained a huge but not lasting success with his "Stella Maris" (1911), after having translated his French libretto into German. With his "hundred-year opera"

"Theodor Körner" (1913) he has just now, like Humperdinck with his "Marketenderin," struck a most propitious juncture in theatrical affairs in consequence of the patriotic boom. Other composers of popular opera like Cyrill Kistler (1848-1907) and Hans Sommer (born 1837) despite painstaking work remained essentially dilettanti; and it is hardly worth while to mention the countless other aspirants to fame in this line.

A few years after the first performance of "Hänsel und Gretel" there appeared Ludwig Thuille (1861-1907). Though resembling Humperdinck in many ways he did not in the least degree attain the success of this composer with his fairy-opera "Lobetanz," (libretto by Bierbaum, 1898) which in the grotesque and gruesome dungeon scene struck a new musical note. Thuille, a Tyrolean by birth, but of Latin descent, happily combined German humor and fairy-romance with Gallic esprit. With the help of this combination he could have composed masterly comic operas, had he only been more fortunate in the choice of his libretti. His destiny, however, coupled him with "poets" who had neither an idea of what the stage required, nor an understanding of Thuille's particular gifts; and the composer, who died young, wasted his charming music on ineffective texts. His first opera, the prize-winner "Theuerdank" (1897, libretto by Alexander Ritter under the pseudonym of W. Ehm) was soon forgotten. It was followed by "Lobetanz," whose sickeningly sweet poetry was for a time made palatable by Thuille's music, strongly resembling that of "Rheingold" and "Siegfried," but fresh, warm, and sympathetic. While "Lobetanz" was produced in many theatres, his "Gugeline" (1901, libretto by Bierbaum), a poor copy of the "Lobetanz" subject, did not command the same attention, although the peculiarly characteristic (and in the third act really wonderful) music belongs to the finest which has been written since Wagner.

Thuille, during the last ten years of his life, understood much better than Humperdinck how to found a "school". Not that his pupils are united in their artistic aims, but all of them have rigidly followed a course which leads to painstaking musical technic. The often used expression "Munich school" may practically be identified with the private pupils of Thuille, among whom a few have made good names for themselves as symphonic composers. Of all pupils of Thuille the most successful up to this time in the dramatic line has been the poet-composer W. von Waltershausen (born 1880). After his first work, a comic opera "Else Klapperzehen," he achieved a huge success with his musical tragedy "Oberst

Chabert" (after Balzac, 1912). This was due above all to an excellent libretto of the most clever structure, which rolled itself off with the speed of a cinematograph, and fortunately compelled the composer to sketch instead of painting minute details. Though Waltershausen has not as yet shown himself to be a musician of great importance, one must watch his development as a dramatist with interest. This is quite the reverse in the case of another Thuille pupil, Walter Braunfels (born 1882), clearly influenced by Berlioz and Pfitzner. He aroused great interest as a musician with his two operas, the merry "Prinzess Brambilla" (from E. T. A. Hoffmann, 1909) and the serious "Ulenspiegel" (from de Coster, 1913) but the libretti, written by himself, could not interest the public. Braunfels has an excessive fondness for making music for music's sake without due consideration for the requirements of the stage, and he therefore cannot be looked upon as a born dramatist. Alongside of Waltershausen and Braunfels, as third South-German composer of the Thuille school, the writer of this article, Edgar Istel (born 1880), takes the liberty of mentioning himself. He has followed the course of Cornelius with his two operas "Der fahrende Schüler" (1906, from Cervantes) and "Des Tribunals Gebot" (1914, from Halm), both with libretti by himself.

Spiritually akin to Thuille is Friedrich Klose (born 1862), a South-German of Austrian descent. His only opera, the 'dramatic symphony' "Ilsebill" (libretto by Hugo Hoffmann, 1903) belongs to the fairy-opera breed. The characterization is as unfortunate as the form chosen. His one act, lengthened by superfluous episodes, lasts almost three entire hours, and contains many lightning changes of scene! Were it possible to shorten the work at least by an hour, so that the public could retain its interest, it would be a wonderful and really effective fairy-opera, modeled without doubt after Wagner's "Rheingold." The dramatic construction of this work, except for its length, is admirable; the unoriginal alliterative language of the book does not too greatly bother one, and the music belongs to the best and most beautiful which has been written up to the present day. The harmless Grimm fairy-tale is here used as symbol of the insatiable greed of power, which hurls back to nonentity those who sacrilegiously desire to rival God. The powerful dramatic climax synchronizes with the musical; the orchestra, beginning with the simplest string-quartet, gradually draws in the wind-instruments and finally, massed together, summons its entire strength to depict Ilsebill's luck and final end.



Curiously enough the followers of Wagner attached themselves almost entirely to the pathos ("Pathetik") in Wagner; the eclectics held on to the works up to "Lohengrin," the hyper-Wagnerians devoted themselves to the "Ring," "Tristan" and "Parsifal," while the fairy-loving musicians preferred to move in the sphere of "Rheingold" and the first two acts of "Siegfried." The fact that Wagner had also written a musical comedy, "Die Meistersinger," which he himself called his "masterpiece," was hardly taken notice of by these all too fervent apostles. In their eyes it was of much greater importance to redeem the world than to free it through gaiety. Incidentally let it be remarked that it is decidedly more difficult to write a comic opera than a tragic opera, since the tragical element can be simulated much more easily than the comical, which demands an uninterrupted flow of inspiration.

It is significant that the first musician of the Wagner circle to hit upon the idea of applying Wagner's principles to a comic opera was Peter Cornelius. And what is still more significant, he did so fully ten years before the first performance of the "Meistersinger," with whose first rough sketch (still ten years earlier) he could not possibly have been acquainted. The "Barbier von Bagdad" (poem from the "Arabian Nights"), conceived in the year 1855, and produced under Liszt in Weimar in 1858, is therefore the first modern German comic opera, hailing as a drama from Wagner, but musically from Berlioz' "Benvenuto Cellini." Cornelius' "Barbier" fell victim to an intrigue directed against Liszt and disappeared for almost 30 years from the repertoire, until young Felix Mottl took pity on the work, which he most enthusiastically admired. He produced it in 1884. Mottl did not give it in its original form (first published in 1904) but in an adaptation made at the instigation of Liszt, consisting largely in an entirely new instrumentation. The propriety of this procedure has been very much questioned; here let it be said that Mottl, despite the best intentions, went decidedly too far. Instead of being satisfied with discreetly retouching Cornelius' orchestration where that was necessary, he created a score which placed the work esthetically and historically in a position to which it laid no claim. Mottl forcibly emphasized (with an instrumentation entirely founded on Wagner's principles) the harmonic and dramatic relationship to Wagner which undoubtedly existed but was after all rather slight. In reality, the original score resembled in style much more the German musical comedy and the French *opéra comique*. It is a fine, delicate musical comedy and, when given in a small house, delights as does a charming genre-picture.

It is *not* a brilliant painting on a large canvas, as the adaptation would have it appear. Whether or not this fine "Cabinet-Stück" will lose in effect if given in large opera-houses which demand stronger accents, and whether or not the triumphant instrumentation of Mottl will there sound more appropriate, is not for me to predict. On the other hand, the case of Cornelius' "Barbier" shows that one of the principal problems of comic opera is the problem of the *locals*. As long as we have only huge houses calculated for grand opera, it is impossible to hope for a further development of the *intime* art of comic opera. Without question there is an urgent need of smaller opera-houses in order to cultivate the masterpieces, for instance, of Mozart. Only a few cities have such theatres, the most beautiful being the old rococo Residenz-Theater in Munich.

The historical importance of Cornelius' "Barbier" rests above all on the fact that he, with the clairvoyance of genius, anticipated forms used later on by Wagner in his "Meistersinger." Cornelius fully recognized that wit and fun in a comic opera will be ineffective unless the music runs along smoothly. He therefore laid stress, and agreeably so, on a blending of demands musical and dramatic and thus with his unaffected lyrics could remain true to the natural bent of his talent. The wonderful final canon of the second act, whose peer in counterpoint is to be found only in the powerful street-fight fugato in the second act of the "Meistersinger," shows what complicated counterpoint forms Cornelius dared to call into service for the dramatic idea. Thus Cornelius' "Barbier" and the "Meistersinger," each in its own way, are the culminating points of comic opera in Germany. The "Meistersinger" holds a unique position as comedy of the highest type, but the vital line of development went forth from Cornelius rather than from Wagner.

Hermann Götz (1840-76), who was not at all influenced by Cornelius and very little by Wagner—the "Meistersinger" he maintained "almost not to have known"—created in 1874 his comic opera "Der Widerspenstigen Zähmung" (taken from Shakespeare by J. V. Widmann, 1874). The fate of this work offers a pendant to that of Cornelius' "Barbier"; it, too, was always praised by the connoisseurs, but was even less frequently performed than the "Barbier." Cornelius once complained that in his work the "slap-bang humor" and the farcical roughness which catch the masses were lacking. Götz and his eminent librettist were given to such things even less than Cornelius, whose finely polished humor will always remain, as the Germans put it, "Caviar

für's Volk." Götz's work, written during physical and psychical suffering, appeal more as the lovable smile of a delicately strung personality than like the "Barbier," as the whimsical fancy of an artist bubbling over with cheerfulness. And nevertheless it is a real comedy. The plot unfolds itself without detriment to the rights of music; and the music proceeds without delaying the plot. In place of Shakespeare's somewhat rough early farce, Widmann's libretto offers a comedy refined by the radiant power of music. Katharina acknowledges herself vanquished by her love, not conquered by Petruchio's physical power. For its proper appreciation this work, almost more than the "Barbier," demands to be approached with searching love from the musical point of view. It never dazzles, not even the orchestration, which is very discreetly handled, always remaining within reasonable limits and never overcharged, yet worked out in finest detail. It will perhaps become a model for the furtherance of a proper style for musical comedy.

How this style, so warmly desired both by the public and the younger musical generation, must be attained, none other than the highly gifted song composer Hugo Wolf (1860-1903) explained in a letter to a friend who wished to compose a libretto entitled "Buddha":

The world has as yet hardly the faintest notion of the philosophical profundity which speaks, in the most unusual manner, out of the last works of Richard Wagner. And already something new must spring into existence, something which will give the people a fresh headache, *nota bene* by previously tested and hackneyed feats, when they are on all sides manifesting a need for comfortable pleasure, for friendly pictures, when every one is yearning to espy in the morose and brooding countenance of our time a hidden smile, an arch expression! Are we then no longer able to laugh heartily and to be merry; must we strew ashes on our head, put on sackcloth, and with melancholy, wrinkled foreheads go about preaching self-laceration? Let him who feels he must redeem the world do so; it will not trouble me. I for one will be merry, and when a hundred people laugh with me I shall be contented. I do not strive for "world-redeeming" jollity. For nothing less than for that. That we may safely deed over to the great geniuses. Wagner has in and through his art, already completed such a powerful work of redemption that we ought at last to delight in it; and not wish uselessly to storm a heaven which is already conquered. Instead, we should realize that it is much more sensible to hunt for a very comfortable place for ourselves therein. I should like to find such a comfortable place for myself, on no account in the desert with water, grasshoppers, and wild honey, but in the midst of a gay, "original" company, with strumming of guitars, sighs of love, moonlight nights, banquets, champagne and so forth; in short a comic opera, and what is more, a real ordinary comic

opera, without the gloomy world-redemption phantom of a philosopher like Schopenhauer in the background. To this and only to this end would I need a poet; and really, he would have to be a poet, a deucedly good one, too. Supply me with him and you will see that a dozen "Buddhas" will not be able to counterbalance such a real ordinary, but original little comic opera.

It is most unfortunate that Hugo Wolf could not reach this clearly perceived goal: the master of the Italian and Spanish song-books was so imbued with Wagner's music that he could not free himself from this dangerous influence. Even such a delicious subject as Alarçon's charming story "El sombrero de los tres picos," offered to him for a comic opera, did not put him on the track of the Latin style, which alone was suitable. Quite aside from the helplessly constructed libretto, his opera "Der Corregidor" (1896, book by Rosa Mayreder) suffers above all musically from a superabundance of polyphony. The voices are weighted down by the orchestra as if with lead. This opera was once called a "sort of Spanish Meistersinger," a comparison appropriate only inasmuch as the filigree counterpoint of the "Meistersinger" orchestra is here employed, quite contrary to the style which the opera required. A few years before Wolf's "Corregidor" Verdi's "Falstaff" had shown how such a subject would be handled musically by a born dramatist. Wolf, however, was no opera-genius, and even details of genius, above all the great jealousy scene in the third act, cannot hide the fact that the work is a failure.

One year after that by Wolf there appeared another comic opera with a Spanish subject, this time taken from Lope de Vega. I mean Anton Urspruch's (1850-1907) "Das unmöglichste von allem." The somewhat strange title explains itself by the moral of the piece: "The most impossible thing in the world is to keep watch over a woman who is in love." In this opera Urspruch attempted to combine the achievements of Wagner, Verdi, and Cornelius with Mozart's style, but consciously attached himself more to "Le nozze di Figaro" than to the "Meistersinger." Urspruch constructed with great cleverness an eminently dramatic, though not poetical, libretto in which he took the requirements of music into consideration with exquisite taste. Unfortunately the music, despite its fine points, is merely the product of a shrewd art-sense, and not of a musical nature bubbling over with originality. A subtle eclecticism predominates. Urspruch uses the Italian parlando style as the basis of his work. In contrast to Cornelius and Götz, who aimed more at the lyrical element, he emphasizes the

dramatic principle and he placed the musical dialogue in a position which it had never before occupied in modern opera. Mozart had, in the marvellous finales of "Figaro," put the dramatic scene as unit in place of the aria, and Urspruch applied this principle to his entire work. He created a number of great scenes, symphonically constructed according to the principle of contrast as in a symphony with first and second themes. Only in a few cases does one find Urspruch developing a special theme which would correspond to Wagner's "Leitmotiv." But, whereas the latter, in symbolizing the characters, possesses unlimited possibilities of psychological variation, Urspruch's device imposes this task on the *entire* theme, the vocal melody, to which the orchestra can serve only as a foil as otherwise the lively progress of the pointed dialogue would suffer or even vanish entirely. This method of procedure naturally demands that preference be given to strings and woodwind instruments for the accompaniment. Also in the handling of ensembles Urspruch used the "Figaro" finales as models. Indeed, he "went them one better" by using the most difficult contrapuntal forms without losing sight of the difference in character of his *dramatis personae*, not even where he employed a fugue with five themes!

Curiously different from Urspruch's opera, which has disappeared from the stage, is E. N. v. Reznicek's (born 1861) "Donna Diana" (1894), libretto by the composer after a Spanish comedy by Moreto. In the temperamental and spirited overture, Reznicek, who is of Bohemian descent, gave promise of becoming the long-sighed-for master of comic opera, but he did not keep the promise. The opera itself is a mixture of styles by a composer who surpassed Urspruch as a full-blooded musician but was very inferior to him in taste. If "Donna Diana" was moderately successful, his next opera "Till Eulenspiegel" (1902) failed completely.

Urspruch's work (1898) was followed one year later by a comic opera which to a certain extent pointed toward the realization of Cornelius' artistic aims. Eugen d'Albert (born 1864), the great pianist, after having vainly tried to carry off the honors in the realm of serious opera with several works ("Der Rubin, 1893; "Ghismonda," 1895, and "Gernot," 1897) attained finally a great if not lasting success with a one-act opera in the so-called "Biedermaier" style. I mean his "Die Abreise," with which he found the right style of modern conversation-opera. In this, even more than in Urspruch's opera, a light, playful dialogue prevails. Fine dialectics are never easy to render musically, especially not

if such a poem is used as that taken from the comedy of the now almost forgotten August v. Steigentesch (1774-1826). This was only slightly revised by Count Sporck, and originally was not intended for music at all, but d'Albert was a musician who, barring many reminiscences of Cornelius, understood how to stamp his work with the seal of originality. The music adapts itself with admirable finish to the subject, which is simple, merry and often borders on the piquant. The principal motives are comprehensible and melodious, with sharp, clear rhythms, and they excel in lightness and agility. They leave an impression of spontaneity, are never banal and are very interestingly devised notwithstanding their apparent simplicity. D'Albert's counterpoint is always light and graceful, exactly as the dialogue demands. His instrumentation is most admirable in its refined simplicity. It allows all the instruments of the orchestra to have their say, avoids massiveness and always remains lucid. Nevertheless the opera did not enjoy a lasting success. It is easy to see the reason: the plot is too flimsy, and has no "slap-bang" humor. D'Albert himself seems to have been of this opinion, since he used in his next comic one-act opera "Flauto solo" (1905, libretto by Hans v. Wolzogen) much coarser means. He thereby seemed to have hit the taste of the masses, but "Flauto solo" has long since disappeared from the repertoire. A musical anecdote, taken from the time when Frederick the Great was crown prince, could have been made a "Cabinet-Stück" of rococo humor, but it was cheaply and roughly cut up by the librettist and lowered almost to the level of operetta, where such a figure as the "Salon-Tiroler" Pepy most certainly belongs. D'Albert's music is on a par with the libretto, and of such inferior quality that one hardly recognizes the composer of the "Abreise." His next comic opera "Tragaldabas" (1907, libretto by Rudolf Lothar) did not meet with public approval and was a failure in every respect.

A few years earlier d'Albert's "Tiefland" (1903, libretto taken from Guimera by Rudolf Lothar) had attained a sensational success, comparable only with that won by the Italian "verismo" of the Puccini brand. "Tiefland" was at first hardly noticed and became a box-office opera only after a very clever theatrical revision. Its success still lasts and is attributable as much to the brutal but stirring plot as to the music. Though really unoriginal, it is very craftily made, and shows a deep knowledge of the means for effect which the Italian "verismo" employed. I cannot admire this work, which a well-known critic called "a noble mixture of Wagner's spirit with a 'verismo' subject" (!) and can see in it

only the result of speculation and exploitation of theatre-effects, but I must confess that d'Albert's mastery over the means employed compels my respect. It is no small task thus to grip and rivet the attention of the public, and certainly the style of this opera surpasses that of many imported foreign works which are advertised with trumpet blasts. Other serious operas of d'Albert—"Kain" (1900, by Bulthaupt), "Der Improvisator" (1900, by Kastrop), "Izeyl" (1909), "Die verschenkte Frau" (1912) and "Liebesketten" (1912; the libretto of the last three by Lothar)—attracted the attention neither of the public nor of the musicians, with perhaps the exception of "Kain," which possesses one stirring scene—where God's voice calls the murderer to account—and which is without doubt the noblest of these works.

For some time after the "Abreise" Leo Blech shared with d'Albert the distinction of being the most successful of comic opera composers. His Biedermaier-comedy "Versiegelt" (1908, text by Batka) followed a less successful little opera "Das war Ich" (1902, libretto by Batka). Both these works are based on the idea of reviving the old musical-comedy form. Unfortunately the contrast between the very simple plot and the heavy, "Meistersinger-like" music is such that the attempt must be considered a failure. Despite many witty ideas, Blech generally lacks lightness of touch and his restless orchestral polyphony smothers the points of the dialogue which it was here decidedly wrong to set entirely to music.

Humperdinck, unlike Blech, did not hesitate in his only comic opera "Die Heirat wider Willen" (1906, libretto taken from Dumas by Humperdinck's wife) to return to the spoken dialogue. The only explanation of this is that the style of the work represents a compromise between the French *opéra-comique* to which the subject belongs, the old German "Singspiel", and Wagner. Despite the masterful technic and the many single beauties contained in the opera, this compromise can hardly be considered fortunate. The only adequate manner of handling this quite frivolous comic subject (subsequently made serious) would have been possible, let us say, after the fashion of Auber. In such a case the spoken dialogue would have been less annoying. Though Humperdinck on the one hand shunned the consequences of Wagner's practices, he, on the other hand, followed them in using an overflow of orchestral polyphony which choked the words and melodies with all kinds of middle-voices in the orchestral accompaniment that are utterly without effect on the stage. Furthermore, episodes occur in the opera which are

calculated to be popular, but work frankly in the direction of operetta-hits, go beyond the limits of dignified opera and also interfere with the dramatic construction of the plot, which is very objectionable anyhow in this opera, especially in the third act. That Humperdinck's contemplative German style was not in keeping with such a frivolous Latin subject is shown in precisely the best musical parts, where his nature expands unhindered, and favors us with the fruits of most delicious tone-poetry. Needless to say, the opera has not remained in the current repertoire.

In contrast to the above mentioned composers of comic operas—with the exception of Urspruch, they all (more or less) hail from Wagner—the German-Italian Hermann Wolf, who (as the son of a German father and an Italian mother calls himself Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari, born 1876), won a huge and sensational success with comic operas, which have their root in the Italian opera-buffa, somewhat in the line Pergolese-Mozart-Rossini-Verdi. Though Wolf-Ferrari composes his works in Italian, he must be counted among the German composers, for the reasons that all his operas (with the exception of his first one, "Cenerentola," 1900) have been performed first in German, and that the composer, though for a time director of the conservatory at Venice, has not yet been able to achieve success in Italy.

The young maestro won renown with his "Neugierige Frauen" (1903, "Le donne curiose," libretto taken from Goldoni by Sugana). After having greatly overestimated the composer, who was at first hailed as "Mozart redivivus," the critics at last realized that Wolf-Ferrari was not an original, inventive genius, but only an eclecticist of unusual talent. This does not reduce the value of the services he has rendered in the development of modern comic opera. Wolf-Ferrari brings with him nothing particularly new, but he renews the old so cleverly that it could almost pass for something entirely new. In addition, he possesses real stage temperament, has sound, pretty and charming ideas, and, above all, he is the lucky possessor of the very rare sense of the refined comic in music. So it came to pass that his "Neugierige Frauen" was hailed with delight by critics and the public—they willingly overlooked in the first frenzy of enthusiasm the many weak points of this charming but immature work, which entirely disappeared after having been given nightly for some time. The unskilful libretto is principally to blame for the undeserved fate of this opera. The old-fashioned dramaturgy of Goldoni is much too closely followed, and the joke of the piece—the astonishment of the curious women, who suspect that in the club of their husbands



the worst excesses take place—is spoiled beforehand, as the club in its complete harmlessness is presented before our eyes at the raising of the curtain. The capital joke in this charming plot should have been the suspense of the public in regard to the secrets of the club, with the result that the “curious women” would have been joined by the “curious spectators.”

A further defect of Wolf-Ferrari's operas—there followed the much less successful “Vier Grobiane,” (with text taken from Goldoni by Pizzolato, 1906, and music in style greatly resembling that of “Die neugierigen Frauen”) and “Der Liebhaber als Arzt” (after Molière, by Golisciani, 1913)—is the lack of that kind of warm melody which flows from heart to heart. This fault does not lie so much with the composer, who struck these tones in his charming one-act “Susannens Geheimnis” (libretto after the French by Golisciani, 1909) as with the subjects. Their characters are like masquerade figures, do not rouse any human fellow-feeling and leave us cold as do marionettes. Wolf-Ferrari's operas taken from Goldoni and Molière, despite delightful musical details and their modern orchestral technic, appear essentially antiquated, and what Wagner said in his paper “About the writing and composing of Opera” holds good in this case: “It is now very difficult to create ‘new’ music for theatre ‘figures.’ It is probable that Mozart has exhausted the music for such dramatic masquerades.

. . . Those who believed themselves to be his followers, bungled and bored.” It cannot justly be said of Wolf-Ferrari that he bungles. On the contrary, his technic is masterly; but that a little tediousness is mixed in with his delicate ideas, and that his works can be looked upon as a passing craze, while Mozart's heart-warming tones will brave the storms of centuries, is certain.

It is not so with “Susannens Geheimnis”: here a different spirit envelops us, here we feel that the composer is not only playing, but that he is giving life, as it were, to a personal experience. This little work, like d'Albert's “Abreise,” with only three rôles (one, the man servant, a mute—a charming idea), absorbs our interest much more than the “Abreise” and should be counted among the lasting possessions of the German stage. The way in which “Susannens Geheimnis” (her cigarette, which the jealous husband imagines to be that of a lover) gradually discloses itself, is most charming and the music, very singable and well adapted to sprightly acting, is the most delightful in comic opera since Verdi's “Falstaff,” which is saying a good deal. That Wolf-Ferrari once allowed himself to be caught in the nets of the worst kind of Puccini “verismo” (“Der Schmuck der Madonna,”

libretto by Zangarini and Golisciani, 1908) should not be held up against him. If he succeeds in securing other libretti of the rank of his one-act gem and in abandoning the masquerade-music which the plays of Molière and Goldoni called forth, he should prove to be the man who will develop the comic opera (to be sure, first-rate singers are a *sine qua non*) in the style of Mozart and Verdi. On the other hand "Peter Gast" (in reality Heinrich Köselitz, born 1854), highly estimated by Nietzsche and an amateur forerunner of Wolf-Ferrari, did not justify the high opinion of his friend, with the very weak text and music of his opera "Die heimliche Ehe oder Der Löwe von Venedig" (1891).

The above mentioned composers of comic opera heeded Goethe's wise counsel that "a mortal man should not compete with the gods," and abstained from aspiring to become direct successors of the "Meistersinger." They contented themselves with clothing harmless, merry, simple subjects in musical garments more or less after the fashion of Wagner. To copy the "Meistersinger" without possessing Wagner's genius, this Icarus flight was first ventured upon by Max Schillings, with his "Pfeifertag" (1899, libretto by Count Sporck). He tried the experiment of projecting personal experiences of a kind upon a subject supposedly comical; and though the background was well chosen, the plot was so unbearably spun out that it was turned into a clumsy joke of three acts' duration. In addition, the music is decidedly unoriginal, without a spark of either wit or humor, and is endurable only in a few symphonic lyric parts. This combination was so tiresome that the opera was soon banished from the theatres.

More fortunate was Richard Strauss (born 1864) with his "Meistersinger," the one-act "Feuersnot," (1901, libretto by Ernst v. Wolzogen). This affords rollicking entertainment since, though in decidedly bad taste, it does not lack wit and humor. Having failed with his "Guntram" Strauss attained his first stage success with this work, and this success was for some time increased beyond all measure by the cunning business trick of coupling the "Feuersnot" on the play-bill with the sensational "Salome" that followed as Strauss's third opera. The mixture of a pretty legend with Strauss's strictly personal affairs, his so-called "expulsion" from Munich, which is compared with the so-called expulsion of his forerunner Wagner, is inorganic, and the erotic episodes of the work are most shameless. Prudish hypocrisy may be repulsive, but the prostitution on the stage of the most delicate things merely to indulge curiosity certainly cannot be approved. For instance, that a vulgar mob in the street, while uttering most

suggestive expressions, waits for a certain sexual event to happen—to offer this spectacle to the German public was reserved for Strauss and Wolzogen; who, moreover, in offensive self-glorification push their own personalities in Kunrad's hopelessly boresome harangue befittingly to the foreground. Strauss's music, though temperamental and occasionally witty, is after all only a weak imitation of the "Meistersinger." Its "greasy" lyricism sinks to such depths that one hardly recognizes the (ethically and esthetically) genteel author of "Guntram." The note that Strauss so masterfully struck in the symphonic domain, especially in his genial "Till Eulenspiegel," he has never succeeded in putting into a stage-work. He has ever since the "Feuersnot" sold his soul to the devil of sensation, and the devil has not yet released him.

The comparatively healthy sensuality of his at times sympathetic "Feuersnot" was replaced by the absolutely repulsive lasciviousness of an Ochs von Lerchenau and the "last dangerous hours" of an amorous but aging lady in his next comic opera "Der Rosenkavalier" (libretto by Hugo v. Hofmannsthal, 1911). This opera was supposed to represent a kind of reborn "Nozze di Figaro." One needs but to glance at the relationship between Rofrano and the wife of the field-marshal, depicted with cynical distinctness, and to compare this with the relations between the Countess and Cherubino, to see how far removed the librettist of "Rosenkavalier" (who has lapsed into the most unfruitful estheticism) is from his great forerunners Beaumarchais and da Ponte. It is the vast distance between real genius and untalented imitation. Such is also the case with Strauss's music. One would commit a grievous wrong to compare it even in the slightest degree with the immortal music of Mozart. Certainly the score contains admirable details, which could be turned out only by one possessing the gifts of a Richard Strauss; but, as a whole, this work is entirely lacking in style, and with its interlarded, banal waltzes is an artistic failure.

In the purified atmosphere which will be found in Germany after the war is over there will be little place for such operas as "Salome," "Elektra," and a pantomime like his "Josephslegende," represented in the spring of 1914 by the Russian Ballet in Paris. These three works possess in the first place great technical value, and as decayed products of a period when taste was very low, wild and stifling, as was the case generally in the last years before the tremendous European storm, they have an undeniable historical value. That a healthier generation will find these works bearable is very doubtful.

"Salome" (text taken almost word for word from Oscar Wilde's drama, 1905) was Strauss's international success and made him the most famous musician of his time. This success explains itself primarily from the technical perfection of the libretto. Though not conceived with a view to music, it lent itself most readily to a musical setting. Wilde's drama, whose unhealthy erotics echoed the inclinations of our time, rolled itself off quickly and without delay when performed as a drama; but with Strauss's music, which proceeds symphonically quite without regard to the needs of the theatre, it became unbearably long and, especially toward the end, was rendered disgusting. In addition to this, Strauss indulged in a concoction of puzzled-out cacophonies and banal sentimentalities. This mixture produced its great effect because the public, after having been sufficiently tortured with incomprehensible monstrosities, came to look upon the Strauss trivialities as particularly "beautiful." As a model example of such beauty the hackneyed motive of Jochanaan may be mentioned.

Much has been written about the "perversity" of Strauss's music, and Strauss has been reproached for having composed such a subject at all. I cannot in the least indorse this opinion. It seems to me on the contrary that Strauss simply was not at all the right man for such a subject: a Russian like Glazounow (who, by the way, composed very racy music to Wilde's "Salome") or a Frenchman like Bizet, whose "Djamileh" strikes a very different note of Oriental voluptuousness, would have been the right composer for such a drama. Strauss on the other hand has no other inner connection with the subject than that of need of sensation, and thus he composed the libretto without regard to its dramatic style. He may be a great symphonic composer, but he assuredly is not a born dramatist. That is evident from his creative tendencies not less than from the circumstance that he never *sees* his scores scenically but only hears them. Hence these impossible orchestral interludes of his which cannot be filled out by motivated dramatic action. So it happens that Strauss, unlike all the great dramatists before him, on the one hand makes his orchestra paint the sung word in detail, on the other smothers it by exactly this detailed orchestral tone-painting. The net result is that the entire proceeding, whose sense no one understands, becomes nonsense.

This criticism applies to "Salome," and also to his later works, however much purer and nobler in style they may be. The recognition scene in "Elektra" (1909, libretto by Hofmannsthal) is touching and sublime, but the painting of hysterical

erotic conditions makes the work just as repulsive as "Salome." Strauss's ballet "Josephslegende" (1914, scenario by Count Kessler and Hugo v. Hofmannsthal) moves in the same sphere of overheated pathological sexuality. In this ballet Strauss is at least consistent, inasmuch as he here dispenses with the cooperation of the voice which in his other works was only in his way. Finally, the strange mongrel "Ariadne auf Naxos" (opera in one act, to be played after the "Bourgeois gentilhomme" of Molière) calls for a few remarks. On account of the unfortunate combination of a long-drawn-out opera act with Molière's comedy (cut beyond recognition) the work has not prospered anywhere. The best parts are the interludes. They are often witty and show Strauss from his most original side. The opera itself with its inorganic mixture of serious and comic elements is, despite many beauties, on the whole unbearable and cannot be given without the comedy of Molière. Performed independently it would be utterly void of sense. How little regard Strauss has for the singers is shown in the murderous coloratura passages of Zerbinetta. Strauss is reported to have said that the singers can "burst" if only his orchestral effects hit the mark. As long as Strauss does not turn from such suicidal principles, and until he frees himself from the disastrous influence of such a decadent poet as Hofmannsthal, it is hopeless to expect of him a stage-work of lasting value. The fact that he is the fashion just now is no proof to the contrary.

Before the operatic fame of Strauss, Humperdinck and Kienzl, the most successful German dramatic composers of the present day, the fame of all those must pale who as musicians are sure of our undivided interest, but have not fared well on the stage. To these belongs Felix Weingartner, the famous conductor (born 1863). His early operas "Sakuntala" (1884) and "Malawika" (1886), both after Indian subjects with texts by himself, were followed by his perhaps most original creation in the sphere of music-drama, the opera "Genesis" (libretto by himself), at first greatly misunderstood, but afterwards to a certain degree appreciated. What followed, works of lofty aim, like the trilogy "Orestes" (1902) and the biblical drama "Kain und Abel" (1914, both with libretti by himself), show Weingartner on paths foreign to his lovable nature, and mistaken in the choice of his subjects. Fascinating as a musician, but very naïve as regards the requirements of the drama, is the great pianist Ferruccio Busoni (born in Empoli near Florence in 1866, since 1894 in Berlin), who became entirely identified with German culture, and indeed "poetizes" in this language.

Busoni shows in his phantastic opera "Die Brautwahl" (1913, after E. T. A. Hoffmann, libretto by himself) that he is extremely gifted for the buffo-romantic. Unfortunately a free display of this talent was impossible within the narrow frame of his opera. Another recent applicant for operatic honors, Paul Gräner (born 1873), may perhaps be mentioned as the representative of what one might term recent German opéra-pathétique. Gräner most certainly has the dramatic sense and his music does not lack the personal note, but his personality is not original enough as yet to excite deep interest or to justify in any way thoughts of Mozart in connection with his work. Still, his opera "Don Juan's letztes Abenteuer" (text by Otto Anthes), produced shortly before the outbreak of the war, holds out at least a fair promise for the future of this type of opera. On the other hand, I believe that the operas of the much discussed Vienna impressionist Franz Schreker (born 1875), "Der ferne Klang" (1912) and "Das Spielwerk und die Prinzessin" (1913), have text-books (by the composer) so strangely symbolistic and music so palpably Debussian that their artistic appeal will not go beyond a relatively limited circle.

We stand at present at the end of a period of development. It set in with the death of the greatest German music dramatist, reached its culminating point in the last works of the greatest Latin genius and has now apparently been brought to a close by the world's war which has so entirely transformed the European mode of life. In these months, which have brought so much "re-valuation" of hitherto existing values, it is a bad thing to prophesy, and least of all should one indulge in predictions of any kind about such a genre as opera, which at this time has been thrown so entirely out of the beaten track. One thing, however, is certain: the result of this monstrous struggle of nations will determine the future of the "essence" of European opera.

Up to this time Germany, Italy, and France have been equally powerful in the world of opera. An analysis of the present situation leads me to believe that the future history of opera will rest with the heirs of Wagner and Verdi, except for Russian influences that are not yet to be foreseen. I have endeavored to show in this essay how the inheritance has been administered up to the present time. Italy, like Germany, finds herself since the death of these two colossal heroes in a state of transition. Let us hope that this transitory state will give way to a great new period. It will be a period, I think, in which good national art will flourish with the popular and merry as chief

qualities. The disposition already exists. To foretell the fate of opera in Italy is difficult, though we may take for granted that her art, nationally less confined, hailing from Verdi's last period and borne on the wings of song, will more easily conquer the world than German art. The latter is very likely to be national rather than international in its appeal for some time to come. We must reckon with the possibility that the expansion of German opera in Europe will be largely confined to Teutonic nations. That a different fate awaits German opera across the ocean may be predicted with confidence. There the German opera composer of the future will be welcomed alike by Americans of German descent and by those whose mother-tongue is English. On that neutral soil a bloodless battle for supremacy will then be fought by German, French, Russian, Italian and probably American composers. In countries undamaged by the world's war the German opera of the future will perhaps grow from a national into a universal art in the sense of that of Mozart, Gluck, Wagner. We who hope to contribute to this new "art-work of the future" which will serve incidentally as a common cultural bulwark of the nations of the white race against Mongolian barbarism and sham culture, should not waste our time in theorizing but should push on to deeds. And in so doing we should always be guided by Wagner's advice: "Children, create something new, new, and again new!"

(Translated by Janet Wylie.)